



The Gospel “according to Matthew” is significant in several ways. First of all, it is harmonious with the other “Gospels” lending support to not only the teaching and historical significance of Christ, but also of His full identity (who He was). This Gospel contains the most teaching of Christ and is firmly directed at pointing out Jesus as the promised Messiah. Not all of the accounts listed are in chronological order and, from the start in the genealogy, it is evident that Matthew is not just writing to offer just “proofs” or historical accounts of Jesus, called Christ. It is often noted that this was written specifically to the Jewish people to demonstrate Him as their Messiah, and this is mostly true but should not lessen the significance to all others (Gentiles) as well, for it would be through Abraham that “all the nations of the world would be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3, 22:18)

This extensive study, this inspiring walk through Matthew’s Gospel will cover events such as the birth of Christ, the teachings of what is commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount,” many of our Lord’s miracles, the Disciples and their progress to Apostles. Topics such as dealing with many of the Jewish traditions and their purposes, parables and their mysterious meanings and purposes, and the significant “Olivet Discourse.” There is no greater privilege we have than the ability to study and learn of the life and teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is no small undertaking and will not be handled lightly or loosely. When it comes to the account of the Gospel “lived-out” there is no concept more significant to our lives (here and eternal) than this. So much of the Epistles cover the “theory” (set of truths) while, here, we see it lived out (from His perfect, law-fulfilling life to His sacrificial death for us).

I. The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah - 1:1-17

A. Matthew immediately presents Jesus as the promised Messiah (anointed one) - vs. 1

1. Many would seek to make their case first before presenting a potentially offensive conclusion first

see John 8:41

Some present their information as “up for debate” - this accounting is not one of them

a. It is common knowledge that Jesus was rejected, popularly, as the Messiah (many “writing Him off” concluding He was born “of fornication” (which will also be immediately countered))
 b. Many, out of intimidation, would go at this differently, but one who is confident and so **assured** of the facts of the matter does not hesitate to boldly conclude “up front”

2. Two crucial requirements are met in the first verse - the Messiah had to be a “son of David” who, of course, was a son of Abraham (both of which were promised the Messiah)

see also Psa. 132:11

Both David and Abraham were demonstrations of the blessing of God on one who takes Him at His word - this is what pleases God the most and rewards the most

a. To David it was promised in II Samuel 7:12-13, 16 that his “throne would be forever” - here there is an immediate reference to Solomon, but a farther reaching promise of the Messiah (as seen in other texts such as Isaiah 9:6-7) - David’s prayer in II Sam. 7:18-29 demonstrates his “thrill” and understanding that this was well **beyond** Solomon (also in Heb. 1:5)

b. To Abraham, the covenant which first referenced the Messiah was given - he and David would need to be “connected to” to legitimize the initial claim to being the Messiah - but it would need to be more than this since others were of this line, but the Messiah had to be of this line - so, the first, primary demands were met

3. It must be understood, though, at the outset that “Jesus the Messiah” is more than just a promised king who would come, but is the Eternal King, being the “Anointed One” of God

B. Key items to consider in the line of Christ - vs. 2-17

1. There has been much discussion over the centuries regarding this particular lineage give by Matthew, especially in contrast to the one in Luke 3 - first, Matthew is not seeking to be exhaustive in his list seeing he excludes many and essentially presents 14 from three groups (Abraham to David, David to the exile and the exile to Christ) - these are select representatives

Some have sought to criticize this account from the start with what they see as blatant flaws - they only demonstrate they have not sought out the purpose and usage of Matthew in these stemming back to Gen. 3:15

One theory stated that Matthew, looking to thwart sure to come criticisms that Christ came "illegitimately," demonstrated that God had already profoundly worked through what were "illegitimate" people

A more in-depth look at these listings would reveal God's phenomenal working to have what would have seemed impossible, happen. Jesus had legal right, but had the fully legitimate right and fulfillment though his physical ties through Mary

The timing of the coming of the Messiah would have seemed odd also - Israel, living as a conquered people not actively seeking His coming

- a. Women, who are not typically included, are included in this list
- _____ b. Some who are "good" and some "bad" are left out - the lineage of the Messiah would be one full of variations and seeming "odd" characters (most with well-documented flaws)
2. As just referenced, the line would be full of sinners (and occasionally a rare exhibition of faith) demonstrating, not that the Messiah would be less than perfect but:
 - a. That the focus would be upon the promise of God and not the people He used
 - b. That God would bring His ultimate answer to sin right in the middle of sin's "stronghold"
3. The women mentioned in this line would not be considered "ideal" by most for the line of the Christ
 - a. Tamar played a prostitute to lure her father-in-law Judah (by which she had twins)
 - b. Rahab was not of Israel and had been a "harlot" (who would be the mother of Boaz)
 - c. Boaz married Ruth who was of Moab (a line of people formed of incest through Lot)
 - d. And Solomon was born of Bath-Sheba to David through she was an adulteress
 - e. Many theories have been put forward to explain the reasoning for listing these, but it is clear that God not only was capable, but planned to work through these less than ideal circumstances
4. God's "ideals" are not man's - God's grace, might, and genius shine more by confounding man's expectations - His "rightness" is more important than our reasonings
5. Another significant point to note: Jeconiah (also known as "Coniah" and "Jahoiachin") was essentially cursed, that none of his offspring would prosper so as to "sit on the throne of David" (Jer. 22:24-30) - though he had seven sons, he was to be recorded as having no children
 - a. This would then seem to pose a dilemma for Jesus to be king
 - b. "Though Jeconiah's sons never occupied the throne, the line of the rulership did pass through them. If Jesus had been a *physical* descendent of Jeconiah, He would not have been able to occupy David's throne. Luke's genealogy made it clear that Jesus was a physical descendent of David through another son named Nathan (Luke 3:31)" Bible Knowledge Commentary
 - c. Many of the prophecies of the Christ will be stressed in their fulfillment in this Gospel
6. And, one of the most significant points in this listing is how Joseph is described in verse 16 - up to this point, the clear pattern has been "...was the father of..." but when speaking of Joseph, he is described as "the husband of Mary" - this is the first hint of the virgin birth of Christ
7. We see also, in the representative "14 generations," in each of the groupings that there was to some degree a more frequent digression from God, culminating in the deportation (mentioned three times and finally in verse 17) and also illustrating that God's promises and workings are not limited by or deterred by negative circumstances (this is why losing hope is faithless)
8. It is essential to understand as the following narratives are presented, that Matthew is not primarily looking to just recount the life and teaching of Christ, but is focused (in the account of His birth) on the fulfillments of Scripture - it is good to take note as the "Nativity" account is reviewed to watch for the number of significant prophecies that were fulfilled just in His birth

II. The Birth of Jesus the Christ 1:18- 25

A. To explain Mat. 1:16, how Jesus was born would be of significant interest (why Joseph was not called the father)

1. The aim of what follows is to demonstrate the virgin birth of Christ

These are not just at the heart of the virgin birth debate, but also for His deity

- a. This is essential for Him to be of "the seed of the woman" - Gen. 3:15
- b. He had to truly be the "Son of God" and not the son of Joseph *He would essentially be the God-sent (Father) God (Son) of God (Spirit)*
- c. All this to truly be "God with us" (not "a" god with us (a demigod))

The repercussions of yielding the virgin birth are higher than most realize!

2. "Either the eternal Son of God entered our race as Matthew here declares, or he did not. If he did not, if Jesus was an ordinary human bastard, or Joseph's natural son by an act of forbidden cohabitation, then they who will may call him their Savior - their lascivious fancy cannot raise him from the mire into which they have cast him." Lenski

3. Matthew is careful to lay out the initial circumstances - vs. 18

Because of her legal "binding" to Joseph, Mary would have been considered guilty of adultery and worthy of being put to death

- a. Mary (His mother) was betrothed to Joseph - this is more than our "engagement" but less than what we consider "marriage" (though essentially they were married but not living as such)
- b. They were dedicated (set apart for each other as a married couple) but they had not "come together" (there had been no physical union).
- c. Mary was then, at this point, discovered to be "with child" (pregnant) - by this phrase and the absence of a recorded defense by Mary it would appear she made none

- see the parallel text in Luke 1:26-38
- d. Then, a crucial clarification - she was discovered to be with child, true, but “by the Holy Spirit”
- e. Clearly, this is going to need explanation - and this will be given, but still demonstrating that Jesus would remain the legal son of Joseph while being the Son of God and the Messiah King

B. The expected response of Joseph and then the reason he changed his planned response - vs. 19-21

1. “Joseph... being a righteous man” - as her husband, he was now faced with a dilemma - vs. 19

Being “just” has no allusion to spiritual pride but is a genuine character as this same word was used of Zacharias and Elizabeth)

- a. He, being an “upright man” (striving to do what is right) planned to “send her away”
- b. He would have felt the **obligation** to “dismiss her” (as if in a divorce though this was even more unique) and it may have been he was deeply hurt (it would seem reasonable, though it is not mentioned) - it is likely he truly loved her, thus he did not want her publicly disgraced
- There is a **selflessness** associated with this idea of “righteous” in Joseph

We see no retaliatory attitude

- c. Truly desiring to do the right thing, he was going to send her away but to do it in such a way as to not have the details in the public record - he did not want her hurt (not enjoying the punishment of sinners) - compare to Pr. 24:17-18

2. Not acting hastily (he thought on the matter first, considering his actions), Joseph has the situation revealed to him for what it really was - vs. 20-21

- a. What had appeared to be a grievous circumstance was now the miraculous working of God in the fulfillment of His plan (from before the creation of the world!) - it was happening “now” and in these **difficult** conditions and circumstances

There is no Greek article, “an angel” —

- b. The answer (revelation) came by means of “an angel of the Lord” in a dream - this was clearly obvious enough to Joseph to realize it was special - (he would be warned again in a dream)

This seemed to be a mode of communication to Joseph - Mt. 2:13, 19

- c. Joseph is first addressed by the angel as “Joseph, son of David” reiterating his line (whether Joseph thought on it or not, he was a descendent of David’s line by God’s working) - Matthew making sure this is distinctly seen in this account

So, now the command is to take her to live with him as his wife - so, don’t divorce and don’t be afraid (of doing what is wrong, not necessarily of what others might think)

- d. The instruction was for him to “not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife” - literally this had the idea of “taking possession of” or “bringing to you” your wife - since being “espoused” they were not living together so this is essentially telling him to take her (now) into his house as his wife

None ever was or ever will be again conceived the way He was!

- e. The reason for doing this (and the rightness of it) is clearly given - for what was “created” in her (conceived) was of the Holy Spirit (this was His doing, His special (one of a kind) “begetting”)

- This is in harmony with the word underlying “only begotten” in John 3 - the phrase being “τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ” literally “the son, the singularly created/conceived”
- f. “She will bear a son...” - in Luke 1:13 Zacharias was told that Elizabeth would “bear you a son” - Joseph being told that this was not “born of/for him”

It is interesting to consider that when we say “Jesus saves” we literally mean “Jehovah saves’ saves”

- g. His name was to be “Jesus” (both Joseph and Mary were told to name Him this (Lu. 1:31)) and the reason given is based upon the name meaning (“Yahweh Saves/Helps”) since He will save “His people from their sins” - this saving from “sins” not Roman tyranny or other issues of life

At birth we are the slaves to sin - we are infected thoroughly and subject to its demands and are helpless in ourselves to save ourselves - Rom. 6:16-20

- h. The underlying word for “sins” meaning “not measuring up because the “mark” was missed so the prize is lost” - His saving coming by means of His life “hitting the mark” and His death paying for the price for the sins demanded by God and His “winning the prize” for us

- i. This is the result of the Gospel that is to be “spelled out” in Matthew’s accounts - commenting on this verse Adam Clarke wrote, “The perfection of the Gospel system is not that it makes allowances for sin, but that it makes an atonement for it: not that it tolerates sin, but that it **destroys** it.” - this is salvation - to be saved FROM sin (its affects, power and results)

C. The prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled in this - vs. 22-23

1. This reference to Isaiah 7:14 by Matthew is not without controversy - the verse reads, “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” - the debate being over the word “virgin” and whether this needs a double interpretation

If Matthew was pulling this text out of context, misusing or mis-defining words, he would have been “written-off” immediately -- this did not happen

- a. First, we consider our context and Matthew’s usage of it - Matthew was an apostle, personally taught by Christ, knew Hebrew and Greek, and would have been held to a strict standard of interpretation by those in his day

There would not have been much significance in prophesying the a “young woman” would have a son

- b. Second, Matthew is far closer to the original handling of this text than we or any scholars of our millennium - his usage of the Septuagint also lends credibility to that translation of the Hebrew texts into Greek - thus the usage of the word for “virgin” (παρθένος) - this also has the proper Greek article in front of it indicating “THE virgin” (the one in particular) - this is present in the Hebrew as well as Septuagint translations

see also John 1:14, II Cor. 5:19 and I Tim. 3:16

c. This virgin will be with child and will call His name "Immanuel" and then the translation is given to this unique name, "God with us"

d. This was (and had to be) a one of a kind happening - this is why a "double interpretation" is not the wisest way to handle this text

2. A quick synopsis of the context of Isaiah 7:14 - this is not necessary, seeing we realize the inspiration of the Holy Spirit on Matthew as well as his scholarship, but seeing as how much skepticism has arisen from the critics' accusations against this, it merits a closer look

a. Judah (in particular, Jerusalem) was about to be attacked by the combined forces of Israel and Syria - all Judah was terrified (Isa. 7:2) - Isaiah came to bring comfort that Judah would not be taken and the attack would fail (Isa. 7:7)

"Not to believe God's word without a sign, is to tempt God, but to refuse a sign when God offers it for the aid and help of our infirmity is to rebel against him."
GBN

b. When Isaiah came to the king in Jerusalem (Ahaz), Ahaz was apparently skeptical, so God told him (through Isaiah) to ask any "sign" (it could have been as "high" or as "low" as he desired - this was a gracious, almost open-ended offer)

c. Ahaz rejected God's offer of a sign claiming a false piety - his stated reason was that he would not "tempt God" (as if following Deut. 6:16) - but his real reason was that he wanted to make an alliance with Assyria (which would have "allowed" him to keep with his idolatry) (II Ki. 16:1-18)

d. God, angry with Ahaz provides a sign anyway, though this would be greater than any he could have anticipated - the sign would still be applicable to Ahaz in that it guaranteed David's "house " would continue (all in its fulfillment in Jesus the Christ)

So, the prophecy is profound in that it predicts His special birth, His humanity and His deity

e. A virgin would conceive and bear a son... - the context is very interesting - this is not in reference to Isaiah's son (Shear-jashub) since he was already born, nor would it be his future son - this could only be in reference to a son, born of a virgin who would be "God with us"

f. His humanity would also be emphasized - He would be born and would grow, and during the time of His still eating "curds and honey" (infant food) He would know to "refuse evil and choose the good" (vs. 15) - then, verse 16 (of Isa. 7) places emphasis on Isaiah's son (who he brought with him (see 7:3) as the prophecy returns to Ahaz's present circumstances)

The reference turns to "the boy" (in comparison to the being of age to choose good or evil)

g. So, In Isaiah, we see the promise of the Son, the promised coming of the Son (Isa. 9:6-7), and the ultimate reigning of this Son on the earth (Isa. 11)

D. Joseph obeys immediately - vs. 24-25

1. As commanded, he took Mary to himself as his wife - this would have involved her coming into his household and would normally have involved a sexual union - this is why Matthew adds clarification that Joseph did not have relations with Mary until sometime after Jesus was born

a. This was in continuing to demonstrate the virgin birth - this is a key point!

b. Our agreeing with the "virgin birth" is important for at least four reasons

Jechoniah being cursed and none of his offspring would sit on the throne

(1). This is the Scriptural account - to believe otherwise is to demonstrate some external influence (science, philosophy, popular thought) on our "faith")

(2). Jesus could not be the natural son of Joseph because of Jechoniah

(3). Jesus could not be the natural son of Joseph and be the Son of God

as in Gen 3:15 (4). Jesus had to come (physically) through Mary to fulfill the "seed of the woman" promise

2. The sovereign hand of God uses obedient people - this is important to note

Though true "fatalism" is actually the belief in the control of "fate" (an impersonal force) just happening to us - this is not in line with the God of the universe, in His person and character, decreeing and causing what would happen

a. As noted, this was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (predicted long before Jesus)

b. God brought it about through individuals like Joseph and Mary, both though, not fully understanding all that was taking place, submitted to the instruction of God

c. Often, "fatalism" is associated with the belief in God's absolute sovereignty

d. As God then, so He still does use time, people, circumstances, obedience, instruction, effort, understanding, and more to perform His decrees

e. The significance of Joseph was mostly found in God's plan and usage of him - yet we must also appreciate his surrender, belief and obedience to God's instruction, especially in light of how unusual his circumstances were

JFB regarding Mary and Joseph coming together as a team to face this

f. "With what deep and reverential joy would this now be done on his part; and what balm would this minister to his betrothed one, who had till now lain under suspicions of all others the most trying to a chaste and holy woman-- suspicions, too, arising from what, though to her an honor unparalleled, was to all around her wholly unknown!" JFB

g. One of the many encouraging aspects of the birth of Christ is the "teamwork" between Joseph and Mary as they faced the miraculous working of God in an unknowing world

III. The Events and Their Significance Immediately Following the Birth of Jesus - 2:1-23

A. Sometime after Christ was born, "Magi" came to worship Him - vs. 1-2

1. His place of birth, "Bethlehem of Judea" is clarified again with the purpose to demonstrate its fulfillment of another Messianic text - the immediate social and time frame context is also given

Herod was one known for fearing the loss of his throne (he was an Edomite thus not a "real Jew")

Matthew provides no details regarding the birth but this can be seen in Luke 2:1-18 - Matthew is still focused (in the chapter) on the significance of the "geographical prophecies" in particular regarding the Christ

No doubt they were intelligent, and traditionally were also called "wise men"

see Daniel 2:48 and 5:11

We can learn much of someone by the choices they make

Far too much has been made of this star when its purpose was to point to Christ - there is no value in focusing on what this star was

- a. This happened "in the days of Herod the king" - these would have been his final years as he would die shortly after all this happened (and as history has it, he had lost much of his mental faculties) - tradition has it that he essentially lost his mind (and he was driven by paranoia)
- b. As to the possible time of Christ's birth John Gill wrote, "Herod reigned, as this same author observes, thirty seven years; and according to Dr. Lightfoot's calculation, Christ was born in the thirty fifth year of his reign, and in the thirty first of Augustus Caesar, and in the year of the world three thousand nine hundred and twenty eight, and the month Tisri, which answers to part of our September, about the feast of tabernacles; which indeed was typical of Christ's incarnation, and then it may reasonably be thought that "the word was made flesh..."
- c. It was during his reign and approximately just under two years since Jesus' birth that "magi" came to find the "King of the Jews" - these were "scientists" (mostly into astronomy and astrology) and were often associated with being advisors to kings - the word used here was often in reference to "magicians" (sorcerers) though this does not appear to be the usage here
- d. They were "from the east," most likely Persia (Babylon) where there appears to have been some influence from years before that was past down in the anticipation of the Jewish Messiah - most likely this was from the time of Daniel (in their captivity in Babylon) - this would have been about 600 years before the birth of Christ - we don't know their number and the traditional assumption of three is simply based on the gifts - it could have been a large group
- e. They came to Jerusalem expecting this king to have been born there - here we see some of the indications of how God typically "works" - He promises (though time and circumstance seem to contradict), He uses the unlikely (in this case Gentile men of significance) and He uses the "humble" (the seeming "lowly" as far as the world is concerned)

2. The "star in the east" - literally, "for we have seen His star when we were in the east"

- a. Much speculation has been offered as to what this was (comet, alignment of planets), but by the descriptions Matthew makes of it, it would be safest to assume this was a one of a kind astronomical anomaly, supernaturally used to guide these men
- b. It was used to bring them to the exact house of the Lord

B. The the troubled response of Herod - vs. 3-8

1. Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled - Herod was troubled because his greatest fear seemed to be coming on him (his dread of losing his power - he already had killed those he thought were threats and even those of his own family) - though Christ's kingdom would far outrank Herod's

So much of God's working involves change of all sorts and will most often come at times that will disrupt our comfort zones (our being lulled into complacency)

Many who are just "professors" and not possessors of faith are not blatantly evil, but can become so quickly when their "ways" are called into question

- a. All Jerusalem were also agitated and most likely because of the potential trouble it represented
- b. This is typical humanity! - rather than excitement over the news and the interest in the promise of God, they seemed to desire things to stay as they were - there is a seductive appeal in the "norm" when it comes to our comfort and things remaining consistent
- c. Their struggles to maintain their status quo would be futile - it may be, also, that they knew internally that this was "real religion" happening versus their facades of faith - "pretenders" always get most uncomfortable when the "real thing" is seen happening

2. Herod then consults with the religious leaders and experts - vs. 4

*Unhappy people, to whom true godliness is a weariness!"
Spurgeon*

- a. He obviously took the beliefs of these magi as legitimate and immediately wanted to know what the Scriptures indicated as to the place of the birth of "the Christ" - though we are about to see a drastic difference between faith and self-protective paranoia
- b. In his controlling fear, he finds out where this was predicted to take place, acts drastically and mercilessly, and then within a few years dies (death being the inescapable reality)

3. Their answer is clear and mainly taken from Micah 5:2 - He would be born in Bethlehem in Judea

Though their understanding was accurate

The idea of "shepherding" was an indication of His differing "leadership approach" than that of all other Kings

- a. The first part explained by these religious leaders/scholars was from Micah 5:2 and it is likely that the second is from II Samuel 5:2 - it appears they paraphrased some of this
- b. The idea was that though Bethlehem was small in comparison to most of Judah, yet it would actually be truly great, for out of it would come a "Ruler" and this ruler would "shepherd My people Israel" just as the Lord spoke to David - the Christ also being a son of David

"These scribes knew where to find the text about the Saviour's birth, and they could put their finger upon the spot in the map where he should be born; and yet they knew not the King, neither cared to seek him out." Spurgeon

The woman in labor in Micah 5:3 is not Mary but the picture Micah used of Israel in 2:9-10, picturing the ultimate return of Israel to their land and the restoration of the entire people

If Jesus is not the One who was promised then He is not the Savior either

This threatened response to the coming of the Christ would be typical throughout our Lord's life - many, to this day, still cringe at the thought of Christ because of the supposed threat to what they treasure

There is no indication anyone else saw this star

No matter what happens, the enemies of God always "play into His hands"

Most likely they were so excited because of the precision of the sign

This would be different from Luke's account because by now they would have moved into a home

In I Kings 10:1-10 we read the account of the visit by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon - as was worthy of such royalty, she also gave gold and spices

A reminder that God is always at work even without our knowing it

God's protection involved much work and inconvenience, but would also fulfill His Word

- c. The rest of the verse in Micah 5:2 indicates that this one prophesied, "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (again expressing His eternity)
- d. What is remarkably absent from this account in Matthew 2 is any action by the scribes and the chief priests - why didn't they go searching? Possibly because these were "sorcerers" bringing the news of a star or they just didn't believe it or that the Messiah was coming at that time
- e. Micah 5 is a very interesting prophecy altogether, and promises (beyond the coming of this "Ruler" who will come from Bethlehem) a conquering of the nations, a restoration of Israel (remnant of Jacob) and ultimately world domination: and in all this He will do away with their weapons and war-tools and with all impurities - this describes what is seen in Revelation as the Millennial Reign of Christ - Rev. 20:1-6 (both "advents" of Christ are described)
- f. One more note on this verse: Matthew is giving special attention to the "geography" because it would be an issue with some questioning if Jesus was really the Messiah - this was seen in a dispute in John 7:40-44 where they question His authority because they believed Him to be from Galilee

4. Herod's deceitful attempts to find this King - vs. 7-8

- a. Herod is narrowing down his plan to kill this King - clearly he did not put much confidence or reverence in the providence/control of God - the lack of the "fear of God" is evidenced in the belief that we can somehow outsmart or get around God's Word
- b. Herod was mostly interested in the timing of when the star shone - he wanted to know the time frame of the birth (this would lend to his having murdered all males 2 years and younger)
- c. He then sends the magi to Bethlehem with the pretense that he also wants to come and worship - this is a reminder that not all who show a "religious" interest in the Scripture do so with honest motives - many will use what they learn to attack it with intent to destroy
- d. Ironically, God used this plan of Herod to give the magi safe conduct to the child (with no military accompaniment), allowed them to fulfill their calling, and then gave Joseph and his family efficient time to escape

C. The excited ending of the journey of the Magi - vs. 9-12

1. Right after leaving Herod, as they set out for Bethlehem, they again saw the same star (that they had previously seen when they were "in the east") - apparently it had stopped shining on their journey to Jerusalem and possibly why they stopped to inquire regarding the King of the Jews - vs. 9-10
 - a. This phenomenon "went on before them" (as if moving to guide them) until it finally stopped directly overhead of the specific house - this was by no means a normal star!
 - b. These magi "rejoiced exceedingly" (they were ecstatic is more the idea) - this was not a typical, obligatory journey but one that was religious/spiritual
2. It was seen as a "spiritual" journey in their response upon entering the house - vs. 11
 - a. As soon as they entered and saw the child, they fell down and worshipped - these were non-Jewish men from Persia, men of significance, bowing down to a child in a small, almost obscure town in front of two others (Mary and most likely Joseph)
 - b. This had to be spiritual realizing they could not have been doing this to impress Mary and Joseph and could not have expected the child to understand - it had to be ultimately done before God - they must have realized this was more than just an earthly king
 - c. Then they gave gifts containing three items, gold, frankincense and myrrh - many symbols have been ascribed to these gifts but we are not given any such explanation in this text - it is likely these valuable gifts would have been used to help support the family as they would escape to Egypt - God providing in unpredictable ways for what He is about to do
3. Then, God warns them not to return to Herod with what they discovered - vs. 12 - because of this warning they went another way back - we read no more of these men again and could only speculate how God then used what they learned and what they may have searched for and learned later of Christ
 - Note: they disobeyed the instruction of Herod because of the instruction from God

D. The escape to Egypt by night - vs. 13-15

1. Almost immediately following the visit, worship and gifts of the magi, Joseph is warned to take the child and Mary, that night, and go to Egypt (Matthew including this to demonstrate fulfilled prophecy)
 - a. Joseph is told why (Herod's plan) and to stay in Egypt (apparently Joseph planned to stay in Bethlehem indefinitely) - the urgency was clear, since he was instructed to leave that night
 - b. He was to remain until he was given further instruction (which he did) - so, by morning, the magi and Joseph and his family had left Bethlehem

Much of the true “miraculous” should be sought in the daily details (sometimes spread over time)

- c. God could have supernaturally protected the child but instead used Egypt as a refuge - so much of how God brings things about is seen as “natural” - the “miraculous” had been occurring as God typically works in the “normal, day-to-day” things

2. This happened to fulfill another “requirement” of the Messiah - vs. 15

Many of these reasonings have come about because of the normal way one would be apt to take Hosea 11:1 - it has been suggested that possibly the original idea in this verse was that because God loves Israel, He would call out His son from Egypt (Christ not having had a warm welcome in Israel yet still Christ would be sent because of God's love for them)

To be fair, it is easy to look on it as typology seeing the similarities to Moses and even the “Josephs” in both accounts being used of God to go to Egypt

For instance, a singular pronoun surrounded by plural nouns

- a. Joseph remained in Egypt until Herod was dead (described more in vs.19-23)
- b. Matthew clarifies that this happened to “fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (this in reference to part of Hosea 11:1) - this (as well as what is stated in verse 23 of this chapter) are two of the most discussed and challenged statements in this Gospel
- c. Here, Matthew directly links what took place with the statement, “Out of Egypt I have called my Son” - looking at this text it appears to be in reference to Israel, so it is most often taken figuratively (as a type) making Israel the type of Christ and Christ being the fulfillment (anti type)
- d. This is the most popular handling of this seeming discrepancy, but this has several issues - one being that Israel is not often called God's “son” (Ex. 4:22-23), Israel being a “type” of Christ (or vice versa) does not have purpose (unless one is trying to make the Church Israel), and the biggest problem of all is Matthew's apparent literal usage of this text
- e. It should be taken as a literal statement of Christ, not just out of “blind faith,” but because if it had been so blatantly a “stretch” Matthew would have been “written off” long ago - Matthew places a lot of emphasis on this phrase as being fulfilled in Christ, so I would be inclined to not take it as typology with Israel - far too often texts are looked upon as “types” when there is no textual authorities for such (similarities do not equal true Biblical typology!)
- f. Matthew was far “closer” to these original texts of the Old Testament than we are, or more than any of the critics of his exegesis over the centuries - In Hosea 11, God is not speaking well of Israel, yet in the middle of all this there is this statement that seems purposely out of place

E. The maniacal response of Herod - vs. 16-18

1. Herod, as was historically normal for him, becomes enraged when the magi don't return - vs. 16

compare with Pr. 28:1

It's hard to imagine now, but Bethlehem was obscure and not really thought of during this time until accounts like that of Matthew - God is most often seen working most profoundly in what most would consider small and insignificant

- a. He believed himself to have been “made the fool” - he believed that he had tricked them into believing him and then had the nerve to be angry at being “tricked” - one of the “companions” of deceit is the belief that everyone else will do it also (paranoia is common with most sins)
- b. He, motivated by personal rage, sent and had all the male children 2 and younger killed in Bethlehem - he may have justified this by thinking he only intended to kill one, but since he was deceived (let down), it would be someone else's fault for these deaths
- c. Some have questioned this incident since it is not recorded anywhere else - this is not hard to understand since Bethlehem was a small town and the number killed (in what would have been considered an insignificant town) would have been less than 20 (probably less than that)
- d. Herod wanted to be swift and thorough in stopping the coming Messiah, but it is clear here and throughout Scripture and history that no matter how informed, efficient and involved mankind is in trying to counter God, they fail (and are often found to be cruel in their pursuits in a variety of ways) - man can reason though and to all types of atrocities

2. The fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15 - vs. 17-18

We must be aware that there is a part of us that seeks flaws in the Scripture either to make us feel better in our selfish or sinful pursuits or to feed the doubting side of ourselves that feels more responsible when living more by intellect/reason over faith - we must remember that it is those given to error (you and I) scrutinizing the inerrant

God's goodness is most often questioned by those with a singular focus on their life now

- a. This verse has also been highly scrutinized as though it is not truly fitting to what took place in Bethlehem (or that it is, at best, comparative) - it would be expected that the unbelievers or that the rejecting Jews would question so strongly Matthew's references to prophecy
- b. But, if we start with the presupposition that Matthew was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we would be more apt to look over the Jeremiah text with that as our focus
- c. With this in mind, when we look at Jer. 31:15 we can see two immediate “This says the Lord...” which could be seen consecutively or as separate declarations - the Lord does say there would be “a voice heard in Ramah” and this of great grief, and Rachel is personified as crying for her children: then in the following verse, the next “This says the Lord” instructing them to restrain **their** weeping for **their** children would return (which would be in contrast to those in Bethlehem)
- d. In Bethlehem, these mothers lost their children (and that as a part of God's plan) which included inconsolable grief - **so, as to the question as to why God did not warn the other mothers in Bethlehem, the first answer given was in the fulfillment of this verse**
- e. This would be the beginning of many difficult circumstances associated with our Lord - yet the declaration of Lam. 3:32, He is still characterized as merciful and compassionate

Rachel was buried "on the way to" Bethlehem - Gen. 35:19

f. One more note: Why does this say "Ramah" and not Bethlehem? It appears that the children massacred were in the whole area of Bethlehem (including the area of Ramah) and Rachel was buried near both places (plus, the original prophecy was given when in that area, Ramah, (by Jeremiah) and it was in contrast to what they were grieving over (separation versus death)

F. Joseph returns to Israel and settles in Nazareth - vs. 19-23

1. Matthew's reason for sharing this is seen in verse 23, to fulfill what was "spoken through the prophets" that "He shall be called a Nazarene" - this is far more important a prophecy than is initially seen

The significance would not so much be the name of the town as much as it would be the association with the town

a. This also has been seriously called into question since there is not one mention of the Messiah being of "Nazareth" let alone several - there have been many attempts to explain this using certain texts, but it would have been understood the times in which Matthew lived
b. The town of Nazareth was actually new and had not been in existence very long

2. Those seeking the kill the Child (Herod and his associates) were now dead - vs. 19-20

Some have speculated he was suffering from a severe case of kidney disease

a. History has it that Herod died a long and very painful death - Josephus wrote, "He had a fever, though not a raging fever, an intolerable itching of the whole skin, continuous pains in the intestines, tumors of the feet as in dropsy, inflammation of the abdomen, and gangrene of the privy parts." - these were just some of his symptoms

In Matthew's account, there is no hint at exaltation of Mary

b. As before, Joseph is informed by means of a dream (an angel appearing to him in it) - in the instruction there is emphasis on "the Child" before his mother ("..the Child and his mother..")

c. After coming into Israel, Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea - Archelaus was known for his cruelty and was ultimately removed from power (by Rome) about nine years later for his cruelty - knowing his reputation, Joseph feared to move into Judea

These difficult circumstances were all leading them to Nazareth (into a region little known and of a lower reputation)

d. Once again Joseph is warned (apparently his concerns were correct) so he moved into the regions of Galilee where Herod Antipas ruled (another of Herod's sons) who was known for being milder (God ultimately using political leaders and even their reputations to lead Joseph)

3. Joseph took them back to their hometown - vs. 23

Joseph may have intended to return to Bethlehem

a. Matthew gives no account of where Joseph and Mary lived before the birth of Christ but this is spelled out for us in Luke's account (Luke 1:26, 2:4) - this would have been a natural place for them to go but it appears as though Joseph had planned, originally, to live elsewhere

b. Matthew (as has been the pattern) demonstrates that this also fulfills prophecy, and is no doubt the reason he is sharing it - but where is this prophecy of Nazareth?

c. Nazareth is never mentioned on the Old Testament, though we do have references to those who took what was called a "Nazarite vow" which could not be in reference to Christ since He did not practice all they would have (such as touching a dead body)

This would be interesting in that it also has allusion to His being insignificant, and as in Isa. 53:2, nothing initially to attract anyone

d. Many believe this is fulfilled from Isaiah 11:1, Zechariah 3:8, 6:12 where the coming Messiah would be a "Branch" from Jesse (David's father) - this is referenced again in Isa. 53:2 - this seems compelling and these verses are prophecies of Christ but it is a stretch to say that the underlying word Hebrew word for "branch" somehow translates to "Nazarene"

e. This is best answered (and fulfilled) in understanding what it would have been like in their day to be called "a Nazarene" - it was a term of derision and its reputation was even seen in Nathanael's response to hearing of the coming of the Christ in John 1:45-46 where he asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

see also John 7:52

This and many other texts are substantive examples of God's choice means to most things being the obscure, insignificant and lowly things of the world - see I Cor. 1:27-29

f. This would be then the fulfillment of all prophecies indicating His lowliness, His being unimpressive to the world at large and ultimately His being undesirable and rejected

g. "To come from Nazareth, therefore, or to be a Nazarene, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth; to be a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness. This was what had been predicted by all the prophets." Gill

4. So, throughout chapters 1- 2, Matthew has demonstrated that Jesus is the promised Christ in His fulfillment of Isa. 7:14 being born of the virgin (and called Emmanuel), Micah 5:2 being born in Bethlehem, Hosea 11:1 coming out of Egypt, the inconsolable grief foretold in Jer. 31:15, and His being called, essentially, a nobody (someone from nowhere) in being from Nazareth

The prophets and the apostles were used significantly to bring us our Scriptures and we must be careful to utilize them properly and respectfully

a. Two more "proofs" are coming in the appearance and purpose of John the Baptist and then in the account of the temptation of Christ by the Devil

b. These texts have been strongly criticized and challenged over the centuries in attempts to bring some doubt as to whether or not Jesus was (and is) the Christ

IV. The Forerunner to the Christ and Baptism - 3:1-17

A. An introduction to "John the Baptizer" - vs. 1-4

1. "In those days" is in reference to the days that Jesus was still living in Nazareth (of Galilee)

It is believed that John came and began preaching in the same area that Elijah was taken into Heaven and where many thought Elijah would return expecting the fulfillment of Mal. 4:5 see John 1:21 for his answer regarding being Elijah and a prophet

A change in their life direction, turning back to God was being proclaimed - as had been the case in their past, they had again drifted from God with a focus primarily on this life

With this distinction lost, many have come to handle all "kingdom" prophecies to Israel as figurative and not literal

- a. John came to the "wilderness" (typically an uninhabited area) of Judea proclaiming (heralding/announcing) a message - again, the "**nontypical**" method of God
- b. John was considered a prophet and though there had not been a true prophet since Malachi, many others has come proclaiming to be "prophets" - there would be others who would follow after him proclaiming to be prophets as well, mimicking John the Baptist - there will always be **imposters** trying to appear as legitimate, while bringing a contrary message
- c. His message pivoted on the word "repent" meaning initially to be sorry, have regret - but this word goes well beyond this idea in including a change of mind/direction - Christ's message in Mt. 4:17
- d. The reason for this repentance was "the kingdom of heavens" is at hand - this is in contrast to the rule on the earth ("heavens" in contrast to the earth) - even in their looking for the Messiah, they limited His potential to this world
- e. When declaring the kingdom was "at hand" (near) it does not necessarily have to include the idea that this kingdom was being offered to the Jews, but was merely stating the fact - Christ's Kingdom is "not of this world" (it's above it and will also include it) but this also does not discount the coming earthly kingdom promised to Israel

2. The reference to the coming of John in Isaiah 40:3 - "Make ready the way of the LORD" - vs. 3

There had already been several indications of the Christ dealing with their sins

Mk. 1:3, Lu. 3:4 and also John 1:23

He came in the spirit of Elijah - Lu. 1:17

- a. This was from a prophecy by Isaiah that was to be a message of comfort - Isaiah 40:2 deals with the iniquity of Israel being removed and then the statements regarding the messenger of the Lord coming before Him - see also John 1:19-23 (John identifies himself) - see also Lu. 1:17
- b. This verse is referenced in all four Gospels that it speaks of John and is even more profound to realize Isaiah was referencing **God** (Yahweh)
- c. He was to prepare the way (set the stage, remove obstacles) and he was doing this in his preaching repentance (which would ultimately lead to salvation for turning from one thing, one must turn to another) - many who practice partial repentance turn from their wrong ways but either turn to another wrong path or back to what they left originally

3. His attire is described since this was the same style as Elijah (II Ki. 1:8) as was the style of prophets

It had become common for false prophets to take on this false sense of poverty and humility

He also ate honey, which was one of the foods mentioned by God to Israel to describe the promised land

- a. In Zech. 13:4 it is also described as the attire of prophets, though in that text it tells of a time when the false prophets will be ashamed and will no longer wear this clothing to deceive
- b. As seen often in the Old Testament, God had His prophets dress in **lowly** clothing
- c. His diet is also described as one living off the land (in the wilderness) - some have tried to make a case for "locusts" being a part of a plant, though it is most likely literally the bug and is still eaten in some cultures to this day *see Mt. 17:9-13 in John the Baptist being "the Elijah" promised*

B. The baptism of John - vs. 5-10

1. As Christ's forerunner, he did more than proclaim, but in his "preparing the way" he baptized

Being remotely located, it would have been probable that only those serious about changing would have made the trek

There are those that appeal to Christ's usage of the word for baptize in Mt. 20:22-23 it would seem more likely that He would have meant more a picture of being "immersed" in what He would face verses a "sprinkling" of it

- a. This baptism would most likely have been associated with purification washing rituals the Jews would have been familiar with - these would have been in preparation to essentially come before God - his popularity grew in that Jerusalem, Judea and surrounding regions came to him
- b. John's baptism, though, included confession and repentance as in **renouncing** their former lives and committing themselves to a new life - the baptism we observe now knows the answer/conclusion and this new life (letting go the old) is in and for Christ
- c. He baptized them in the Jordan river and it is likely it was some form of immersion (those being baptized would come **into** the river and as stated of our Lord in vs. 16, He came up out of the water) - the method has been argued for centuries, but the underlying word βαπτίζω involves more the idea "to immerse" (and even those that say it means to "wash," it would seem best to wash more thoroughly)
- d. And, these "confessed their sins" - this is essential in true repentance and it more than lip-service to God; it is an internal and external **agreement** with Him regarding our sins

2. This baptism of John was not indiscriminate - vs. 7-10

- a. Some of the Pharisees and Sadducees had also come for baptism (the way it is phrased it appears as though they were in their own group) - it would have been expected that they would have been "above" those around them

Sadducees rejected the idea of rewards and punishment and the resurrection of the body - they would have been considered by some as more intellectual

These were sincere in their pursuits of popularity and, no doubt, looking to become leaders in the next fad but this does not equate to sincerely seeking the Truth

"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" Mt. 12:34

Verses 7-8 demonstrate that revealing (even harshly and directly) one's character is not condemning judgment, but discerning judgment (in lending to a possible solution) as then John gave them good counsel after his rebuke

compare with I Thes. 1:9-10

Their fruit was not necessarily "evil" but was "not good" meaning it was of no true value - such is the case with false professors, the proud and self-righteous

This was in the parable of the vineyard owner who rented out his vineyard - those who were tending it killed the owner's son

Faithfully and enthusiastically adhering to misinformed traditions are no "safe zone" from God's judgement

- b. This is an interesting grouping considering they were typically opposed to each other - they often "joined forces" against Christ and His followers - the Pharisees were the "separatists" being considered the more traditional of the two groups - the Sadducees would have been more "modern" in their thinking (the religious "thinkers" versus faith) - these were moralists to a degree (as the Pharisees) but driven by skepticism (questioning more than believing)
- c. They came "for baptism" - judging by John's response to them they were insincere - many in religious positions find their motivation and drive in the "popular," and will often be on the lookout for the next trend to join so as not to seem out of the "mainstream"
- d. He immediately reveals their true character by calling them a "brood of vipers" - this statement was not only descriptive of them but of where they came from - these "vipers" would have been seen often by John in the wilderness and would have typically run from fire
- e. Essentially, they were deadly in who they were, what they stood for, and in their message - seeing an opportunity, they wanted to join in for their own selfish, deviant purposes - John was, as it were, astonished that they would be seeking to "flee from the wrath to come" (as in mocking their trying to cover their true motive in coming) - many will feign repentance but time always reveals its genuineness! - many confuse regret (or even caution) alone as repentance
- f. So, along these lines, John challenges them (not condemning them) to demonstrate "fruits" (outward evidences) of actual repentance (as some have it, "reformation") - it is easy to show temporary sorrow in a group, but true repentance is seen in ongoing actions, striving for change - as Paul commended the Corinthians in II Cor. 7:9-11
- g. Then, after sound and gracious counsel, he looks to take away their false sense of security - vs. 9
- h. They apparently had brought themselves to believe that God was in a sense "cornered" in that He had to "save" them because they were descendants of Abraham (as many will construct all sorts of false protections from God's wrath) - God did not **NEED** them as they seemed to assume
- i. Some allow themselves to see their "cooperation" with God as to His benefit, yet in the truest sense, it is for our best that we submit to God
- j. The reference to God making stones His children may be an allusion to what was coming in the incorporation of the Gentiles and ultimately "the Church"
- k. Then the analogy of the upcoming judgment upon their people was described as a tree (or trees) that were all set to be cut down and disposed of (burned) because they bore no "good fruit"
- l. Christ would reference bearing fruit several times and one of those times was in Mt. 21:42-44 telling the Jewish leaders that the "kingdom of God" would be taken from them and given to those who would produce fruit in it - the destruction of Jerusalem, and ultimately Israel would come not long after Christ (as He would speak more of) - there has never been a nation, ethnicity or gathering of people who had such an extensive past of God's promises, exhortations and privilege and yet none of that would protect them from the results of their disobedience and the neglect of God's Word (and this by adding so much of their own thinking to it)

C. John's baptism versus the baptism of the Christ - vs. 11-12

1. John, now directing his message back to the people, speaks of the coming One - vs. 11

John's baptism, as with the sacrificial system that had been before, would not be the final answer to their salvation and the reconciliation with God - this, though, was about to come on the scene!

John 1:15 is ironic in how reads in the KJV, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me."

The underlying word for "worthy" picturing having "enough" (ability) or competence (know-how)

- a. John narrows the scope and content of his baptism in its substance and purpose - his was just in/with water (symbolic of something greater, but the water had no power in itself) and the purpose was for repentance - yet even with this repentance, there still needed to be an answer, a solution to their need (sin) - note, though, he did not baptize them so they could repent, they were baptized because of their already existing repentance - see Lu. 3:10-14 for what this repentance looked like
- b. In contrast, "but He who is coming after me is mightier than I" - John now fulfills his core purpose in being the forerunner of the Christ - Jesus "came after" John as this was the design (much has been made of the wording that somehow it indicates Jesus was a disciple of John, though this is unnecessary seeing Jesus came after John - as royalty would follow their heralds)
- c. The One coming is "mightier" - He is stronger, greater and of immeasurably stronger forcefulness
- d. And, to vividly describe His greatness, John used a picture of the greatest humility - John admitting that he was not worthy to be even the least of the slaves of Christ - in Like 3:16 he records also that he was not even worthy to "untie" His sandals
- e. He will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (versus water) - The Old Testament texts referencing the "pouring out" of God's Spirit is done of God (another reference to Christ's deity)

These in contrast to "water" that John baptized with - water was external and the Spirit internal; water cleansed temporarily outwardly, while fire purged thoroughly

- f. His "baptism" will be of the Holy Spirit and fire - this would ultimately be the indwelling (filling) Spirit of God on its recipients (as prophesied in Joel 2:28-29 and declared fulfilled by Peter in Acts 2:17-18) and the fire, since it is in association with baptism, would be a purifying (for the good) fire (as in removal of all impurities) - Christ confirming in Acts 1:5
- g. Note: some have clarified that baptism essentially carries the idea of "**identity**" (one volunteering to be identified with another, thus the baptism of the Holy Spirit identifies us now with Christ) - no longer known "as of" ourselves, but "as of" and for Him
- h. The reference may also be associated with the fire pictured in verse 12 which would then be more in association with the final **judgment**

2. Besides His baptizing He also comes as the purifier - vs. 12

It is good to keep in mind that the term "judgment" in the Bible is a term describing a "separating" (good from bad, false from real, useful from useless)

This separating process was used often by the Lord as in separating wheat from tares (Mt. 13:24-30) and sheep from goats (Mt. 25:31-33)

- a. The "winnowing fork" is an agricultural instrument used to throw harvested wheat into the air and allow the wind to blow away the chaff, and to allow the wheat to fall to the ground to be gathered - the goal was to "clear the threshing floor" picturing completely finishing the work (which, in this case, was separating the wheat from the chaff)
- b. The wheat is treasured-up while the chaff is burned with "unquenchable fire" - "Singular is the strength of this apparent contradiction of figures: to be burnt up, but with a fire that is unquenchable; the one expressing the utter destruction of all that constitutes one's true life, the other the **continued** consciousness of existence in that awful condition." JFB

D. The baptism of Jesus - vs. 13-17

1. After approximately 30 years, the Lord comes out of Galilee to the Jordan and begins His ministry

This is another text identifying the sinlessness of Christ

John, who shortly before was confronting the religious leaders now, humbly seeks to yield to Christ

- a. After explaining the baptism of John (for repentance and confession), Matthew now tells of Jesus coming to be baptized - John's response was opposite to what he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees - now, he sees one truly sinless and himself as sinful in comparison
- b. The response of John is one of the many identifiers of those truly seeking righteousness - those who see themselves as righteous often reach such degradation that they see God (or Christ in this matter) as **lacking** - posturing before God reveals so much of ourselves
- c. John tried to prevent Him, speaking the truth when stating he should rather be baptized (for repentance and confession) by Jesus
- d. In the account in John 1, upon seeing Christ he declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" realizing who He was before the sign he was promised to see - this text also tells us that it was God that sent him (John) to baptize

read John 1:29-34

We also see the preexistence of Christ referenced by John in 1:30

He identified with sinners though He was not one - He would do all that sinners should have done for righteousness but were unable

As our Lord clarified to John, it was "proper" (fitting) to do this, though John saw himself as drastically unqualified for the task - so it will be with us

2. This text has been questioned over the years as to why the Lord would come for this type of baptism

- a. Though He was sinless, though He had nothing of which to repent, He came to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness" (and as clarified "at this time")
- b. To be the Savior, He also came to obey God in all things and this ordinance was established by God (to John in particular) - this also demonstrated the Lord's pure **humility**
- c. This is also a good example of what "righteousness" would look like - before God, the most "righteous" thing a sinner could do is submit and obey all God commands - not all they could imagine they ought to do (on their own) to please God

3. Immediately upon baptizing Jesus (coming up immediately from the water) John saw "the heavens were opened" and he saw the Spirit of God descend upon Him as in the form of a dove - vs. 16-17

- a. Here again we see another text clearly demonstrating the three persons of the Trinity - the **Father speaks, the Holy Spirit descends and the Son receives**
- b. Jesus, in His human nature, would also be given the Holy Spirit for guidance and comfort
- c. Luke also points out that, at this point, Jesus was also praying - Luke 3:21
- d. Two key, totally unique descriptions are testified by God - first that Jesus was "His son" and that with Him He was "well pleased" - no other could even come close to such criteria!
- e. With such fanfare from God Himself, we also should consider baptism a reverent and necessary ordinance that we should follow, and that with as much reverence and sobriety as possible

4. Also included in the account of John, we see that there were some future Apostles were "on the scene" the next day and were most likely there when all this took place

- a. in John 1:35-42 we see that "two disciples" were with John (one of those Andrew the brother of Peter who would then bring Peter to Christ)
- b. Here we see the decline of John and the "rising" of Jesus (John's decrease for the Lord's increase)

And not just "Son" but His "beloved Son" - this with being "well-pleasing" demonstrate the closeness of the relationship emphasizing the sacrifice of the Father as well

V. The Testing of Jesus, The Beloved Son of God - 4:1-11

A. This portion of Matthew (as well as in Mark and Luke) is often titled the “temptation” of Christ, but the underlying word *πειρασθῆναι* carries more the idea of testing with intent to prove and scrutinize something

1. Jesus was “led by the Spirit” to be tested (not to face enticement to sin) but to be proven for who and what He really was (as would be questioned by the devil himself)

James in James 1:12-13 makes the distinction between God’s purposes and all other evil intents of others in tempting us; they for evil, God never brings his about for us to fall or fail

- a. For us, temptation does seem to entail the involvement of enticement to sin, but in reality, when we face temptation it is more to prove what we have (in Christ)
- b. To face this testing, He was led further into the wilderness and since it was the leading of God’s Spirit and of the Will of the Father, this was only for the good

2. When facing various “testings” ourselves we can learn key points from this account

- a. Testings will often follow times of “victories” or highlights in our lives
- b. These testings will often come when we seem most weak but, in reality, are most ready - at our weakest we often do not realize our greater dependence upon God’s Spirit
- c. Testings that are “of God” are for our benefit and His purposes, but temptations we “muster-up” ourselves lead us to sin (as in James 1:14)
- d. These testings are intended to be difficult and should not be an overwhelming surprise
- e. Often these tests come sequentially and not to be seen as “face it once and it’s over” - sometimes our misinformed expectations make trials even harder

as in II Cor. 12:10

Also, when these testings involve the devil and his minions, we need to realize he is a “master” of deception and trickery and we must not be prone to lean on our own understanding but to learn to proficiently wield the Sword of God’s Word

B. The “first temptation” - “if it’s in your power to do it, then do it” - vs. 2-4

1. This first dialog should not be considered the start of this testing - in Mark 1:13 he wrote, “And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan...”

It should be noted that since Christ could not (would not) sin, that it wasn’t easier on Him - instead He faced the full brunt of it - we never do because we either yield or are spared by God’s grace - see Heb. 4:15

- a. He had been fasting (going without food) for 40 days and nights (possibly because He was being tried the entire time and did not come to “hunger” until 40 days had finished)
- b. It was then, when He was famished (seemingly vulnerable) that the devil came in person to launch his strongest attack yet, with the next three dialogs

2. This first dialog begins just as the Tempter did in the garden with Eve - question what God said

- a. As he does do often, Satan questions God knowing full well what God said - and this particular temptation not only questions God but questions God’s motives and abilities in appealing to the hunger now being experienced by the Lord
- b. He begins “If you are a son of God...” (there is no article in the Greek) - Satan will often misquote God by leaving something seemingly small out or by stressing the wrong emphasis
- c. The first “front” seems to be intended to “bait” the Lord to need to prove something and then he offers Him a suggestion which was not of faith and borne of presumption
- d. “If you are God’s son, prove it by meeting your own needs since it’s in your power to do it” - this would essentially be the same that those at the cross would say - Mt. 27:40-43
- e. The tempter uses several other tactics - he makes “sin” seem convenient by using the multitude of stones as potential loaves of bread - He wants to present many opportunities to yield so each is viewed as potential failure which is a part of his plan to overwhelm
- f. He presents the will of God out of God’s timing - God would have Him eat but not at this time
- g. He uses the sense of true need to question God’s motive, ability or love - “For sure God would have met your need to eat by now (after 40 days without food it seems reasonable!)”
- f. And finally, he sought to have our Lord prove Himself and God on his (Satan’s) terms - this is often a motive in varying temptations - to have the intent to “prove God” to ourselves or others, but on our own terms and in our own timings - God **proves** Himself perfectly and in the perfect timing - others in the past have tried to fulfill God’s will their own way
- g. God had led Christ by His Spirit into this, and would lead Him out at the proper timing

God, in Mt. 3:17 said, “ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐν” (the Son of Me, the Beloved) while the devil said “... εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ...” (if a son you are of God...)

Those that deny the deity of Christ are in the company of Satan in questioning it

The Devil is skilled at making sin look like the righteous thing to do at the time and can even make it appear to somehow glorify God

Many disgruntled professing Christians have walked away from God falling for this same scenario - trying to have God “prove” Himself on their terms

3. The Lord’s response was one of quoting Scripture - vs. 4

Faith is not seen in the needs met today, but in the needs of tomorrow that have yet to be met

- a. Christ could have spoken new revelation but instead quoted part of Deut. 8:3 - in this text Moses was revealing why God led Israel for 40 years in the wilderness and humbled them, allowing them to face hunger to show them of what life really consists and is sustained
- b. Jesus immediately, using Scripture, refocuses to the truest priority - life is not determined by what we sense and might be led to believe at any time (especially when under stress or at ease) but by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” - life pivots on this not on food or any other apparent necessity

Contentment (which is founded on faith in God and Who He is) is the greatest barrier to Satan (who uses the “discontent card” quite often

Having all the food one could desire still does not make them live - we must not confuse the means to live with the source of life/living

Even when we don't think we're dependent on God, we're dependent on God!

It might be speculated that if Adam and Eve had resisted the first temptation they may have faced something similar to the second the Lord faced

C. The "second temptation" - "prove God on your own terms" - vs. 5-7

1. This test is opposite in its intent and presentation than the first

"If Jesus has real filial trust, the devil intimates, he will not hesitate a moment; and, of course, if God fails to keep His Word, that Word is nothing, and Jesus might as well be dead as to live and rely on empty promises." Lenski

- a. "This second temptation is a cunning one: he is persuaded rather to believe too much than too little. He is not now to take care of himself, but recklessly to presume, and trust his Father's promise beyond its meaning." Spurgeon
- b. Before, the first temptation was questioning God's provision right in His present circumstances and this second was a challenge to "test" God's protection based on God's Word

2. Notice the "Holy" surroundings used and the "religious" framing of this temptation

A great deal of the temptations to be faced in life will be along these lines - "If your faith is so strong in God's Word, put God to the test"

These "tests" of the Devil are never intended to prove rightness and wrongness but are skewed to produce his intended results (attempting to make God the "fool" or the "enemy")

This same James who was a leader of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15)

- a. The Devil (literally "slanderer" and "traducer" (reputation destroyer)) took Him to the Holy City (Jerusalem), to the Temple and quoted from the Holy Scriptures - playing off the Lord's usage of Scripture, Satan seeks to tempt the faith of Christ with an act of presumption
- b. This approach is typical of the Devil's methods in trying to use what is Holy to defame what is Holy: trying to either point out the hypocrisy of our beliefs or to force the emptiness of the object of our faith (as with "atheists," not because they have a better answer but just that in their inward hating of God (and a God-concept) they can only deal with their consciences by tearing down another's faith) - they have no answer but cannot accept the real answer
- c. This "pinnacle of the Temple" was a literal place (there is a Greek article) and it is the same place that later (as tradition has it (Hegesippus)) that James the brother of the Lord was thrown off, stoned and finally beaten to death with a club

3. The "setup" - "If you are a son of God throw Yourself down, for it is written..."

The usage of Psalm 91:11-12 was clever seeing it deals with the security of those who place their trust in the Lord - put in this scenario and "spun" this way it could appear to be a proper application

This promised protection was for those trusting God and that trust is primarily evidenced in an obedient walk, not a self-serving presumptive walk

"... as the path of duty is the way of safety, they are entitled to no good when they walk out of it." Clarke

- a. The proposal on its own would have been absurd but the reasoning attached to it (using Ps. 91:11-12) is made to appear as though it is a great act of faith
- b. As if not being convinced of His being THE Son of God, the Devil proposes a demonstration of the faithfulness (and reliability) of God - it is speculated that this location was also chosen since there would have been many of the religious leaders who would have witnessed this and would have received Him there as their Messiah (essentially bypassing any long, drawn-out and painful process that would have been originally planned)
- c. It is evident from this text that Satan is knowledgeable of God's Word and will seek to use it for his own purposes (just as all false teachers will seek to use the Bible for their own ends)
- d. The Devil leaves out a phrase from the text "...to guard you in all your ways" and then misapplies the rest - the missing phrase does help understand the intent was that God would protect throughout their "ways" in life (the one walking in obedience)
- e. "Our Lord had repelled the first temptation by an act of confidence in the power and goodness of God; and now Satan solicits him to make trial of it. Through the unparalleled subtlety of Satan, the very means we make use of to repel one temptation may be used by him as the groundwork of another." Clarke

4. The Lord's precise counter to the idea propositioned by the Devil - vs. 7

"pretext" is a "ruse" (misleading)

Satan sets one verse against another while our Lord compares Scripture with Scripture for clarity

- a. The Devil did use Scripture but his "proposition" was not the intent of the text - thus the statement, "A verse out of context is pretext" is vividly seen here
- b. Christ responds "On the other hand" ("again") it is "written" - He does not point out the missing phrase nor, in His own words does He challenge Satan's interpretation - He simply offers up Deut. 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test"
- c. Psalm 91 in no way was encouraging putting God's faithfulness to the test deliberately, setting the parameters of the test and the expected outcome of the test - this would be to forget that it is "the **Lord your God**" that we are attempting to dictate

We are to **trust** in God's faithfulness not to **test** it

God will "prove" Himself, but a demanding, impatient or even a proud posture will prompt this type of tempting God

Presumptive thinking stems from a confidence in self-perception over patient trust in God's mighty hand

Too many are too quick to read-in to a text to make it more believable to them, though this in itself is a temptation that should be resisted! The only exception might be allegory and this is not the case here

Part of the point was to "envision it now" the power that could be had by another means - see Psa. 75:6-7

These "glories" are fleeting and are only a facade for when one reaches "the top" they find only fear and discontent

This "power" is only as much as is granted him by the people of the earth acting in cooperation with him against God - he has no real authority except over the other "devils"

Many follow a philosophy of "please the world and gain an audience for God"

To worship is to adore out of reverence and dependence upon someone, acknowledging their superiority carrying with it an admitted need to obey - only God is to receive this from us (and anyone on earth that might receive anything close to this (such as authorities) is only out of our worship of God and not of the holders of these positions themselves)

The Devil would come again with temptations though of a different sort - these were presented as friendly while the others would come as attacks

- d. The Lord demonstrates an essential aspect of proper exegesis in demonstrating the harmony of the Scriptures (they do not contradict) - many temptations to do what is wrong will emanate from poor exegesis (bringing with it pseudo-religious support)
- e. This verse is in reference to what occurred in Ex. 17:1-7 where Israel "tested" God when they demanded water to drink and said, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

5. A few good lessons to learn from this testing

- a. Do not limit God's rightness or power to personal perception (always trusting)
- b. Don't believe you have a firm grasp on **all** God's ways - Isa. 55:8-11 (always a student)
- c. It is not up to me when God will work and how He will work (always a slave)
- d. God is not subject to my interpretation of any text - He is faithful to what His word really says

D. The "third temptation" - "A little compromise can go a long way" - vs. 8-11

1. The context of this temptation - Much has been discussed on whether this and the previous temptation were in "reality" or "in the spirit" - many (if not a majority) side with the second though the wording here in Matthew or in Luke should not lead us to this conclusion

- a. If the "push to jump" was not literal it would have been just a facade - plus, the Devil would have to somehow have access to control the mind and perception of Christ (this is unacceptable)
- b. As to the "high mountain" described in this account, it need not be one that could see all the nations of the world - if we strive to take this plainly, the Devil did bring Him to a very high mountain and then, miraculously showed Him all the world's kingdoms in an instant

2. The Devil seems to have conceded that Jesus is the Son of God since he doesn't challenge it

- a. He takes Jesus to a very high mountain and sets the **perspective**, as it were, of being "on top of the world" - it is common for the temptation to pride to work from above all things rather than below
- b. The tempter showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory - these, though, would be all the kingdoms and their glory still under the curse of sin which is something to be considered with us as well when tempted to sacrifice what is eternal for what is temporal
- c. He then offers Jesus all of them, and though Satan is a usurper of power he is still acknowledged as the "prince of this world" (Jn. 12:31 and Jn. 14:30 where the Lord states that he (Satan) is said to have "nothing in Me" making it clear the Devil has nothing of which to "take hold of" to sway or influence (control) the Lord)
- d. All would eventually be given to Christ anyway so this seems more to be an offer to bypass God's method (humility, suffering and crucifixion) as well as a short - cut

3. The only demand to receive this is the submission in worship to the Devil - vs. 9

- a. Satan's objective - present the "product" first while down playing the price and to some degree, make it an opportunity for the "good": after all, think of the good that could come!
- b. This is where the compromise comes and could have been appealing had not the Lord known the emptiness to these offers - this would not have worked because it would have defied God and His purposes no matter the "intent"
- c. With us it can come across with thoughts and ideas such as "I need 'much' to serve God 'much' (all kingdoms)" such as enough money, time, talents, or I need recognition and acceptance for success in **my** efforts for God

- d. The proposed price though was very costly - to gain this Jesus was to bow down and show reverence and dependence upon the Devil as if he was needed to gain the world - any cooperation or submission to any way or tactic of the Devil will always be wrong and essentially demonic (again, no matter how seemingly "good" the intention) - "Nowhere is homage to Satan more common than in connection with sacred causes, the interests of the truth, righteousness, and God. Nothing tests purity or motives so thoroughly as temptations of this class." Expositor's Greek New Testament

4. The Lord's two-fold rejection of the offer - vs. 10-11

- a. The Devil had presented himself as a friend but Christ responds immediately calling him "Satan" which means "adversary" (enemy) and tells him "be gone!" - the idea being "go away as I will hear you no more" (there is no interest here) - we often fail to reach this point in our wrestling with temptations as we often are willing to hear more internally hoping to be talked into it - many lines of thought are better left unfinished!
- b. The Scripture quoted is as blatantly open and direct as was the offer of the Devil

Jesus, out of true trusting reverence of the Father would face all the costs required to ultimately be Lord of all

The adoration of God also counters the "God is your enemy" tactic of Satan - we appreciate what we have when we see it as from Him as we would even the simplest items from someone we love

Distractions and discontent are prime conditions for temptation

Luke 4:13, "...he departed for a season"

- c. After "sending him packing" the Lord clarifies Deuteronomy 6:13-14 - Satan offered, as it were, a short-cut to all the kingdoms of the world at the price of worship - without hesitation the Lord offers up the warning that was given to Israel just after they were told to be cautious when inheriting houses and wells and more that they did not work for
- d. The concept of what "worship" really is, is also illustrated here - it involves reverence, fear, submission, homage (bowing down), adoration and then service - the idea of worship typically involved the giving of offerings (gifts, sacrifices) to the one worshipped - Satan always desires our "sacrifices" of what is holy and eternal for what is convenient and temporal
- e. Christ would again use a similar statement with Peter in Mat. 16:21-23 - this is where Peter rebuked the Lord when He spoke of the death He must die - Christ identified the "reasoning" as of Satan (that suffering such a death could not possibly be of God - and yet it was)
- f. Focus and contentment are key qualities in resisting the Devil - if we are satisfied with what we have been given, temptation is not "tempting"
- g. "The Devil left Him" - during this temptation, Satan tried to position himself as a friend, but that having fatally failed, he (from now on) is openly opposed to our Lord - if we also get passed the varying deceits that evil is somehow in our best interests, we will be "targeted" for more direct opposition - we must expect it as long as we live on this earth
- h. Angels then came and served Him (in a sense fulfilling the promise in Psalm 91 as the angels were "given charge" to protect Him) now that He had won this victory

VI. Jesus begins His Galilean Ministry - 4:12-25

A. Some time and events are left out by Matthew, though the narrative is quickly headed towards another fulfillment of prophecy regarding where the Messiah would preach/teach - vs. 12-17

1. Jesus moved his home from Nazareth to Capernaum - this move, as Matthew describes it, was after hearing of John's (the Baptist) imprisonment - vs. 12 (see Luke 4:16-30 as to why He left Nazareth)

Though Jesus was still in the same jurisdiction under the Herods - it seems more He used this as the time to start his ministry now that the "Heralds" had finished

- a. This was not in fear, as some might speculate - Matthew makes it clear that the Messiah would need to minister in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali (in the area of Galilee)
- b. It seems probable that God used the imprisonment of John to dictate this move (this beginning) as it would have been normal for anyone associated with John to also have been imprisoned

2. His coming and settling in this region fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2 (Isa. 9:6-7 are often read at Christmas)

Galilee, as was Nazareth, was looked down upon by the "elite" amongst the Jews yet our Lord was not influenced by these distracted proud

So much had occurred in these areas over the centuries after Israel went into exile for their disobedience - at a time when hope did not seem sensible, the light now begins to "dawn"

This was not a choice of convenience or even opportunity as much as it was following precisely what God had ordained long before

- a. He left the small and insignificant town of His upbringing to a much larger place of business activity next to the Sea (lake) of Galilee (Capernaum)
- b. That the Messiah would go to this region and conduct most of His ministry there would have seemed appalling to most Jews, seeing they would have expected the focus to have been in Judea, centered around Jerusalem - Galilee was also associated with the Gentiles
- c. This, as another proof of who Jesus was, fulfilled what Isaiah prophesied, as Matthew then goes to quote from parts of the first two verses of Isa. 9 - this text demonstrating that He would be the "great light" that shown to those in "darkness" and (literally) in the land of "the shadow of death" (a place without hope) - this region was characterized as those in "darkness" (blinded to their condition) and living under the ever present "threat" against them - these are those the Messiah, the Son of God Himself, would spend the bulk of His time - we should also realize God's placement of us as pre-ordained rather than falling into the trap that God's will must always be somewhere else (because my situation looks too hopeless)

d. This prophecy is very precise in laying out the actual regions this ministry would take place (where this light would shine) - the wording "the people" is a term used in the Old Testament in reference to Israel (to whom this light was first sent)

A reminder that all went according to God's plan

3. The Lord reiterates the core message of John, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" - vs. 17

The "self-justified" and the worldly-wise will always stand in opposition to any message including a required "repentance"

- a. This word, "repent" is core to all presentations of the Gospel - it is a command to change one's thinking, thus to changes one's ways from something to something - from **sin** to **salvation**, from **self-righteousness** to **justification**, from **bitter disbelief** to **saving faith**
- b. The loving Savior was now Himself heralding the message of repentance, not a "passive faith" (characterized by inactivity, motivated by presumptive belief that no change is necessary)
- c. "The point to be noted is that to preach is not to argue, reason, dispute, or convince by intellectual proof, against all of which a keen intellect may bring counterargument. We simply

state in public or testify to all men the truth which God bids us state.” Lenski

d. Again, this message was being given to those “in darkness,” without hope - those who will reject this initial message have often become the focus of well-meaning Christians who then alter their message to make it more palatable, adulterating the message attempting to get those who would not truly receive it anyway, to take it to heart (pragmatism usurping precision)

The “door of utterance” is those that listen and heed the first word of the Gospel message; “Repent!” - Col. 4:3

B. The “calling” of the first disciples - vs. 18-22

1. Jesus had spent a little time ministering in Judea before John was arrested, and it was during this time He was introduced to Andrew and Peter (and most likely James and John) in John 1:35-51

In this text, Philip told his brother Nathaniel that this was the one of Whom Moses and the Prophets wrote

Encounters with what is truly “holy” has a similar affect on us - we are comfortable with ourselves until aware of the Holiness of God

In Lu. 5:10-11 they “forsook all they had” and the Lord told Peter to “fear not”

a. They would have heard the preaching of John and would have been baptized then after the baptism of Jesus, they followed Him

b. Luke provides information shortly after the “call” we see in Matthew’s account - Lu. 5:1-11 - here Jesus uses one of their boats to teach because of the crowds, then has Peter and his group fish more till their nets were at the point of breaking (it was then Peter recognized his sinful state in the presence of the Lord)

c. So, now in the account in Matthew, Jesus is later walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and seeing Peter with Andrew fishing, called out to them and said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” - their response was immediate as was that of James and John

d. They would leave “their father” as well as their livelihood to follow the Lord - but Jesus also “clued them in” on what the end result of their learning would be - “fishers of men” - they would, as it were, “catch men” from the sea of the world with the net of the Gospel - this is not **the call** to us but our situation should be looked upon as similar - our vocations and responsibilities are always to be seen as secondary to “following Christ” and doing His bidding

e. Three of these initial four would become the “inner circle” of the Lord (Peter, James and John)

2. The priority of following Christ above all is a common theme in Matthew

To be distracted with other “loves” will affect our following and our “fishing”

a. In Mat. 10:37-39 Jesus tells of the conflict that would come because of Him and then clarifies that any that love another more than Him is not worthy of Him

b. Then, one of the often confusing (seemingly) text is in Mat. 12:46-50 where He makes the truest distinction of our true family (using His own earthly family)

C. Jesus teaches and preaches (heralds) the Gospel of “the Kingdom” - vs. 23-25

1. It is important to understand the usage of “kingdom” by Matthew

The Lord’s Kingdom is not “of this world” (John 18:36) for it is above it and over all

There is, of course, a promised earthly kingdom to come as seen in Revelation which will focus on Israel and complete ALL the promises made to Israel as a people

It should be noted that the writer of these notes agrees with the majority of what L.S. Chafer wrote in his entire work of Systematic Theology - we just differ on this point

The Gospel essentially pivots on God being over all (especially sin which would normally appear to reign supreme on the Earth)

a. The phrase used “τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας” at it’s most plain idea is the “good news regarding the rule” (and in this case the reigning/rule of God represented in Christ)

b. If taken to refer strictly to the earthly kingdom to be established in Israel, it limits the idea(s) associated throughout the New Testament related to the Kingdom too narrowly (L.S. Chafer and others are credited as proponents of Christ, in texts like this, actually offering the Kingdom (earthly) at that time and then equate some of the following texts (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7)) with that offer (calling it “kingdom living”) and equating it to, more or less, “the Law” and not with grace (yet it need not be **limited** to either) - these teachings are always true!

c. The main issue with this stance is that none of these texts state this - the general use of “kingdom” refers to God’s rule over all, even the kingdoms of this world - this is then true in all ages that we are to turn our focus and “purpose pursuits” to God’s reign (kingdom) - thus the “good news” is what God is offering as His answer to all issues (related to sin) versus what any earthly kingdom could offer - and, as to be seen in the very end of all things related to this Earth, they will “pass away” and then the fullest sense of God’s reign will be seen in the new Heaven and new Earth!

2. This message was being brought to the Jews in their synagogues - vs. 23

a. These were places they would normally come together to fellowship and were also known to be places of formal teaching - though Gentiles would also be hearing what He taught

b. His teaching and preaching were supported by His miraculous healings of all sorts of illnesses - miracles were never an entity to themselves nor a ministry alone, but were always used to validate the speaker and draw crowds - their purpose was to get a hearing of the message (the message being the important thing)

c. Jesus was demonstrating what would be involved in the “fishing for men” - this was enhanced by meeting their physical needs to meet their spiritual needs

The message was eternal, the healings were temporal

3. Jesus became well-known and news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding regions - vs. 24-25

The Lord stated the "woe" to the one who had "all speaking well" of them in Lu. 6:26 - Micah (2:11) also mentioned that if one had come to Israel prophesying what they wanted to hear, he would have been "the prophet of the people"

- a. His purpose was not fame though the fame provided an audience - as will be seen later, His purpose was more the message and without hesitation yielded the fame rather than compromise
- b. Many throughout the centuries have been unable to handle popularity - once obtained, many fear losing it and adjust their message and approach to "maintain" it
- c. Jesus' message was supreme and truly was "Gospel," though since it was beyond the earthly kingdoms and not the earthly kingdom, it would be rejected by most of society

VII. Jesus' "Sermon the Mount" - The True Character of Citizens of the Kingdom - chapters 5-7

A. These next few chapters are highly debated, not because it is unclear what they say, but because it is clear what they say - the debate lies more with its application (what and who)

1. If this teaching is taken exclusively as just "kingdom living" (based on 4:23 and still future) then exactly when would these "characteristics" need to be applied?

Some might appeal to 5:19-20 but if these verses make this text "Law" then how exactly is it "good news"? One would not be "saved" by the works of the Law in the "Kingdom" either - these "commands" (charges) are for citizens to "be" not for non-citizens to become

- a. Many, when their issues with these chapters are narrowed down the most basic "reason," make their conclusions because these teachings are deemed either impractical or impossible
- b. Others claim these are still essentially "Law" and are not a part of the Gospel of Grace - this cannot be the case given the nature of what is being taught (not "law" but what really characterizes (qualities) one who is a citizen of God's Kingdom) - living who/what we are - this is a theme used in the epistles when many of the same instructions are used
- c. Just because this teaching is before the atoning work of Christ does not disqualify it from the Gospel (grace) - it will be by grace that these will be fulfilled and lived out no matter when these teachings are presented - textually there is no reason to limit Matthew 5-7 to a select group (unless there is a desire/motive to "get out from under" these standards)

We need to beware seeking "theological outs" for clearly provided instructions!

2. Some of these texts will be difficult to handle (practically) but should not change our exegesis!

A large amount of false teaching arises when this process is backward - practical application first then interpretation

- a. We must always follow this "rule" - interpret what the text actually says (regardless of the presupposed implications) and then work out the application
- b. It is true that the setting (time frame) that this was given was "under the Law" - but as Christ will soon clarify, there was more to the Law than the "letter" and the "spirit" of the Law (moral law) was to be **characteristic** of the citizens of the Kingdom of God

B. The setting - vs. 1-2

1. Jesus had become very popular and had large groups following Him - the account in Matthew 5 takes place some time later but is brought forward by Matthew to give it prominence

He also "named them apostles" as these would be they He would send out

- a. The account in Luke 6 demonstrates that this teaching came after the Lord had prayed an entire night (Lu. 6:12) and then selected the 12 men who would be His closest disciples
- b. While surrounded, He went up a hill, sat down (as was custom for teachers) and began to speak to His disciples - there were obviously many others around and listening in, but these remarks (based on Matthew and Luke's accounts) were directed to His disciples

2. It is sometimes helpful to see where one ends up when reviewing what they taught

As the "multitudes were astonished" at what they heard (Mt. 7:28) so should we - astonishment at the wisdom, the difficulty but mostly by His authority

- a. In this case, this dialog ends in Mat. 7:24-29 - "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them..." is compared to a wise builder prepared for the "storms" to come
- b. With this as its end, we should be careful to pay attention to these "words" and giving consideration throughout to how our actions should be affected by them

C. Those most truly "blessed" are those that are "poor in spirit" - vs. 3

1. The underlying word for "blessed" in these verses is "Μακάριοι" (plural adjective of μακαριος)

The "happiness" to be had is not circumstantial in these cases but is more positional (and to be more clear, it is knowledge of and assurance of that position that brings about such satisfaction - thus the usage of the word "blessed")

- a. This word also has been intensely worked through in finding an appropriate English equivalent
- b. Many translate it "happy" but that word is mostly associated with feeling and circumstances
- c. In the many uses of the term one of the best explanations was an illustration - the term was used to describe an island or a paradise that contained everything one could desire to be content - it was one not lacking in what was of true value - *Oh how fortunate are...*
- d. So, the underlying idea is more "Oh the blessedness of..." (their contented satisfaction) and this to such a point that they are not "taken" with the world and its claims to making "satisfied customers" (all of which come to disappointment and no relief of the inner desires met)

2. Who are then these blessed "poor"?

- a. There are a few words in the New Testament translating various ideas of poor

The "proud in spirit" being those brimming with self-confidence because they are full of self - they believe happiness is found in their aggressiveness and eccentric personality

The point not being distinct for distinction sake but being who they are because of what they know themselves to truly be before God - they find truest contentment in this truth

There needs to be an emptying so there can be a "filling" of "Christ in us" and the Holy Spirit

compare with James 2:5 - "poor in this world" and "rich in faith"

These are the "every spiritual blessing in heavenly places..." of Eph. 1:3

The earthly kingdom yet to come will be part of God's kingdom but will by no means represent its entirety

Earthly kingdoms struggle to survive every year of their existence

And it is this "righteous grieving" that identifies also these "blessed" who will be comforted

There is a steady weight of disappointment we will have all our life and we deal with it (are comforted) with the reality and rule of God's kingdom now and forever

This verse is not stating that we will need to work at mourning as much as it us we will and are fortunately comforted knowing what we know and what will ultimately happen

There is an interesting illustration of this thinking in Psa. 126:4-6 when some Israelites returned from captivity and in their desolate homeland worked anyway, with grief knowing it would "pay off" later

- b. The others carry the idea of those working for a living and the wages being very small, though that is not the idea here with "poor" - here the word is πτωχοὶ picturing one crouching as in begging - these have nothing but what they are given, having nothing of their own and unable to "get" for themselves
- c. These are they who realize their condition, thus see themselves as dependent and it is "in spirit" (their innermost self (heart)) - it is truly who and what they are
- d. "It should not be our ambition to be as much like everybody else as we can, though we happen to be a Christian, but rather to be as different from everybody who is not a Christian as we can possibly be... we are not looking at men confronting one another, but we are looking at men face to face with God. And if one feels anything in the presence of God save an utter poverty of spirit, it ultimately means that you have never faced Him." Lloyd-Jones
- e. "These wretched beggars bring absolutely nothing to God but their complete emptiness and need, and stoop in the dust for pure grace and mercy only." Lenski
- f. Practically speaking the "poor in spirit" are those who have "emptied themselves of themselves" as with the example of the Lord in Php. 2

3. Why are these "blessed" above all others? - ".theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

- a. They, in their selfless poverty (utter dependence) have "the kingdom of heaven," in contrast to the kingdoms of this world (and all their accessories) - the kingdom of heaven being above this world in all ways (in quality, time and space) - eternal in all three aspects
- b. These, having "come to grips" with their status before their Creator, come to find true contentment in realizing what they have been given by God - citizenry into His kingdom now
- c. Even while we still live amongst the kingdoms of this world, we now have (possess) the Kingdom of Heaven, though this Kingdom is distinct as seen in Luke 17:20-21 - here the Pharisees questioned as to when the "kingdom of God" was coming and Jesus clarified it would not be like earthly kingdoms in being limited to regions or arising with progressive "pomp" (the "look, here it is!" or "there it is!") seeing it ultimately is "within you" (versus the external reigning and power of earthly kingdoms from without) - compare Jer. 31:33 (law within them)
- d. These "beggarly in spirit" are truly blessed because they are part of an eternal kingdom and this not only motivates to contentment but to purity also - see I John 3:1-3

D. Those most truly "blessed" are those that "mourn" - vs. 4

1. This is one of the most ironic (a seeming paradox) of the entire sermon

- a. Essentially it states "contented are those that mourn," another reason why "blessed" should not be translated "happy" (which communicates more feeling than a state of mind/being)
- b. This "beatitude" at its most basic idea communicates the reality that those that mourn, truly mourn over what they should mourn, are truly content knowing they will be comforted
- c. This grieving is also over the present earthly "kingdom" and all associated with it - there is, as was described with Lot (II Pet. 2:7-8), a "vexing of the righteous soul" - there are many things in a sin-cursed world that will and should grieve us to the core
- d. The opposite idea to these "mourners" is one of lacking seriousness, the pursuit of constant frivolity and fun (those that refuse to face the realities of sin and its affects in this world or that refuse to face it for any length of time if it can be at all avoided) - these "opposites" don't grieve over personal sin or the sin and failings of others because they live for **this** life

2. Why are these "blessed" above all others? - "...they will be comforted"

- a. "... by the God of all comfort, by Christ the comforter; by the Spirit of God, whose work and office it is to comfort; by the Scriptures of truth, which are written for their consolation; by the promises of the Gospel, through which the heirs of promise have strong consolation; by the ordinances of it, which are breasts of consolation; and by the ministers of the word, who have a commission from the Lord to speak comfortably to them..." Gill
- b. When society tries to find comfort in the escapes it has to offer, even in their laughter and fun, inwardly they do not find true comfort and certainly not a lasting one, as all of us will have moments where the trials and "scarey things" of life must be faced
- c. There is an unshakable inner-comfort in knowing the truth about things - we face life's challenges and trials not because they comfort us but because, even in our tears, they must happen and our loving, comforting God is overall working it all for true good

compare with Titus 2:2-6; I Pet. 4:7 and 5:8 (and James 4:7-10)

If we don't grieve over what we are to grieve we will (in our avoidance) miss comfort and in so doing not be content - contentment is not found in running from reality but in being able to face it

From (Design for living: Lessons in Holiness from the Sermon on the Mount)

The word for "comforted" (παράκληθῆσονται) being related to the name our Lord gave the Holy Spirit to the "Comforter"

- d. Interestingly enough, there is no comfort where there is no grief; no true comfort - we actually need to look to remove all the guards we instinctively construct to avoid as much grief as possible - yet, as long as we live in this world (looking back to the examples of the first century Christians and Apostles) there is to be a sobriety and "gravity" about us, always aware of the sin-cursed world we live (especially over sin we see around us)
- e. "Our Lord did not promise, "Blessed are they that moan, for they shall be comforted," but, "Blessed are they that mourn." When we carry some burden that brings tears, our natural response is to complain, to moan, to question God's wisdom and benevolence, God's right to do this to us. He did not say, "Those who moan will be comforted," but, "those who mourn." The biblical concept of mourning is recognizing a need, and then presenting that need to the God of all comfort." Dwight Pentecost
- f. We come to discover consolation in God's grace in our griefs (not from our griefs) and discover more stamina in the reality of the comfort to come - these comforts are seen in the mourning seeing the tense is present ("Blessed are those who are mourning..") - note also, this is grief and not despair - the griever feels what **must** be felt, the despairer yields to it and quits

E. Those most truly "blessed" are those who are "meek" - vs. 5

1. The underlying word for "meek" is πραῖς generally taken as "gentle" and "humble"

It's usage in the New Testament pictures one unassuming as far as seeking fame and power the way the world does - our Lord was described as "meek", not being His own "publicity agent" but entrusting Himself to the Father in all things

This should be a quality of leadership - one should not be allowed to control others when he cannot control himself

To the truly meek, "self" is not the focus

These are more "promotional agents" for others than themselves

- a. It has often been described as "power under control" with emphasis on the control
- b. It is not one who is weak or helpless, but one who, though having ability and strength, controls (mainly, in our case, because of their dependent trust of God)
- c. William Barclay, in his expansion on this verse worded it as, "O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is god-controlled, who has the humility to realize his own ignorance and his own weakness..."
- d. The opposite would be an angry rights-pursuer, embittered by past offenses against himself, needing to impose and enforce his opinions on those around him
- e. It has been mentioned by several that there is a word in English that used to truly capture the essence of this word - "gentleman" - this type of man was supposed to have been characterized as one controlled in his demeanor and not as a brawler
- f. This, of course, does not describe one who does not speak-up or rise to the defense of what is right, but in all this they don't "take it personally" (after all, they are **poor in spirit** anyway!)
- g. These "meek" are characterized by their teachability (a learner's spirit) and not brimming with SELF-confidence but, in our situation, confidence in God and His rightness and control - these would be those who would rather they be "left-out" or hurt than others (selfless)
- h. It should be understood that meekness is a fruit (result) of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23)

2. Why are these "blessed" above all others? - "...they will inherit the earth"

- a. Mankind seeks all forms of inheritance through varying forms of self-assertiveness - God is "against" such and no matter how clever or "earthly-fortunate," they will not be "inheritors"
- b. This is essentially verbatim to the first part of Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace." (ESV)
- c. Inheriting "the earth" (literally "the land") was a connotation to the inheritance of Canaan and is illustrative of the inheritance of trusting and obeying the Lord - it not only alludes to possession, but possession of safety and all needs met in abundance; thus contentment
- d. Paul stressed this reality to the Corinthians in I Cor. 3:21 and II Cor. 6:10

Psalm 37 begins with instruction against envying and fretting over "wrongdoers"

There will be no personal pride in the new heaven and earth

F. Those most truly "blessed" are those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" - vs. 6

1. Our Lord uses wording that we can not only understand, but "feel-along with"

These would not be those satisfied with "finger sandwiches" and little cups of "punch" (sweetened so the un-thirsty will still drink it)

The "natural man" craves varying sins and levels of sins believing they will bring satisfaction yet they only bring disappointment and disillusionment

- a. To hunger was more than a simple craving, but was more an appetite of need - as it was used of Jesus in Mt. 4:2 at the end of 40 days and nights without food - one in this case would be famished, starving and thirsting in want of food and water
- b. These cravings, these known necessities are for "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνην) describing one desiring to be "right" and do "right" (we do, of course, obtain a righteous standing before God in Christ (being "declared so), but this verse entails more the outworking of what is inward - every true Christian should be able to identify with this verse in their longing to live-out who and what they are in Christ)

This hunger/thirst for it demonstrates a recognition and sense we don't have enough and drives us to find the true source, definition and enablement of it

The etymology of this Greek word (χορτασθῆσονται) started with a reference to feeding animals, and then (in a sarcastic sense) it came to be a picture of someone feasting (as we might say "he ate like a pig")

What if, for instance, the offender is unable to ask for it (we never meet again)?

Those truly merciful are not focused on their own "miseries" so as to miss the miseries of others - another's pain, these believe, must be dealt with first

We are given chances of living this quality every time someone offends us or lets us down - an ongoing, steady irritation with others is in opposition to this - we show mercy because we have been shown mercy - we forgive because we have been forgiven

see also Psa. 41:1-3

The root word for "merciful" demonstrates the underlying idea - that being "compassion" and in most cases, is a compassion on someone in their need - so to truly have mercy on another we must see them in light of their need.

It is too easy to "excuse" ourselves from responsibility because we reason a way around it using what we see as evidence against it, only the evidence is based upon my frame of reference only - many "evidences" have been later found to counter us once a better vantage point is seen

- c. Regarding the true idea of hunger in this verse, J.N Darby wrote, "When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father."
- d. This hungering and thirsting after "rightness" is the longing to be rid of sin altogether, its power and presence, and to be practicing and surrounded by righteousness

2. Why are these "blessed" above all others? - "...they will be satisfied"

- a. The word for "satisfied" (or filled) carries more the idea of being fed or "fattened-up" - their pursuits will be profitable on getting even more than they expected versus all else that the world would be able to offer (as in the "husks") - the world ever always consuming but never filled
- b. This "fulfillment" comes because of what is hungered for - this is actually describing the underlying idea of "virtue" (as in II Pet. 1:5) - this is, at its core, the love of what is right (morally and accurately before God) and having such is one of the essentials listed by Peter in avoiding "stumbling" (and is evidence of having "escaped the corruption in the world")
- c. The "satisfied" is a future passive while the hungering/thirsting are present actives - those "hungering and thirsting" for true rightness will have/find themselves filled
- d. The opposite's truth is often seen in our age by the overwhelming dissatisfaction with life that permeates our society even though we have been philosophically and materially blessed

G. Those most truly "blessed" are the "merciful" - vs. 7

1. Mercy has been described as active pity and functioning compassion - it is more than the feeling

- a. This "activity" of mercy involves forgiveness (for mercy is often needed by those who have wronged us) - there has been a popular thought that we need not forgive those who don't come and seek it of us, but this is fundamentally unchristian - what good comes in not forgiving?
- b. True mercy is a demeanor that seeks the best for another when they are unable to help themselves (as in the Good Samaritan) - his compassion was active and costly (time/effort) - there is a drive to relieve the suffering of another (seeing all my resources as given to me (poor in spirit) so when a need is seen I deduce that this is why I have been given them)
- c. Mercy is not helping one IN their sin (overlooking or excusing it) for that would not be merciful, yet neither is it so "calloused" in its righteousness that it sees the misery of others as only the punishment of their sins, and not as an opportunity to demonstrate the same type of mercy God demonstrated towards us - God's mercy was seen in His **dealing** with sin to **forgive** it
- d. Mercy is true pity on another, not just the feeling but the urgency to act on it and lend aid
- e. There is an "odd" sense in which those truly merciful prefer those in need rather than being driven to surround one's self with those who seem to be able to help/aid them

2. Why are these "blessed" above all others? - "...they will receive mercy"

- a. These will receive what they have given - we often hear the phrase "what goes around comes around" carrying the idea that what you do or don't do eventually comes around to affect you whether it was intended or not- see Pr. 11:17
- b. This cannot be just in reference to God's mercy, though that is clearly a major part of this (though God's mercy and grace come without our having to have already exercised mercy)
- c. This verse isn't saying "you have to demonstrate mercy before you can get it" as much as our Lord is stating a fact, "The merciful receive mercy, thus they are content"
- d. One of the hindrances to one showing mercy is a focus upon how all end everyone affects "me" - so if someone treats "me" hurtfully because they are hurting, if I'm not alert to be on the lookout for this, I am unlikely to show compassion
- e. A skeptic might seek to counter this verse with thoughts such as "History seems to show that many nice people have been had cruelty shown to them even though they had been nice" - at least two things need to be considered: first, many who seem to be "nice" (or even compassionate) have been, at best, philanthropic, but we are unable to know their motives (which may have been self-serving and motivated to ward-off a nagging conscience): second, even when one is being treated cruelly by his "fellows" it doesn't mean he isn't receiving mercy and grace from God in the midst of it
- f. Again, these are not those showing mercy to obtain mercy, they "live it: because it's who they are - we as those in Christ are obligated to show mercy and forgive because it has been done to and for us - there have been many who seek to work around showing mercy to one who has hurt them, but considering what God has done for us, why would we desire to "win" our own way and come to a point where it could be effectively countered

H. Those most truly “blessed” are the “pure in heart” - vs. 8

1. The idea of what it meant to be pure was multi-faceted

These would be the “undistracted of heart” thus the “singularly focused of heart” in contrast to the “double-minded” (James 1:8)

This being similar to Mt. 6:22 with the “single” (clear) eye - these have a single focus (the opposite being cross or cockeyed trying to focus on more than one thing - we might even say the “evil eye” is so because of an astigmatism (distorted vision))

The heart being the “seat of personhood” (who I really am)

“Moral surroundings” are good but we must not place our trust in it to make one’s heart pure

- a. To be pure was to be unadulterated, clean, and not tainted with what was unwanted or forbidden, but also includes the idea of singularity of focus, especially with the inclusion of the idea of this being “in the heart” (in their innermost thoughts and desires)
- b. It appears this is related to Psalm 24:4-6 and is one who “...has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully” stressing a clear conscience - these are people of integrity and “transparency” not given to varying forms of hypocrisy
- c. Much of this is accomplished (made so) having been “through the fire” (purged with heat) and by “life pruning” (removing what would normally be a life-drainer if left attached to the heart)
- d. These are they not focused on the outward appearance of purity but on the inward - the Pharisees and Scribes were those focused on the “appearance” of themselves and others - it is in the heart, thus it is more than knowing (the head), it is **“being”** (the heart)!
- e. The pure in heart are characterized as those who “resist the Devil” while the impure are those characterized by resisting God - the pure have a “united heart” (focused) - **see Psa. 86:11**
- f. Notice also they are blessed who are pure in heart (pure to the core) not blessed because they live in a “pure environment” (surroundings) - much blame has been placed on one’s environment as the cause of evils (it is the heart condition that makes the difference, not the societal conditions)

2. Why are these “blessed” above all others? - “...they will see God”

It is inward purity of heart (of being, thinking) that is the source of proper perception as in Titus 1:15 - to the “pure” nothing is “unclean” to them because their heart motive is good but to the “defiled of heart” all things, no matter how ceremonially clean, are defiled

The “interpreter” of what is seen is flawed and though directly confronted with aspects of God they cannot/will not see Him

- a. It is true that these will literally “see God” (I Cor. 13:12; I John 3:2-3) someday, but the sense here is more that they will recognize and discern what is truly “of God” versus what is of this world and fleeting (seeing “what is what” and for “what it is”)
- b. There is also a sense in which seeing is “experiencing” something as in John 3:3, “Except a man be born again he cannot SEE the kingdom of God” and in John 3:36, “... and he that believeth not the Son shall not SEE life...” (will not truly experience it)
- c. The “heart” of a man has a direct affect on what he can and cannot see - his physical and intellectual focus may be sharp, but if his heart is adulterated and impure, his perception of what he sees (recognizes (lit. recalls from what was seen and understood before)) is tainted and even distorted (not having a “solid something” to compare it to to understand)
- d. There is no greater satisfying joy than truly recognizing God at work and not only familiarity with His working but the expected anticipation of it always

I. Those most truly “blessed” are the “peacemakers” - vs. 9

1. These “makers of peace” do so on many “fronts” - pursuing to make peace between man with God, man with man, and man with self

These would need to be poor in spirit, meek and lovers of righteousness and, to maintain/control their own spirit would need to be pure in heart

*This quality does not describe “peace at all costs” since that usually involves compromising a truth or moral to maintain a semblance of peace - “thugs” can “maintain the peace” through threats and force, but this is not **true** peace*

Bringing true calm to another’s life with the truth

- a. To be one who seeks for **true** peace, he must be one that deals with people understanding their flaws and other influences, and sees them in their need, not in their present condition
- b. The word for peace pictures bringing parts together into a whole - *reconcilers*
- c. This is key to understand so that we don’t confuse the meaning here - it is not “appeasement” to keep someone(s) calm, but that which truly (actually) resolves rifts (diplomats)
- d. These must be selfless and focused upon the goal - they must be those lending to proper solutions and not adding to the problem with their own attitudes - even when there are wrongs on one or both sides, their “presentation” of the answer must be strategic (thought through to lead one to true peace and not just a “cease-fire)
- e. The opposite is not just “war-makers” or “brawlers,” but can also be seen in those who do not aid the conflicting parties in facing reality - the answer must be more than just agree to disagree and must demonstrate the reasons for peace and the points of genuine agreement
- f. With all this understood, a true peacemaker seeks and uses the “word of reconciliation” to reconcile a sinner with God (II Cor. 5:19) - beyond this, these also help “make whole” the “wounded of heart” as in the idea of “coming to peace with life” (bringing calm content)

2. Why are these “blessed” above all others? - “...they shall be called sons God”

- a. The primary meaning is that they will be called by God His “sons” (more than children, seeing “sons” are also heirs) - others may or may not identify them as such
- b. So much of conflict finds its source in the taking of sides and the perceived need to be associated with groups (and the fear of standing alone) - yet here these can “maintain” realizing their association with the God of the universe and the “God of all peace”

“God of peace” - Rom. 15:33; 16:20

c. If we remember our position as “sons of God” in Christ, we are more apt to let go personal offenses and the “collateral damage” incurred against us by those we seek to help that are in great emotional pain or responding in fear

d. These are the “sons of God” because they are like their father - the ultimate peacemaker!

J. Those most truly “blessed” are those “persecuted for the sake of righteousness” - vs. 10-12

1. To be “persecuted” is to be pursued with harmful intent - it is not just the harm, but the threat as well

These are shunned by society, even (or especially) by religious people because it does not fit into their “standard”

a. Though, it is not suffering for being/doing wrong, over-zealousness (our own versions of righteousness) or for being unkind or rude in action, approach or behavior

b. First of all, it (persecution) is being disliked, hunted and “picked-on” for qualities that contradict society and the fundamentals of humanism (such as these “beatitudes”)

c. Those “poor in spirit” contradict the “self-esteem” *virtue* of humanism

Rooted n “suppressing the Truth in unrighteousness” Rom. 1:18

d. Those that truly mourn for what is right/real, contradict the goal of “escapism” of humanism

e. Those that are meek contradict the “if you want to do it, just do it” *virtue* of humanism and the “don’t let anyone stand in your way” approach to life

f. Those that “crave” true righteousness live in opposition to the loyalty to the moral replacements (humane moralisms) meant to appease the conscience and forget God - The strategy of humanism is to put forward its most moral people in contrast to its most immoral people to portray that they “have it all handled” without God - this is why they must “persecute” true demonstrations (and thoughts) of righteousness, realizing it exposes their counterfeits

Man is born with a conscience which demands to be satisfied which is accomplished (without God) by conscience quick-fixes lauded by society to artificially appease conscience

g. Those that are truly “merciful” (forgiving out of pity) contradict varying philosophies that support the idea that life is about us (pursuits of comfort and pride) - humanistic mercy is often evidenced by needing some type of recognition

h. Those that are “pure in heart” live the opposite of the societal and religious emphasis on the externals (appearance and the intention of purity is all that is sought)

All must be stopped that does not allow for some type of humanistic infiltration

i. Those who are actually “peacemakers” will be despised/discredited because they don’t use the approach and philosophy that the “present age” uses and don’t define “peace” the same way

2. The be “reviled” is to be mocked in all sorts of ways, made fun of and discredited

There does not seem to be much persecution and mocking because there is not much of the true Christ evidenced enough for the “world” to hate

a. This is done by the falsities that will be spread (all types of lies and innuendos will be put forward, treated as credible, justified and then believed)

b. This will be done for the sake of Christ (because of association with Him) - see John 15:18-21

3. To be such people, these must be able to stand alone for what is right, patience to wait for “justice” and an absolute confidence in what they believe (faith), not given to flirtations of compromise

4. Why are these “blessed” above all others? - “...theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

a. This completes the “circle” with the same motivation - they have now and will continue to “possess” the heavenly, eternal kingdom and this is described more in the next point

b. These are blessed, seeing they have reason to be happy (cheerful) and exceedingly thrilled since their “reward in Heaven” is “numerous” (πολύς - **much** in content and **many** in number) - “reward” carrying the idea of “wages” (pay) for labor - this would be in contradiction to the motivation of most to avoid trouble for the sake of Christ, valuing the temporal over the eternal (the *well-packaged “lackluster”* over the “gloriously eternal”)

The rewards in Heaven will far outweigh the worst we could ever suffer on this Earth infinitely better

c. Writing of this “reward” Gill clarified, “..not of debt, but of grace; for there is no proportion or comparison between what the saints suffer for Christ, and the glory that shall be revealed in them by him; not in earth, but in heaven.” - as we would desire the reward to be since any reward here will be lacking/fleeting and will lose its thrill

d. Why so blessed? - these are in excellent company - the same ill-treatment was had by the Prophets of God (one of the odd ways their genuineness (as prophets of God) was evidenced)

5. In any age, it is common for its inhabitants to seek contentment, and as history demonstrates, mankind has a rotating list of options that has been tweaked and varied through each society - yet each similar in their avoidance of these qualities (beatitudes) and these motives

a. To do this, each age must work at lessening their definition of contentment, and this usually ends up in some form of endurance (make it through life) by distraction

b. These also must come up with their pseudo-rewards that are “pushed” so hard by society and require so much time and effort that they take-up the bulk of its residents’ time and energies (and those who see through the facades are provided other distractions of philosophy and psychology)

K. Living as the “salt of the earth” - vs. 13

1. There is a great deal of material written on the meaning of this first, seemingly simple phrase

It doesn't take a great deal of salt to make a difference - a little truly does go a long way - we seek impact more than numbers

The world always has had and always will have “salt substitutes” that will seem to fulfill the role as well or even better than the “real thing” but will be ineffective in the end

Persecution should not stir thoughts to compromise; instead it should evidence contrast

With eternity in our sites, it is impossible for us to be temporarily driven as the age in which we live

- a. It is clear that salt was used as primarily a preservative and flavoring, though it is most likely that the main analogy is to that of salt's fighting “ **corruption** ” in all that is around it
- b. No matter how this is viewed, one point is clear (especially seen in the later part of this verse) that salt essentially “ **contradicts** ” its surroundings (against bacteria (impurities)), in food it contrasts the flavors of what it is sprinkled on and, as we see today, when placed on snow and ice, it melts it - **it is not intended to blend but to contrast**
- c. The emphasis in the verse is on the “you” as in saying, “you, you alone are the salt of the earth” - don't expect or rely upon the age in which you live to fill this role
- d. In conjunction with the verses just before, Matthew Henry wrote, “This would encourage and support them under their sufferings, that, though they should be treated with contempt, yet they should really be blessings to the world, and the more so for their suffering thus.”
- e. Essentially the analogy is to our “differentness” to our surroundings - we are to be unique (which is in-line with our being “holy” thus “set apart” from the world) - “worldliness” is the absence of this contrast in having the same loves, priorities, moral basis and goals of the world as it happens to be in the time in which we live in it - John Stott is quoted in a message on this text as saying, “And when society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame **unsalted** meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?”

2. If salt could lose its “saltiness” what possibly could be done with it?

“μωρανθη” where we get our word “moron” as in being “made the fool” because it is distracted/diverted from purpose

Christians should think it ridiculous to become “like the world” - it is not why we are here, why we are created!

If it were not for the influence of the Holy Spirit through His Church on the world, the world would swiftly rot into a putrefying mass having nothing to counter the naturally corruptive influence of sin

- a. The underlying word for “tasteless” is a word describing something becoming foolish, silly, and useless because it has lost or yielded-up its distinctiveness
- b. It has been noted that genuine salt cannot lose its “saltiness” and that the thought is absurd - though, this is the point! It is absurd to consider something becoming what it is not in its essence - there were examples of genuine salt becoming weakened and diluted because of its surroundings, but this is more adulteration than it is becoming what it is not
- c. If something is considered “salt” but is then seen to not be salt, what use is it? If it does not fulfil its intended purpose it is only fit to be thrown away
- d. “There is bitter truth also in the fact that a saltless and powerless Christianity makes more **unbelievers** than all the books of infidels that were ever written.” Lenski
- e. There has been a downward trend in the professing Church towards conformity to the world rather than contradicting it, making it of no practical use as a unit - though, true salt, even when crushed into tiny pieces, is still potent, if not more potent
- f. It seems sobering to consider the wording of our Lord in describing the demise of “unsalty salt” in it being “trampled under foot by men” - traction for the enemy!

L. The revealing lights of the world - vs. 14-16

1. Salt and light are similar in effect, both contrasting their surroundings though salt counters corruption and impurities while light counters darkness and **blindness** (ignorance)

As spots, smears and blemishes on a mirror so we distort or hide this “light of truth”

Or as with a light, the more transparent the cover the more light is seen (the more light “gets through”

see II Cor. 4:1-7

- a. We are “light” only because we have the true light from Christ (He being the Light of the World” - John 8:12) - we are not the source of light and are only as effective as we clearly and precisely **reflect** and emanate His light (truth)
- b. It is interesting to consider that the job of a mirror (in this case, reflecting the light of Christ) we are not doing “our job” when we seek to showcase ourselves - the mirror is not used to reflect itself but the image of its owner
- c. It (light) is intended to be prominently displayed and not hidden since its purpose is to be distinctly evident in the surrounding darkness - the **exclusivity** is also in this verse (you alone are the light of the world, indicating that the world has no other light and, most certainly, we are not to be looking to the “world” for our light (insight into life purpose))

2. This light that we bear (live) is never intended to be hidden

- a. As a city on a hill will be even more evident at night to those wandering in darkness and a lamp lit in a house is set up on a lamp stand so it can provide light from a more viewable vantage point (so we are to be obvious, visible and standing out in our uniqueness)

These others would not be the "light of the world"

These "good works" are to be sterling and not "all show" and of no content - they are proven to be such (truly "good") when they bring glory to God and not the "works doer"

The word for "good" (καλά) carries the ideas of lovely, beautiful, helpful, honest, useful, and well adapted to its purpose or end all of which are "attractive"

- b. It should be noted that Christ made this statement long after Plato, Socrates and Aristotle had come and gone with their philosophical conclusions: and when the so-called "enlightenment" came, it was anything but true "light" (it being based upon "reason" and individualism)
- c. Paul stressed a similar illustration in Php. 2:15 where he reminded those Christians that they "appear as lights" (shine as lights in KJV) while living in a "crooked and perverse generation" - this was his motivation for them to "do all things without grumbling and disputings"
- d. The purpose for this "shining light" was to be visible to all men who would in turn "glorify your Father who is in heaven" - many seek to follow the first part in making sure their "good works" are seen by all but not in a way that actually glorifies God as their father - there is a difference between having the light and living it as our Lord appears to be illustrating - in the service of the King we seek to bring love, admiration and service to Him and not to ourselves
- e. "...the church did the most for the world when the church was the least like the world. Today, many churches have the idea they must imitate the world in order to reach the world. A nation will not decay and collapse because of the people who peddle pornography or illicit drugs, but because of Christians who are no longer as salt and light. Sinners will act like sinners. When saints begin acting like sinners, their compromise hurts not only themselves and their families and churches, but also contributes to the decay of the entire nation." G. Campbell Morgan
- f. It needs to be noted that this is the first time in Christ's teaching that He refers to God as their/our "Father" which was a different idea to many who would normally have considered God somewhat impersonal

M. The Christian, the Law, Righteousness and the Kingdom - vs. 17-20

- 1. Christ did not come to do away with, discredit, destroy or undermine the Law and Prophets - vs. 17

This entire topic has been controversial but Christ explains and emphasizes it perfectly!

This verse and the following can be confusing if we do not understand HOW He came to fulfill and what it means for us - there's no need to "lessen" the Law to make it doable to us

In the "Old Testament" there were no "throw-away" points or predictions made - even what was "alluded to" will be fulfilled

Many poor interpretations of Scripture have resulted from well-intending persons whose faith was weak and thought God needed an "out" from criticisms of men or out of what seemed impossible

Clearly this is not in reference to salvation by works because the consequences are not Hell but lesser significance in God's service

A good inner motive (intent) is not always a guarantee of doing and being right, but a wrong, self-serving motive does guarantee doing wrong

Ironically, striving to keep some of the ceremonial laws and even the societal laws would have been at best, a distraction and at worst disobedience (as seen with the Churches of Galatia)

- a. It may have already been believed that Jesus was coming to overthrow the tenants, commands and predictions of the Old Testament (all of it and its purpose not just some of it)
 - b. The extreme opposite was actually true, as He clarifies (and will demonstrate in His revelation of the true intent of the commands later in His discourse) - the first two words (Μὴ νομίσητε) not only mean "don't think or consider" this to be true, but also "don't practice it as if it was true" (watch how our Lord masterfully deals with legalists and antinomianists!)
 - c. He came (as regards the Law and Prophets) to "fulfill" (to "top it off" as if an empty vessel, thus to fill it up, completing it) versus distorting or taking some away
- 2. "For certain" (truly, absolutely (ἀμῆν)) the very smallest detail of "the Law" will **happen** - vs. 18
 - a. It was practiced, and still is in most circles, that the Law was divvied into most important and of lesser importance to stress what one should really follow and what one did not have to be as concerned about and which commands could be overlooked or under-emphasized
 - b. Christ, not shying away from any aspects, affirms that every detail will be accomplished before the end of the age (before heaven and earth pass away) - **see also Luke 16:14-17**
 - c. The phrase "not the smallest stroke" was in reference to the Hebrew "yod" the smallest of the Hebrew alphabet and also used in reference to simple marks often added for clarification
 - d. There has often been the tendency to read difficult texts (to understand or believe) and to interpret them in such a way as to try to make it easier on God to fulfill!
 - 3. In making the point very clear, Jesus presents a basic comparison in how the commandments are handled - vs. 19
 - a. The first is any who "loosens" (leading to *breaking* which is the automatic result to loosening any standard) and not only this but they teach others to do the same are truly "least" in the "Kingdom of Heaven" (which is not just future, but now) - this was a practice of the Jewish religious leaders in the time of Christ (who were considered and considered themselves greatest)
 - b. In contrast, any who does and teaches them is considered "great" (of value and "carries weight") in the Kingdom of Heaven - the initial point is consistency (not just teaching but practicing what is preached) for there is no need to counter God on any point
 - c. Many stumble over the "doing of the Law" as though it is somehow in contradiction to the rest of the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, but we must remember two key points - first, the ceremonial, social, judicial, and ceremonial laws were fulfilled already in Christ (ceremonial/sacrificial seen in the renting of the Temple veil, and the social/judicial was ended with the destruction of Israel as a nation) - second, the "doing" is stressing the following of the "spirit" (the intent) of the moral laws as given (which are still applicable) - it should also be noted that these had not been fulfilled yet (at the time Christ was teaching these truths)

And true teaching servants of God would never approach the Word of God in such a way

These were not looked upon as "evil" people as we might be inclined to do after the fact, but were considered very sincere pursuers of what was right and their lives were generally characterized as such

"surpass" indicating it goes beyond the superficial - it is "deep" versus "shallow" it is "heart" versus "head" it is "life" versus "speech" - the head and speech are both needed but are not alone

It ends up being not a striving for righteousness as much as it is that since we are made righteous we think righteous thus live it

Christ was the fulfillment and the means to the name of God, "The Lord our righteousness"! - Jer. 33:16

Of course, the Lord is not discounting murder, but is demonstrating its "associates"

The word for "Hell" (γέενναν) being a literal place outside of Jerusalem to burn trash and other refuse and which had become symbolic of the final, eternal, fiery judgement of the wicked

We are to live with the expectation that we are to strive to live out these standards of the moral Law in the fullest sense, though we have not "reached it" we still press on toward the mark..." Php. 3:14

It is revealing of the nature and focus of this wrong type of anger as it attacks the mental capabilities of its object and not the spiritual issues that are most likely involved!

Matthew

- d. We know this is the meaning by considering and staying in context - the Lord will go on in the following verses to demonstrate how many of the moral laws had been loosened by stressing the "letter" over the "spirit"
- e. The Lord would fulfill every detail of the Law Himself, and as the book of Hebrews goes to great lengths to demonstrate, He fulfilled every detail of the sacrificial, ceremonial Law
4. The surpassing "righteousness" of one entering the "kingdom of heaven" - vs. 20
- a. Essentially our Lord is stating that unless YOUR righteousness goes far beyond that of the "Scribes and Pharisees" there is no entering the kingdom of heaven - The Scribes being experts on the Scripture and the Law (scholars/intellectuals) and Pharisees being experts on the living and implementing of the Law (zealous practitioners)
- b. The key to properly understanding the intent is to understand the point - it's not so much the "degree" of righteousness and much as it is the "kind" - external, ritualistic, "letter of the Law" righteousness is not the true essence of what righteousness is supposed to be - just as a parent may lay down "laws" for their children but may still be discouraged when the child stoically follows them without understanding the "spirit" (overall intent) of the "commands" (also meant to be instructive) are given
- c. As the Lord is about to expound, there was far more given with the Law that was intended to be a **righteousness** of thinking/heart, leading to a practical righteousness lived and prioritized
- d. How will our righteousness exceed that of these religious leaders? - **Practically**, it will be a part of our thinking (rather than just "laws," we seek out **full intent** not just looking for a narrow interpretation and implementation in our lives) and then most importantly, legally, positionally and effectively THE righteousness of Christ Himself applied to us in our regeneration as seen in Rom. 4:1-8, Php. 3:9 and I Pet. 2:24
- e. "Those who can do no more than simply keep the rules, however conscientiously, haven't even started as far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned" R. T. France

N. The surpassing righteousness in living the full intent of the laws of relationships - vs. 21-26

1. The next section of verses is building off His clarifying a righteousness (of the Law) that surpasses what had been taught and practiced by the Scribes and Pharisees - these clarify the underlying "spirit" and overall intent of some of the various laws God had given - applied, we would come to take these clarifications as indicating that we should not even venture onto the path that leads to the final forbidden result - for instance, murder is the compilations of anger, hatred and disdain
2. You've heard taught that you should not murder, but **I** say to you... - vs. 21-22
- a. If one committed murder under the Law they were "liable" for judgement (the end result being execution, but the Lord stresses the legal process also)
- b. Yet, Christ clarifies that if one is angry "with his brother" (friend, family or even acquaintance) or takes it a step farther and calls them names (expresses the disdain verbally) such as "Raca" (empty-head) of "fool," is in danger of even greater - this would have been considered very odd for the Lord to say seeing no court would convene over just anger and name calling
- c. Yet, when some might start to laugh at such a concept, the Lord mentions the ultimate of judgments well beyond any human court - Hell
- d. In the fullest sense of the intent of the sixth commandment (Thou shalt not murder), all are not to even become "unrighteously" angry at another ("righteous anger" is only seen when the anger does not stem from some perceived self-right that has been infringed upon) and to allow it to culminate into openly expressing the demeaning hatred
- e. Seeing the Law in this true light would make the concept of "saving" one's self by keeping the Law totally impossible to conceive, and this is just the first clarification - but, on the other hand, thinking that living in light of the imputed righteousness of Christ in our account excuses our belittling this law and all that goes with it, would be presumptive and uncharacteristic of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven
- f. So, being who we are, we must be aware of our attitudes towards others - it is instinctive to be hateful in varying degrees because of our tendency to self-love - yet God's perspective (and He is truly the Judge of judges) places a seriousness on the offense (before Him) on if and why we get angry with another person - anger in itself is not wrong, but becomes wrong when it either is stirred by personal pride or becomes verbally degrading (stemming from condemnatory thoughts, "writing-off" others)

3. Seeing God places such a high value on our earthly relationships and interactions... - vs. 23-26

The Scribes and Pharisees would have placed the importance of the offering above the needed pursuit at reconciliation

It's that important! This would be the height of inconvenience, yet realizing its seriousness before God, it is done immediately

This response, this attitude is the extreme opposite of the spirit that leads to murder - it is an esteeming others better than you esteem yourself - Php. 2:3

This will not be easy in any sense of the imagination, but because of the original law, "Thou shalt not murder" we are driven to avoid even the initial "footpaths" that might lead us to it

- a. Even when participation in a religious service or "rite", if coming before God you realize "your brother" has something against you (legitimate; you know they can truly "point the finger at you") then stop what you are doing, right at that moment, leave and be "reconciled" with him and then return to your service to God - it is this important before God!
- b. This is a particularly interesting illustration of this point when we understand what was being described - this sermon was being presented in Galilee (quite a distance from Jerusalem), so this person would have (theoretically) have travelled to get there, and now must travel a great distance to seek "reconciliation" and then return to complete his "offering" to God
- c. The goal is to be "reconciled" with the offended person - seek to restore friendship, which at its core is communication - rifts between friends cause this to cease which becomes the greatest "blow" to the relationship - what if they refuse to reconcile? - first, this does not negate the attempt on our part but those offended also have clear instruction from the Lord in Mark 11:25, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions"
- d. This entire line of discussion counters any attitude on our part that "feels free" to harbor bitterness against another person (no matter who they are or what they've done) - those that wrong us we must forgive, and even those that seek to "wrong" God we must not allow bitterness (against them) to take root

4. Realize the urgency to seize the opportunity to be truly friendly with an "opponent" - vs. 25-26

By way of application, often, our "feuds" with others end up recruiting others on both sides making resolution less likely and probable costs higher - just as in going to court if it cannot be settled without involving "officials"

The phrase "paid up the last cent" demonstrates the "judicial" conclusion to the matter versus a more friendly, less formal (workable) handling if done in a friendly fashion

- a. The Lord, still building on the previous clarifications in genuinely living out the intent of the law, now uses an illustration of a rift (caused by an unpaid debt) and being taken to court
- b. The instruction of Jesus, in this situation, is to be inclined (always) to be friendly with the one who has been wronged (with one we have some type of debt) - this "approach" is to be done "while you are with him on the way" (while you have the opportunity)
- c. The normal motivation is that the situation not escalate and it cost you dearly! - in the example of going to court, if others **must** be brought in there can be as it were "collateral damage"
- d. Pride and stubbornness are often the leading causes of costly break-ups of former friends - and most often these "costs" are not monetary but are emotional, consuming as it were our time and energies (as we must focus them; on something that could have been avoided) - these considerations should be on our minds always, thinking before we speak, act or commit ourselves - for instance, we could think, "what might this cost me" before saying what we are thinking (or feeling - feelings unguarded lead to unaccountable speech !)
- e. The Lord compares this to being in a prison where there is no "getting out" or "away" from it until whatever the debt is estimated to be, is paid in full
- f. In reality, we cannot afford to carry these "attitudinal debts" with others! - this scenario is not covering what happens if the "opponent" will not reconcile, but that's not the point anyway - we cannot control what others do, but we are responsible for our own actions
- g. Note: some have attempted to use these verses to make a case for a form of "purgatory" though, in context, it's dealing with interpersonal relationships correctly, all in the **spirit** of "not killing" each other

O. The surpassing righteousness in living the full intent of the law against adultery - vs. 27-30

1. You've heard taught that you should not commit adultery, but **I** say to you... - vs. 27-28

The word for "lust" (ἐπιθυμῆσαι) is the same idea of coveting (longing or craving to have) and is specifically forbidden in the commandments also

This does not apply to a man with his wife since being his wife she is not "just a woman" as far as he is concerned

- a. The "letter" of the law was clear and many strove to avoid the final act, discounting the underlying thoughts - many may have (and may still do so) believe that even though they think "lustfully" they are alright since they have not actually acted on it
- b. Many have tried to argue against the meaning of what the Lord clarified in verse 28, but it means exactly what it states - anyone (any man in this case) who "gazes" upon any woman "with lust for her" **has committed adultery** with her IN HIS HEART
- c. "If a man earnestly wish to commit an evil, but cannot, because God puts time, place, and opportunity out of his power, he is fully chargeable with the iniquity of the act, by that God who searches and judges the heart." Clarke
- d. The key to this text and harmonizing with the next two verses is found in the emphasis on the heart - the eye will only look to what the heart desires - everyone has eyes but not all commit adultery in their thinking

*It is not uncommon to find those that justify (in their own minds) the "lustful look" because they don't act on it - but **sin** is in the heart and not in the action*

There is no such thing as accidental adultery - this sin as well as the sin of hatred are practiced in the heart long before action takes place

In Mat. 18:1-10 Christ reiterates these statements in the context of being (or allowing) stumblingblocks

We see this with medicine quite often - if a deadly infection is in a part of the body it is amputated to preserve the rest of the body - because of the understood priority drastic measures are taken

This then should provoke the unavoidable question, "How then is the heart to be dealt with effectively?" - all these "law clarifications" is to lead for the assurance of an absolute need for a Savior!

"He who despises the warning to cast from him, with indignant promptitude, an offending member, will find his whole body "cast," with a retributive promptitude of indignation, "into hell." Sharp language, this, from the lips of Love incarnate! JFB

This area of the Law is also being used to demonstrate how they had come to redefine the Law to fit their own motives and drives, thus their need for true change

Notice the phrasing in Mt. 19:8, that Moses "permitted" divorce and this is a far cry from legitimizing it

There are no laws legitimizing divorce, just a few regulating the results - God's clearest stance on divorce in general is in Mal. 2:13-16 - don't "deal treacherously with the wife of your youth"

Divorce takes place because of some sin (one way or another) though sin is not to be seen as negating marriage - it might separate couples but it is unsubstantiated to say it dissolves the marriage before God

Matthew

- e. It must be stressed also that Jesus is clarifying that "you have heard that it was said..." making it clear that the belief that a strict "letter of the law" approach to what God had given, was man's **traditions** and never God's Word - so much of what is put forward as being "God's Word" these days, is actually tradition and common acceptance more than it is God's Word
- f. So all warnings against fornication should include the mind (heart) - Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5 - those that take a false sense of comfort in their "secret sin" of lust, need to realize the weight that our Lord put on the thought even more than the action - one will never actually commit adultery that has not first **thought** on it - see also James 1:14-15 for the true **PATH** of sin

2. The highest priority of dealing with sin and not living with an acceptance of it - vs. 29-30

- a. Our Lord demonstrates the magnitude of thought sins (of the heart) by comparison with body parts that are typically highly cherished - for instance, if the "right eye" or "right hand" is what is causing you to sin, then certainly sever them from the body and cast them away (be rid of them altogether, forever) because their end-cost is too great!
- b. Of course, as the Lord already clarified, the true source of evil that leads to an eternal Hell is the heart and this is what needs to be dealt with - as with our bodies, if we have a part that is deemed deadly to the rest, it is agreeably removed (even at what would normally be considered great loss) because of a greater loss that would come
- c. Albert Barnes commenting on the aspect of Hell wrote, "Thy body, with all its unsubdued and vicious propensities. This will constitute no small part of the misery of hell. The sinner will be sent there as he is, with every evil desire, every unsubdued propensity, every wicked and troublesome passion, and yet with no possibility of gratification. It constitutes our highest notions of misery, when we think of a man filled with anger, pride, malice, avarice, envy, and lust, and no opportunity of gratifying them for ever. This is all that is necessary to make an eternal hell."
- d. No doubt this approach was taken because it is the innate protections and defense of our sinful heart that causes us to **blame** sin on anything else but it! - in our cases if we're not saying "The Devil made me do it" we're blaming on something else (genetics, environment, mental illnesses, and more) and not our hearts (our true natural selves) - for to do so would make it clearly apparent that we are thus helpless to help (save) ourselves
- e. This is an excellent text to point out the seriousness of the thoughts and intentions of the heart - the need for the renewing of the mind cannot be stressed enough (especially realizing the common acceptance and promotion these days of living mainly for **appearance**)

P. The surpassing righteousness in living the full intent of the law regarding marriage and divorce - vs. 31-32

1. It seems fitting that the Lord would go from dealing with the issue of lust to the issue of divorce (especially the divorce laws as they had become what was used to try to "lawfully" gratify their passions) - they determined that if they had the legal document of divorce, it justified their reasons in getting it
- a. The "lust" that would drive the pursuit of a divorce need not just be physical - many justify a divorce because of their emotional cravings deemed legitimate when called "**needs**"
- b. It is not new, but we live in a time when divorce and remarriage are quite common - much of this stems from man claiming (as his own) God's institution of marriage (which was foundational to all mankind in Genesis 2, and was established even before the Fall of man)
2. This text, as well as the text in chapter 19, are hotly contested because of the sensitivity surrounding the topic of divorce in general - this is a strong example of exegesis by popular thought - this text does not legitimize divorce nor does it provide an allowance for remarriage after divorce (which is why there is so much written and discussed regarding this and a few other texts)

- a. Many resort to this text and the one in Matthew 19 to make a case for divorce because of Christ's reference to the divorce laws (as though somehow this **sanctioned** divorces)
- b. It must be understood that the core text dealing with the "bill of divorcement" is Deut. 24:1-4
- c. The Deuteronomy text is actually dealing with **one specific issue** related to the divorce practices that were occurring in Israel in the time of Moses - if a man divorced his wife and she married another, he cannot ever remarry her - this was the topic/law - from this had come the belief that since there were laws regulating divorce then divorce must have some legitimacy
- d. It must be understood; the Law never sanctioned divorce **it just regulated it!** Many of the laws were written to deal with the aftermaths of many sins or other social ills, but these sins were not to be looked upon as "allowable" because the Law regulated them

One of the greatest concerns is the "freedom" to remarry counting it "cruel" to forbid it making singleness itself cruelty - the Apostle Paul certainly would have disagreed with this sentiment in I Cor. 7

e. There are many "what-ifs" that will often be brought up such as "What about remarried couples, what should they do?" and "Didn't God say He gave Israel a certificate of divorce in Jeremiah?" - **these, though, do not change the institution of marriage as it is before God** - remarriage after divorce is supposed to be seen more as an anomaly not a norm (to readjust the perceived concept of marriage and to help us be considered more compassionate) - and God with Israel used their practices as an example to them, and was encouraging Israel to return - more detail will be discussed when we reach Matthew 19

3. So as to not go "off-track" from our text, watch the flow of thought - in verse 21 our Lord stresses the importance God places on our human relationships and the great costs that come when we are not thoughtful - He then went on to the importance of even/especially the thoughts in a marriage relationship (focusing on lustful/covetous thoughts) - it is then in the next area, relating to what has come before, that our Lord addresses the loose handling of marriage (by means of divorce), divorce demonstrating a lack of true reverence for relationships in the most intimate of human relationships!

Under the Law women could not divorce and those who had been sexually intimate before marriage also were forbidden to divorce

a. Again Christ deals with "what had been said" which, as is most often the case, veers off course from what was originally written and what was originally meant - in this case, they had been taught that if someone wanted to "send away" his wife (separate from her) all he needed to do was give her a writ of divorce - this made the initiator of it feel "lawful" and then it was assumed they were free to remarry (which had become what ended up to be a using of the Law to commit adultery)

The reason for divorcing based on "fornication" was taken from Deut. 24:1-4 text (because he "found some indecency in her")

b. It is similar to today where divorce is now a matter of legal documents (as though it was these that made their marriage in the first place) and just as then, divorces are now for all sorts of "incompatibility" issues and not "fornication"

c. The Lord's clarification - He starts with "But I say to you..." not as though He was legislating new law, but as He was making the intent clear by exposing their profound misuse (and the result)

The core sentence and its purpose is clear - the Lord had just dealt with "adultery" and now demonstrates another way the sixth commandment was defiled by their loose divorce practices

d. It is crucial to take the sentence carefully to not be distracted with the so-called "exception" - the core sentence reads, "**everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery**" - how could a husband **MAKE** his wife commit adultery? Many assume by her remarriage, but this is just that; assumed and not what is being stated - instead, if a husband "puts away" his wife for any reason except that of her "unchastity," makes it **appear** that she is adulterous, which was what was considered the lawful standard to put away a wife - thus **stigmatizing** her as an adulteress regardless of what she will do afterward - this was another demonstration of unrighteousness (where not only are they unfaithful themselves but now do damage to another)

e. So why the "exception clause"? - if a man divorces his wife because she really is "fornicating," then he is not the cause of her adultery since she is to blame - the Lord is dealing more with the "innocent party" in these two verses

4. Regarding the divorce issue, the Lord was very clear in Mark 10:10-12 and Luke 16:18

This is the plain meaning and it is only questioned because of some other influence such as popular thinking of any age where it is looked upon as unacceptable

a. Neither text has the "exception clause" because the core topic of the "legality" of divorce was being addressed - to divorce and then remarry is to commit adultery against the spouse, and to marry one that is divorced is to commit adultery

As will be discussed further in Matt. 19 the reason that divorces were permitted was because of the "hardness of their hearts" and not because of marital infidelity

b. It is popular to try to "skirt" the issue by claiming that since adultery in the Old Testament was to result in stoning (thus death), then it is permissible to remarry if your spouse is adulterous - then, as the thought process goes, since stoning was no (is) longer practiced, then the unfaithful spouse is as "dead" to you and you were then free to remarry - the biggest problem with this line of thinking is that it is only inferred and not plainly taught!

The only legitimate release from the marriage covenant is death as Paul mentioned in Romans 7:2 as an illustration of living under the Law

c. One more critical problem we would have if we held to the view that adultery dissolves a marriage is trying to live with what our Lord just taught in the previous verses regarding adultery of the heart - if what Christ said is to be taken seriously, then a wife should divorce her husband if he has had lustful thoughts in his heart (if adultery dissolves the marriage)

d. Another serious problem is that this stance leaves no room for forgiveness - if unfaithfulness happens in a marriage and the infidelity truly dissolves the marriage (as so many teach), then reconciliation through forgiveness is not possible - marital infidelity in all forms is very bad, but as illustrated in the life of Hosea, God Himself would take Israel back even though she had been unfaithful

e. So, the righteousness our Lord is stressing is best seen in truly committed marriages

Q. The surpassing righteousness in living the full intent of the law regarding oaths - vs. 33-37

1. Just as there were laws to deal with divorce (not endorsing them but regulating them) so oaths were in the law to deal with lying (truthfulness could not be assumed because of sin)
 - a. The Lord, in these verses, is not forbidding oaths, but is encouraging (as He will with marriage in chapter 19) God's original intent for our communication - it's easy to forget that promises and vows exist because of the deceitfulness and tendencies to lie in mankind
 - b. It is often mentioned that the Lord was under an oath (Mt. 26:63-64) but this was not His oath and the other two "oath" references in Matthew (14:7, 26:74) were both in evil situations
 - c. Then there is the oath of God mentioned in Heb. 6:13 - it is not a contradiction to this text seeing the emphasis of the Lord is on the truthfulness of all our speech
2. Again the Lord begins by mentioning their traditions regarding the law, in this case against lying ("bear false witness") - it had been used as a path to make varying degrees of speech (some fully binding if certain things were invoked, and other speech (oaths) not as binding) - vs. 33

God in this case, was the only one who could legitimately swear by God since He was God - all other vows invoking God are still lacking because of the oath takers themselves

How often have we seen this in action where one seeks to defend themselves by showing the "flexibility" in how what they said could be interpreted?

- a. This led the way to trickery of all sorts (as in someone figuring they could get out of a verbal obligation because they did not promise "to God" in some way)
- b. This is why we need so much "legalise" in our transactions today - many are led to believe something when the "promisor" uses cleverly crafted words to deceive, and yet still gain the confidence of their intended victim

We are already supposed to see ourselves as speaking (and promising) before the presence of God anyway at all times

see Mt. 23:16-21

Another phrase that used to be popular was "As God is my witness..." - better to be unconvincing than to use God for our own reputation - God uses us, we don't use God!

The more familiar we are with the true greatness of God the less likely we are to flippantly use His name or anything associated with Him to serve our own ends - we are the slaves not the masters

3. The practice of "swearing" by something related to God to give it more credence - vs. 34-36
 - a. The Lord was speaking against making an oath (to God or people) and "pulling in God" to what was being said, as though it could now be **more** trusted - no doubt this led (and still does) to many then equating God (in varying degrees) with liars and deceivers - true reverence for God would not allow us to practice such risks with His reputation
 - b. The "work around" that had been developed to invoke the name of God (without using the name of God) was to invoke something related to Him - so, **make no oath at all** "by Heaven" since that is God's throne, and not by the Earth since that is His "footstool" (as described in Isa. 66:1), or by Jerusalem, since it is God's city (the Great King)
 - c. Many still invoke God into their speech, not necessarily by making oaths, but by phrases such as "I prayed about it" or "God led me" or even "God told me" - it is irreverent to attempt to pull God into our speech to somehow be more believable
 - d. Some, in an attempt to leave God out of their oaths, practiced a popular method of making an oath "by your head" as if to swear by their life - the problem with this was the assumption that they actually had control over their lives and could use it as a type of bargaining collateral - the Lord countered this with a simple point of their total lack of actual control over their lives - who can change (by their own intentional will and determination) the color of one hair, just one, on their head? - with such little authority, how could one "swear" by it?

Many promises are made in the midst of stressful, fearful situations and are not well thought through - better to face the pressures and not speak at all than to unrighteously obligate oneself

Christ was stressing in this text the source of our words being the heart - evil speech demonstrating an evil heart and empty speech demonstrating an empty (vain) heart

see also Eph. 4:29

4. Instead, in the truest sense of not "bearing false witness", let your "yes" be "yes" and "no", "no" - vs. 37
 - a. Our "normal" speech should be fully reliable and each should feel the obligation to do what they say; be truthful and accurate in what they say with an underlying pursuit of honesty
 - b. The reason this should be so is at least two-fold - when the Lord said, "anything beyond this is of evil" primarily identifies the fact that oaths came because of the prominence of lying and people looked for a way to stress their "unlyingness" - second, because if someone needs to make an oath or swear to their honesty (to be trusted) this truly "smells" of dishonesty
 - c. The common core with lies and oath making is the lack of reverence for our speech and words in general - "rambling on" is not uncommon and we are often guilty of speaking just to counter awkward silence or just to hear ourselves speak
 - d. One of the most sobering texts in all of Scripture is found in Mat. 12:33-37 where the Lord warned that "every careless word" will be accountable "in the day of judgment" - this word for "careless" (idle) is not just "curse words" or "swear words," but is also **useless** speech - even in our so-called "small-talk" we should be serious as to its content and its purpose
 - e. These verses dealing with oaths, should be one of the greatest motivators for us to truly "think before we speak" and not just in the choosing of our words, but in the choosing of our subjects - we do not want to get pulled into "idle conversation" consisting of words put forward without profit and without good/useful purpose

R. The surpassing righteousness in living the full intent of the law regarding retaliation - vs. 38-42

1. To rightly understand these next set of verses, we need to realize the emphasis on yielding legal and perceived rights in exercising the full sense of the law of “ loving thy neighbor”

There are times when compromise is the right thing to do but compromise across the board (as always and option) is certainly not endorsed by the Lord - as seen in His uncompromising defense of the Truth (as seen even His His teaching in these texts)

Even with these realities in mind, following Christ's instructions will be “unnatural” for us and will involve a faith-focused posture on what's really happening when we are personally wronged

- a. These verses are often questioned as being unrealistic and involving concepts that would allow the “wicked” to trample us under foot (as if the Lord was supporting all tenants of pacifism (peace through compromise) and passivism (“live and let live” - a practical result of fatalism or just an overriding unwillingness to act)
- b. There was a place for these laws (seeing they were part of the Law (Ex. 21:22-25; Deut. 19:15-21)
- c. But the perception had become that these were their personal rights, and if these rights were infringed upon, they then had the right to retaliate in kind (as they felt was “in kind”) - this would then lead to a sense of excitement, thrill or satisfaction in carrying out what would have been considered “retribution” but what became revenge
- d. As seen in the texts referenced above, these laws were for the courts to “meet out” and never were intended for individuals to take into their own hands and determine just punishment - ever since the beginning of mankind, man has been inclined to seek to have the one offending pay more than what they “meted out” (as with Lamech in Gen. 4:23-24)
- e. The Lord is not adding to the Law or making new law but was, as He mentioned in verse 17, He did not come to do away with the Law but to truly fulfill it

2. In dealing with what they had heard regarding “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” Jesus counters what the Law had become (in its “out of context”, popular interpretation of personal rights (which could be justly (as they saw it), **personally** reimbursed when trespassed) - vs. 38-42

- a. Our Lord goes beyond **restraint** when it comes to personal offenses and goes to the point of “going the extra mile” (returning good for evil) - this is contrary to our nature and will depend on a focus that is steadied on something **outside** ourselves and our pride
- b. First He illustrates in dealing with a personal insult - to be struck on the right cheek was a picture of an insult (with one of two expected results - either submit (cower) or slap back in defense of personal honor - Christ instructs neither, but something quite unexpected - turn to them the other cheek (**demonstrating neither cowardice nor pride**) - this type of strike (the right hand to the left cheek) would have been “backhanded” (again, a challenging insult)
- c. The point being made was don't “resist the evil person's personal insults against you” - their agenda is to provoke you to fight (setting the agenda/method of dealing with the disagreement or situation - most often it is best to not counter at all unless it can be done in a controlled, mature fashion) - too many good concepts are defamed, not because of the content but simply because they were allowed to be presented in a degrading, contradictory format
- d. Also, it is interesting to consider that to turn to offer the other cheek would require the breaking of eye-contact, avoiding a stare-down (which would continue the escalation)
- e. Even if being “sued” to take something from you (personal in the case our Lord describes) let them have it - again, it must be noted that this is in a **judicial** situation and not a standard to follow where we allow any and all to just take what is ours - yet, the concept is clear, don't let things (personal property) be what we “fight for” - it's not worth it! - vs. 40 - in this case one was being sued for his “shirt” (possibly as collateral of some sort for a debt) - they were to offer their outer garment as well (something that could not have been lawfully taken - see Ex. 22:25-27)
- f. This is an exceptional teaching of the Lord seeing it went beyond the norm - it is as if He was telling them to go beyond what the law would require - **be above reproach!** - Paul also dealt with something very similar in I Cor. 6:7-8 (suffer the loss of property rather than defame God)
- g. Then, the third example, if compelled (forced by law) to go one mile, go two - this references a practice older than the one instituted by Rome (it was a Persian term) - anyone could be made to act as a porter of sorts (to carry messages and even equipment) one Roman mile, a practice which would have typically been resentful to an occupied people
- h. These three examples all demonstrate a doubling of the response - one cheek struck, another offered; one shirt taken, the coat offered; one mile compelled, another is given
- i. And finally, all still under the countering of a vengeful attitude, give to those that ask and don't turn away from those looking to borrow from you - often, selfishness stems from an embittered spirit focused on wrongs done to it - here, one might reject a request from someone they believe deserves their misfortune

This was not to set a standard of letting others kill you as our Lord Himself avoided such because “His hour had not come” and when it did, He was God's sacrifice

see Prov. 18:6

A controlled forum is what we strive for - many opponents to us and God will maneuver to get the “playing field” to their advantage - controlled, disciplined silence is sometimes best

As with the Hebrew Christians in Heb. 10:32-39 when, for the sake of being associated with what was right, they joyfully accepted the seizure of their property

The Lord does not call this an unjust suit so the response does not seem to matter

No doubt much of the difficulty with this would be the unexpectedness of it, thus the inconvenience and discomfort - if one would go a mile out of their way that might add another mile to get back...walking

compare to Luke 6:40

- j. The resistance to give or lend also stems from a notion that we own what we have - the love of things leads to essentially be owned by those things
- k. A similar text in Luke 6:30 goes further in stating that if someone takes something of yours, don't demand it back (as if in giving/lending expecting **nothing** in return)

compare with Pro. 21:26 where the righteous gives unsparingly

S. The "completeness" in loving your enemy - vs. 43-48

1. Few concepts puzzle and strain the comprehension as much as these next few verses - to love an enemy, to pray for those who persecute seems impossible, or at least highly unlikely! - vs. 43

As seen today, there was a pseudo, societal "love" that had come to be accepted as love (yet was more, at best, a tolerance) and sacrificial love was a rarity for uncommon occurrences - many will sing the praises of such exhibitions in others but abhor the obligation of such in themselves

- a. The common "take" on Lev. 19:18 demonstrates the effect of popular thinking on a normally clear verse - the instruction was clear until something was left out and another added
- b. The verse reads, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord" - yet, vengeance was being sought (as just seen in vs. 38-42), grudges were considered normal and expected - then there was an acceptance of a requirement to love but "not as thyself" and discounting the source of the Lord Himself (the epitome of true love itself!)
- c. Then there was the added "...and hate your enemy" which was justified by those so "nit-picking" the Leviticus text that they assumed that since this was to be directed at one's neighbor (sons of your people), that those not fitting such a description were then free to be hated - this also demonstrates an expected tendency in us (to be warded off) and that our seeking out "loopholes," to maintain somewhat of a clear conscience in avoiding particular commands we find distasteful or outright unacceptable - there were, of course, other instructions in the Law that did command a love of an enemy and kind actions towards them

The Lord clarified the truest concept of who/what a "neighbor" really is in Lu. 10:25-37

e.g. Ex. 23:4-5, Deut. 23:7, Pr. 25:21-22

2. "Love your enemies and pray for them... so that you may be sons of your Father..." - vs. 44-45

This point is either missed or de-emphasized in our clamoring to find a way around this

This "love" is driven by the need of the one on which it is focused and "spent" - it is not driven by self-consideration but either by hope for their change or pity in their condition

This love does not appreciate the person afflicting them but can appreciate God's purposes in and through them

To "bless" them and "do good" to them is to speak well to them (not returning in like what they give and truly "do good" in doing to and for them what is right and best - both concepts have an "eye" on the need, not their conduct

Many Christian psychologists would stress the negative results of an unforgiving heart and the mental and health benefits of doing what is right - but they miss the core motive in this text which is to guide us in all areas without a primary focus on personal, temporal benefits

Our hostile responses to our "enemies" is proof of our dealing with them in light of their sin and not in light of their need (which is UNGodliness

- a. Before we allow our emotional instincts to counter or compromise the interpretation of these verses, we must consider the intent behind the command
- b. The instruction was not just to love those that are mean to us, but, in reality, be like our Father Who is in Heaven Who loved us when we were His enemies!
- c. The Lord's choice of words for "love" is important to understand also - He does not instruct us to "like" (as we would a close friend with whom we have much in common (φιλεω)) for that would be unrealistic - the word is αγαπατε clearly indicating a selfless consideration of the other in their need, verses their reciprocating (or ability to reciprocate) affection and kindness back to myself (as we often define love) - this is a love of the will and not the emotions, though it certainly would be expected to affect the emotions at some point
- d. The truest demonstration of this love (by us) is to pray for them - this is interesting realizing it involves the appeal to God for them and the acknowledging of God in the situation in which we find ourselves being "pressed" by these enemies - this also demonstrates that this love for them is out for their best not the endorsement of their pursuits and attitudes
- e. The phrase in the KJV, "... bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you..." is not in the older manuscripts and not referenced when quoted by the early Church "fathers" - it appears to have been added from the Luke 6:27-28 text - it is clearly not wrong to include these ideas in our discussions of this text since Luke adds more detail though Matthew did not (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) deem it crucial to the context - we need not be presumptive in trying to "fix" what Matthew recorded as though our perspective (2000 years later) is better (**we do not want to trust our "take" more than his**)
- f. Matthew's focus (in contrast to Luke) was on the internal (Luke including outward expressions of true love), demonstrating again the emphasis on the heart - common courtesies are expected but are never enough to deal with the internal needs/conflicts of others - this also is to affect our thoughts (perspectives) of those we would consider "enemies"
- g. The underlying drive in us that motivates us to this is not to improve our lot, or even to avoid the devouring effects of bitterness (all of which are valid, but not primary), but our motive is to be like our Father - this same Father Who graciously provides the benefits of His creation on even those who are 'evil' (this not being an endorsement of their conduct, but a profound demonstration of His graciousness, seeing that anything above Hell is more than any of us deserve!) - just as God did not and does not "deal with **us** according to our sins" (Psa. 103:10), so we should seek to emulate His love toward all others

see I John 3:1-3 regarding the greatness of God's love and its personal purifying impact

Ah, but so often we doubt God's insight or perspective on the matter and doubt His timing

So if even the most morally debased and crooked amongst them practice such, why have a law to begin with?

Even the most criminal can be courteous so as to get what they are after - this stresses the importance of a genuine heart attitude versus an external facade

Lucifer's pursuit of God-likeness was one of equality where our pursuit of God-likeness is to be one of holiness (set-apartness)

Love LIKE He does, don't be threatened by attacks LIKE He isn't, be fully generous LIKE He is and be graciously unselfish just LIKE Him

see Eph. 4:25-5:2

Our works of and for righteousness may be seen of men (as referenced in 5:16) but are never done for them to see - even without an audience, without any recognition required we are to do what we do for God and His glory

The "rewards" of "people praise" fade and thus become addictive as the pursuit to get more goods (realizing people are easily distracted and forget) - this life pursuit is extremely unfulfilling, for when the reward is achieved it instantly begins to fade

Just think of what could actually be done if we would live this command all the time and were truly not motivated by the honor bestowed by people - we could serve at all times in all places!

- h. Many find this particular command (to love an enemy) impossible, because they do not recognize the degree to which God loved them and "graced" them - the more we realize the loving grace of God, the less likely we are to be condemning of others - we desire to "deal" (aggressively, retaliatory) with our enemies, yet the Lord says to "pray for them" (bring their need before God and He will perfectly deal with them (in quality and in timing))
- i. We must never lose sight of the facts that we were the enemies of God (Rom. 5:10) and, by our self-focused lives sought to "press God in" (force Him, "persecute" Him) and yet, while being His enemies, while sinners, He died for us - see also I Peter 2:18-25

3. Don't settle for the "great OK" (societal norms), instead, be "**complete**" like your father - vs. 46-48

- a. One of the driving forces behind justifying, not just wrongs, but even justifying so many excuses to neglect "higher pursuits," is seen in the concept of "everybody's doing it"
- b. So, loving someone because they love you seems reasonable and expected by most, and even the "tax collectors" (those despised by most in their society) do the same - note also that this was Matthew's (Levi's) occupation - so what "reward" could they expect from such a non-exemplary living and response?
- c. If you "greet your brothers," don't even the "Gentiles" do the same (in this case distinguishing them religiously) so how is this "more" than anyone else? - it is incredibly easy to fall into a religious lifestyle that is considered exceptional by some (at least by ourselves) but is, in reality, no different than most (then even some of the irreligious or "heathen")
- d. Instead, in contrast, "be perfect"! - at first glance this would seem to be an impossible task given by our Lord and might drive some to figurize the meaning and then tie it into the imputed righteousness of Christ - we do become truly and completely justified before God in Christ, but this is not the intent of this verse
- e. This reference to "perfection" is not in degree as much as it is in kind (quality) - notice the wording - be perfect **AS** your heavenly Father is (in the same way) - we will never be complete (the core idea to the underlying word (τέλειός) but are to follow His kind of righteousness in contrast to that of the Scribes and Pharisees (just as this whole section began in verse 20)
- f. The struggles over this verse should not be on the ideas of "perfection" as much as it should be on being like our Father (Who is the standard of true perfection anyway) which then drives us then to learn of Him, His thoughts and loves and to be like Him in them rather than any of those on Earth (no matter how socially or religiously popular they are)

T. "Look out" for the true motive as to why you do what you do - 6:1-18

1. The reason why we do "good works" needs to be scrutinized for two general purposes - vs. 1

- a. If we do them to be "seen of men" we are likely to do them for the praise of men, and if "man" changes his ideas of "good works" we are apt to change our pursuits to match
- b. Second, if we do our "righteousnesses" **for** the eyes of mankind we get the "reward" (results) versus from the Father in Heaven (which is infinitely (in all senses of the term) better!)
- c. There should also be a fear that when man is no longer impressed with what is right before God, those living for the praise of man and those living to be "impressed" (soliciting the aspirations of people to please them) will no longer do anything of true value altogether and lives will be filled with all sorts of vanity (uselessness)

2. Beware (take great care) public giving (for any cause) - vs. 2-4

- a. Many give publicly for the purpose of recognition and were characterized by Christ as making an open show in an open place with as many observers as possible (to "get as much out of their gift" as possible) - they seek the praise of people and society and, as Jesus clarified, they receive it - it is fleeting, in contrast to the eternal rewards of the Father (eternal not only in the sense they keep coming, but also that they do not "fade" in their splendor)
- b. There should be a secrecy in our giving "to the poor" don't be like the "hypocrites" called so because they seek to act as though they are truly doing what they do for God - this is key for us to think on in comparison to our motives; why do we really do what we do and can we actually do service just for the eyes of God and without the honor (or even the appreciation) of people? - this actuality is discouraged on all fronts (maybe not openly or even knowingly) by the popularity of seeking to encourage good works by offering open praise and recognition - this has become a normal practice in Churches
- c. The significance of the phrase "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"

When the opportunity comes to give in any capacity, do it and then forget it

Hypocrites can be identified in their NEED to be acknowledged in their "good deeding"

The word "openly" as seen in the KJV - RWP - The Textus Receptus added the words en tōi phanerōi (openly) here and in Mt 6:6, but they are not genuine. Jesus does not promise a public reward for private piety. - the reward is the Father's seeing and not others!

Some may sense the need to be more reverent, which is understandable if it is truly done realizing they speak to God

The essential purpose of prayer is to converse (talk) with God and not to receive recognition for it by people

It should be noted that there is nothing wrong in realizing there are rewards for doing what is right and with the right motive before the eyes of God - He rewards (still in grace) in far greater measure

It is key, of course, that we actually be praying! - so not "if you pray" but "when you pray..." (it is assumed)

To do good things and pray without anyone knowing but God requires we actually believe He sees and the extra work at secrecy is worth it and then cannot be driven by the pursuit of recognition

It is definitely the quality that is more important than the quantity when it comes to prayer

God is not honored in our cliches (filler statements without heart participation) - our conversing with God is to be our most intimate conversation

The "model prayer" that our Lord is about to give is short and yet every word proper and precise

Matthew

is not in keeping one's giving secret from others as much as it is picturing being so secretive it is as though one is keeping their giving (good deeds) secret from themselves - when we do "good" it is not supposed to be something we focus on in our own thinking - **see Mt. 25:34-40** where the "righteous" don't **know** of their own "righteous deeds"

- d. The danger in becoming a hypocrite (a "play-actor") is the high potential of believing the "act" one's self because the "pretend" becomes the norm and can be firmly believed (especially when the externals become popular and the hypocritical deeds become desired by the masses) - the inner-congratulating of hypocrites provides many a false sense of satisfaction and achievement (to which the truth then becomes a **threat**)
- e. The "your" in verse 4 is normally plural (ὁμῶν) but here is singular (σου) stressing the very personal relationship to God our Lord presents in this area of not only what and how we do what we do, but why; to be seen by our Father doing His work
- f. He (the Father) seeing us in secret rewards us (this reward being a form of "reciprocation" (giving back)) in far greater (or lasting) measure (as in Mt. 19:27-30)
3. Beware (take great care) in your praying (where, why and how) - vs. 5-8
- a. This is a far more controversial (as far as countering popular practice amongst Christians) than many realize - standards of praying for the ears of others have become commonly accepted - this is often evidenced in the cliches used, and more eloquent language used (yet it should be noted that other than the proper names and titles ascribed to God in Biblical prayers, the wording of those praying is **normal** and genuine (normal))
- b. Again, our Lord uses the "hypocrites" as the example to avoid - "He rebukes two revolting faults in prayer, ambition, and vain babbling." GBN
- c. These "love to stand and pray... that they may be seen by men" - there is nothing wrong with standing and praying and even being "seen by men" when doing so, but if this becomes the heart motive then the issue arises - this point and the previous demonstrate a tendency in any religious practice to develop a motive for commendation by people (either in that they pray period, or pray long or short, or pray "passionately") and that these become what they are known for - we desire to be "**known**" of God and not to seek also (or only) man's praise
- d. For if this is the case (the motive), the goal will be reached (to some degree) and the "reward" (recompense) will be had in full by men and not God - these seek more after what man provides than what God provides
- e. The ideal form and place of prayer is in private, hidden from others and with the heart - it is true that there was public praying at times but **this** method is the one encouraged by our Lord - it not only protects from distractions, but it aids in focus - even as we are in our conversations with each other, we are most often more sincere (ourselves) when not in front of others
- f. The heart motive again is to be "rewarded" by the Father Who sees us (and hears us) praying in secret - to ensure the "conversation" is only between ourselves and God, we enter our "inner room" and "shut the door" - note also it is your "Father who is in secret" Who sees what is done "in secret" - with areas such as prayer and "alms" giving, God is in the "**hidden**" from public view" far more than in the "public eye"
- g. With the motive discussed, now the Lord deals with the method - when praying do not use "meaningless repetitions" - these would be something like "filler" as in talking to talk - there is nothing more noble in a long prayer when it is long for long's sake, for "It is heathen folly to **measure** prayer by the yard" (Lanski)
- h. "To repeat a form of prayer a very large number of times has always seemed to the ignorantly religious to be a praiseworthy thing; but assuredly it is not so. It is a mere exercise of memory, and of the organs of noise-making: and it is absurd to imagine that such a parrot exercise can be pleasing to the living God." Spurgeon
- i. The significance also of **commanding** against these vain repetitions, is the evident lack of sincerity, the notion that God must be "bothered" and is more seen as a stand-offish deity than He is a father - this tendency in our prayers may also indicate why we find ourselves not praying at all (at least on a regular basis), not seeing Him as **our** Father (God) Who is near
- J. The "Gentiles" (using these repetitions) believe they will be heard (or heard more) with their many words - there may be times our long, personal prayer, but most often our most sincere

Even though our father knows what we need before we ask, we still ask (else, as James pointed out, we might not "have" (James 4:2)) - God, in His sovereignty ordained prayer as a means to actuate His will

praying will be short (especially when done in the faith that God knows my heart and needs not be informed of too many details (as though He is uninformed) - We pray because we are **commanded** to do so; we pray because this is the "means" by which God has deemed we receive much of what we have or are to have; we pray to keep our daily dependence upon God and we pray because we will want to bring these things to our Father (not supposing that He does not know, but simply because He *is* our Father and will be our supplier and the giver of wisdom (true answers))

4. So, in contrast to the simply external appearance of righteousness, pray correctly; truly - vs. 9-15

One of the first things we notice is what is not present in this prayer... many words - it is short and every word has a purpose

Before we think of the earthly concerns to fill our prayers we acknowledge the fullest perspective, meaning and purpose in our lives - all found in our Creator and His eternal purposes which are to affect the whole of our prayers

It is interesting to note that the word for "hallowed" is an imperative passive (in this case, not commanding something of God but strictly leaving this "sacredness" of His own name to Him - it is not ours to make or determine (simply to acknowledge and agree)

The prayer that it would "come" demonstrates and expectation of it coming to this earth and overruling it - this should cause us to consider which "rule" we actually prefer!

This is why we never "demand" - but simple request realizing His will (perspective) is perfect and ours isn't and that in not answering as we ask still fits our prayer (our seeking His will over ours)

One of the keys to prayer is to keep us dependent - as a true beggar I have not but for what I beg and receive - all I ever have is borrowed from God

There is debate as to the actual definition of the word "daily" (ἐπιούσιον) as meaning "tomorrow's" or enough to let us exist - either way the idea is "enough"

Taken in context, we are making this request in the seeking of His Kingdom and will - we eat to live we live to seek His kingdom!

In light of this text and all others in Scripture it should be assumed (by us) that we will (we must) be forgiving - it is the bitter doubter that seeks to throw unnecessary doubt on this phrase

- a. The model of praying that our Lord provides is a sample ("in this manner") and was not intended to become a "script" we follow in praying to God - we never read of any of the disciples/apostles or the Lord Himself praying these exact words, so its significance is in its examples throughout
- b. The very beginning is key to praying as we ought - it is not to strictly a "deity" that we pray, but is to "our Father," this being a very personal term versus an expected formality - we are His children by adoption as described in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:5-7
- c. It is addressed to our father Who is "in the heavens," not restricting Him to that location, but in a recognition of the greatness of the position of our Father and always with an understanding of Heaven being where we are headed - so in the first few words we see not just an idea of phrases to use but the significance of who we are talking to and of our needed eternal/heavenly focus
- d. Then, when stating "Hallowed be Your name" we are to come before Him with the understanding and approach of how "sacred" He is (far above us in all ways) - we don't just say these words, we are to embrace the reality of them in our posture to Him and how we come to Him - "hallowed" being the word "ἁγιασθήτω" carrying two core ideas - He is set apart in being **above** us (thus His being our father is by means of His condescension) and second, "holy" in the sense of being "**uncommon**" (not treated as we would any other name or person)
- e. Some may ask as to why we should pray (προσεύχεσθε) - literally to direct our wishes to) this, His name is already holy - the best answer to this is found in our expressing our wish/desire to see it openly acknowledged as such by all - essentially asking He (His name) be honored
- f. "Your kingdom come" is far more profound than many of us often consider - realizing the kingdom of God has always "existed" and is over all, this statement is a request for His rule and authority overall, with a special consideration to the age in which we live and its current kingdoms: this is, of course, and admission that the present "kingdom" is not **ideal** or preferred
- g. Then, in our praying it should naturally follow that we would seek (in light of what we have just sought) that His will be done now on the earth as it already is (in the same way where it is openly acknowledged and revered) in Heaven - this "posture" is to be consistent throughout all our prayer/prayers seen as governing all we would request - please note that this request comes before any other "practical" request that is about to be made
- h. After getting our "posture" correct, we are then ready to deal with the temporal - notice the precision of the next phrase where we could state it like "Give us today the bread we need for today" ("**this day**" and "**daily** bread"), and not as we might often request "give me this day tomorrow's bread... next week's bread (needs)" - when analyzed, a good deal of our prayers are, in actuality, a seeking of the avoidance of faith (as if saying "please let me not have to pray (make this request) tomorrow) - this aspect of prayer reminds us to seek/pray for what is enough, not being driven to place our security in the "more than enough for today" and it reminds us of the **source**, daily, of our needs being met - the danger of "more than enough" is the daily forgetting of acknowledging where it came from and will continue to come from
- i. This part of the model prayer also focuses on the requesting of our most basic needs, which in contrast/comparison to Mt. 6:31-32, shows we are to seek it from the Lord, but not to worry about it (making it our main focus to seek it out, realizing He knows we need it)
- j. The next phrase in this model prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" is one that causes much tense discussion usually centered on the question, "will then God not forgive us if we don't forgive others?" - rather the thought (in this verse and its clarification in verses 14-15) deals more with the realization of our obligation to forgive (and be forgiving) realizing what we have been forgiven (as in Mt. 18:21-35)

This is not so much an asking for forgiveness as it is an admission of moral responsibility to forgive

This should be a sobering statement to realize we are all to be praying - sadly, professing Christians are often characterized as being unforgiving grudge-holders

This prayer request was also instructed by the Lord in Mt. 26:41 - "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation... the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"

This is our "siding" with God against sin and even our own natural inclinations - in essence asking "please keep us from our natural selves and all its wrong desires

We want and acknowledge God's Kingdom and power. All belongs for the intended purpose of His glory! - we agree and He supersedes/surpasses all limits of time - forever!

*This entire concept is illustrated by the Lord in Mt. 18 where he illustrates a great debt forgiven and a lesser debt not forgiven - one forgive a great debt **cannot** be unforgiving of lesser debts*

In contrast to the emphasis in Isa. 58:3-7 many had come (by the NT times) to practice fasting as a religious ritual versus a sincere heart burden - when burdened enough, we will often fast automatically

It does us absolutely no good to appear to be dedicated and living by faith (and suffering in it) when the reality is not there - and when the reality is there we will not care what others think

- j. This was also in stark contrast to the prayers of the heathen and the hypocritical leaders who would not dare to pray in this manner - to pray "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those indebted to us" would be against their measurements of piety (they seeing themselves so far above others, forgiveness is far from their thinking and practice)
- k. It is very important in handling this verse to remember the prayer does not use one singular pronoun and is stressing the reality of praying as a group (not necessarily publicly, audibly in front of each other) but that we are a family coming before our Father - the interests of the "whole" are considered and not just *mine* (even in the request for daily needs it is plural, focusing on each other) - **true prayer is never selfish in its motive, thus never in its content**
- l. Having dealt with our sin (forgiveness), attention is turned to the future and the avoidance of sin and all sorts of failures - "And bring us not into temptation" - Many fall prey to temptation never having asked to be led from it (we have not because we ask not!) - this is not a prayer for God to not tempt us (see James 1:13-14) but an open recognition of our vulnerability to temptation and our need to be protected from it; and even while in it (when also considering another use of "temptations" includes the idea of "trials")
- m. Instead we ask "deliver us from **the** evil" - just as we are to ask for God's kingdom and will to be done on earth, so we seek, while here, to be free from evil entirely (internal and external recognizing our dependence on God to be rid of evil, and not dependence on our own determination) - many take "the evil" to be "the evil one" which also would be a proper translation (with the definite article) and would then also be asking that we not be participants at all in the Devil's agendas in any way (even religious) - see also Titus 2:11-12
- n. A case could be made (when considering the flow of thought) that "the evil" could also include all that is involved with unforgiveness (seeing this is explained more in verses 14-15)
- o. The "doxology" as it is often called (last part of verse 13) has a great deal of textual issues associated with it (seeing it is not in the oldest and "best" manuscripts) and was believed to be added by early church liturgical practices - either way, the content can be supported by the rest of Scripture and it all points back to the absolute control of God
- p. On the seeming conditional nature of verses 14-15 Spurgeon wrote, "This enforces Christian action by limiting the power of prayer according to our obedience to the command to forgive. If we would be forgiven, we must forgive: if we will not forgive, we cannot be forgiven ... It may be a blessing to be wronged, since it affords us an opportunity of judging whether we are indeed the recipients of the pardon which comes from the throne of God." - so this statement is not limiting the forgiveness of God as much as it is limiting the content of our prayers
- q. These verses should not be worrisome for the true believer since we are to see forgiveness of offenses against us as non-optional - it's not so much that we must forgive as much as we WILL forgive - the unforgiving are the unforgiven plain and simple!

5. When fasting, do it secretly, just before God - vs. 16-18

- a. For the Israelites, fasting was only required on one day a year (the Day of Atonement Lev. 23:27 "humble your souls" (afflict your souls with fasting and prayer)) - any other fasting would be either voluntary or involuntary (forced by circumstances)
- b. Fasting in Scripture was typically associated with prayer and most certainly with worship of God and "devotion of the heart" (versus just afflicting the body to get something out of it)
- c. Fasting had become (religiously) a way to demonstrate exceptional devotion to God and thus had become a practice many desired to be noticed doing - the "spiritually proud" cannot simply be faithfully devoted to God; instead they cannot resist the urge to make their supposed devotion visible to all to bolster their self-imagined, self-defined "pious" image
- d. So here our Lord does not discourage fasting, instead He stresses secrecy in keeping the act pure in its motive to express a sincere heart in the matter
- e. The "hypocrites" (again, these "wearer of masks" desire to look religious without actually being devoted in their hearts) make a point to look afflicted so as to get noticed and others realize they are fasting - "There is a play on the Greek words aphanizousi (disfigure) and phanôsin (figure). They conceal their real looks that they may seem to be fasting, conscious and pretentious hypocrisy." RWP
- f. Instead, when fasting (usually because of a great burden) don't make it obvious - we should not actively seek the praise nor the pity of people

A case could be made in using this text as encouragement to always to "clean-up" (basic grooming) before others

Earthly friendships are nice but are never to be seen as truly essential in "making it through" life's trials - they can be highly overrated

This world has treasures but we are not to be treasuring them - what the world treasures (sees as its greatest values) is not to be what we treasure

βρωσις, often translated "rust" really means "eating":

All that this world has is subject to all forms of theft and deterioration - if it is not stolen and if it is not eaten by insects, simply the passing of time will take it away - all these are inescapable and known instinctively by all

It is likely to be next to impossible to find any self-professed "investment consultant" that will turn your focus and values past this life

see also James 5:1-3

G. Campbell Morgan

see also I Tim. 6:3-10; 17-19

True generosity (of time, reputation (yielded for the sake of others), money, energies and talents) require a life focus focused beyond this lifetime

It is likely that even if any of these had true light at some time, the gradual onset of blindness/darkness becomes normal and they no longer can see they don't see

"...it is ingrained in our very nature that our heart, will, and work be governed by another. The only question is who this other shall be." Lenski

g. Since fasting is to be done between the one fasting and God, do all you can to look normal and do not seek in any way to draw attention to yourself - again, the motive is to be seen by our Father Who will "reward" for the self-denial (either by added comfort, greater strength (and more)which are internal - the sympathy and favor of onlookers (and even friends) actually pales in comparison to the rewards of our Father - times of loneliness will come more often than we might anticipate (and even when surrounded by people), but these are times to watch and expect the grace of God to be evident (and God's friendship seen more clearly)

U. A guarded heart focused on eternal treasures - vs. 19-24

1. The Lord turns from the coveted praise of man to avoiding the coveted offerings of this world - vs. 19

a. The way this is phrased carries the idea "stop storing up treasures on earth" **now** - the phrase in Greek is "Μὴ (don't) θησαυρίζετε (be treasuring) ὑμῶν (your) θησαυρούς (treasure) ἐπὶ (upon) τῆς γῆς (the earth)" - to "treasure" is to desire and be driven to store "it" up
b. What and **where** our valuables really are, needs to be discerned and corrected as needed - if it can be devoured (by moths or other vermin for instance) or if it can be taken from us, it is very poorly invested and will sooner or later be taken or will decay away

2. The reason this is so essential to understand is found in the fact that where our treasure is our heart will be also - the two cannot be separated - vs. 20-21

a. The wisest course of life is to treasure-up (store-up) what is protected from any form of theft and decay in Heaven (where our Father rules over all - our home)
b. All else distracts us from our true purpose and what is of lasting value (such as the distraction of living for the ever-fleeting praise and recognition of man (even self-congratulating))
c. We seek, as those in Hebrews 11 a city whose builder and maker is God - we are to be praying "Your kingdom come" - our investments are there and not here - this is exceptionally challenging in our society where investments are solidly based in this world, for this world, and are often framed as being "for our future" - the "Take no thought for tomorrow" concept coming in 6:34 is very foreign even to the average Church member today, and is likely to be considered **irresponsible** in some fashion
d. "If you make your fortune on the earth, poor, sorry, silly soul, you have made a fortune, and stored it, in a place where you cannot hold it. Make your fortune, but store it where it will greet you in the dawning of the new morning, when old earth passes from you. Make your fortune there. Possess not the things of the now; but the things of the now and the forever."
e. Where our heart is reveals what we treasure and our heart is most often revealed in what we use our earthly treasures on (those of time, resources, money, strengths and talents)

3. The example of the "good eye" (clear/single) versus the "bad eye" (bad) - vs. 22-23

a. Using an analogy of the eye and light, Christ describes the eye as the "lamp/candle of the body" providing the direction in which it will ultimately go - thus one's focus is crucial to the direction they will go in life/living (it's what provides direction for the next step)
b. If the eye is "clear" then the the body (the whole of you) is truly full of light (clarity of what's really going on - true perception of one's surroundings and direction)
c. The idea of "clear" (ἀπλοῦς) does mean "single," but was used in a sense of being generous because of the "soundness" of the focus (as in contrast to the "evil eye" which was a common phrase for a stingy, self-focused individual)
d. Then, if the eye (lamp of the body) is "bad" (evil, corrupted by some type of covetousness) then the situation is dire seeing the "light" is actually darkness (as in one being blind but not knowing they actually are blind - what they see as light (vision) is at best a mirage of sorts)
e. A greedy focus (greed for all sorts of "gains" of resources, popularity, power, etc.) distorts one's ability to see life/living correctly - all types of selfishness need to be diagnosed as quickly as possible realizing the seriousness of issue - it could lead to blindness !

4. You cannot be the slave of two masters - vs. 24

a. The simple idea of "serve" is a misleading translation of the underlying word - many could make a case for their ability (and seeming success) at **servng** two masters - the clear indication is that of being a slave to two masters which is impossible
b. It is very interesting to see the usage of the Greek phrase "τὸν ἕτερον" (the one) indicating a master of a completely different kind versus another of the same kind (alloV)

see Pr. 4:23

This hate may not be obvious but often takes on the form of constant complaining and bitterness directed at God and His Word - we may find ourselves treating God as though He is to be the slave (as in a "magical genie" to do our bidding)

And yet all aspects of serving "mammon" lead to painful disappointment having "bought into" all its promises of contentment and satisfaction - it is a merciless master!

We see this often in our lives when we become so focused on staying alive that we no longer truly live (and by "truly live" we don't mean "have fun" realizing true living is fulfilling purpose) Yet so much of our discussions revolve around what we have eaten and what we wear (at least in a prosperous society such as we have)

The goal, as to be discussed, is a calm trust in our Heavenly Father to supply what is needed - an agitated, anxious approach to life is truly a wasted life - the child of God worried is extremely unnecessary which makes it so sad

Living to live is not living!

Some skeptics point out that some birds die from starvation yet this discounts the comparative illustration - they are clearly taken care of in their majorities and we "outrank" them

To disregard thought of mortality id to invite wastes of all sorts resulting from poorly planned priorities

- c. The issue isn't as much the "serving" as it is the "love" - **whoever or whatever we love the most we will serve** - what we do and why we do it reveals our hearts - the heart must be guarded!
- d. The Lord explains this from the perspective of the slave - their love cannot be divided (this love includes their affections, thoughts/reasoning, priorities and personal agendas)
- e. The scenario is real - we often find ourselves deceiving ourselves, believing we can serve God and other things (deluding ourselves) but what we love (inwardly, truly) we may not even know till somehow our loyalties are "put to the test" - we, inwardly, will love one and hate the other, which many professing Christians come to find after some time - they love themselves most and will come to "hate" when God does not fit their self-serving agenda
- f. Then as Christ explains, this leads to a "holding to" (cling to in devotion) one and a "despising" (think ill of or "disesteem" (be disappointed with)) of the other
- g. So for all of us, we cannot serve (be the slave of) God and "mammon" at the same time - "mammon" typically taken as "money" or the "power of money" but basically carries the idea of the objective/purpose of "getting" (accumulation) and finding comfort, joy and security in it - this is the "evil eye" in verse 23 - see James 1:8, 4:4; I John 2:15-16

V. Security must be found in God - all else profoundly distracts us in life - vs. 25-34

1. "For this reason..." - because you cannot serve two masters (of a totally different kind), don't give yourself over to anxiety pursuing "mammon" (as if it is to be the norm for life) - vs. 25

- a. The word for "worried" (or "take no thought") is easily misunderstood - the idea is not necessarily just worry as it is used in a positive sense (as in "caring for" something)
- b. There are things/concepts that should occupy our time and resources, and these are not to be eating and drinking or clothing (if we'll have enough or look good in comparison to others)
- c. The question our Lord asks drives to the point at issue here - "Is not life more than food...?" - many who gain wealth and are able to store-up plenty of food and other necessities still do not find contentment; and many more, who are unable to hoard resources become driven to "get ahead" (which itself is rarely (subjectively) reachable)
- d. We must be on constant guard as to what we are living for and why - we need not be rich to be distracted by the drive to "live to get" - some of the most covetously-driven people are those that are considered poor and it is this distraction from life that the Lord is addressing
- e. Living is more than food (we eat to live, not live to eat) and our bodies (their purpose and usefulness) are of far more value than what clothes we put on them

2. "Look at the birds" as an example of the care of the Father - vs. 26

- a. Birds do not "sow and reap" as we do, yet they are appropriately taken care of - even though they do not "store into barns" they are not driven by worry but by confident expectation
- b. They do "work" to get their provisions but, they seek it "around them" as God has provided - the point is not in neglecting work or other responsibilities in life God has provided to sustain us, but is not to be distracted by them as though we exist simply to survive as long as we can
- c. They have "such care" from God, should we not expect at the very least, the same, seeing we are of greater worth than they (pointing back to the original creation and God's purpose and priority in it (focused on mankind))
- d. Trusting our Heavenly Father totally is what is essential - even when allowed to suffer hunger or deprivation of any sort, we are not to lose sight of His provision of ALL that is needed (even unto death, which in faith, we realize as one of His most gracious acts toward us)

3. And what good is worry anyway; what can it do to change anything? - vs. 27

- a. The example Christ gives is indisputable - is there any anxious thought or action that can extend our lives? - Does worry preserve us or the ones we love? - though it is unreasonable, we still allow ourselves to see various forms of worry as being responsible and expected
- b. The request in Psalm 90:12 is not "Teach us how to **lengthen** our days" but "teach us to **number** (measure) our days" all with the purpose to have a "wise heart"
- c. Anxiety of all types is difficult to avoid since it stems from a lack of faith; and living by faith is usually less pursued than living by sight - many allow themselves to think that their lives can be lengthened by their worrisome pursuits of avoiding death altogether - yet the person who has already faced its reality will end up being the most contented - no doubt there are many that live longer, but do not ever come to truly "live"

4. So, don't (a command) worry (ever) over life necessities - vs. 28-32

Note also this was "Solomon in all his glory" (the best he could do did not equal what God does)

The emphasis is not on avoiding work and then trusting God for needs - it is working for something higher and more important than all earthly pursuits

As one studies flowers and other vegetation it becomes clear that God "clothes" each one with specific purposes, for specific reasons

Worry can be motivated not just by a lack of need but out of what we perceive the thoughts and opinions of others to be

Having some faith they started looking and thinking in the right directions and then have been distracted to direct their look of confidence elsewhere

A child is more to be identified in their trusting dependence and expected obedience to the Father

And our Father distinguishes between true need and desire (coveting)

- a. Consider how well God takes care of the "lilies of the field" without their working or "spinning" and not being the flowers of a garden (where they would get special care) - yet even Solomon with all his wealth was not clothed as spectacularly as these common, unattended flowers
- b. To clothe in this context was to "adorn" which is interesting to consider in light of the emphasis in our day of the look and quality of the clothing - many, because of fads, become discontent and anxious, not at the lack of clothing but at what others might think
- c. So much of what is being stressed here is "God knows perfectly what He is doing" - He shows such care for what is here one day and burned the next so how could we doubt His care for us? - grass (and more) was commonly gleaned and burned for fires - people did not think much of these common flowers but God did - gratefulness is often neglected because we do not notice the details of all that God does for us and around us
- d. Trust in God would enable us to realize whatever clothing we have to wear at the time is sufficient and must not worry it won't be enough (or "good" enough)
- e. Those afflicted with such anxieties over food, drinking and clothing are called "little-faiths" by the Lord - many would assume that when they are thirsty, for instance, that if they do not see water near by that it would be responsible to start to worry (forgetting that our focus is to be on our Father and not on our surroundings or obvious venues to meet our needs) - it is not those that have **no** faith, but **little** faith/trust
- f. So DO NOT be saying/asking "What will we eat or drink or do for clothing" - most of us have had some experience with this growing up where we thought very little about where our food came from and how we might get needed clothes - why? Because we trusted our parents - this is the same type of thinking and trust we are to have throughout life in light of our Father
- g. Why not fret and focus on these things? - **the first reason** given is that it is what all the other "peoples" do; they "eagerly seek" (with a passion) after them; they live for them and measure, one way or another, their life's success by it's abundance - **the second reason** we don't worry over these things is that our Heavenly Father already knows we need them - He is the Designer and created us with these as needs and will supply them "as needed" - to worry that they will not be met is to distrust His wisdom and goodness - see Mt. 6:8; Lu. 11:11-13, Psa. 103:13

5. Our life focus is to be singular - "the Kingdom of God" - vs. 33-34

But so often professing Christianity looks very similar in its priorities to the rest of the world - something else **must** be driving us in life!

This is in contrast to the pursuit of the rightness of man (including our own "manly" rightness - part of our daily objectives is the demonstration of God's rightness (moral, mental, philosophical, religious, etc.) over all others

This must not be mistaken for procrastination where someone puts off today's responsibilities regularly - these must be faced and it's always best to face today's responsibilities today

see pr. 27:1 - we don't know the good or ill that may come tomorrow so don't conclude tomorrow today!

- a. "Seek first His kingdom" - the Lord's "agenda" and His righteous ways and thoughts (truths) are to be our life's **primary** endeavor - it is not that we never seek these other things (for we do as the birds would seek out God's provision), but they are never our priority (we have a "strange" (as the world would see it) expectation of them)
- b. We are to be "theological" in all we do - even the necessary "earthly" tasks we must do, we are always striving to view them in light of their significance for God's purposes/kingdom
- c. Therefore, in the daily pursuits of our Lord's "agendas" we can know (and trust) that He will supply all that is needed (as we do His will/work) - this is the same idea as that stressed already in Mt. 5:6 (where the truest hungering and thirsting is "after righteousness") and in the Lord's model prayer in Mt. 6:10 where we pray for it and seek (live for) it - we are to find our fulfillment in these endeavors above all others - **so, do we? This is no mediocre approach to Christianity as if it was a religious accessory to life - it is a dedicated life focused on this end**
- d. "...even "all these things", meat, drink, clothing, or whatsoever worldly sustenance else is necessary for you: which are not parts of the happiness of saints, only appendages thereunto; which they have over and above what they are, or should be chiefly seeking after." Gill
- e. So, based upon this reality (these facts), don't fret about tomorrow (what may come or be coming, even when seemingly based upon "good evidence") - it is often characteristic of a chronic worrier, once they have today's fears alleviated, to turn their worrisome focus to tomorrow
- f. Let tomorrow "worry" about its own troubles (in an odd sense, put them (frettings) off till tomorrow for when it comes it will then be "today" and we will have ample grace to handle its challenges - we must not be those trying to handle tomorrow's challenges today
- g. Each day, by God's providence, has enough challenges and difficulties to face - many fatigue and look to give-up in their proper life's priorities because they have allowed themselves to mentally and emotionally take on not just tomorrow's pressures, but months at a time

Our lives are to “revolve” around this core purpose and it for this that we will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ

- h. As a result of worry (in verse 31), the Gentiles “**seek eagerly**” life’s necessities while the Lord instructs us to “**seek first** of all” (or primarily) the “kingdom of God” (His agendas/purposes in life) and “His righteousness” (seeking first to live it out in our lives (as has been contrasted to the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees))
- i. We then, free from life’s natural worries, are free to be faithful in the day He has given, making full use of it without having to spend its resources on tomorrow’s supposed pressures

W. Do not hold a judgmental posture with each other - instead, discern properly - 7:1-6

- 1. This next “topic” is not unrelated to what has come before in that this is still in direct contrast to how the Scribes and Pharisees exhibited their “brand” of righteousness

This is characteristic of all the self-righteous - they allow an elitist stance against others

- a. These would stand in judgment of others for the purpose of superior comparison, using their “take” on the Law they supposed they were keeping - yet as the Lord demonstrated, this same Law was far more involved than they had interpreted it to be
- b. This same standard would be that which they would be judged (primarily) by (by the Law-Giver Himself), only **not** their self-serving interpretation of it and (secondarily) by their self-righteous peers - legalism (“standards” as a means to grace) breeds a hyper-critical atmosphere that breeds fear and facades (because appearance must become the goal since a scrutinized conscience reveals that perfection of thought and action is unachievable)

As its opposite - those promoting “no law” must support the appearance of no guilt and conviction (and why Mt. 7:1 is so often misused)

- 2. What exactly is then meant by “judge not” - vs. 1-2

- a. We know it **does not** mean all types of judgement/discernment since there are many forms of judgment we are to practice (see John 7:24; I Cor. 5:12; I John 4:1)
- b. Clearly, some form of discernment will be required in following what’s coming in verse 6
- c. As was seen with the religious leaders (in contrast to the “commoners”) it became common to “write-off” others who did not demonstrate all the external marks of their religious ideas - this is in stark contrast to true Christianity which, discerning wrongs, is obligated to be loving, patient, merciful and forgiving
- d. “But do not indulge the criticizing faculty upon others in censorious manner, or as if you were set in authority, and had a right to dispense judgment among your fellows. If you impute motives, and pretend to read hearts, others will do the same towards you. A hard and censorious behavior is sure to provoke reprisals.” Spurgeon
- e. It is far too easy for us to see ourselves as above what others face, failing to properly judge ourselves - our consistency is not to be the standard by which we rightly discern for if it is, the focus will drift from the standard of Christ to a comparison of ourselves among ourselves and this is not wise - see II Cor. 10:12 - the standard we are to follow is in Php. 2:3 where, in avoiding selfishness and are to “regard each other as more important than ourselves”

Many who misuse this verse as if it were saying no “line can be drawn” or no identifying of wrong can be had are themselves highly judgmental in their usage of it

“..the command to judge not is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous. Jesus does not tell us to cease to be men (by suspending our critical powers which help to distinguish us from animals) but to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God (by setting our selves up as judges)” Stott

- 3. Deal with **your** “issues” first - vs. 3-5

As in I Cor. 11:28-31 where we are to “examine” (scrutinize) ourselves

- a. The Lord uses an example of one person scrutinizing a speck of some sort in another’s eye, while failing to recognize a “beam” of timber in his own
- b. The situation at hand is not so much the differing sizes of problems as it is the obstruction to the eye (discernment) - the critical one notices “small” blind spot in another, but because he is not in the habit of scrutinizing himself, has missed a massive problem of his own (no doubt a big part of this is his critical spirit)
- c. Ironically, it is a discernment problem - one is using a magnifying glass on the weaknesses or faults of another, while failing to ever look in the “looking glass” (mirror) at his own problems - it is a blinded person trying to deal with the partial blindness of another
- d. Deal with your hypocrisy first in “owning-up” to your problems - deal with it first and then, seeing clearly, you can aid in removing the obstruction to the discernment of your “brother”
- e. **We must beware in falsely dealing with this concept by allowing ourselves “token flaws” so we can avoid or excuse dealing with something in us that is far more serious**
- f. We also learn that if we desire to be truly helpful to others (in removing their obstructions) we must deal with ourselves effectively - truly edifying and exhorting others involves far more than sincere intentionality - just because we desire to help others does not mean that we can - many have been injured and misled/misdirected by well-intending people who see their desire for “ministry” as seeming evidence of their ability to see (discern) correctly
- g. We should be, in light of this text, careful to examine ourselves first when we find ourselves spotting and thinking on the weaknesses of others

see Rom. 14:4, 10-19 - we are not to stand in judgment of “another man’s servant”

This is a popular form of blindness - many believe they have reliable discernment because they can spot the flaws in others - the more they see in others, the more they are secure in themselves

This is what a “hypocrite” does

The account of nathan with David is a good example - David discerned the evil in the story he heard while missing the same evil in his own life

4. Not only do those with perception problems hurt themselves and others, they also do harm to that which is sacred and of greatest/eternal value - vs. 6

If, as was seen in the previous verses, we are blinded to our own blindness we are apt to misuse and misrepresent what we've been given in Christ

Many lacking perception and over-confident in themselves offer-up the Truths of Scripture, the precious concepts of the Gospel to mockers and scorners hungry to discredit it and "tear to pieces" the presenter

The Bible does not belong in a venue of being one of many choices (as if common)

- a. This verse is one that makes some feel uncomfortable, especially in light of how this chapter began - we are not to be judgemental but we are to be discreet/discerning as to how we handle that which is related to God/Christ and the Faith
- b. It is possible to become so familiar with the idea of God and His Truth (and the Gospel) that we are not cautious in its usage (indiscriminate) and this is what is being addressed here
- c. Swine and dogs were not only "unclean animals" but were associated with what would be considered, traditionally, as that which defiles - to give or offer that which was holy (as in sacrificial meat) to dogs would have been repulsive and supposed to be unthinkable (accept to the rebel) - to offer what was of great value to someone that not only does not know its value but that will trample should be absurd to us - compare to Pr. 9:7-8; 23:9
- d. We may not always discern others well but, based on this text and others, we are to be looking for those that have some interest and idea of the value of what we are to be offering
- e. There is an associated idea with this as well in not giving ourselves (as those set apart and having what is truly precious) over to that which is "swinish" (lovers of filth) and becoming of dogs (indiscriminate eaters of anything including what is vile) - many a "drifter from the faith" has become "fodder" for this world's haters of God

X. So, to avoid worrying, in avoiding arrogant judgmentalism and misuse of what is holy, ask - vs. 7-12

1. It is likely that most of our failings and periods of feeling lost and alone are because we fail to ask

"double-minded", in this case, is one following the ritual/command with disdain

- a. As stressed in James 1:5-8, when lacking wisdom (insight) "ask of God" and ask "in faith" without "doubting" (skepticism (being confident we will not receive but asking to make a personal point that God is wrong somehow))

- b. Also, as pointed out in James 4:2, we don't have because we don't ask, or ask selfishly

2. How will it be possible for us to follow such instructions given by our Lord? ask, seek, knock! - vs. 7-8

He does not give everything we ask as we asked for it for He being our father gives us "good things" as he best knows what is good and we don't - we will come to learn more of this as we continue in all three

- a. "We ask for what we wish; we seek for what we miss; we knock for that from which we feel ourselves shut out." JFB - all three expressing a probable posture and urgency before God as well not only our basic needs of Him, but all other graces to truly live as a disciple ought
- b. There is no discrimination with God, for "everyone" who asks (asking, present tense) receives; the one seeking (time and effort spent in pursuit of something) finds it (as promised to Israel in Jer. 29:13); and everyone who knocks (seeks entry) it is opened (opportunity that would not be had if it were not sought and acted upon once it was presented)

"Pray; pray often; pray with sincerity and seriousness; pray, and pray again; make conscience of prayer, and be constant in it; make a business of prayer, and be earnest in it. Ask, as a beggar asks alms." MH

- c. These verses present the core "method" of what real prayer contains - there is the asking (requesting) which most realize, but then there is the seeking (this is the looking, expecting with anticipation to act in harmony with however God is revealing it); and then there is the knocking, the acting on what was requested and presented - this reveals the full spectrum prayer and its results to be more than just the asking - it is very expectantly active and responsible in/with its results - request, look for it, use it!

3. Why ask expecting to receive and find? - because we ask of our Father - vs. 9-11

Even with flawed, earthly fathers, there are general expectations that can be had

If your earthly parents can distinguish between these differences of similar looking good/bad, what would we expect anything less of our Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth?

- a. Christ, as He clarified in chapter 6, God is not an "impersonal entity" or "force" in the universe; He is our Father and using that concept He solidifies why we should be confident in coming to Him as a child would to their earthly father
- b. For instance, if a child asked their father for bread, would he give him a stone? Their bread could resemble a stone but a father would know the difference and would give what was needed (out of just general care) - and what father would give his child a snake (eel) when he/she asked for a fish (though again an eel might resemble a fish but the father knows what is good and what isn't in this case)
- c. To "drive the point home" He makes it clear that if "you" being "evil" (πονηροὶ - wicked) are able to give good gifts to your children, how **much** more should we expect our Heavenly Father, Who is in Heaven, governing all, truly know what is good and will give it to those asking
- d. It is very important we maintain the right idea of Who God is and what He is to us as our Father or we are likely to not only not ask and come to Him for our basic necessities, but are apt to respond as the Scribes and Pharisees who drifted away from God as their Father and thus looked upon life more as an obligatory ritual and not an ongoing relationship

Then, rather than coming to Him for grace to do as we ought we are likely to avoid or redefine responsibility to suit our sensibilities

4. In everything you do to others, therefore, treat them as you would be treated - vs. 12

- a. This verse is often referenced as the “Golden Rule” because it is to be considered of great worth (in pursuing its practice) and is to be a standard (measurement) we expect to live by
- b. Notice it does not say, “Do to others what they do to you” nor does it say, “Do unto others whatever you want (feel) to do” - we are to try to truly put ourselves in their place and treat them as we know we would need (we ought) to be treated - true empathy
- c. In light of the previous verses, we therefore would desire not to be proudly “judged” and, in following the example of our Father, be giver of “good gifts” to those asking
- d. “It is not, of course, what--in our wayward, capricious, gasping moods--we should wish that men would do to us, that we are to hold ourselves bound to do to them; but only what--in the exercise of an impartial judgment, and putting ourselves in their place--we consider it reasonable that they should do to us, that we are to do to them.” JFB
- e. This verse is known by most people in one way or another and yet is very rarely followed - it is common/normal to **treat as treated** (reciprocal) failing to realize we are to treat others as we would desire to be treated whether they treat us that way or not - it is unconditional!
- f. “Πάντα” (all things) is the first word of this phrase, emphasize its indiscriminate application
- g. Our Lord then places this practice in a category of “the Law and the Prophets” as in acting as a summation of the practical outworking of what was stressed in the Old Testament - we easily lose sight of God’s purpose in us loving each other and being driven to be considerate (It was so significant, God “legislated” it) - Rom. 13:8-10, Gal. 5:14, I Tim. 1:5

Treatment of others dictated by moods is never sanctioned - so the “I wasn’t feeling well” “excuse” is inexcusable

This is especially needed when forgiveness is presented as an opportunity - we would be treated graciously when we fail but it is very easy to treat others with disdain when they fail or wrong us, acting as though we are not subject to the same failures

see I John 3:14-18

Y. Beware of following popular trends (following the crowd), popular teachers and popular sentiments - vs. 13-23

1. As much as we may subscribe openly to not “following the crowd,” our natural tendency, left unchecked and unchanged, leads us to do just that - vs. 13

As is about to be stressed, this is not just “worldly” pursuits but also “religious” (even spiritual) pursuits seen as authentic, not because of their true content but because of their popularity

- a. The command is to “enter through the narrow gate” in contrast to the wide gate (where one would see themselves bringing anything and everything they desired along the way)
- b. Not only is the path/gate that leads to destruction wide and inviting (easy), but it is also popular - it’s the way that most see as the best and appropriate path in life/living
- c. One of the goals of discerning any life direction/philosophy is to study where it leads - the figurative crowds in the Lord’s example seem to be driven by the flow of the crowd, the ease/convenience of the path and are not considering where exactly it is leading them
- d. “Destruction” here is not annihilation but “ruination” literally picturing a “cutting off” - “apóleia (“perdition”) does not imply “annihilation” (see the meaning of the root-verb, 622 / apólymi, “cut off”) but instead “loss of well-being” rather than being. “

Vine’s Expository Dictionary

2. Why the “narrow” way? - it leads to true life - vs. 14

It would be difficult to choose such a path unless one was told (and believed) that the difficulties associated with it were well worth it

The examples of the truth being popular (with groups) in Scripture are few and short-lived

- a. The picture of the path and gate to life is one of seeming insignificance and inconvenience - the path and gate are discouraging to those who would want to carrying along much “baggage” and it is not naturally inviting (just as we’ve seen the characteristics of those truly following Christ’s clarifications of true righteousness over against that of the Scribes and Pharisees)
- b. Very few find it - this is a very sad and sobering text! The majorities will never be in the right when it comes to the correct path to eternal life and the Kingdom of God - we don’t want to be come cynical, but we must be wary of popular trends **especially popular religious trends**
- c. The illustration our Lord uses demonstrates that instinctive living (going with “the flow”) leads to eternal ruin, while living on the path (the way) to true life is **never** seen as “normal”

3. Beware the “pseudo-prophets” disguised as sheep - vs. 15-20

The term for “prophets” is used religiously and references those who promote themselves as devoted to God - as the Scribes and Pharisees would have seemed

This is the danger of the trends today where anyone associating themselves with Christ and Christianity is to be left unscrutinized and the only test is their perceived sincerity

- a. The underlying word for “beware” (Προσέχετε) is that of paying close devotion to something, and in this case, cautious attention in order to avoid danger
- b. The danger comes through those calling themselves “prophets” (proclaimers of God’s Word) with deceptive motives - these are those “selling” the “broad way” and “wide gate”
- c. These “come to you” because they are not sent by God - they are self-called, and ultimately self-ordained to a ministry that is truly “theirs” (of their own making for their own agendas)
- d. These are not self-deceived (as those in verses 21-23), but know what they are doing (they know they are “crooked” and have a deliberate agenda to snatch away any of the “sheep” and devour/destroy them (consuming them, their energies and purposes for themselves)
- e. They “dress” (put on the front) as sheep to fit in and deceive

True sheep will also be identified by their hunger and need for true "fruit" (teaching, genuine practice) - "good trees" produce useful nourishment and "bad trees" produce that which may have some initial lure but will not provide what is needed to sustain and will even poison

All these fruit-bearing trees/bushes result in some type of growths and may take time to see some for what they are - a true forth-teller of God's Truth will not last long among the goats either

Innumerable religious systems (including ones associated with Christianity) inculcate their followers with a false (pseudo) gospel who in turn then face death confidently, not knowing they are headed for eternal judgment

The essential start of "doing" this "will" is seen in John 6:37-40 (... believes in Him...)

Note that "not everyone" saying "Lord, Lord" - this is what those truly in Christ say out of reverence for Christ also

Their works were very "out in the open" works (very public) yet so many of the works in-line with the will of the Father are inward and hidden

Often "lawlessness" is not prevalent immorality as much as it is "showcased" self-glory, self-righteousness and independence with a hidden self-will - and all this done in His name!

see Ii Tim. 2:19 as an almost direct parallel verse to this

This is also another "proof text" of Christ's deity seeing He is the Judge at the end

- f. These are to be identified for what they are (by the true sheep) "by their fruits" (the output/output-growth of their lives and their teachings/doctrines) - though it should be understood that there will be many "goats" among the sheep that will hunger after the fruits of these false prophets - "... Every hypocrite is a goat in sheep's clothing..." MH
- g. Good fruits are not to be had from trees (worthless trees) bearing useless fruit - this is not a comparison between healthy plants/trees or unhealthy ones, but between trees of a totally different kind - these false prophets **cannot** produce good fruit because it is not in their nature; it is not who/what they are - Christians and the Church then provide a possible "feeding" ground" if these "ravenous wolves" can effectively deceive - see also Luke 6:45
- h. As the church of our day becomes a place of monetary wealth it also becomes attractive to such
- i. The end of such ("bad fruit" or "no fruit" trees) is fire (as seen on the other side of the "broad gate") - "Not to have good fruit is to have evil: there can be no innocent sterility in the invisible tree of the heart. He that brings forth no fruit, and he that brings forth bad fruit, are both only fit for the fire." Clarke
- j. And seeing then such an end, each will be able to spot them by their deeds, character and their teachings as compared to the Word of God, thus our Savior restates ("so then") the needed focus on these "professing prophets'" life output

4. Beware being one of the "sincerely" deceived" - vs. 21-23

- a. Few texts inspire more sobering fear than these few verses - this group described as being before the Lord are genuinely convinced they are His and are taken by surprise - it may be that this group suffers the most unimaginable shock of all groups to stand before God (believing themselves set for eternity)
- b. Only those "doing the will of My Father" will enter the Kingdom of God - it is first apparent that what was being proclaimed by these false teachers was not the will of God - the will of God is first a recognition and submission to His will over "mine" and then involves all that He has provided in His Word to be believed and "done" (believed, followed after, and obeyed)
- c. Their defense (revealing the object of their faith) is in their works (not their reliant, dependent faith in the work of Christ for them, but **their** work for Him)
- d. They will say (these "many"), "Lord, Lord, did we not..." - these "many" were some of the majority on the "wide road" leading to destruction and had "banked" their souls on their good works (and their list of works is outwardly impressive) - there are many in professing Christianity that respect Christ and appreciate Him (and all He did and stood for), but they do not truly trust Him (seeing their dependence on His righteousness alone and their good works done out of appreciation and not personal "merit")
- e. These self-deceived people "prophesied" in His name (forth-telling the Word of God), claim that they cast out demons (exorcisms) in His name, and in His name performed miracles, and the Lord does not counter their sincerity - yet He calls them "...you who practice lawlessness" (not just those doing bad things, but those essentially "a law unto themselves" who apparently, in this case, had a form of Christianity of their own making (on their terms for their purposes))
- f. The words of the Lord are truly frightening, "I never knew you" and "depart from Me" - it's not that the Lord did not **NOW** know then, but that He **NEVER** knew them - this can't have been those supposedly saved and that "lost" their salvation, for that would be something like "I once knew you" - as uncomfortable as this might make some in certain theological circles, this must be in reference to God's foreknowledge (knowing His own (intimately) beforehand) - this must be a special "knowing" (seeing it is the generic word for knowing) and cannot mean He never had knowledge of them (He being divine) - it is a "knowing them as His own" that is missing

Z. Beware where, on what, and how you build your life - vs. 24-29

1. These last verses are the conclusion to the "Sermon on the Mount" and provide a perfect ending
- a. The emphasis is clear - these "words of Mine" need both "hearing" and "doing" to be foundational to one's living - many hear without doing and many attempt to do without truly hearing
- b. True understanding of what is taught is evidenced in one's life - many know and know of the teachings of Christ, but they do not truly understand them because they are content to just know and periodically utilize bits and pieces for their own causes
2. The truly wise (sensible) person will study what was just taught and seek to form their life around it

“...who proposes to himself the best end, and makes use of the proper means to accomplish it.” Clarke

Some come to know and don't do and some do without ever knowing - the truly sensible do both with what the Lord has taught

A great deal of their area has dry land and wadis that had little to stop or absorb torrential rains from strong storms and the waters quickly became raging rivers with a powerful, destructive force

Too many of us are apt to live “hoping” no storms of life will come and become surprised by suffering - the sensible person follows what the Lord gave expecting the need of ever growing disciplines

Many make it through life's trials (surviving) and pride themselves on it yet fail to realize the structural damage and the storms yet to come

These would not be typically looked on as the “Godless” but seen as spiritual and religious in comparison to other people and not the standards the Lord just presented

As in “dull of hearing” not so much meaning they can't hear as much as hearing they do not listen

These do not expect to blend in and are not fad followers - they fully expect to contradict their surroundings with eternal values over temporal values

These do not allow themselves bouts of anger (stemming from a fostered dislike/hatred of others)

Though this overall attitude can be applied to other wrong actions deemed “OK” because of “talking down” one's spouse

Their “yes” means yes and their “no” means no because each is thought-through

- a. The underlying word for “wise” is not the typical word, but is φρονίμω describing more the person who thinks things through because they are cautious - this is in contrast to the “foolish” man who is so not, because he lacks intelligence, but because it is misapplied or unutilized for the best purposes
- b. The wise “hears” and “does” - many a person considers themselves wise by measuring how much they have “heard” and can retain, yet the key to true wisdom is knowing how to use it and implementing what was learned - **knowing is not to be equated with doing**
- c. The “acting on them” is seen in more detail in Luke 6:48, “...who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock...” which would be hard work, but done in anticipation of the “storm” to come - it is not a matter of **if** the storms will come but **when** - these storms are described by our Lord as progressive in “the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and slammed against the house” (the wind and waters) - these are trying storms (revealing structural integrity)
- d. And, as we expect, the house did not fall because of its foundation and not because of its construction - the land was full of sand and rocks - it could be imagined that some would be persuaded to build on more sandy foundations because of scenery or popularity - comparing to a previous analogy, we could imagine salesmen along the broad path leading to the wide gate selling the benefits of such “prime location” on which to build, focusing on the “now” without anticipation of the coming storms (luxury being the focus not safety)
- e. Everyone will go through life's trials, so it is not a matter of wisely evading them but in prudently preparing for them with ever-increasing strengths - this is supposed to be an expected norm of maturity versus the popular idea that growing older is to lend to more privilege - then there are those that build with much effort and sacrifice and with “cleverness of design,” placing their faith on their planning and ingenuity - yet when all this is placed on the wrong foundation, it will not stand the trials to come

3. The “foolish” person is one who hears and neglects what the Lord taught - vs. 26-27

- a. We must not miss the point that is being addressed - it is one who does hear or come to know the Lord, and then fails to act on what was taught - “Talking about Christ, his righteousness, merits, and atonement, while the person is not conformed to his word and spirit, is no other than solemn self-deception.” Barnes
- b. Both storms are the same and are described as violent (e.g. “slammed against the house”) - and in the case of the “stupid” one (stupid in that they should have and could have known better) their life construction falls apart and the fall is “great” (an extreme event and extreme loss of all they valued)
- c. It should be noted, the underlying word for “foolish” is μωρῶ meaning not ignorant, but “dull” as in having lost sensitivity (senseless) to what they should have heeded - the true “moron” is not someone who has never learned, but one who has learned it and not lived it (applied)

4. In summary, building one's life on what our Lord said involves...

- a. Striving daily to live out the qualities of the beatitudes so as to be like salt and light in the world, expecting persecution in the process - the opposite (foolish response) would be to discount each as being unreasonable, unachievable and impractical and steering one's life so as to avoid persecution for “righteousness sake”
- b. The wise/sensible will live daily working to be genuinely loving, not yielding to the temptations of temper, expecting to be the initiator of peace whenever possible, versus unchecked or unrestrained emotions (being reactionary)
- c. The truly sensible avoid all aspects associated with adultery/immorality, while fools flirt with sexual temptations, allowing themselves a belief in personal “control” and seeing such temptations (and yielding inwardly) as harmless - fools allow what they consider “little vices”
- d. Those following these teachings of Christ never treat marriage in such a way as to attempt to make your spouse “look bad” before others so as to justify a wrong action on your part (as a husband divorcing his wife, falsely placing on her the “stigma” of adultery)
- e. The wise do not try to allude what they have said (as in commitments (or as in vows)) - they sense fully their obligation to fulfill what they obligate themselves (as if it was a vow)
- f. The wise person looks upon negative treatment to themselves as opportunity to counter it with a good and gracious response - they are not retaliatory

The foolish see themselves as or strive for independence and prayer is seen as an unavoidable necessity when in a "jam"

The foolish live for the "now" and find fulfillment in "treasures" hoarded here (uninvested in God's purposes)

The foolish learn that they are not to worry and even why, but in stubbornness continue to do so anyway lending it credibility

Those lacking discernment allow themselves to use God's Word and name however suits their agenda at any moment - God's Word is treated as a commodity

The lives of the foolish are directed by their feelings/moods and not by this standard of Christ

The foolish hope to believe anything and consider any exclusivity as intolerance - this then (ironically) makes tolerance (of evil) one of their highest virtues

One of the results of such an approach is that it leaves its followers (learners) in "holding patterns" around truths that need to be settled - because of such scholarship, many have come to accept that no one can be sure of most of Scripture (which is a grievous error!)

True Christian scholarship strives to GET TO the Truth not to DEFINE/create the Truth

- g. Those who follow what Christ taught do what they do for the eyes of God and not for people - part of the fear of the Lord is an awareness of His ever watching eyes, and these see that as an advantage - none of what they do for Him and His purposes, they realize, are wasted
- h. The wise pray to the Father (as instructed by our Lord) and are not scripted, not using meaningless repetitions - these look to Him for their needs (being constantly aware of their dependence) especially in the avoidance of evil (not self-reliant)
- i. The truly sensible (as Christ defines them) realize the necessity of forgiveness being fully and constantly aware of God's forgiveness to them
- j. The wise person sees their life as an investment for eternal purposes (including sacrifices and disciplines (like fasting)) and does not live for the rewards that mankind may offer now
- k. The wise is fully aware that they cannot serve two masters, and define their life priorities around God (the Father), and His "bidding" to trump all other life priorities
- l. Those who are truly sensible are not worrisome, realizing their Father rules over all and knows their needs (and will be their actual source of protection and provision)
- m. The spiritually discerning do not judge others on the basis of their self-perceived authority, but seek identify and deal with their own character flaws and in so doing, hope to be of encouragement to others in dealing with struggles
- n. The spiritually wise do not look to allow what is holy and precious to be trampled upon by those hostile to the Gospel (and thus to Christ) - they instead are on the lookout for those demonstrating a desire/hunger for the Truth and seeking to live holy before God
- o. The wise actually do live by the standard of treating others as they would wish to be treated themselves, and not treating others as they themselves are treated - the standard is set and does not fluctuate with feelings or circumstances
- p. The wise person is not a "crowd-follower" in life but the foolish are popularists in either looking to be popular or looking to be a part of what's popular at any given time
- q. The discerning wise do not assume that everyone who professes to be a Christian actually is a Christian and lives with the realization that some who say they are Christ's are actually wolves in sheep's clothing and will be identified more by what they "produce" than by what they proclaim
- r. The wise man expects to learn of what Christ says to do and **fully expects to implement it**

5. When the Lord completed this "sermon," all listening were amazed - vs. 28-29

- a. They were literally "struck with astonishment," seeing He taught them "as with authority"
- b. The core idea behind this was that they realized He spoke as one would speak who was the source of the truth and not just as one repeating previous concepts already taught
- c. The other idea with this, was that they were astounded that He did not teach like their teachers, the Scribes, who were the religious scholars of their day - as was historically the practice of these Scribes, they would debate concepts to no definitive conclusions which is often the outcome of so much of "Christian scholarship" today - ever reasoning and putting forth facts and ideas without reaching solid, proven answers - those who speak with no authority or with their own authority are both to be shunned
- d. The Lord's teachings and the rest of God's Word must not be lumped in with other philosophical categories as though each can be equally "played-off" the other

VIII. Initial Miracles of Christ Fulfilling Isaiah 53:4 - 8:1-17

A. Following the pattern he (Matthew) has already set, the next narratives are not just for historical information, but are leading to another specific fulfillment of Isaiah's description of the Messiah - vs. 1-4 (see verse 17 first)

1. There is some discussion about the accuracy of Matthew's handling of part of Isaiah 53:4 and this will be dealt with in more detail when we reach that verse

There are far too many in "Christian scholarship" that feel empowered to question Matthew's handling of Old testament prophecy because they cannot substantiate all that is said in what is available today - this discounts not only faith but also the allowance for more information we may come to know later (or may not)

- a. The point Matthew is "driving to" is that the Messiah would be one who would heal diseases and would be one sympathetic to their conditions (as a result of their being infected with sin, essentially addressing their "griefs" in addressing their "infirmities")
- b. As we will see in so many of the Lord's miracles, He does them, not to just heal them temporarily from sickness, but to declare (and even illustrate) the Truth
- c. It must also be allowed that Matthew was working from a copy of the LXX that we no longer have and should not accept that Matthew adjusted the texts to his purposes

2. The healing of the leper - vs. 1-4

This is in contrast to so much of what has been seen associated with "miracles" today - the miraculous becomes the point and the message non-existent (or useless)

The leper's request was a good example for all of us, "Lord, if you are willing..." - this should be our "posture" before God at all times

It is typical to desire to "serve" those the world admires in some fashion while it is of Christ to serve others according to their need over their appearance or social standing

"μαρτύριον" - to serve as a witness or evidence to them and not so much proof of the healing as much as proof of the healer

It would be easy to overlook the hindrance that a personal celebration may cause to others or even the work of the Lord - the message was to be the focus over the miracles!

There is a natural tendency in all of us to sense our debt of love and submission before receiving a gift and to lose it after having the gift in hand

His purpose in coming (to do the will of the Father) and His message were the focal point - His compassion to heal stemmed from this - the drive for popularity sees others as a means and does not see itself as a means for others

It is possible Matthew omits them to keep the focus on the Gentile

If taken as a statement then the idea is that of "I, Myself, will go to him and heal him" which, considering the situation of this being a gentile also demonstrates a difference in what would be expected and in both cases the urging of the Jewish elders in Luke 7 would indicate their expecting resistance from Christ

- a. After the Lord taught, large crowds followed Him - miracles would come but the initial "draw" was His teaching/message - Matthew is dealing with these miracles (initially) as proof of who Jesus is but also demonstrates that Jesus was not "about miracles" as much as he was His message
- b. Amazingly, with all these crowds following, a leper made his way to Jesus seeking healing - lepers were to stay away and keep their distance - as he is described in Luke 5:12, he was "covered in leprosy" (his situation was dire, his end near and, no doubt, contributed to his action)
- c. His approach to the Lord was one of humility and submission - to prostrate one's self in their culture was not unusual, but the leper's request was special - he was not insistent nor did he attempt to force the situation once he was there - he left the decision to Christ and was not as some "push" these days, *claiming* their healing by some form of insistence - many are guilty these days of believing they are "claiming a promise" and are thus expectant to receive, not expectant to trust (and there is a difference!)
- d. His approach was one of faith/trust - "**you** can make me clean" - this was not typically looked upon as a curable disease yet he sensed something in Christ (the seeming impossible)
- e. In Mark 1:41 we're told that the Lord was "moved with compassion" for this man, which was characteristic of the Lord being "driven" by compassion over obligation in meeting needs
- f. Our Lord then reaches out and touches him which was also remarkable, because of the leprosy (not just the contagiousness of it, but also considering its appearance - this is also a good example for us to follow in being less motivated by appearance and more so by others needs
- g. Then the precious, thrilling words from the Lord, "**I am willing**" and immediately the man was cured - the only doubt the man had was answered in these few words
- h. The the Lord tells him to tell no one but to go show himself to the priest (this would be in Jerusalem), offer the offerings Moses had commanded, and do this "as a testimony to them" - either as a witness of the validity of Christ's miracle or that the man was actually clean (or both)
- i. Why tell him to not tell anyone? This has raised many questions and even speculation over the centuries - the answers should all be in consideration of the context (here and the other Gospels) - three basic answers are fitting and useful - first, it was so that he would not linger and stir-up the crowd with his excitement (which he did and, as described in Mark 1:45 he did **so** much so that "...Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city...")
- j. The second answer was that the man should hurry to do what he ought to do - Mark also tells us that the Lord "sternly warned him" to do this (Mk. 1:43) and this was in keeping with the Law - the Lord did not come to abolish it but to fulfill it and this was part - it would have been easy for the former leper to discount the law in his joy and to forget it seeing he had what he had desired - responsibility must not be lost in celebration!
- k. The third answer is also supported in another reference to the Lord instructing silence concerning Himself - in Mt. 12:16 Jesus instructed those He healed to "not tell who He was" and Matthew ties this to Isaiah 42:1-4 - part of this speaks of the coming Messiah; "...nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets..." - He would not be boisterous concerning Himself - the Lord was not motivated at all by the pursuit of popularity!

B. The exhibition of faith by the Centurion - vs. 5-13

1. At first a physically "unclean" man came to Him, now an "unclean" Gentile asks Him to come to His house to heal his servant - vs. 5-7

- a. This is also described in more detail in Luke 7 and we find the Centurion sent first Jewish elders to speak in his stead and second he sent his friends
- b. The request is described as "imploring him" and Luke clarifies that the servant was dearly loved by the centurion - the Jewish elders who came making the request are mentioned in the Luke 7 account as bringing up reasons why the man was worthy for Jesus to visit and help - the centurion had built a synagogue for the Jews
- c. The servant is described as being "fearfully tormented" in his paralysis (or was paralyzed by pain)
- d. The Lord's response in verse 7 has some debate surrounding it as to whether or not it was a statement or a question (interrogative) - it seems more fitting that this is a question as in saying, "Should I go to him and heal him?" Jesus being a Jew and this man and his servant a Gentile - this then lends more also to the response of the centurion later

The use of the term "racism" is inappropriate since there is only one race (human) - as God divided them at Babel, so He unites them in Christ

Here again, as with the leper, this man did not have a demanding spirit

We are often guilty, in our prayers, of laying out how we expect an answer yet prayer is to be our leaving it to God

This man, knowing as little as he did, had grasped a concept which seems difficult for many "seasoned" believers today - the Lord is Lord over all, and **all** answers to Him (even sickness which may seem rogue or under sin/Satan's dominion)

Jesus also was impressed with the faith of the Canaanite woman in Mt. 15:21-28 - Matthew would again point out Gentile faith

Some have attempted to make a case that those coming from the east and west are "lesser: Jews but this is not fitting to the context of the Lord's comments regarding a gentile's faith

As John the Baptist opened his preaching with "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" so now the Lord references it - He is the core of this kingdom

Refusing and neglect of this sort are often not seen (initially) as deliberate but are so because of lives filled with temporal distractions and time/effort fillers keeping the focus upon all else and not their purpose in life

Faith will most often be evidenced when things are difficult in life (as the centurion demonstrated during the sickness of his beloved servant - was if valued is entrusted to the Lord's care

"He does not say according to thy prayer, or according to thy righteousness, and goodness, but according to thy faith: and it is further to be observed, that this cure was wrought, not so much for the sake of the servant, as his master; and therefore Christ says, "be it done unto thee"; let him be healed for thy sake, and restored unto thee, to thy use, profit, and advantage." Gill

Matthew

e. The Lord would bring on the scene a concept that was not only new to most Jews, but not common amongst most Gentiles - crossing **ethnic** lines: there is no other concept or movement that brings differing ethnicity together than the Gospel - many in our era try to bring them together with temporal, fleeting commonalities while the Gospel of Christ (in contrast) is lasting - artificially "forcing" unity will not work (there must be a "rallying point")

2. The submissive humility and unique faith of the centurion - vs. 8-10

a. Apparently, upon hearing of the Lord's initial question/statement he does not respond in arrogance (from his high position in society), but in humility declares that he is "unworthy" for Jesus to come into his house ("worthy" carrying the idea of "measuring up")

b. It would be easy to overlook or underestimate the next statement, but it shows profound, almost premature faith - the centurion mentioned that he knows that Jesus only need speak the word and his servant would be healed - he does insist on "**normal**" measures

c. It is interesting to note how honorable these Roman military leaders are portrayed in the New Testament (this centurion, the one at the cross, Cornelius, and those with Paul)

d. In revealing his thinking, this Roman officer explained that he knew what it was like to receive and follow orders (under authority) and even in his subordinate position he had others under him - as he was expected to obey orders, so he expected those under him to obey orders and thus expected that Christ, being over all, could speak the word and those under Him would do His bidding (he believed/acknowledged a spiritual hierarchy as well) - this is faith!

e. This serves as an example of true faith for us today - we should conclude from this also, that if we ask something of the Lord and it is **not** done, that that also is of His will and not to ever consider that somehow the Lord is unable or **ungracious**

f. Jesus "marvelled" (as in seeing this as remarkable) that this Gentile man had such unrestricted confidence in Him, and that such faith was not to be found "with anyone in Israel" - as would be seen throughout this Gospel, where one would normally expect to find faith there was little to none to be had, and where one would not expect to find it, it was profound

g. As we see in Heb. 11:6, it is this faith that God is most pleased with - a confident trust in Him

3. Faith is the sign of those who truly **belong** to God's Kingdom - vs. 11-13

a. The Lord then states something very profound which Luke does not record in his account in Luke 7 - the picture the Lord gives is one of a feast (reclining at the table) and the attendees the Lord mentions are the "big three" as far as the patriarchs of Israel are concerned - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that many will come from the "east and west" to recline with them - this must be, per the context, Gentiles (as was seen in the faith of the centurion)

b. This is in "the kingdom of Heaven" and not in reference to the earthly kingdom as such, and should not be used to discount the coming earthly kingdom promised to Israel - even in that one, as seen in Isaiah 25:6, it will also be open to "all peoples" - Christ did not just represent and bring a message of a Kingdom on earth, but the eternal one described as "in and of Heaven"

c. But the "sons of the kingdom" will be "cast out into outer darkness" - this pictures those left out of a feast (at evening) and are left in the darkness grieving - the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" pictures those overcome with their grief and are in the **agony** of regret - these are these Israelites who should have known better but refused/neglected

d. This cannot be in reference to all of Israel for at least two reasons - first, the three patriarchs are mentioned and second, texts such as Romans 11 and others describe Israel as a people repenting and returning to Christ (being once again "engrafted" into God's work/kingdom)

e. So, it is key to recognize the key "sign" (evidence) of those belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven - faith/ trust (unyielding confidence) in the Lord in all things throughout life - there will be those frequently throughout life who have a show of faith but do not possess the substance of it - as the centurion demonstrated in his faith, a citizen of Heaven will take God at His word and will **assume** His control over all

f. To the degree the centurion had trusted Christ, so it happened - it was not his faith in his faith but his faith in Jesus that made the difference - many times in life things are more trouble some and overwhelming because we are fighting faith, ignorantly believing it to be easier - true faith will seem like a far more difficult path when, in reality, it is easier (as the Lord would mentioned, "...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- g. "It is what the philosophers call a 'performative utterance,' not stating that something will happen, still less merely wishing it, but making it happen. This is the cure 'by a word' which the centurion had asked for (v.8) and which Matthew will again emphasize as Jesus' method in exorcism..." - R. T. France

C. Jesus, the bearer of sin's consequences of sickness and diseases - vs. 14-17

1. As Matthew ends this first section of miracles, he ends with a miracle in Peter's house - vs. 14-15

Luke also recorded that the house was where Peter and Andrew lived - it was common for multiple generations and close family to live together

- a. Jesus went into the home of Peter and upon entering is met with the fact of Peter's ill mother-in-law, lying down (burning) with a fever - note: Peter's wife is also referenced in I Cor. 9:5
 b. Matthew records the touch while Luke mentions the Lord "rebuking" the fever - the word for "rebuked" (ἐπετίμησεν) describes a warning/charging as one would who had authority over another - she is immediately healed and gets up to serve the Lord - no recovery needed!

2. As the evening came, those brought to Him increased - vs. 16

We do not see the Lord shrink away in these times of seeming endless sicknesses and demonic possessions - He was, as we are about to see, come to bear with these sinners and the results of their sins

- a. This, as Luke records in 4:31, was the Sabbath in which these miracles were being performed, and as sunset came (the end of the Sabbath), many were "free" to "bear the load" of their sick family and friends - this would have most likely gone on most of the night (if not the entire night) as we see the Lord finally sleeping in the boat later, in the storm
 b. The Lord was shown to be not only compassionate, but authoritative (true meekness)
 c. Many of these were "demon possessed" - these were those under the control of a demon (or demons) and this was not hard to believe seeing that so much of this region was historically known to be immensely evil - demon possession is often the result of those totally yielding themselves to demonic ideas, influences and practices - it should be noted that as we see throughout the Gospels, many of those possessed had physical issues associated with it, yet the Lord distinguished between them (the actual cause/problem)
 d. The Lord "...cast out these spirits with a word..." - which word it was is not the point - the point being His absolute authority and command over such - it was typically expected that "exorcisms" would take a long time and many words - this account (and the others) should be noted today by those professing Christians that believe their sin issues (or other issues) are the "fault" of a demon, yet how can one who is truly **in Christ** have a demon in them? (demons, so fearing the Lord, would not dare!)
 e. So Christ healed ALL who were ill that came to Him

It is easy to question the actuality of demon possession today mainly because most don't believe in it and, would attribute it to some type of mental illness (not that all mental illness is demon possession) but this should be considered a possible cause

If one is truly possessed by a demon, they are not in Christ - this is necessary to mention in light of so much that is called "spiritual warfare" today

3. Matthew references Isaiah 53:4 as being fulfilled in these acts of the Lord - vs. 17

Many "scholars" in our era have come to question much in Matthew and in other texts (such as Hebrews) either claiming the usage of a flawed text (LXX) or trying to "excuse" these as "double-fulfillments" claiming a literal fulfillment in the time of the prophets and thus a mere allegorical tie to the Messiah - this approach (popular as it is) robs these texts of their intended profundity and why so many seem unimpressed with these "proofs" given by Matthew

- a. Many question Matthew's handling of Isaiah 53:4 as though he misinterprets it, misquotes it thus misapplies it - this should not be considered in light, first of all, of his usage of "fulfill" (πληρωθῆ) meaning "to accomplish" - Matthew, without any vagueness, indicates this was done in fulfilling what Isaiah had written - "His perfect humanity whereby He was bodily afflicted for us, and in all our afflictions (Isa 63:9; Heb 4:15) was the ground on which He cured the sick; so that Matthew's quotation is not a mere *accommodation*." JFB
 b. The Lord was, in coming to deal with sin, dealing with sin's results (for this is what sin has to truly offer (sickness, misery, possession/oppression)) and, in His teaching, dealing with countering the thought processes and life philosophies of sin (and sinful living): and finally, in His death and resurrection, the entirety of sin and its affects
 c. The significant phrasing being "He Himself took..." - **He** took it upon Himself, **He** bore it all for us and each miracle and demonic exorcism is an ongoing reminder of not only His ability and authority to do so, but **the reality of His actually doing it!**

XIV. Challenges of Being a Follower of Jesus - 8:18-27

A. Matthew includes not only the experiences of the Lord's disciples and what they were able to observe, but also describes the desires of some to follow... and the Lord's direct answer - vs. 18-22

1. It's interesting to see Christ's response to many who asked to follow Him (discipleship)

Compare to Luke 9:62 (those looking back having begun ploughing are not worthy of Him) - and the first one asking the Lord to be a follower is comparable to the seed that fell on stony ground, shot up but had no root (Mt. 13:20)

- a. This is in contrast to so much of the approach to "discipleship" in our day where the "potential" followers expect to be wooed into following
 b. The Lord stressed the hardships/challenges associated with accompanying Him - this is one of the key aspects to what should be discipleship - describe it as the challenge it really is
 —c. True discipleship must be sustained by more than enthusiasm - it must be **principled!**

2. The impact of Jesus was more than just His miracles, but also His differing idea of discipleship

Where Jesus went the crowds would come and follow - the opposite, as has been seen in history, would be to establish a place and set efforts to lure people - Christ made it difficult and did not cater to half-hearted laziness

The word for "Teacher" is one Matthew always uses of "outsiders" addressing or referencing Jesus

True followers of Christ will soon come to know a sense of an expatriate and homelessness

It is not unloving to give someone the truth and to leave off an elaborate pep-talk designed partially to deceive (by leaving things out)

This is one of the "proof phrases" linking the Messiah to being a man

Many have taken this situation to be a man just wanting to go bury his father who had just died - this is unlikely seeing he was with Christ - it is more likely he wanted to stay with his aged father until he died to take care of him and then he would follow Jesus

It is interesting the Lord calls those living for this life only as "dead" - these are dead in as much as they are separated from true life/living - we must not live for what these "live for" - we are not clamoring for these "privileges"

There has come to be a "socializing" of the Gospel where being a follower of Christ is seen as part-time work/hours, though with expected full-time benefits

Compare John 8:31 to John 6:66 - "continuing in His word" is proof of true discipleship

- a. Jesus, seeing the crowd instructed, He and some disciples embark across "the sea" - the reason for leaving at this point, with so many still around, is not stated, but Matthew Henry wrote of this, "Many would be glad of such helps, if they could have them at next door, who will not be at the pains to follow them to the other side; and thus Christ shook off those who were less zealous, and the perfect were made manifest."
- b. First we are told of a Scribe who approached the Lord stating he would follow wherever He was going - Scribes are rarely depicted as amiable to the Lord but here is one calling Him "Teacher" - yet Christ does not say what we might expect (to try to get the Scribe "on board")
- c. Jesus answers just part of what following Him would involve - His practical situation was worse than that of animals; foxes having dens and birds their nests - yet "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" - to follow Him would be to have no real "home" here - we do not know if he actually followed Him, though it seems unlikely since he is left unnamed
- d. "He sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms and the glittering arms, and is eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked. It is less cruel to disillusion such a man than to let him rush in and go down to disappointment." Lenski
- e. This is the first time the Lord is recorded using the term "Son of Man" the title He gives to Himself - it is a phrase that at first glance is one of meekness and humility - literally translated it would read "the son of the man" or "the son of the mankind" - it gets its derivation from Dan. 7:13-14 indicating a special man to whom would be given "dominion and glory" and a kingdom that would be everlasting (see also Mt. 24:30) - Some believe this was a veiled reference to His being the Messiah - regardless, He was THE MAN (the ultimate man, demonstrating His humanity, and when realizing Who He really was, His condescension)
- f. We should take note that it was not that Jesus could not have had a home nor that He had no resources - but, the demands of His ministry were of such that He would never "settle down" - it would be one of endless busyness in the service of the Father
- g. Right after the Scribe, another "disciple" asked that he first be permitted to "go and bury" his father, which on the surface looks like a reasonable request - it would have seemed normal and right for a man to take care of His father as was the respectable custom and expectation
- h. The Lord's response seems harsh - It is difficult to understand the entirety of His meaning of "let the dead bury the dead" though, taken as plainly as possible, we understand that the physically dead cannot bury themselves - so the first "dead" must be in reference to another type of "dead" and that being spiritually dead (those living for this life only, whose purposes and priorities are found only here - these can be left to focus on this life's priorities while we who are in Christ must give greater weight to those of His kingdom) - Christ did tell the man to "Follow Me" and in so doing leave the "dead to the dead" - as significant as funerals can be, they must not be looked upon (as so with other earthly prioritized ceremonies) as usurping all other priorities, especially those of service to our Lord
- i. Most would not desire such sacrifices, and other discomforts and this teaching would have been radical compared to social norms - full discipleship would have been unwanted while "casual discipleship" would be the norm until the end of the Lord's ministry (when public "tides" shifted from Jesus) - many will desire to live "somewhat" for Jesus but not "all in"
- j. "Jesus can hardly have been surprised that true discipleship remained a minority movement, and that popular enthusiasm for his teaching and healing stopped short of full discipleship. Many are invited, but few are chosen." France also, "The harshness of this word is removed except in the case of the sentimentality of the worldly minded who pay a good deal of attention to fragrant flowers and flowery tributes to the dead while they blink at the harsh reality of death itself and of that which is worse, spiritual death and eternal damnation." Lenski

B. A "regular journey" becomes a demonstration of great power and weak faith - vs. 23-27

1. The Lord and the disciples (more than just those who would become the 12) get into the boat

- a. We learn also in Mark 4:35-36 that the crowds were "sent away" and that there were "other boats" with Him - it also tells us they "took Him as He was" providing the detail that no other preparation (e.g. supplies) were prepared - they just left
- b. A strong storm begins, waves covering the boat and in this scene the Lord sleeps!

2. "What kind of man is this?" - vs. 23-27

It's key to not only deal with the "what" but the "when" also, as both under the direct purpose of God

*Confidence in our Lord even when the storms will/may lead to our death - in faith we would **not** desire to live apart from God's will*

Many have thought for sure they would die in a moment only to be surprised by an unexpected (often unimaginable) saving - we must never prejudge our circumstances pronouncing final judgment

So, why fear the storm? "Because we are dying" - why fear dying? For many of our fears, the fear of dying is really at the core - see Heb. 2:15 (the bondage of the fear of death)

Our being impressed with God's working is not designed for us to then anticipate no more challenge, but to be ready for greater situations that He will prove Himself again to be faithful (worthy of our faith)

"Every part of the creation (man excepted) hears and obeys the Creator's voice." Clarke

- a. Though the wording in English looks simple, Matthew draws special attention to what is being described, "καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς μέγας ἐγένετο", literally, "And look (take note), a great shaking came into being" - don't just notice the significant storm, notice also the timing
 - b. While the boat is "being covered with waves," Jesus kept sleeping - He is the supreme example to true faith lived (a TOTAL confident trust in God's control and purpose at all times) - this is a visual we should strive to keep before us always in the "storms of life" (literal and figurative)
 - c. These experienced fishermen assessed their situation as dire and woke the Lord - they had already judged their situation as fatal, "*we are perishing!*" - as is about to be profoundly demonstrated, it would seem reasonable for us to consider our faith strong because we last "so long" in a stressful/fearful situation, and then give up when no visual or perceived hope is in sight; yet even (and especially) then, hope must not be lost!
 - d. The Lord's response would seem odd to the casual observer; first He asks "Why are you afraid?" - when the Lord is removed from a situation it seems perfectly normal to us to fret and be afraid (and to find the reason in our fear from many angles) but this is a good question to try to answer - what are we truly afraid of? - with these disciples it was "perishing" (dying most likely by drowning) - Jesus had heard what they said and still asked the question
 - e. In all this, Christ reveals the issue to be "little faith" - once again, it's not "no faith" (as in faithless) but "little" faith - these had a growing faith, having been with Him to learn and see what He could do; but as is so often the case, once we are confident based upon the experiences in life God places us in, a more difficult situation than we have ever faced comes; only to prove Himself again as He did in the lesser things
 - f. Jesus then "rebukes the wind and the sea" and all becomes perfectly calm - imagine the quick change in the sound alone - from seeming chaos and fear (with loud talking) to silence (and that not just the **absence** of the storm, but the **presence** of amazement (awe)) - imagine the exchange of glances!
 - g. In their amazement they finally ask "what kind of man is this that even the winds and sea obey Him?" - the only answer to this would have to be "this is no mere man" - the creature cannot control the creation like this - He was the creator within His own creation (Col. 1:15-17)
3. One of the ongoing challenges of being a follower of Christ would be the multiple situations that would involve faith (and those mostly revealing the littleness of their faith and the need for it to be grown) - this is true with us also - the "just will **live** by faith"

XV. Jesus Displays His Power/Authority Over Evil and Sin - 8:28-9:8

A. In the next two accounts recorded by Matthew, two significant points are revealed in their outworking

compare to Eph. 2:2 and I John 4:1-4

1. Christ has power over the fallen angels/demons - these are not rogue beings with no limits as to their actions, and as will be seen, they are sure of their doom - there is a sense of caution we should seek to live by when thinking on and dealing with the "evil spirits" at work in this world
2. Christ has power over sin (which is forgiveness) - we can and must forgive sins against us, but only Christ is able to forgive sin altogether and before God - both of these making it clear He is the "go-to person" when facing evil influences, beings, situations and their resulting sin - many will seek the aid of mankind, his philosophies, moralities or "escapes" (distractions) from facing reality, or will even go so far as to seek out Satan (in all his forms of being an "in-the-stead of God" or just yielding to the deceitful beliefs that to embrace certain evils will provide protections (as in paying thugs to protect you from **them** and their cohorts))

B. Jesus, with a word, drives out multiple demons possessing two men - vs. 28-34

1. Having crossed the lake and demonstrating His absolute power over nature, He and His followers are met by two vicious, demon-possessed men

Examples like this are often sought to cast doubts on Scripture but demonstrate that these skeptics seek distraction through focus on seeming contradictions trying with all they have to avoid what is plainly being taught and demonstrated

- a. These were in the realm of the "Gadarenes" (near the town of Gadara) - there is much discussion in commentaries over the differences of locations mentioned in the corresponding Gospels, but this was a region with a few cities in close relative proximity and could be referenced by differing names and still be correct - so this is a non-issue
- b. There is also concern by some that Matthew mentions two men and Mark and Luke only mention one man - there is no problem realizing one was more prominent

Ironically, there are those dabbling in varying forms of mysticism, mindlessly surrendering themselves to some unknown, unseen entity

In Luke 8:27 the same is described as living among the tombs and as not having put on clothing for a long time

The affects and influence of evil, exposed for what it really is, are seen in such examples and these should (properly) repulse us to heading in its direction when its initial lures seem appealing - the wise look past initial temptations to their expected and potential outcomes

Any seeking to distance themselves from Christ in their words or actions, find something clearly in common with these demons - we are never more like demons than when the thoughts of Christ or His presence is a bother to us

These demonstrate the height of evil - knowing who Christ is and knowing their accountability still blatantly live in rebellion - this is a deadly, depraved resolve we never want to tread even close to!

see Acts 19:13-16 where seven men try to deal with one spirit without Christ

Mark records that there were about 2000 pigs in this herd

In the Luke account these also begged not to be sent to the "abyss" which is their future destiny - Rev. 20:1-3

Another lesson to be learned - in our pursuits and lusts to be independent, even these seemingly powerful beings are not self-determinists

- c. That demon possession is clearly taught and demonstrated in the New Testament is without debate - to believe that there is no such occurrence today is to be presumptive, especially in an era where the spiritual is discarded in favor of the intellectual or the experiential
- d. These dwelt in and around the tombs (places reserved for the dead, places typically associated with grief and being the "trophies" of sin's ultimate conclusion (death))
- e. Mark, in describing one of them, describes that he had been "often bound with shackles and chains" but was able to break free of them and could no longer be restrained - Mark 5:1-5 - he was also described as night and day screaming "among the tombs and mountains, gashing himself with stones" - he was a scary man!
- f. These men were so violent no one could go near them or "that way" - notice that extreme, uncontrollable violence, strong association with the dead and death, and nakedness are part of the behavior of such "evil-inspired" and controlled men - it should be noted though, that the Lord never is recorded as placing any blame for demon possession on its victims - this of course is no excuse for surrendering one's self without reservation to that which is evil (not necessarily because they might be possessed, but just realizing **there really is nothing appealing in what it has to offer**)

2. These unclean spirits (fallen angels) want nothing to do with Jesus - vs. 29

- a. Luke and Mark record that when he/they saw Him, he/they bowed before Him and spoke loudly (essentially yelled their words) - as they spoke, their first words are essentially asking "what do we have to do with you?" - This is more along the lines of saying something like "why do you come to bother us?" - to "devils" Christ is repulsive
- b. These also recognized him as the "Son of God" (or "Son of the Most High God" in Mk. 5) and His power and authority to "torment them" - their statement "before our time" shows they realized the time is coming and did not want to face it at that moment - these fear-provokers were fearful themselves of Jesus - this is why we are not to fear such beings (spiritual and even physical) - all live in dread of God whether or not they own it, which is one of the underlying reasons mankind fears death (inwardly knowing the "next stop before God) and the evil spirits dread their upcoming judgment (knowing they are answerable)

3. These demons, powerless now before the Lord, plead for an alternative - vs. 30-31

- a. Mark (in Mark 5) records that the Lord was telling them to come out of the man and that Jesus had asked their name - the answer back was "Legion" because there were many possessing at least one of the men - see Mat. 12:43-45 for more clarification or another example
- b. One such spirit would be more than we could handle but the Lord, just in being recognized as near, is overwhelming to them
- c. They pleaded to be allowed to enter into the herd of swine that were nearby - this has provoked a great deal of discussion over the centuries but it not unclear as to what was asked and what happened - why make such a request? We are unsure, but it seems quite apparent from this text and others that these seem to like to possess bodies (even animals as a last resort) - clearly, though, Christ valued the men more than the animals
- d. These demons were also pleading in the account in Mark not to have to leave the country (the region they had been) most likely because they had a strong and well established influence - and judging by the response of the townspeople, this was the case

4. Then, as Matthew records it the Lord gives one word, "Go!" - vs. 32

- a. With this one command, He not only frees the men but gives permission for the demons to go into the swine - this is an interesting point to consider, that these spirits even need permission to enter into pigs - these beings are not as powerful and as independent as they would have us believe (in opposition to God)
- b. As soon as the spirits went into the pigs, the entire herd rushed to their death over a "steep bank into the sea" - there is some speculation that these demons asked to enter the swine fully intending to do this and to try to hurt Christ is some way - this is a reasonable assumption

5. The entire city hears of this and comes to confront Jesus - vs. 33-34

- a. As soon as the herdsman saw what happened they ran back to the city to report all that had happened, including what happened to the "demoniacs" - rather than being grateful and in awe of His power, they were fearful (possibly because they were used to life as it was and, like the demons did not want to be bothered by Him)

Many love the things of life because they help distract from their ultimate accountability before their Creator

- b. These did not want what Christ stood for, taught or was doing, seeing the disruption it had already made to their lives shortly after He arrived - they clearly valued their pigs more than those that were healed - it is still much the same today where the majority would rather carry on with everyday life as it is rather than risk facing spiritual/eternal reality
- c. It may be that the “devils” had planned all along to do this and have the blame of their deeds placed on Him (as is seen today where God is criticized for the natural outworking of the sins of man - all evil that befalls us is deserved and any grace that God bestows is undeserved and not required !)

C. Jesus demonstrates His power to heal far more than the body - 9:1-8

- 1. It appears as though the Lord was in the area of Gadara for only that morning and then asked to leave

In Mark 2 we learn He had been in Capernaum and in His house when the paralyzed man was brought to Him

- a. He returns to His own city (Capernaum) where He had left a crowd
- b. As was most often the case, wherever He was known to be a crowd formed - in Luke’s account (Luke 5:17-26) there was a crowd, and in it were many Scribes and “teachers of the Law” from the surrounding regions to see and hear Him (these were self-righteous opponents - many immoral people are also self-righteous in their own eyes, having justified their immorality)

- 2. Four men (Mk. 2:3) brought a paralytic to be healed by the Lord - vs. 2

The significance of faith (trust in Jesus) is being stressed by Matthew and that usually in the face of great opposition

- a. We learn in Mark and Luke that because of the crowd, the men who brought the paralytic opened up part of the roof and lowered the man down in front of Jesus
- b. Matthew notes that the Lord saw “their faith” (having gone to such lengths) but this also includes the man seeking healing
- c. The Lord then says something unexpected, discerning what could not have been discerned by anyone else in the room (except maybe the paralyzed man himself) - Jesus discerned the greater need (burden) of this man - forgiveness of sin
- d. It would clearly seem, from the text, that this man had not revealed what was troubling him most (even more than his being paralyzed) and may have been the reason he would have been so persistent and urgent to see the Lord in person
- e. Upon seeing the man and knowing the greatest burden on this man the Lord and begins with, “Take courage, child...” - the man must have been discouraged (possibly because of the crowds and the unique way he had to be brought before Christ)

Observe the tenderness of our Lord in addressing this poor man as “child” (or “son”) and seeking to encourage him immediately and make him feel at ease

The Lord was very gracious and tender to those genuinely seeking help and was also harsh and stern with those seeking only points to criticize

In Luke 5:25 we learn that when he left, he did so “glorifying God” which is the genuine response to forgiveness (the sensed weight of sin removed)

- f. The first word from the Lord is “Θάρσει” meaning, be at ease, be encouraged, be cheerful, followed by what he needed to hear more than anything else (more than a declaration of his healing), “...your sins are forgiven.” - this may have been the real reason this man needed to see Jesus, though the healing would be secondary, to prove His power to forgive
- g. Those with a strong sense of their sin/guilt realize the torment it produces far above that of physical pain - the pain of guilt cannot be “gotten to”; it is in our inner most being - guilt can not be “drugged” away or “psychologically excused” but must be dealt with genuinely, facing it for what it really is and being “relieved” by one with the authority to actually do so

- 3. Immediately, the Scribes reasoned within themselves that Jesus was blaspheming - vs. 3-7

- a. This does not appear to be something they immediately voiced but all thought within
- b. We are told in the other accounts that part of their thinking was that “only God has power to forgive sins” of which they were correct - any mere man stating such a thing would truly be blasphemous (to speak evil of God or, in this case, to take on one’s self what belongs only to God)
- c. The simple phrase, “Jesus knowing their thoughts...” carries a lot of weight - we may guess at another’s thoughts or discern it (generally) by their expressions, but only the Lord could know them for what they truly are and then dealt with them as though they had actually been spoken
- d. The Lord, clearly multi-tasking (meeting this man’s spiritual, mental and physical needs while taking on the criticisms of these religious scholars) asks them why they are thinking “evil in your hearts?”
- e. To make His point, Jesus asks which is easier to “say” - no doubt it’s harder to forgive sins (as this can only be truly, effectively done by God) but it is easier to say it - to say “Get up and walk” to a paralytic would be more difficult because it is “falsifiable” (those hearing will expect to see it happen) - so, to prove He not only says the sins are forgiven, He proves He has power to do it, He says not only “get up” but also pick-up your bed and go home”
- f. Christ did it in this order to demonstrate that he had ἐξουσίαν (authority) to forgive sins - this word not only means authority but also “power” and “freedom” to do so

This would not have seemed evil to these Scribes yet the Lord reveals it for what it truly was - they were correct in their assessment of what blasphemy really was but were incorrect in their applying it to Jesus - they were thinking evil thoughts though they seemed pure to themselves

Three miracles were performed - The forgiving of sins, the reading the minds of the Scribes and the healing of the paralysis

Again notice there was no recovery - the healing was so that he was made as if he never had been paralysed

Disease and illnesses are so often categorized solely in the realm of the biological that we forget these ongoing reminders of what sin has to offer

Nevertheless, they still directed their glorying to God and not to man - it is too easy to direct our glory to the people God uses more than to those He graces with such gifts

- g. The instruction would have been profound enough to have the man "get up" but to demonstrate he was whole, he was to also take up the cot/stretcher he had been carried on and then walk home
- h. There is no reason to draw from this account that the man suffered his paralysis because of some particular sin, but it is undeniable that all suffering, sicknesses and other ailments are because of sin - these types of healings were excellent proofs of His authority over sin
- i. The presence of sickness in our lives is an ongoing reminder of the presence of sin (and its affects) is in this world and a reminder of our dependence upon God for forgiveness

4. The response of the crowd is one of fear and reverence - vs. 8

- a. The crowd was ἐφοβήθησαν (in fear) - imagine the thoughts and apprehensions as this man walked passed them in such a crowded space - this type of awe is often the result of being shaken with real reality - there is an admiration that comes from seeing the mighty power of God displayed and yet a timidity in light of our own sinfulness and smallness before Him
- b. Interestingly, Matthew points out their glorifying God for giving "such authority to the people" - either this was in reference to the authority given amongst mankind or, more likely they still only saw Him as just man - it is so human to focus solely on the human !

XVI. The Plentiful Harvest - 9:9-38

A. This "harvest" the Lord will reference at the end of this chapter involves many different peoples and situations

- 1. But we are to see it as it is, "His harvest" to be worked, and the one first mentioned in this context was *see I Cor. 1:28* — a tax collector (one usually despised and usually corrupt) - the Lord choosing that which was "not"
- 2. Examples like this should be an encouragement to us especially in a day in which even the "Church" has fallen into the ideology that God can only use the popular/ fully equipped to do His work in a pre-planned, predictable way - this context, of course, dispels such notions

B. The "calling" of Matthew (dealing with the "sick" and criticized by the "healthy") - vs. 9-13

- 1. It should be noted that Matthew only refers to himself in his Greek name and not his Jewish name (Levi) and spends minimal time on his call by the Lord
- 2. We learn he was called while sitting in the "tax collector's booth" - his occupation is often translated into English as "publican" which is derived from latin in reference to "public service" (he worked for the government, taking in the the required taxes - equivalent to our current IRS)
 - a. Yet in the next chapter he is named among the twelve Apostles (those sent out)
 - b. He, as were the other disciples, was taught by the Lord Himself - this learning included listening as the Lord taught others and the twelve exclusively - but it also included being with the Lord wherever He went, observing what He did, how He responded
- 3. With two simple words, "Follow Me" He called Matthew and in Luke's account (Luke 5:28) he "left all" - here we have Jesus calling versus those seeking to follow - and in this case we see no hesitation as far as business left undone (as in the man who wished to bury his father) - and, as is always the case with those truly called by the Lord, his life would never be the same (he would not return to what he left)
 - Following the Lord (discipleship) is not a "give it a try" type of thing - see Luke 5:11, 14:33
- 4. Jesus attends a meal in the house of Matthew and is criticized by the Pharisees - vs. 10-13
 - a. Matthew records just Jesus eating with many tax collectors and sinners but Luke records that this was in the house of Matthew (Luke 5:29)
 - b. The Pharisees knew of it and approached some of Christ's disciples (probably because they would not go themselves into the house) - they asked as to why their "Teacher" would be eating with such - not only eating, but even going into one's house with such openly bad character was considered unthinkable
 - c. It has become common to use this example and other to seek to justify bad company altogether - but as is about to be made clear, Jesus was not there to just fellowship, not enjoy or be influenced in the least by their sinful practices and philosophies, but was there to "heal" — those "sick" which is far different that most "light and darkness" relationships today
 - d. Amazingly, the distorted handling of this concept by many in the "Church" has caused its purpose to be neglected entirely - Christ was there to "physician to the sick" and those that considered themselves "healthy" (or righteous) saw no reason to be with such - Christ was there to bring them to repentance with the truth of their condition

We don't learn from others just by hearing them teach, but also from their ongoing "living" - the "out-living" of our character will be a teaching tool; for good or bad

Having knowledge of true righteousness is never to develop into an idea of exclusivity of it being for just us to have but that it carries with it an obligation to be shared and promoted to those in need

see II Cor. 6:14

The Church has become so non-confrontational that we see it as inappropriate to deal with these sin issues openly and directly - we are to have dealings with the ungodly with the purpose to "win" them (not to us but to Christ)

Matthew

*This would have left them dumbfounded having just been shown that they were not doing what **they** should be doing - they saw a need (condition) and shunned it rather than seeking to work to "heal" it*

Even doctors must take the same medicine they prescribe, especially when in contact with those that are ill, lest they become infected with the same thing - doctors strive to counter disease not encourage it!

Despising sinners and the absence of compassion for their need is ungodly

- e. Jesus' answer to them was masterful in at least two ways - first, He was using their premise (that they were "healthy" (righteous) and that these sinners were "sick" (unrighteous)) and that in doing what He was doing, seeking to help the sick, He was doing exactly what He was supposed to be doing
- f. Second, Jesus quotes part of Hosea 6:6 where God declared that He desired mercy (kindness/compassion) more than sacrifice - sacrifice was instituted of God and the practice was to demonstrate to them the mercy of God in light of their sin and that it was not to be just a ritual - these sought only the externals and not the internals that were to motivate them
- g. We still see the same today - many will either write-off "sinners" as those to be avoided or, when forming relationships with them they become like them and do not strive to introduce true healing - **if they avoid the sick they have no purpose in their calling and if they become sick they will need a doctor also to come and help heal them**
- h. Christ did not call those that think they are righteous already but those who know they are sinners - even true sinners (as these Pharisees were proven to be) can see themselves as well and in no need of healing - even the most evil are self-righteous when they reject repentance
- i. Matthew was himself an example of the Lord "calling sinners" - see also Luke 5:32

C. Hanging on to the "old" trying to affix to it what is new - vs. 14-17

- 1. As we still see today, there are those who will hang-on to the old for the old's sake missing the changes that come when the Truth is realized and the changes that it brings

Jesus was not against fasting, just fasting for the wrong reasons and from the wrong motivation - the Law only demanded fasting on the Day of Atonement and all other fasting was done in response to some type of grief

- a. Jesus is once again confronted by those who are concerned that He is not following lawful traditions and may be in need of correction - some still try this in more subtle ways
- b. This is the first time we see the disciples of John coming as their own group - John was now in prison and would soon be put to death
- c. They are concerned that Jesus and His disciples are not fasting while they and the Pharisees do fast (most likely, twice a week) - there were and will always be those that stress the ritual and tradition over Biblical purpose (and usage)
- d. They approached Christ after the Lord had been feasting in Matthew's house - it may have been also motivated by their own grief of their teacher being imprisoned and their being disturbed that Jesus was not grieving with them
- e. It is likely that the Pharisees were part of motivating John's disciples to do this (for the Pharisees were not friends to John) - yet the Lord's answer (again, masterfully) did not condemn John's disciples nor His own, but once again put the Pharisaical mind-set in its place
- f. It would be inappropriate for the "groomsman" to fast and be grieved while the "groom" was still around - so in this first countering illustration, it is appropriate for the disciples of John to be fasting in grief but not for the Lord's disciples
- g. There would be coming a time when His disciples would fast when He is "taken away from them" - this was His first reference to what was coming for Him - yet while He was with them, there was no need for fasting as a result of grief/sorrow - this is at least a small glimpse of the setting of Heaven; continuous joy because of the non-ending, never parting relationship with our Lord

We are instructed to weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice, but we are not told to rebuke those who do not weep and mourn with us

Plus, Jesus had already made it clear the motive and method for fasting - it was to be done in secret without "letting on" by their appearance that it was being done

- 2. The destructive results of trying to mix the "new" with the "old" - vs. 16-17

The old garment, in this case, the self-righteous pursuits of the Pharisees and the legalistic approach of John's disciples cannot have their flaws mended by what Christ brings - they must be made new

- a. The Lord uses two illustrations to make a point - the first is that of affixing a new piece of unshrunk material to an old garment with a hole needing to be patched - if this is done, once washed or when it gets wet, the new cloth will shrink (as expected) and will make the tear worse than it was before
- b. The same goes with pouring new wine into old wineskins - the old skins will not be able to handle the natural process that come with the "new wine" and they will burst - both then are lost; the new wine and the wineskins meant to hold it
- c. Here, in their day, and the same in our day we must not also try to mix the old (the tenants of the Old Covenant with that of the New) - the old is to give way to the new - what Christ was bringing did not discredit the old but it would bring it to its end and usher in "new birth" (as Jesus also explained to Nicodemus)
- d. We still see in our day those trying to mix Judaism with Christianity (trying to hold onto what was meant as the shadowy precursors to the reality (substance of Christ as the "caster of the shadows")) - the old will not/cannot mix!

Many are still attracted to the old formalities and ritualistic structures seen on the Old Testament while missing the satisfying contentment of how we are to worship now - resting and rejoicing in what Christ did and not in the formalities and religiosity of what we can do - these may bring a sense of security fastened to the wrong thing

This is why so many who give Christianity a "try" are quick to discard it when it "bursts their bubble" or begins to tear away at the parts of what is supposed to be the "old man" that they desire to hang on to

- e. We can benefit from this illustrative truth still further - as explained by Paul in II Cor. 5:17 when one is truly "in Christ" they are a "new creation" - that which was old (what they used to be) has gone away and what they are (as new) is being lived and seen (inwardly thus outwardly)
- f. It is becoming widely accepted today in popular "Christianity" to see possibilities in mixing the old with the new - it is promoted that Christ can be so utilized as if a "patch" to fix the apparent holes of our "old man" - but this will not work for when the new "acts" and does what it is intended to do (convict, correct, and change us) it causes greater rifts because it is not compatible
- g. But when that which is new is affixed to or poured into one who is made new "both are preserved" - the truth of what the Lord was teaching and all He came to do and fulfil is often lost to those trying to mix it with what is fading away (yet still being clung to, thus pulling one apart)

D. Christ defies the "experts" - vs. 18-26

- 1. In the next two accounts recorded by Matthew, both demonstrate Jesus power and understanding of situations as being far above all other experts (those genuine and self-perceived)
 - a. With the woman who suffered with a "hemorrhage" she had sought the help of medical experts for 12 years and had spent all her resources doing so - see Mk. 5:25-26)
 - b. With the mourners and company at the home of Jairus who laughed at Jesus assessment of the situation, Jesus was once again proven to be right while others were wrong or incapable
- 2. Jairus (as so names in Mark and Luke's account) came to Jesus for help

God will use desperate situations to help reveal where our faith is directed and if it is of any measurable degree (seen in resulting action; turning to Him)

We also learn in Luke's account the girl was 12 and his only daughter

Hopelessness is not a part of a Christian's walk - no matter how bleak the situation (even in death) there is hope in Him (His wisdom, power and purposes) - the worst this sinful world can bring to us (death) is no match for Him!

It was the reference to the resurrection in Acts 17:32 that some "scholars" "wrote-off" Paul

- a. He was a ruler of a synagogue (thus a man of significance and authority) yet when he comes to Christ he bows down - as Jesus will soon clarify, this man was motivated by faith (seen not only in his coming to Jesus but in his humility also - as with the centurion, lowliness is one of the by-products of true faith)
- b. Mark and Luke indicate that Jairus started by indicating his daughter was near death but Matthew, combining all that took place in a condensed form, indicates she was already dead - Matthew is out to demonstrate His authority and power over death
- c. He was confident in Christ even though his daughter had died - The Lord, in Mark 5:36 told him not to be afraid just to believe (trust Him) when he received news of his daughter's death
- d. "... and though any other physician would now come too late (nothing more absurd than *post mortem medicina*--medicine after death), yet Christ comes not too late; he is a Physician after death, for he is the resurrection and the life;" Matthew Henry
- e. We normally don't consider this, but the reality of a coming resurrection is made more profound considering the time that has past for those who died in Christ - even the full affects of the decaying process will not hinder His power to resurrect!

3. As they were going, a woman with an incurable condition touches Jesus for healing - vs. 20-22

"There is no evil so old, and incurable, which Christ cannot heal by and by, if he is touched with true faith, but lightly as it were with the hand." GBN

Many, after hearing he diagnosis (physically or philosophically) will not come to the Lord (their faith being firmly planted in the wisdom and power of man)

There are two types of "sinner touches" - those meant to infect/influence to sin and those seeking to be freed from their sin - God judges one and saves the other

Informed faith is essential to life - ignorant faith (misinformed) is dangerously deceitful!

- a. This unnamed woman had a "hemorrhage" (a bleeding issue of some sort) for twelve years and could not be cured - the best of their day could not help her - she was, as it were, at her end - this is so often the means God brings us to where we should be by graciously bringing us to our end) - the truest faith is exhibited when visible hope is un-seeable
- b. Her miraculous healing is very unique for one particular reason - she says nothing and seeks to be healed incognito - we're not sure why she did not seek to speak to the Lord and we see in the other accounts that she was afraid when Jesus stopped to ask "who touched me?"
- c. As is so often characteristic of true faith, it was unvoiced but acted upon - she truly believed that she would be healed if she just touched the fringe of His garment - Jairus asked the Lord to come and touch while she came and touched
- d. She was afraid (and as seem in the other accounts, the disciples were confused that He would stop to consider being touched while being touched by so many in the crowd) - she may have been embarrassed or concerned that she might be considered unclean and then found wrong to have touched Him (many feel unworthy to come to Him now, though it is the unworthy He seeks)
- e. Jesus is quick to calm her first calling her "daughter" (as in a little girl - this is the same word Jairus used of his daughter) and then He makes it clear that she is now "saved" from her illness and that her faith was the instrument (the means used) - again, it is not faith in faith but faith in Christ - all other faith, as strong, genuine and consistent as it may be will be useless because its object is not worthy of such faith)
- f. As is the case with all of the Lord's healings, she was fully better, nothing lacking in dealing with her sickness

4. Jesus is laughed at in His assessment of the dead girl - vs. 23-26

They also mention that Jesus encouraged Jairus to believe and that his daughter would be restored to him

Even today, the reality of our Lord being with us always is a comfort through the worst of griefs we will face this side of eternity

This is at the core of why so many openly and some secretly think down upon what Christ taught and said because it does not fit with their visual experience - yet faith does not depend on what is seen but Who is known

Interestingly, those that believe in the resurrection of the boy will look upon the body as being asleep in anticipation of it once again being made alive - the spirit does not die even when separated (for a short time) from the body

The Lord was not intimidated by the faithless mockers - even miracles proved to not be enough to win them over when His popularity waned with the people - the fear/reverence of man always overcomes pseudo claims to faith

False professors (in both senses of the term) are constant detractors away from the Truth and if not for the Holy Spirit, we would not likely ever find it with the endless counterfeits "sold to" true "seekers"

It is possible that Jesus did not acknowledge them because of how they were addressing Him - His being known as the Messiah (which He was) was apparently not to be promulgated

Versus demanding self-will

- a. Upon arriving at Jairus' house Jesus is met with "noisy disorder" - this was a typical response at a "wake" shortly after someone died - both Mark and Luke record in their accounts that just after the woman was healed, a messenger came to let them know the young girl had died
- b. This noisy group was made up of genuine mourners and likely paid mourners and others busying themselves preparing for the funeral and meal - the "commotion" was understandable except for the fact that Jesus was coming - Jairus believed, but it appears no one else in his household did - hopeless grief is understandable without Christ!
- c. There were "flute players" also, though they were not there to lighten the spirits - as we see also today, there is a tendency to "wallow in grief" rather than to seek out God's purpose in it and the grace He has and will continue to show - sadly many Christians demonstrate inconsolable grief just as profoundly as the hopeless
- d. Jesus insists on the crowds to leave and His reason makes them mockingly laugh at Him - when He says that she has not died but "sleeps," they see this as absolutely absurd (for in their vast experiences they had never seen a reason to doubt the permanence of death)
- e. Even in a time of grief these were able to laugh, though not out of something being truly funny but out of a grieved disgust (which can often be the response of those focused solely on their hurt and nothing else)
- f. Why did Jesus make this statement? Had she not really died? She had died but Jesus' perspective of death is not like ours - she was not as "dead" as they assessed her to be: in her situation, her separation was to be ended and she would be revived
- g. John 11:35 - "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (NASB) - death is intimidated by Him!
- h. As soon as the distractors were removed, Jesus took her by the hand and she got up - Jesus did not typically cater to skeptics but focused on the believing - faith is highly honored by the Lord while the disbelief of others is disregarded
- i. "The fountain of life thus communicating its vital energy to the dead body. Where death has already taken place, no power but that of the great God can restore to life; in such a case, vain is the help of man." Clarke
- j. The unsolicited fame spread more because of this (even though, as indicated in the other accounts He told them not to tell what had happened) - once again this demonstrates Jesus was not a popularity seeker and also that the Truth will spread without our extensive planning and ingenuity - though false accounts are often spread also, to the disappointment of those seeking out the legitimacy of what they have heard

E. The blind men saw what others did not and because of it gained their physical sight - vs. 27-31

1. Two blind men followed after Jesus shortly after raising the girl from the dead - vs. 27-29

- a. Their pleas were for "mercy" - they had no sense that Jesus HAD to heal them - this basic, simple thought escapes many in our society today where there is an expectant (almost demanding) perspective that God must heal all our issues and relieve us of all pressures and struggles
- b. Yet these also realized who they were asking mercy of - the term "Son of David" was a widely recognized Messianic term and Jesus does not acknowledge these men until they came into "the house"
- c. Even though He did not answer them right away they followed Him into the house - as if to stress the key to the situation, Jesus asks them if they believe He can do this - it was not the blindness or even the mercy that was being highlighted but Jesus as the key object of faith
- d. Without hesitation they affirm it "yes Lord" - affirmative respect!
- e. As He touched their eyes He tells them it will be done "according to your faith" - "not, Receive a cure proportioned to your faith, but, Receive this cure as granted to your faith." JFB
- f. Many have a strong faith and belief system, but the key, as seen here, is where this faith is directed - it is not the amount of confidence but the quality (based in its object)

2. Jesus sternly tells them "...see that no one knows..." - vs. 30-31

- a. Why so aggressively tell them not to speak of this? it seems odd that this would be in reference to the miracle since others would soon (easily) see what had happened
- b. It may be in reference to them calling Him "Son of David" which others had yet to realize

As still seen today, many serve the Lord on their own terms feeling right in contradicting what is plainly taught because, from their reasoning, they cannot see the wrong in it

- c. When truly living in light of God's sovereign will, one need not feel stressed to get public sentiment on their side to accomplish what God has given - if anything, it is avoided so as to not artificially seem to bring God's will about by popularity
- d. The two men cured of blindness "spread the news about Him throughout the land" - these, in their zeal disregarded what they had been firmly instructed - though they were sincerely grateful and probably thought their deeds were good, they were wrong

F. Two extreme attitudes toward Jesus - vs. 32-34

1. As Jesus was coming out of the house a mute man was brought to Him
 - a. The man's muteness was a result of being possessed of a demon (the greater problem)
 - b. Some physical ailments were a result of the demonic influence and others were not - this is likely true today though with most attention being directed at the biological, the spiritual is neglected (except in the cases of some given over to varying forms of mysticism (in error also))
 - c. Very little detail is provided by Matthew on the healing, most likely because his focus was upon the responses of those watching
 - d. The man's mute condition was healed when the demon was expelled
2. To the general crowd there was amazement (not just in this particular work but in all that had been happening in such a short amount of time) - it's one thing to see the miraculous a few times in a lifetime, but to see so many over such a wide spectrum of areas (healings, controlling nature and authority over the spiritual) and in a short amount of time, produced a correct conclusion - vs. 33
 - a. In considering just the exorcism, it was not something anyone (historically) could do with absolute certainty and with such immediate and lasting results) - with many exorcists, their results were reasonably questioned - Jesus was no ordinary person
 - b. Though they all had limited experiences, they were correct in their assessments of Christ's work and were unaware of the far greater work still ahead - conquering sin!
3. The Pharisees, trying to counter the rising popularity had little option in their response - vs. 34
 - a. They did not deny the results of any of these works, and since they could not, they ascribed His work to that of Satan (the "ruler of demons") - Jesus does not answer them here and possibly this gives them boldness to use this reasoning again
 - b. As will be seen in greater detail in Matthew 12, this was a dangerous conclusion to reach - it can be instinctively defensive to attribute evil to that which counters personal pride - envy is a dangerous conductor of life decisions (especially in our internal conclusions)

This is to be considered with all the Lord's dealings - As alluded to earlier He was the supreme multi-tasker making full use of any situation - the responses of onlookers to God's working is important as well

No one should find security in the fact that they are not countered immediately - many who are unanswered assume their rightness based on that and yet are still wrong

G. The motivating compassion of Christ - vs. 35-38

1. Jesus continues this schedule with all urgency in all the "cities and villages" (in the Galilee region)
 - a. His ministry was first teaching and proclaiming the "Gospel of the Kingdom"
 - b. As would be mimicked by others, He went into their synagogues in these places - these were places that the truth was to be proclaimed but was lacking
 - c. The Gospel of the Kingdom was the good news of the **true** kingdom (in contrast to all other kingdoms of this world, past, present and future) - this is the kingdom where grace and mercy abound and true justification is to be had in contrast to the self-righteous justifications of the Pharisees, which offered only superficial hope founded on self-estimations (derived from a redefining of the Law of God) - Jesus' compassion was seen in His giving what was needed and not what was popularly desired or widely espoused
2. Matthew records that when the Lord was looking out upon the people (in all His busyness), wherever He was at, He was moved with compassion - vs. 36
 - a. This word for compassion does not describe a surface feeling but one that is deep-seated within - the Lord truly "deeply felt" for these people seeing their **real** condition
 - b. His compassion was for their being "distressed and dispirited" (harassed and helpless) - bewildered and confused by those who should have taught and led them and as a result, weak (as if in laying around without strength and motivation to move) - they were "directionless" and essentially hopeless, like sheep without a shepherd
 - c. A shepherd was to lead the sheep, as a group, to where they should go for what they needed, and to protect them from what would harm them (food-wise, terrain-wise and from predators seeking to feed on them)
 - d. Their many "would be shepherds" neglected their real needs - for this Jesus was grieved for them

compare this to Acts 10:34-43

Pharisees sought salvation by consensus while Jesus brought/taught salvation as God's work

His had an "informed compassion" - many have a misinformed compassion leading them to acts of compassion that compound the situation and do not meet the real need

This is a reminder that we all need to scrutinize our driving motives for the service we offer to others for the Lord - is it compassionate or some sort of envy?

Many place a such singular focus on the physical needs of others that they will forsake or compromise the spiritual needs of others - the "good" overtakes the "best," the symptoms are "medicated" and the underlying disease is neglected

- e. In a way, it would have been better for them to have had no one acting as their shepherd than to have the religious leaders they did have, who led them incorrectly into areas that hurt them and ultimately robbed them of their strength
- f. Many in our day are moved to compassion (most) by the physical needs of others, while few seem to be moved by the dire spiritual needs (spiritual famine and ruin) that is happening (even in the name of "religion") all around us - "conviction quick-fixers" become the desired works of the Church so as to appease a sense of responsibility (than to deal with deeper issues that might involve more labor/effort) - compare to Isa. 56:9-12

3. The plentiful harvest, and the "sparse workforce" - vs. 37-38

- a. When looking upon these needy people, the Lord uses the analogy of a harvest ready to be harvested - it is "the Lord's harvest" (this would be the Father) - nothing is stated or even hinted at in these verses that suggests that the disciples were to be the ones planting and nurturing; simply field laborers for the harvest prepared (made so) by the Lord
- b. With such a great harvest there are few actually harvesting (the laborers are few) - it is typical that those coming to Christ will desire the "benefits," but avoid or disregard the "work" - yet, what is often unseen is the fact that the labor is one of the surprising rewards
- c. The answer to the need is to "ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers" - it is interesting to note that the first step in the Lord's service (after having the need revealed to us), is to pray for the Lord to provide workers - this is followed by (then) Jesus sending out His disciples (making them "apostles") - thus the idea is to pray for workers expecting/hoping to be one of them ourselves
- d. "Jesus does not tell the disciples to go out and to get workers. This mistake has often been made, and workers are brought in that God has not called. The harvest is God's and he must provide the workers..." Lenski

The privilege of being "fellow workers" WITH God - I Cor. 3:5-9

Often we entertain the thought that a work we are in is a work that belongs to us and is then to be formed and dictated by our will - if we see it (as it really is) as the Lord's word, we will realize the necessity of seeking out His will and not our own - this alone would increase our prayer life

XVII. Instructions and Guidance in the Lord's Work - 10:1-42

A. To do the Lord's work, the Lord's authority and empowerment are needed - vs. 1-4

- 1. These 12 students (disciples) were now being sent out (the first step of "apostleship," though they were not yet the final 12 apostles seen in Acts (Judas would be gone by then))

As seen with spiritual gifts - they are to be used in accordance with His purposes and priorities - we do not have authority over the use of our gifts

- a. The Lord gave them "authority" (the right/privilege) to do so, and in giving them this He also gave them the "power" (the ability) for there really is no ability without authority - this is key realizing that ability does not always carry with it the "right" to do something
- b. This power was "over" "unclean spirits to cast them out" - this would be primary, not just because their potential affect on the physical, but also in their direct opposition to all that is truly right (all that is of God and His truth)
- c. They are also given the authority and power to heal all types of diseases and "weaknesses" (physical) to be used as the Lord was using them - see vs. 7 (to "preach")

- 2. Matthew uses this point to list the disciples as they were at that time - vs. 2-4

By nature, as we are, none of us has the right to serve God - this is a granted privilege

- a. These were plain men, not men of wealth or much ranking in society - their influence and effectiveness would come only in doing the ministry of their Lord, in His name and by His authority - all is borrowed (even the responsibility/job)
- b. These had nothing of themselves that could be used to bring in more followers - ***their significance (as is ours) would be found in the message and calling they had been given***

- 3. These 12 were called to responsibility which would entail high costs - lives devoted to His work

- a. According to tradition, Peter was crucified (upside-down)
- b. Andrew is believed to have also been crucified (upon an "X" shaped cross and it is also reported that he preached to onlookers for the days it took him to die)
- c. James the son of Zebadee - his death is mentioned in Acts 12:1-2 where he was put to death "by the sword" most likely by beheading - see Mt. 20:20-23
- d. John was, according to tradition, boiled in oil but survived - he was banished to Patmos and is believed to than have ministered in the area of Turkey till he died
- e. Philip's death is uncertain though he is believed to have been crucified in Hierapolis
- f. Bartholomew - though not certain, some tradition has it that he was skinned/flayed alive
- g. Thomas - tradition has it that he was lanced (speared through) while ministering in India

In his banishment he wrote the book of Revelation

Not only did he receive grace to follow Jesus, but then was graced to be able to pen this Gospel directed to his own people - one of his roles, as seen in this Gospel, was that of a first century apologist

It is probable that Paul took his place realizing Paul was called of the Lord while Matthias (chosen in Acts) was chosen by casting lots

This message was to God's covenant people first and would later be spread to the rest of the world - this is a theme reference many times as in Paul's reference to it in Rom. 1:16 (to the Jew first)

History also demonstrates the demise of those that consider association with the Truth the same as living in it - all sorts of religious off-shoots have sprung out of Christian associations but are not truly of Christ

It is easy, after receiving the Truth, to act as though it is ours to divvy as we see fit and to withhold it as we see fit - as is about to be seen, "worthiness" is seen a different way

The Lord would later tell them to do the opposite - see Luke 22:35-36

God will use various resources throughout our lives in the fulfillment of meeting our needs **to do His work**, but the ministry is NOT the accumulation of such

To this day there is still the tendency to focus more on the uninterested or those opposed to the Gospel while missing those eager to hear and receive it but are overlooked because of a focus upon "the opposition"

Matthew

- h. Matthew "the tax collector" - interestingly Matthew still identifies himself this way (not necessarily putting himself down, but magnifying God's grace to him (seeing this is not a credential one would have typically put forward out of pride)) - tradition has varying stories of his death and some place him Ethiopia where it was said he was martyred
- i. James the son of Alphaeus - Tradition seems to indicate that he was thrown off a pinnacle of the Temple (apparently survived the fall) and then was beaten to death with a "fullers club" (a piece of wood used for bashing/washing clothes)
- j. Thaddaeus - Also known as "Jude" was martyred either by crucifixion, or being hacked to death
- k. Simon "the zealot" - The word for "zealot" is transliterated in other translations as "Canaanite" but "zealot" is a better handling - it is believed he was a religious zealot (fanatic) which is interesting to consider that the Lord would choose one misguided more by self-righteousness - it is believed he was martyred, but how and where is not known
- l. Judas Iscariot "the one who betrayed Him" - He died by killing himself (described in Acts 1:18) - Judas is a reminder also that even in the best of groups and circumstances, there can be a traitor to the Lord - apparently he also received these powers from Christ but they were not proofs of his genuine conversion - Judas is also a good reminder that just because one starts well does not guarantee they will end well - caution and alertness are always needed

B. Preaching the kingdom while living by faith - vs. 5-15

1. The first instruction - "Preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" - vs. 5-7

- a. Up until the Lord was resurrected, this was the "implementation plan" of the Gospel message of the "Kingdom of the Heavens" being present (having come)
- b. This was still during/under the Old Covenant (Testament) and the message was that of the new era being introduced (that of the Messiah and that of God's grace) - this was not in reference to the earthly kingdom promised by God (which still has yet to be realized)
- c. The reference to Israel as the "lost sheep" goes back to the end of the last chapter - the focus should not be on where they weren't supposed to go (since the message would soon come to these also) but on to whom they were being sent - it is easy to become critical of how things are structured, but it needs to be realized that it needed to begin somewhere
- d. These were those to whom "the Oracles of God" had been given as well as the covenants of God - it makes sense that it was to start here - it also is a graphic reminder that even with the Truth readily available and even, to some degree, traditional, if it is neglected (left unstudied, unlearned, unpracticed) "lostness" is certain to follow!

2. The second instruction - Minister freely while preaching and healing - vs. 8-10

- a. These, now having been given healing powers of all sorts were now to utilize them in His service - this is an easily overlooked evidence again of Christ's power and authority - not only could He and did He **do** these, He was able to give the same ability to others
- b. These abilities were to be used "without charge" to the recipients - having themselves received this message and these demonstrations freely, so they should expect to give it out freely
- c. On **this** mission they were not to acquire or bring with them gold, silver or copper/brass and extra clothing - for "the worker is worthy of his support" - in this case though, the "boss" is God and He will ensure their needs are met - this would be living out Mt. 6:25
- d. These verses are not in support of some "vow of poverty," but do lend to the reality that the work of the Lord is not dependent on money and resources - the core of the outworking of the work of the Lord is faithful laborers going into the Lord's field for His harvest - He will most assuredly meet every need (as He knows best what are truly needs and the needed timing for each)

3. The third instruction - while ministering "bless with peace" those "worthy" - vs. 11-15

- a. As these disciples would go out to various cities they, having no provisions, would need places to stay and eat - Jesus instructed them to look for those "worthy" and to stay with them and if the house was truly "worthy" they were to bless it with "peace"
- b. The concept of "worthy" is easy to misunderstand in the text - it had nothing to do with the "value" of the individuals but everything to do with the response of them - if they were open and interested to the news and teaching of the "Kingdom of Heaven" then they were worthy - but if the disciples were mistaken and come to find that those who seemed initially interested but now were uninterested or hostile to it, they (the disciples) were to "take back" their blessing of peace upon the household

See another example in Acts 13:51

We've certainly seen the results in our day of many in the Church looking to "win" the lost on their (the lost) terms

Sodom and Gomorrah were known for their perverse immorality and yet are not deemed as evil as those, though outwardly moral, that reject the work of Christ and disregard His message

- c. If they "do not receive you, nor heed your word" they were to "shake the dust off your feet" - this was picturesque of treating even the dirt of that house, city or region as being defiled - to reject and oppose the "Good News" was considered the height of evil (even (symbolically) to treated as we would treat something infectious)
- d. Nowhere in the New Testament do we have an example of the Apostles or early Christians spending much time trying to convince naysayers and opponents - **the focus was to be upon those open and genuinely seeking the Truth**
- e. To further (and graphically) demonstrate the seriousness of the rejection, the Lord declared that it will be more "bearable" (tolerable) "in the day of judgement" for Sodom and Gomorrah - it is clear from this and many other texts, that a day of judgment is coming and that (somehow) there will be varying degrees of agony (possibly related to the agony of regret - those who had the direct message of salvation preached to them and had ample opportunity to rightly respond and did not, their regret truly will be unbearably agonizing)
- f. "They that would not hear the doctrine that would save them, shall be made to hear the sentence that will ruin them." Matthew Henry

C. The hardships ahead of them - vs. 16-23

1. Being sent out "as sheep among wolves" - vs. 16-20

- a. The initial analogy is vivid - to be as sheep among wolves is to be one not only "hunted" and living in a constant state of threat, but to be hunted to provide a source of "nourishment" for the enemy - they will look to thrive off our resources, our fear and our lives
- b. "That is, I send you, inoffensive and harmless, into a cold, unfriendly, and cruel world. Your innocence will not be a protection." Barnes
- c. Yet, in the midst of this situation, the Lord uses what would at first glance seem to be an odd illustration of what/how they should be - to be "shrewd as serpents" was not in reference to their association with the Devil, but was in keeping with the animal itself, in avoiding danger (cleverly, stealthily); and, to counter the deadly poison of serpents the Lord says they must also be "innocent" (harmless) as doves - we're not out to harm but to help **though, as these, we should expect to be harmed while striving to help**
- d. It bears noting that the word for "innocent" (ἀκέραιοι) has the idea of being "unadulterated" being "simple", just what you really are
- e. Be on your guard (pay attention) to these types of people because of their intentions - they will "hand you over" to the authorities as wrong-doers - and in particular, these authorities will "scourge you in their synagogues" (these being community and religious authorities) - it is easy to lose sight of the internal conflict these would have in how they would be treated - it would not be just beatings and floggings, but would be judicial in nature - they would be looked upon as criminal and sentenced as such
- f. Just as the Lord would later say to Saul (Paul), these also would be brought before "governors and kings" for His sake - the Lord would use the "trouble" they would find themselves in to be brought to these "lofty" places (to bear a witness of Christ and His message (the Truth))
- g. Knowing the conflicting circumstances coming, and on top of that, their responsibility to be this "witness" for the Lord, would have caused them to fear and to begin to think through how best to say what they would need to be said in these circumstances - yet, in preparation for these times, the "Spirit of your Father" will give what and how they are to say what needs to be said
- h. The idea was for them not to become "anxious" about what to say and how to say it - this text, of course, should not be used to "legitimize" no study or preparation, but for these specific events (brought by God and as an opportunity for a public witness for His sake) is when this could be expected
- i. We cannot absolutely claim this text as "our own," but we most certainly can expect that the Spirit of God will direct what should be said and when to say it - it is likely that many of us cower from the thought of such events fearing we are totally unqualified to speak for "His sake", yet if He leads us there He will guide us through the right answers
- j. The Spirit of the Lord has more influence/control than we might be aware - for instance, this concept fits well with Pr. 16:1 - man plans what he will do (in this case, *TO* these disciples) but the answer (response) is of the Lord (either in word given or in what actually happens)

Be discerning of your surroundings and do not unnecessarily provoke a situation but not in such a way as to be genuinely deceitful

synagogues also being places of local justice (as in judgment halls)

"Few things were more improbable when this was uttered than that the fishermen of Galilee would stand before the illustrious and mighty monarchs of the East and the West." Barnes

We do see illustrations of this taking place soon after the Lord ascended into Heaven - see for instance Acts 4:13 - The Apostles words truly were from the Holy Spirit and are thus recorded as/in Scripture

We are mistaken when we view our lack of eloquence and education as being insurmountable for the Holy Spirit to use - Moses tried the same "excuse" pursuit

2. "Hated by all" - another cost of standing with and bearing the name of Christ - vs. 21-23

This is illustrative of the great costs that would be associated in His service - the strongest of natural bonds would be overturned because of Him

This will be dealt with more in 10:34-36

Those that are "saved" are those who endure to the end - through the trial or to death

Persecution is not a sign to stop what is being done for the Lord, but most certainly can (and was) be used to direct to another location

- a. Families, as a result of the message of Christ, will be at deadly odds with each other - brother will "betray his brother to death" (handing them over to the powers that be) - this could be out of a developed hatred or motivated by some form of self-preservation
- b. Fathers will hand over their children and children their parents to death - it has been stated that only the love from Heaven or the love from Hell will conquer "natural love" (family love)
- c. Not only should they expect to be treated disdainfully by their closest relations and friends, but they should also expect to be generally hated by mankind (all types of people) - it won't just be a hatred from those in ranking positions, but they would also be hated by the lowly, needy, self-righteous and even those also hated by most others
- d. Their focus is to be on the end of these trials for it is indicative of those that endure to the end to be saved - genuineness before others (and even ourselves) is most often seen/evidenced in enduring hardships far more than in times of ease
- e. So, for these apostles, the Lord instructs them that when they do face persecution in one city, "flee to the next" (escape to the next) - it's interesting the way this is worded - it doesn't just mean to run to hide in another city, but to go to the next city to continue ministering
- f. **It is to be the core focus of ministry to look to share the truth with those desiring it**

3. "Till the Son of Man comes" - vs. 23

One of the greatest problems with this stance is its total lack of support in Matthew, and in particular to this text in chapter 10 - in Luke 21:24 we see a key reference to Jerusalem being trampled under foot until "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"

Also, in Luke 21:28, if this was directed at the disciples in particular, it is commonly believed that none of them were at Jerusalem when it was destroyed, and even if they were it was certainly not a time that could be described as "your redemption is drawing near" - this type of wording is truly fitting of the end of the age

When the Lord references His coming it is often in reference to His second return but as seen here, it need not always reference that and many errors come when trying to read into a text what was never intended to be there

- a. This last half of verse 23 has produced a great deal of discussion as to its meaning - because of the later impact of how this phrase is handled (in Matthew 24 especially), we need to consider the handlings and reach a solid conclusion
- b. When the Lord told these disciples that they would not finish "the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes" there are a good majority of conservative commentators that believe this is in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD - this would seem like a stretch until it is realized it is tied (by these) to Luke 21:10-36 - the text in Luke does reference the destruction of Jerusalem amongst very similar sayings to what we are reading here
- c. In Luke 21:10-11 the Lord describes great events yet to come and then in verse 12 begins to describe what will take place before all this; namely what was about to happen to these disciples - then the Lord picks back up the "end of the age" prophecies in verses 25-28 - all this is said to make the point that the MT. 10:23 phrase need not (at all) be tied to Luke 21 since, though they contain similar statements (and it is likely the Lord said these more than once), what Matthew is recording here is truly earlier on (more like what is at the beginning of Luke 9)
- d. Another view (less popular) is that Jesus was referencing His transfiguration or after His resurrection - these seem more probably than the previous but do not seem to fit the context
- e. The one that seems most normal to the text is widely disregarded as too simplistic (possibly because it does not read too much into the Lord's usage here of His reference to Himself as "the Son of Man" (many, it seems, figure there must be more meant since this term is used prophetically in Daniel)) - the plain handling of this phrase would be that the Lord told them that before the they would cover all the cities, He would come to them (they would meet - up again) - this did, of course, happen - see Luke 9:1-9

D. Do not live in fear - it will be a profound distraction from purpose - vs. 24-33

1. The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the slave above his master - vs. 24-25

As the Lord alluded to earlier, it will be the association with Him and that which is truly done for "His sake" that will bring on being "hated by all" - this demonstrates then the real problem with living for/ by an objective to be accepted and appreciated by all - we are His students and slave, not our age!

- a. The Lord was preparing the mind set of His disciples for the ridicule and persecution they were about to face - it would have been an obvious point that neither was above their superior and that their goal (highest aspiration) would be to be "like" their teacher or master
- b. So, if the "head of the house" (the master) is called "Beelzebul" it would be reasonable then for the rest of the household (including the slaves) to be associated with the same - just as Jesus was (and would continue to be) associated with the Devil (by the religious leaders), they can expect to be considered evil in the same way
- c. Sadly, today many do (in varying degrees and ways) consider themselves as above Christ as teacher and master (their teaching being accepted by the masses and their religious service "fitting" with popular thought)

2. Because they are "with Him", don't be afraid of what others will think or do - vs. 26-31

- a. What/who we fear will most certainly be a controlling factor in our lives

And this revealing of all things will ultimately be before God Himself which is where the truth of what "really is" will matter most - all hypocrisy and hidden agendas (hidden behind long-formed facades) will some day be seen for what they are - this could be in our lifetime in varying ways or at THE DAY

The concept is that of no intimidation of standing with the message of Christ - This does not speak of those who openly speak out of their "sincere ignorance" not having learned from God

Many would later come to deny Christ before men because of their fear of what man could do to them while down playing the greater fear they really should have of God - man is extremely limited in what they can do (physically and in time)

We will be allowed to face many "smaller" enemies in preparation for the bigger ones - this is why we should not look on failures with littler things as being little failures

This is not indicating annihilation but more of a destruction (as in a house torn apart is looked on as destroyed though it's parts still remain) as well as looked upon as separation (as death is to the body) - only now eternal separation from God (all goodness)

"That is, God, your Father, guides and directs its fall. It falls only with His permission, and where He chooses." Barnes

It is not cruel or depressing to live with the awareness the Lord gave His disciples - many are depressed in their "safe" lives because that lack a fundamental and lasting (worthwhile) purpose for which to live

These ideas are at the core of texts such as Rom. 8:28-29 - we realize that all things (everything we could say) does work out for the good to those who love Him and these love Him because He first loved them

- b. The Lord instructs them to be bold and not timid in proclaiming His message, in spite of the threats and actual harm that may come upon them
- c. To yield to the fear and keep quiet is not what they should expect "to do" realizing, first, all that is secret will be made known (revealed) - this includes all their enemy's thoughts, intentions and true character (motives) as well as their (the disciples and the Lord's) motives and "rightness" when it comes to what was truly of most value in life and Truth
- d. This is comforting, realizing much of their suffering would be because these disciples would be publicly condemned, so their enduring public shame and rejection (especially from the religious groups) would ultimately be worth it - note also that here we are, more than 2000 years later seeing the integrity of some and the hypocrisy of others in these texts
- e. All that Jesus was teaching them in "darkness" (as if in seclusion from public attention) and what is, as it were, whispered in the ear is to be openly declared (in the light) and on the "housetops" - this is comparative to what we experience also - what we learn privately or in small groups as we mature is preparing us to be open-declarers of the same truths
- f. Might this result in being killed? The answer is clearly "yes," so Jesus goes right to the greatest fear that would be typically had - the fear of being executed - to "kill the body" is the worst that these enemies can inflict upon these disciples
- g. The Lord, as it were, pits one fear against another - He does not here say not to fear man because of God's love (which would be true), but instead points out that when they are faced with the fierceness of man, **the fear they would face with their oncoming death should pale in comparison to their fear of God**
- h. "To lose the body is to lose little, to lose the soul is to lose all." Lenski
- i. Mankind cannot "kill" the soul as God can (and will for many) - he can only get at the physical - some might make a case that people can affect the mind and in a sense get to the soul of another, but this happens only when permitted by the "victim" - in times of persecution, unwavering focus must be the plan/objective (and it must be "practiced" beforehand)
- j. God is the only one Who has power/authority over both the physical and the spiritual - He alone can "destroy" (ἀπολέσαι - "destroy" (cut off entirely)) both body and soul in "hell" - it is important to realize the indication of a bodily resurrection of even the wicked, as both BODY and SOUL are to be sent to "γεέννη" (a name given to a place where trash was sent to be burned outside of Jerusalem and had come to be a name for Hell)
- k. In contrast to this, the Lord uses sparrows as a value lesson - two sparrows would bring only a cent - though their little lives are of little to no value to mankind, yet their death cannot happen apart from "your Father" - each one as it "falls to the ground" (dies or is killed to gain this "cent" of which it takes two to earn) - the core idea behind this is that it is under His jurisdiction, His guidance, His will - if God shows such attention to the death of sparrows, we can expect that our life will be of much greater worth
- l. Even the hairs of the head are "numbered" by Him - this carries a greater idea than that He just knows how many - each one is "numbered" as in great care - we don't even pay attention to each hair, thus His care for us and His attention on/to us is greater than we would have of ourselves - this would have been a steady encouragement to these disciples as our Lord contrasts these normally fearful possibilities with the loving care of the God of the Universe!
- m. We should realize that these challenges to the disciples should be an encourager to us not only to live facing the possibility of the same for our future, but in living each day with such a perspective, we would be daily expecting to die to self in all the ways God will lead us (to not live for self (as Paul in I Cor. 15:31)) - many will boast, in times of ease, their preparedness to die for Christ, **but in mere moments will stagger at the possibility of being inconvenienced for Him**
- n. So, DO NOT FEAR (present imperative middle or passive - φοβεῖσθε) - do not "withdraw" out of dread or panic (don't lend (passive) to your own fear (thought control)) nor allow yourself to be lead to fear (passive) - this type of fear is the result of a misplaced focus
- o. As discussed earlier, these disciples did face persecution, rejection, prosecution and execution all with these realizations that the Lord first discussed here with them - it is interesting to consider that it is possible that these words were on their minds as they faced these things
- p. And this all based upon the value the Father has for them - we have no true value without His value of us!

3. Open and unafraid association with Jesus Christ - vs. 32-33

- a. Then, in addition to all that has been stated, Christ lets it be known that all those that “confess Him before men” He will do the same for them “before My Father”
- b. The idea of “confess” indicates an association with as in standing with openly, and this is not only seen in action but is also evidenced in one’s speech - at its most literal meaning, the word describes one “saying the same thing” - so it is not just speaking of Christ before men, it is saying what He said (for it would be too easy to share our version of His message made “compatible” with more popular or publicly acceptable thought)
- c. And the motive behind this (which He gives) is the priceless words we should be driven to live for - to be “confessed” (identified with) by Him before the Father - this is not symbolic speech - this **will be done** at some point before God the Father and those truly in Christ will hear it (and no doubt will be such preciously overwhelming words that they will remain in our hearts throughout eternity - **He stood with me!!**)
- d. So, for us also, as the thoughts or threats of oncoming stress and earthly sorrow appear to be at hand, our focus must remain heavenward - see Col. 3:1-4
- e. “The fear of man is a snare” (Pr. 29:25) because once entangled in it, it is controlling

It is an open identity with the Lord before all men in spite of all the ill these men can do to us

It is this reality that drives us in our boldness and fortitude to stand with and for Christ throughout our lives - these verses are not providing for a works-based salvation but are indicative of those truly “in Christ” - these will, these must stand with Him for what could compare/compete with what’s coming!?

E. The “sword” versus “peace on the earth” - vs. 34-39

1. Jesus makes it clear one of the results of His coming - divisions in families - vs. 34-36

- a. This is a key statement for a couple reasons - first, it is very similar to what is found in Micah 7:6 (where Micah described his time and, some believe, pictured what it would be like in the last times before the Messiah would come) - second, it uses what would normally be a place with people we would hope to find some semblance of peace - the family
- b. The Lord was and still is the “Prince of Peace,” but the peace He brings (peace first and primarily with God) would first bring with it a violent response
- c. The peace that God brings also includes a peace that is “made so” because of its conquering of sin - yet because of the widespread love of all sorts of sin this would mean that His message and work would be as a sword **thrown** into their midst
- d. The Lord did not want them to have the wrong idea of what the affects would be of His work and message - many today are still unaware of this and do not expect it
- e. Christ told them that part of His coming was to “set at variance” (set one against another and divide them) - He describes some who that will be divided - a man against his father, daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (these being examples of the younger against the older)
- f. It would be so extreme that “a man’s enemies will be that of his own household”
- g. As then still we see today, the costs of true discipleship to Christ are high even to the separation of families - it comes down to the fact that some will not yield to believe in Christ nor accept His message (truth) - sin (even that of religions and philosophies) will be so integrated that even the natural bonds of the family will be severed

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. **Not as the world gives** do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” — John 14:27 (ESV)*

The word for “bring” (βαλεῖν) carries more the idea of something being thrown or cast into something

The way it is worded it is the younger that are bad and are turning on the older because of Christ - it is not always this way but it is common for the younger to turn against their Godly foundations

2. Realizing this was sure to come, the Lord warns against the normal tendency to side with family - vs. 37

- a. This would be, if not the greatest, one of the greatest challenges they would face
- b. After all, did not God give them their families? Is not their primary responsibility to them?
- c. The answer is made clear - if one loves family more than they love Him, they are not “worthy” of Him - the underlying word for this pictures something weighed against another to assess its worth - so, one that loves parents more than Christ is not “fit” for Him and one that loves children more than Him is also not “fit” for Him either
- d. It may be also, today (and possibly then) that some would put family ties on the same plane as Christ and would see themselves as “balancing” the two equally - but, in reality, seeing they will not place family UNDER Christ, they are in all reality placing them ABOVE Him

“Worthy” also means “of like value” - in comparison to Who He is and What He brings, family does not even compare - yet many will choose family above Christ fearing the pain of these separations

3. It is not only what is lost, but also what is pursued that drastically changes - vs. 38

- a. By nature, most will see a normal approach to life being that of a pursuit of comfort and harmony with this earth and all that is in it
- b. Yet in following Christ, these would be “taking up their cross” and following after Him - there is clearly a hint to where He was going and thus, where following Him would lead
- c. So one who does not see Jesus as one worthy to die for (and live in a readiness to die for Him) has also demonstrated they are not “worthy” of Him

The cross was for crucifixion and taking it beforehand (before the trial and judgement), and thus willingly bearing about this “cross” (this expectation to die) with them from there on out

One would follow (be following (present tense)) because they fully expect He knows the best way - reluctance or refusal to follow demonstrates a trust of their own sense and senses more

- d. Taking it as normally as possible (in the context), the Lord was using the most vicious form of execution (not just in its physical pain but in the humiliation and rejection associated with it) and does not say that they should just face it (or be willing to do so), but says they should “**follow**” Him (He set the example and one “worthy” of Him expects/hopes to follow it)
- e. These are “not worthy” because they do not truly believe, for if they did, they would follow in spite of the pain and shame that comes in following Him

4. “Life discovery” is found (εὕρων (find) τὴν (the) ψυχὴν (self/life)) only in “life yielding” - vs. 39

Many will excuse facing responsible hardships with a reasoning surrounding something related to “self-discovery”

- a. Again, in this context, if one “saves” their life (physical life) by disassociation with Jesus, they will truly lose their true life - one that gives up (lets go) their life (physical life) will find true life
- b. This also includes the idea of “losing” one’s life (living) for Christ while still living - interesting, one of the core ideas with “finding” life here is that of discovery (it could be worded something like “he who discovers himself will lose his life (Himself)”)
- c. It is true that one who gives-up the pursuit of a life for self-gratification and self-glorification for the pursuit of Christ-likeness, will come to **discover** true living
- d. Living for self leads to true “loss of life” altogether (not necessarily physical death, but the forfeiting of real life (what it means to truly live)) - as the Lord mentioned in John 10:10 (“abundant life” - over and above what one could **anticipate**)
- e. This does not just refer to eternal life to come, but even “truly living” while still here in this life - many come to discover that a life for self makes for deep dissatisfaction (though this is more than a reference to a “charitable life”) - even that with its occasional selfless acts is frustrating, seeing with all “sacrifices” comes many more “evils” that seem to counter good deeds
- f. This verse really is fundamental to “true discipleship” - most “disciples” are searching for greater meaning and purpose and no truth could be more essential to a life to stay focused (not distracted by the endless shallow offerings of our age) - many have nothing to live for because they have nothing to die for - when we have something greater than our life, it makes it “worth living” for - though each age has its counterfeits for this also
- g. It must also be stressed that it is not just the losing of life that is key, but it is the loss of life **“for My sake”** that leads to true life discovery! - those living as a disciple of Christ in our days are looked upon as “fanatics **missing** out on all this life has to offer”
- h. “Losing” one’s life here often comes in the form of the yielding of earthly goals and ambitions to “know Him” better (Php. 3:10), losing family and friends because of Christ and His truth, not being acceptable to them - all culminating in the ostracization of “the world” (our age)

see Rev. 2:10 and the reference to how the “crown of life” is received

With a focus on the “great accounting” of God when this era is finished, allows one to realize **nothing** is futile - a life considered by popular opinion as lost here, ends up being the fullest life that could have been lived because of its lasting value (eternal)

To “gain” ones temporary life here (at the cost of following Christ) is not only to “lose” eternal life, but is never to know what true living is!

F. “Receiving the Lord” by receiving those that are His - vs. 40-42

1. After having prepared the disciples to face rejection, persecution and even execution, He now comforts them with the fact that there would be some that would be welcoming - vs. 40

It is not the person being honored - it is their master Who is honored and received - value is found in association with Him (so is the rejection)

“entangled” so as to become interwoven with “this age” (of “the same cloth” as it were

- a. Notice the link from disciple to God - when one “receives” one of these disciples, they are truly receiving Christ into their association also (since these bear His message (vs. 14)), and thus receive into their midst the One that sent (commissioned) Him
- b. Note also as Jesus was commissioned/sent on a mission by God, so were these men - it does us well when we finally reach the point of realizing we too are commissioned by God into and for His service, and as such are not to be “**entangled** with the affairs of this life” - II Tim. 2:4

2. If anyone receives a “prophet” and the “righteous,” they receive/partake of the same reward - vs. 41-42

One is an official position (prophet) while the other is any one standing with Christ (righteous) and for His “rightness”

- a. To receive a prophet “in the name of a prophet” is to welcome them, acknowledging them and their position as such (these being “forth tellers” of God’s Word)
- b. The same goes with welcoming the “righteous” as a righteous person - this also is an acknowledgment of their association with God “The Righteous”
- c. This is not just a comfort to these disciples, but to anyone participating at even the most basic levels - these who receive, comfort and support these disciples, prophets and their fellow “righteous” ones, can expect to participate in the rewards of such - none accomplishes the work of the Lord they have been given to do on their **own** - as so well illustrated in I Cor. 12, God has so designed “the body” with the necessity to work together
- d. Even the act of giving a cold cup of water “to one of these little ones” carries with it a “security” of not losing a reward (as though it was so little that they thought would not profit them)
- e. The encouragement that is to be had is with this realizing that all service is of lasting value before God, and He knows **all** acts and sacrifices done for His purposes

The opposite to these would be religious acts done for self and self authority (in other words, where what is supported is what fits a personal outlook, philosophy or agenda)

XVIII. Blessed Are Those Not Offended by Jesus the Christ - 11:1-19

A. Jesus' ministry "approach" stirred questions from John the Baptist and his disciples - vs. 1-6

1. The instructions to His disciples were now finished (exhortations and encouragements) and He went on to teach and preach in their cities as well

This would lend to the question of John and his disciples since they were also expecting some form of judgment to be included with the Messiah - the time given for repentance through enlightenment was longer than they had supposed

- a. Consider the combination of "teach and preach" - the first provides the details, background and instruction while the second "proclaims" and "heralds" out the Good News while calling for a **decision** (repentance) - both are needed in ministry (for without teaching, the message is unsupported and without preaching the instruction does not lead to (call for) a decision/change)
- b. These cities would be in the region of Galilee and this was the continual fulfillment of "those that walk in darkness have seen a great light..." (Isa. 9:2)

2. The question of John - "Are you the only one we should expect?" - vs. 2-3

It is common for believers to expect of others and even of themselves that there should never be a struggle with reconciling the Truth we lean from God's Word and what we face in day to day life - but it IS to be expected and each "bout" dealt with

- a. It needs to be stated up-front that there is no problem in handling this questioning of John and his disciples at face value - many over the centuries have tried to shield John and place more "blame" on his doubting disciples - this discounts the fact that the prophets that came before John also had struggles with personal doubt, and as Peter went on to clarify, desired to **explore** and understand further their own prophecies (see I Pet. 1:10)
- b. The question sent to Christ through his disciples asked if He was the "expected one" or should they be looking for another - see Mt. 9:14 where John's disciples questioned Jesus
- c. "...the reason of this message was, neither the ignorance and unbelief of John, or his disciples; but that John, with the rest of the Jews, having a notion of a temporal kingdom, and hearing of the mighty works of Christ, wonders that he himself was not delivered out of prison by him, grows impatient upon it, and asks, if he was the Messiah? And if he was, why did he suffer his forerunner and chief minister to lie in prison?" Gill
- d. John had preached earlier that the One that would follow him would "baptize with fire" indicating a judgement - this was all true, but John himself did not yet know of the **two** comings of the Christ - the first as Savior the second as Judge (as far as the sinful inhabitants of the Earth are concerned) - it would appear that just as Jonah grew discouraged that the "enemies" of Israel (and God) were not destroyed (per his prophecy) because of the patient mercy of God, so John also struggled with the great, merciful patience of the Messiah
- e. John did ask if they should look for another of a different kind (ἕτερον - versus another of the same kind ἄλλος) possibly leaving room for another who would come to bring judgement - this would not then discount Christ as Messiah but in a struggle to harmonize what he knew and heard, would allow for another to come and make-up what appeared to be missing - true faith, when struggling against doubt (not seeing the "evidence" expected), does not give-up altogether but will often **search** for other ways for God to be faithful to his Word

Expectations which are not fully informed (still needing to learn more), if given too much credence may cause us to dwell on doubting questions based more in what we see than what we have been taught to see and look for

As described in Rom. 9:22-23 that God bears with evil to show more mercy to the "vessels of mercy" - his patience equates to salvation to many should shame all of our impatience with the evil in the world

This is why Abraham, with his faults, is listed as a man of faith in Heb. 11 - his faith never wavered seeing he fully expected God to fulfill His promise though he was unsure how - he acted out of assumption and not out of a lack of faith

3. See what is being done, and do not be distracted by what does not seem to be being done - vs. 4-6

Often the "evidence" God does supply is disregarded because we are looking for something else based in personal preference over and above objective Biblical Truth

- a. In the same account in Luke 7:18-23 he mentions in verse 21 that just as these disciples of John came that Jesus "cured many people of diseases and afflictions", cast out demons and healed the blind - all of which were to be done by the Messiah
- b. Jesus tells these disciples to go and tell John what "you see and hear" - it was not just the miracles but also the accompanying **message** (as was also to be expected of the Messiah - see Isaiah 61:1) - this stirs another interesting thought to consider realizing that in Isa. 61:1 it also mentioned releasing prisoners (but this would be a release from a far greater prison than what John was facing - the prison of sin is the worst of all and He came to break its chains!)
- c. The "poor have the Gospel preached to them" also stresses the targeted audience of the Messiah - not the successful of this world but those suffering from its delusions
- d. Then the Lord offers another beatitude at a seemingly odd place - "blessed is he who does not take offense at Me" - truly content/fulfilled are those that are not "tripped up and ensnared" in offense against Him, **because of Him** (because of what He does, teaches and preaches and by what He does **not** do) - these "offenses" occur when one places their perspectives above the Truth, because they fail to reconcile them with the fact of God's sovereign hand at work, always in all things
- e. This type of offense is still seen in our day where many become offended by the real Jesus of the Bible and either turn on Him altogether or concoct one of their own making, more conformed to their "own image"

Practically speaking the "poor" are usually a better audience realizing the "rich of this world" are more apt to see sin as a friend and not a prison master

The word for "offense" (σκανδαλισθη) pictures an entrapment/entanglement laid to ensnare the unsuspecting or unobservant and thus to hinder (trip-up) right thinking and good conduct

B. The “greater greatness” of the “least in the kingdom of heaven” - vs. 7-15

1. Remember previous interest, zeal and conviction... and now privilege - vs. 7-11

As the Lord counselled the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2:5, they needed to “remember” from where they had “fallen” and “repent” back to doing the “first works” seeing these “first works” were never meant to be abandoned (as if moving on to something better or just by growing bored)

The “social moderates” (clamoring for the middle (the safety) of popular trends/thought) were and still are common for most people but are not those who end up getting attention because they stand out - moderates blend and don’t “shine”

Those in the crowd would have known that this sin should have been spoken against but none had the boldness as John did to stand against it because he was not inspired by the potential of such earthly promotion and comforts/prestige

This was the greatest honor a prophet could have ever hoped for - even in John’s doubt he was more privileged than all those who came before him

see also Isa. 40:3

This “greatness” is not based in mankind’s opinions or notice

Mat. 3:10, 4:17 and 10:7 all pointing to what was coming (even at that time) with Christ Himself - this aspect of the kingdom of heaven came with the fulfillment of Christ’s work and would be in contrast to all that came before (in the Old Covenant which pointed to this time)

All since the time of Christ work from a far better position/vantage point - this should serve as a reminder/obligation to us to not squander the privilege

- a. It would seem that there could have developed in the previous dialog a doubt regarding John
- b. Yet, as soon as these questioning disciples of John left, Jesus praises John in the highest possible way and then, after setting a “lofty level,” proceeds to show describe even “greater”
- c. To do this, Jesus asks three probing and illustrative questions regarding the motives of the people and why they were interested in John in the first place - this partly goes to deal with the fickleness of people and how quick they are to lose their interest when excitement wanes and/or trouble comes
- d. Did they go all the way out (a long journey) into the wilderness (one of difficulty and discomfort) just to see a “reed shaken by the wind”? Was this just to “see the sites” - of course not, since these reeds were common all around and one would not need to travel to see them - it is likely though that this phrase is symbolic (since it is in the singular) of a person who is swayed and controlled by popular opinion and trends
- e. Such men were common and would not have drawn such a crowd as John did - Jesus begins by reminding them of the person that stirred them because he was principled and uncompromising - he was anything but common! - people like this are needed but often unappreciated
- f. Second, Christ asks if they had “gone out to see” a man “dressed in soft clothing” (as if in luxurious attire typical of the wealthy or privileged) - would they have had to travel to find those who worked at being accepted by the “upper class” of society? Those living in “kings palaces” were those who were able to work their way into the favor of such (Herod in this case) - this was pointed also because this would have been the same place John was imprisoned because he not only would not compromise, but openly stood against the open sin of Herod and was imprisoned because of it
- g. So, if it were not these first two, did they go out on this difficult trek to see a prophet? And, that, the Lord clarifies, was really the reason they went out - because such a one was rare throughout history (and included a hope for their future found in a message from God)
- h. Yet, Jesus reveals, this was “more than a prophet” - all prophets that had come before looked forward to the coming of the Christ and here, John was the one who not only spoke of His coming but prepared the actual way for Him - as John prophesied of the Lord’s coming, the Lord came! (note: people would like the idea of having a prophet again, just not the message)
- i. For John was THE ONE referenced in Malachi 3:1 - the “messenger” to prepare the way “before Me” (meaning Jehovah/God/Yahweh) - yet here, the Lord phrases it “I send My messenger ahead of You...” as in, ultimately the Father addressing the Son/Jesus
- j. With certainty, none “born of women” who have come before who is “greater” than John the Baptist - he was greatest because of his privileged position - this is greater than Abraham, Moses, David and all other prophets - it is key to note how our Lord measured “greatness” - it was not as men measure it in societal prestige or in fame, but in the honored responsibility graced upon such a one
- k. Yet even being the “greatest” of all that came before him, this was not the pinnacle - the “least in the kingdom of heaven” is greater than John was - this verse has caused a great deal of discussion and disagreement, but the usage of “the kingdom of heaven” is very important - it cannot strictly refer to eternity in Heaven (though that is the result), since one of Matthew’s key points in the Gospel is the kingdom of heaven being “at hand”
- l. It is important to not lose sight of the usage of “greatness” just ascribed to John - again, his greatness was one of a privileged position/opportunity so also is the greatness of even the “least” in the kingdom of heaven brought on by Christ’s finished work - as will be mentioned in 13:16-17, any so “blessed” to see and hear Christ (what He said and did) was the “envy” (my word) of the “righteous men and prophets” who had come before

2. “If you are willing to receive it,” the kingdom of heaven is here - vs. 12-15

- a. “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence...” - Jesus, now clearly declaring this “kingdom” as coming (now) begins by describing the **eager** violence against it - this phrase can be taken in Greek in the middle (violently coming) or in the passive (violence being done to it and directed at it) - either work in this context and can have essentially the same meaning - violence being done to it or because of itself (message/content) it stirs violence against itself

The crowds were a mixture of all types of "aggressiveness" - selfish, violent and desperate yet a few would emerge as proving themselves as having "ears to hear" and willing to receive it as it was being presented

Much opposition to Christ (and His message) comes from how it contradicts natural, self-serving inclinations

see Luke 1:17 where John came "in the spirit of Elijah" and John 1:21 where he denied that he was the actual person of Elijah it was all or nothing

True faith comes from God - disbelieving God comes naturally to/from man

- b. It is interesting to see how an eagerness of those this kingdom was being presented to could end up being so violent and aggressive - some out of selfishness for themselves or out of proud opposition to what they feared may be coming - from many or the religious leaders' perspectives, if Jesus was the messiah, they did not want His type of kingdom!
- c. The "taking it by force" demonstrates a typical approach of the "natural man" to God - they will have it "on their own terms" and will seek to dominate what really belongs to God - much of so-called Christianity is really humanism incognito (in disguise) - and that which will not kowtow to their acceptable version of Christianity will need to be dealt with violently also
- d. When the Lord said "prophets and law" in verse 13 He reversed to normal order stressing the most recent to further back (rather than "Law and Prophets") - all the previous combined had been pointing to (prophesying) of this time... **where these were "right now"**
- e. As in rebuking them (the majority) as will continue in the following verses, Jesus states, "...if you are willing to accept it..." which most were not - they were not ready and willingly to recognize John the Baptist as **the Elijah of the New Testament**, thus that he was the forerunner — of the Messiah - this was not a "pick and choose" situation where they could discount either
- f. Disbelief of varying kinds will often find its source in the will - these refused to believe because they were unwilling (which, sadly, is the normal state of man when it comes to God, His word and ways) - one can consider the costs and results of believing, and on that alone may refuse to believe
- g. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" - this was a common statement by the Lord and emphasizes the importance of what was said - it is like stressing that one should not disregard what was or is being said - many will hear, few retain, and "fewer yet" heed!

C. The immature response of "this generation" - vs. 16-19

1. The comparison of their generation to a childlike response (even a game) - vs. 16-17

- a. Jesus frequently used analogies to make a point, and many of these were in the form of parables, most of which were not understood by the majority of hearers
- b. "This generation" Jesus said is like children playing (or trying to get a game started) in the "marketplace" - this would have been, no doubt, a common scene they could have identified with - children ultimately becoming frustrated with others who refuse to play their games
- c. Some have tried to make a case that it is Jesus and John trying to get others to play (the celebration scenario or the mourning/funeral scenario) - it is absurd to think of Christ comparing Himself and John to pretending children, frustrated that others will not play with them - plus, the order would be wrong if this was the case, because Jesus would be associated with the "playing of the flute" in celebration and John the funeral dirge (but John came first)

The people are the children only interested in others who will "play along" and are put out at those who will not - though, as will be illustrated, they don't even really know what they want

Jesus and John were not the ones looking to pretend!

2. The "generation's" response to both - vs. 18-19

- a. John came with the demonstration of many self-denials, lived in very difficult circumstances and was not looked upon as a man of joy (more as a man of judgement) - yet their response was to say, "He has a demon!" - as with the Pharisees, this was a common response to someone who demonstrated a greater discipline or insight than themselves
- b. These same, when seeing the "Son of man" fellowshipping with "sinners" (eating and drinking), their response is to associate Him with being a "gluttonous man" (self-indulgent as those who are at a celebration) - again, a desperate response to try to discredit His message/ministry
- c. So, as these children in the illustration, these people proved their lack of sincerity in what they were seeking, for when they were given it, they rejected it (because of what else came with it)
- d. John's truths were too serious and sobering for them and as children, they like to have their idea of "seriousness" (drama) more fitting to their control - Christ's offerings of hope (especially to the poor) were not in keeping with their social goals
- e. These were both responses from the religious leaders whose objectives were set on "self-rightness" - they did not want truth; they wanted a religion of their own making vindicated, supported and propped-up by Jesus and John (which was not going to happen)
- f. Yet, "Wisdom" (truth/reality) is vindicated/justified in its outcome (deeds) - sooner or later, "pretend" is exposed for what it really is - and this is not just future "vindication" as Jesus in His statements here is demonstrating that their positions (requirements) could not be met - they would/did reject both (He demonstrated the His/John's) rightness

The conviction that John's forceful message brought would either provoke repentance or a desperate attempt to discount him

The mourning was too real and the eating and drinking (celebration) with the wrong people

This is, of course, the normal response to most religious people throughout the ages - they worship and adore what is agreeable to them and their natural sensibilities

XIX. The “Woes” of Rejecting Christ and the Benefit of “Coming to Him” - 11:20-30

A. As is about to be discussed, to reject Christ is far more involved than rejecting “God” and “morality”

1. There is a far greater accountability before God for those who have learned of Jesus

We cannot expect to learn and be informed of these profound truths and not expect that some responsibility will come with knowing it - we must not figure that we can just learn and not act on it somehow (implement and integrate it)

- a. It is similar to the idea in Luke 12:48 where, speaking of stewards, one who is given much (more), more will be required/expected of them
- b. In our text, these were being given far more insight and detail along with “powerful works” by the Lord Himself, and by those whom He sent
- c. The group addressed in Hebrews 6:4-8 are those who have become well acquainted with the Lord and His truths - and in “falling away” (true apostasy) it is then impossible to renew them to some form of repentance (as those also in Heb. 10:26-31 who “trample underfoot” the blood of Christ, having become knowledgeable of what it was and what it does - there is no other “sacrifice,” no other answer to save them)

2. So, there is a high accountability in knowing these truths of the Lord, His answers and purposes

For us there is to be a reverence (a respectable fear) when approaching the Word of God - we will be judged as believers on what we did with what we were given - we must not take lightly any time we are taught or learn the Word of God

- a. In our era, it is common to think that all learning is alike - that we can pick and choose out of what we learn (and in most cases this is true) - but the Lord makes a distinction with what He taught and demonstrated - if not followed with repentance, there is an overwhelming consequence coming
- b. As also pointed out by Peter in II Pet. 2:21, it would be better to not to have known the “way of righteousness” than to have know it and turned on it

B. Christ denounces three cities/towns for their lack of repentance - vs. 20-24

1. Jesus decried the cities where He had done the most of His “powerful works”

Many teachers/preachers have altered the message for better overall a acceptance - the goal is popularity and not changed lives

- a. These drew crowds, but as was just covered in the previous verses, the majority criticized Him (and John) - they enjoyed the benefits and loved to be amazed, but were uninterested in the message
- b. The focus of the Lord was not on popularity, but on repentance (and a change in their thinking thus a change in their lives) - this is to be the objective of all “Truth teaching”
- c. Repentance is a change of the “inner self” and in this case, it was for the good of their souls

2. “Woe” to Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum - vs. 21-24

This is a demonstration (reference) to what is sometimes called the “middle knowledge” of God - He knows all that could have happened at any given point - this then also points to the predetermination of God - these would have repented if given the same “chance” - yet the majority of those given it in Christ’s time rejected it

- a. If these same miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented - these were ancient cities well known for their wealth and luxury as well as their indulgence into sin - in Isaiah 23 there is a specific prophecy against Tyre predicting its downfall
- b. Even in their great notoriety and worldly success, they would have changed their focus if what was done by Jesus in Chorazin and Bethsaida were done in them
- c. These very secular people of Tyre and Sidon would have repented in “sackcloth and ashes”, demonstrating grief/regret - “... remarkable language, showing that they had done less violence to conscience, and so, in God’s sight, were less criminal than the region here spoken of.” JFB
- d. It was an interesting thought that these cities went less against conscience (an informed conscience at that) than those in the cities where Jesus taught
- e. Even the morally wicked city of Sodom would not have been destroyed by God had they witnessed the same - notice the Lord does not say they would have repented, but the sense would be that they would have (realizing the city was destroyed **because** of its evil)
- f. Though Capernaum was “exalted to heaven” (as in being so built-up by the presence of Jesus (dwelling there for a while) and His ministering so often there), they will “descend to Hades”, a term picturing the downfall of the city itself
- g. What a point to consider! The secularity of Tyre and Sidon and the lowest of immoral qualities of Sodom are less deplorable before God than the disregarding of the message of Christ - most in our day would rank Sodom as far worse than disinterested “religious” folk disregarding what Jesus did and truly taught
- h. We do not know exactly how one person’s torment will be more or less than another’s when the “day of judgement comes,” but this point is clear that for those in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, that heard and saw the Messiah (God’s deliverer from sin and Hell), it will be worse
- i. It is likely that a major part of the torments of Hell will be that of regret - to have come so close, to have been on the very brink of salvation and to have walked away, will truly be an eternal torment! - The same rings true today with our generation having the truth so easily at our usage and the Truth being so available in so many venues

These miracles that Christ mentions were to meet needs supernaturally with the purpose to draw a crowd and lend authority to His teaching - miracles on their own do not bring repentance - repentance needs content to “change the mind”

C. Glorifying the Father's plan and method as it contradicts man's "genius" - vs. 25-27

1. In a context that would normally be discouraging to most (very little "results" as man measures them), Jesus praises His Father for concealing "these things" - vs. 25-26

Whenever we sense the urge to think critically against God we must remember who is who!

And Jesus glorifies God because of this - many of us would be inclined to criticize God for it wishing He would get the "worldly-wise" and those the world respects to "side" with the Gospel - see also I Cor 1

The "wise and intelligent" here are wise to the things of this age - there is nothing wrong with this intelligence except when it is uninformed/unbelieving of the wisdom of God (what life is about, how it came to be, what it is to look on life from God's perspective)

- a. Lest it be missed who He was addressing, the Lord directs this praise to the Father "Lord of heaven and earth" (ruler of the universe) - in case what He is about to state is looked upon as ridiculous and lacking intelligence
- b. The rightness of these teachings/truths and the understanding and acceptance of them is from God, and God has seen it best that those the world looks upon as "infants" will be those He "uncovers" His truth before - those known to be "wise and intelligent" as the world would see it, will not recognize what is directly before them
- c. We are only told the reason that it is "well-pleasing" to Him (in His sight) - this is probably because it is not glorifying to man but to God - "infants" are those wanting to learn, expecting to learn, while those who see themselves to be "wise and intelligent" are proud of their scholarly achievements - this then becomes an entity to itself (learning to be smart versus learning to truly learn (the thrill of discovery and understanding))
- d. This is another indicator that any degree of comprehension of God's revealed truth (in His Word) is a gift and not a right or something that can be "achieved"
- e. Christ was thanking God that these things had been revealed to νηπίους - these are infants and not just children - this demonstrating their dependence - the wise of this world see themselves as such because of their supposed independence - see also Mt. 21:14-17
- f. Consider also Isaiah 29:13-16; Jer. 8:8-9; **9:23-24** and Prov. 1:7

2. All "has been given over" to Him (Jesus) by the Father - vs. 27

One may know a great deal of facts and yet end up totally failing at his/her endeavor because they are missing just one crucial point of information or fact

As with these "infants" we are to realize our constant dependence upon Christ not only for our salvation but for our understanding of the Truth that comes because of Him by means of the "Comforter" He sent

- a. Having made it clear that true wisdom/intellect is of God, He goes on to make it clear that the only one who truly knows the Father is Himself (Christ)
- b. Remember, having all the knowledge and "smarts" the world can offer apart from God is partial wisdom, missing the fundamental truths that give them their fullest meaning and provide for their fullest usage
- c. Having "all things delivered to Him" (παρεδόθη - handed over to His control - not "revealed" to Him as though He was lacking) - so as it was the Father's will to reveal the Gospel truths to "infants," it is by the will of the Son that the Father will be revealed - see Mt. 28:18, Heb 1:2
- d. "What a saying is this, that "the Father and the Son are mutually and exclusively known to each other!" A higher claim to equality with the Father cannot be conceived." JFB
- e. The word the Lord used for "know" (ἐπιγινώσκει) is more than an intellectual knowing - it is a relationship as in one may "know of" someone and "know about" them, without really knowing them - many believe they know God/Christ because they have come to know much about Him yet without an actual relationship

D. A "yoke" leading to "rest for your soul" - vs. 28-30

1. The invitation of Christ in these verses is to those "toiling" (working, laboring to do what is right before God and to live out their lives (and are thus wearying themselves (active))) and to those "heavy laden" (those being "piled-on" by others as to what they should be doing to please God and live right (passive)) - vs. 28

These are those fully aware of the burdens of life and the burdens of striving to be right by doing what is right (their own conscience prodding them as well as the legalistic proddings of the Scribes and Pharisees)

- a. Essentially, these are any and all wearying themselves and being over-burdened in their pursuit to live as they should - they want to do and be right - they desire to be disciples
- b. The opposite would be those who have so comforted themselves (falsely) into believing they are "all set" when it comes to living as they should (and being pleasing to God), that they do not fear accountability and have time and motive for personal pride and to "bully" others toward their own ideas of spirituality and religion

2. The promise of rest would have been in stark contrast to all else they would have been hearing

And as seen in our day, these would be led to either disillusionment, frustration and discouragement in the pursuit of contentment or would settle for a society-defined definition of contentment

- a. From the secular side, they would be hearing the idealism of Rome and all the tasks they were to be following to find some semblance of success and purpose
- b. From the religious side they would have been pressed to fulfill and keep-up with all current and past emphasis of the religious leaders while constantly living on the brink of displeasing God (and this ultimately being a struggle to reach the minimum requirements of the Law and of the endless traditions that had been added to them

Notice that it is after the yoke is "taken on" and the learning begins that rest is found for the soul - even on this side of eternity we can come discover some aspects of finding true joy in our "work" - the "lazy" find no fulfillment in their sedate state - the fullest joy comes from a life full of works investing in eternity

compare to Mt. 23:2-4

His interest is truly directed at us, being distinct to the self-serving interest of mankind in general - the norm even in religion is to look on others as potential benefits to us

People and institutions will grow bored or fatigued with our burdens after a while - it is best to develop and learn to bring them to God - see 1 Pet. 5:6-11

- c. From the "just being human" side, life with its disappointments can become overwhelming - pile enough discouragements together and one can sense a constant state of being "weighted-down" (with no seeable relief in sight)
- d. The **rest** that is given is not one that is a release from all work and responsibility, but is more like the relief caused when one has insurmountable pressures that have accumulated and which drain them of energy, motivation and even ability to do what they ought to do - the "yoke" that is taken up with Christ is "easy and light" - so "easy and light" it brings with it "rest for your souls" (at the innermost being - many physically strong are brought low with wearied souls)
- e. Writing on the phrase "learn of Me" Craig Keener wrote, "Like a good sage, Jesus invites disciples to learn from him. Yet Jesus did not interpret the law, including the law of rest (Mt 12:1-14), the same way his contemporaries did; his yoke was lighter. In contrast to his opponents (23:4), Jesus interprets the laws according to their original purpose, to which he is privy (5:17-48; 11:27; 12:8)-for example, interpreting sabbath laws in terms of devotion to God rather than universal rules (12:7) and divorce law in terms of devotion to one's faithful wife rather than a loophole to reject her (19:4-8)."

2. He is "meek and lowly of heart" - what a contrast to secular and religious leaders!

- a. He is "approachable" and truly "for us" not against us - this is essential to remember when we face apparent hardships - the tendency is to take them on as if they are ours to bear alone (society's yoke, religion's yoke, family yoke) - yet His "yoke" is pleasant and burden is light because, by His grace He bears us through it
- b. When this is distorted or forgotten, we become discouraged and unnecessarily defeated - like those He was addressing, we too have the inclination to keep "all our care" upon ourselves - when that fails we tend to then cast it on others or institutions (none of which will ever be equipped to handle them, nor will they last when it comes to being always their to help)

XX. The Authority of Jesus Above All Others - 12:1-50

A. These next group of verses may seem as though they deal just with "legal" issues, and yet reveal to us the authority of Christ - this is in contrast to the multitudes of conclusions reached by the religious leaders who considered themselves and their traditions to have the greater weight

1. This is true to this day - many will hear and even, at times, study the Bible, but will give greater weight to their own interpretation or that of a traditional interpretation so as to not disrupt their lives and their comfort level - another poor response is to disregard it altogether
 - Neglect of studying and learning what the Lord taught is one of the greatest evidences of pre-supposed "autonomy" (self-governance)
2. The topic of the authority of Christ is far more than just a theological point - this is one of many sections that brings out this point - it's easy for us to look upon Christ and His teachings as **past** authority while failing to stress His authority now and forever - do we live in light of this daily?

B. The "Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" - vs. 1-8

1. On the Sabbath Day, Jesus was leading His disciples through a grain field (wheat or barley), and being hungry, the disciples pulled off some of the grain and ate it - vs. 1-2

This was the beginning of many times when the Pharisees were following Christ looking for some infringement of the Law - this level of scrutiny was never intended by God - flagrant, unwarranted breaking and disregard for the Law was punished - see Num. 15:32-36 for an example)

see Gal. 3:24

Legalists rank ceremony and formality (logistics) above people - as Jesus clarified, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath - Mk. 2:27

- a. This was permitted by the Law (Deut. 23:25) and the scrutiny of the observing Pharisees was not so much on this as much as it was on their interpreting such an act as "reaping" (harvesting) which was forbidden on the Sabbath (they were desperate to catch Jesus breaking the Law)
- b. A true "legalist" is one that believes they can earn "merit" by their keeping of the Law, forgetting that the Law was never a means to personal merit (grace), but was a standard of true "Godliness" - the entire sacrificial system was established to deal with the various "transgressions" of the Law pointing to God's mercy - yet even the sacrificial system became a meritorious practice to some, missing the point of mercy
- c. Paul pointed out that the Law was our "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" - it was never intended to make us equal (or independent (not needing)) with Christ!
- d. A "legalist" is also someone who, believing they have the gist/sense of a text or of some of the Law, proceed to interpret and apply it as they will (no having read/studied it all) - their objective is not the actual understanding of what God has given - they seek only what will lend to their own sense of righteousness

- e. It should be remembered that Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, so all He is about to say is clarification, not annulment or misinterpretation of the Law
2. Adam Clarke observed regarding the hunger of the disciples, “We may well wonder at the extreme poverty of Christ and his disciples. He was himself present with them, and yet permitted them to lack bread! A man, therefore, is not forsaken of God because he is in want. It is more honorable to suffer the want of all temporal things in fellowship with Christ and his followers, than to have all things in abundance in connection with the world.”
3. Jesus clarifies the true interpretation of the Law - vs. 2-6

It is believed that this sin and its consequences is what David references in Psa. 119:28-29

- a. Jesus uses the account of David, when fleeing from Saul, ate some of the “showbread” - the account of this is in I Sam. 21:1-6 - here David goes to the Tabernacle to get food and lies to Ahimelech (David said he was on a secret mission for Saul) - this encounter later gets 85 of the priests killed - yet, with all this wrong, David was not wrong in receiving and using the “Bread of Presence” - the Pharisees knew David was not wrong in eating the bread

As it was with these Pharisees so it is with us - many come to know Scripture but fail to understand it and its author seeking to wield it for THEIR causes - destructive and important uses of the Bible lend to its being discredited in the opinions of many

- b. So, Jesus asks, “Was it lawful for David and those with him to eat the bread?” - He knew their answer would have to be yes - but how was it right?
- c. This is answered and illustrated further with a clear example of one “law” being above another - the priests, on the Sabbath, break the Sabbath laws forbidding work - this was done in the work the Law required them to do in the sacrifices and in the baking of bread (see Num. 28:9-10 for an example) - for in understanding more of the Law Giver and His complete Law, it becomes apparent that some laws “outrank” others, making it possible for some “lawbreakers” to be “blameless” because of their greater purpose (obeying the Law over another Law)

Stubbornness of this type carries with it eternal consequences and is in all actuality deadly!

- d. The next statement, “But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here” was far more profound than would have initially been estimated - we do not read of any reaction by the Pharisees to this statement perhaps because they were already stifled by His counters - it should be noted at this point, that even though Christ did effectively answer their objections and “won” the argument, these did not change or repent - twice Jesus asks “Have you not read...?” indicating something they should have known - these (the Pharisees) were examples of “knowing enough to be dangerous” (a phrase demonstrating an unwarranted over-confidence that sometimes sets-in when one comes to know a part of a bigger concept)

And yet another reason to treat other Believers with careful respect

- e. The Temple was the “place of meeting” where the presence of God was known to be - in this case, Jesus was the “House of God” (where God dwelt and WAS) - and then because of Christ’s work, we are now also the Temple of the Holy Spirit and should then look on each other as such - see I Corinthians 6:19 (so in serving Christ and other Christians, we are in a sense, like those serving the temple (which carries with it great responsibility and privilege)

4. And yet even further, Jesus drives to the heart of the matter - the priority of mercy - vs. 7

“Men’s actions reveal what affinity they have for God’s Word and how they meet or fail to meet what God really wants.” Lenski

- a. Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6 (as He also did in 9:13) - the expression of mercy-showing is to take priority over the ceremonial law (as in the sacrifices) and in this case, had the Pharisees kept focus on God’s GREATER priority for us (mercy/kindness/graciousness), they would not have “condemned the innocent”

It is never wise nor good to be looking for the flaws and failures of others - their need is to be what drives us!

- b. This is an interesting phrase, in that it demonstrates they were not looking to show mercy (as in being motivated to do so (if at all possible)) and, secondly, that the disciples were “guiltless” (they actually had not done wrong and the Pharisees really did misinterpret Sabbath Law) - Jesus would not have said this if they (the disciples) had truly done wrong - this is not a mercy-pursuit for those seeking to condone their sin, but for those striving to do right and/or repent

5. As “Lord of the Sabbath,” He is the one His disciples must answer to - vs. 8

Even as Peter warned Elders in I Pet. 5 not to “lord it over the flock” - they are God’s not theirs

- a. Even now it is often difficult for us to realize we answer to Christ and not to each other (in our walk, growth and pursuit of maturity) - this does not automatically discount what others may say or point out, but that we must truly work to evaluate if the criticism is valid or if another is trying to be “lord” over us - HE IS LORD and anyone aiding us toward that reality is a friend and should be heeded - anyone looking to claim this role/rule for themselves is not to be heeded or followed (this, of course, includes self-rule, self-lordship)

- b. Such as statement (and the one in verse 6) indicate again His attestation to His deity - He is “Lord” over the institution that God Himself established so only one who is God could rule over it
- c. See John 5:17-23 also regarding His authority - the Pharisees had no idea what they were up against!

C. The authority of Christ over defining what is “good” - vs. 9-14

1. The “setup” - looking to “lure” Jesus into breaking one of their own defined Sabbath laws - vs. 9-10

Intimidation is often a tool used by those intimidated (inwardly) themselves - they desire to squelch the opponent and not face the challenge

As was seen in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ provides the “original intent” and not the evolved distortions God’s standards have become by traditions

As the Lord is about to reveal, they were arguing/thinking from the wrong “angle” altogether - they presupposed that healing was against the Law on the Sabbath - they just accepted it as fact

It need not have to “hold-up” in court but damage can be done with apparent, legitimate prosecution

- a. Having answered objections regarding his disciples “reaping” on the Sabbath day, Jesus goes into “their synagogue” - He was not intimidated with their “ganging-up” on Him, nor was He afraid of being outsmarted by their knowledge and confidence
- b. Jesus, confident in His authority and Truth, goes into their “stronghold”
- c. “... and lo, there was a man having the hand withered...” (YLT) - Matthew words it in such a way as if to indicate the situation being conveniently arranged for the Pharisees to try to trap Him in breaking a law - it is still the same in many ways today when the rightness of a person is judged on an artificial, man-made religious structure that does not measure one’s actual dedication to God, but simply measures their dedication to a religion or philosophy
- d. Clever maneuvering is not to be our objective - reaching the right conclusion is to be
- e. They, having staged the situation, ask, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” - the man had a “withered hand” indicating it had lost its ability to function - He had already been healing so it was not whether or not He could heal, just whether He would heal on this day - after all, He could heal the next day, one might assume (to avoid the intimidation)
- f. Their intent was to “accuse Him” (ἵνα κατηγορήσωσιν αὐτοῦ. - plainly, to just be able to bring what would look to be a legitimate, formal point against Him) - they would build on this approach till they (the Pharisees) would get Him arrested and crucified on false pretenses

2. “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” - vs. 11-12

The evil heart of mankind will often be so clever it can make it moral to be immoral - it can be made to look holy while being cruel

Humanism crosses all lines with its infection - even the Law was being redefined with humanistic influence - self and personal profit are made to be the “moral” and sacrifice with no personal gain are made to be unlawful

By letter of the Law it is broken, but context shows how a “greater good” frees from wrongdoing - the Law needs to recognize some laws/responsibilities having greater importance over others

*In a sense it can be taken (the Lord’s question) as not just defensive but aggressive - it it LAWFUL to do good on this day (in other words, is it not a **MUST** to DO it?)*

- a. Sadly, as the Pharisees and others had come to do often, they would use the Law (it’s seeming logistics and details) to avoid having to do good - as in Mark 7:9-13 where Jesus reveals their use of the practice of “Corban” to avoid having to support their parents in their later years
- b. Jesus “cuts to the chase” and asks regarding their normal handling of when a sheep falls into a pit and is stuck - it was acceptable to work at getting it out even on the Sabbath - the Sabbath Day was not meant to be a burdensome day where an urgent (legitimate need) was to be left
- c. A man (in this case, this man) is of far greater value than a sheep - in comparison, would it not be immoral to aid an animal and neglect a person (unless of course one realizes their own benefit and profit in aiding their livestock, yet helping another may yield no personal benefit)
- d. Being the “Lord of the Sabbath” He authoritatively declares that it is right/lawful “to do good on the Sabbath” - as He illustrated before, there are other responsibilities that usurp formal laws (as we have with “good samaritan” laws where one is protected from prosecution from certain laws when coming to aid someone in distress - such as one trespassing to help someone in a burning house) - in such cases it is immoral to stand by and not lend aid when it is in your power to do it!
- e. Imagine, trying to counter this reality, that somehow it would be against the Sabbath Day Law to “do good” (that it was prosecutable to do what ought to be done (moral obligation))
- f. In Mark 4:3 it mentions that when he asked this that they kept quiet - either they had no answer and knew they were trapped, or were just waiting to get their seeming “leverage” against Him (after all, they just needed the appearance of wrong doing)

3. Christ lives the Law and answers His own question with His action - vs. 13-14

The withered hand was restored to normal - again, His healing was instantaneous and complete - His omnipotence was again demonstrated supported by His moral perfection

- a. In Luke 6:8 it mentions He knew their thoughts and defies them - He does what is the right thing to do even when the “moral leadership” stood against Him - for us, often we will need to stand alone in doing what is the right thing to do before God even though popular opinion stands against us - popular sentiment does not define right and wrong!
- b. Without touching the man, Jesus tells him to stretch out his hand and he did - there was no labor or unnecessary exertion on His part - He kept the Sabbath day completely and rightly
- c. Rather than sensing their wrong and being shamed in light of such power and grace (and truth), in their stubbornness, they left conspiring how they might “destroy Him” (in context it indicated their planning to have Him killed)
- d. “To heal on the Sabbath - a mortal crime; but to plot a murder - a perfectly lawful act!”, “... violence, the last resort of vanquished opponents.” Lenski
- e. So, Jesus Christ did not just teach what ought to be done and argue against His opposition, He demonstrated what ought to be done - what the intent of the Law actually was

D. Jesus, the unassuming servant - vs. 15-21

1. In the face of rising tensions and challenges from the Pharisees, Jesus, knowing their intentions and thoughts, left the area - vs. 15-16

It is easy to turn ministry focus to an apologetic focus rather than working from the presupposition that what we have has already been proven and time is better utilized ministering to and teach the needy - some focus will be needed to answer critiques when they force themselves upon us, but it need not be the core of what we are after

It was a warning also because there is nothing noble in being contentious just to be contentious

Matthew Henry

- a. Even though many “zealots” and “patriots” would have desired Him to stay and continue to “put them in their place,” Jesus left so as to not stir-up trouble and continued to minister
- b. Though many today would see this as the time and place to challenge the religious leaders further, Jesus focus was on ministering to those seeking the Truth (and actual help) rather than turning focus to countering the Pharisees
- c. Again, He “healed them all” (those following seeking help) - it may seem like an obvious point, but those not following Jesus were not being helped and were not being taught - true learning typically requires an investment of our time and effort
- d. As referenced earlier, Jesus was not seeking popularity and fame, so He “warned” them (ἐπετίμησεν - strongly admonished) “not to make him known” - God does not need publicity to accomplish His purposes - thus the underlying quality of “meekness” - confidence in God’s sovereignty frees us from the anxiety to get “enough” attention to succeed
- e. Persecutions (and even the threat of it) can be used to drive us to minister in other places - we must follow our Lord’s example and not use pressures and threats like these to excuse us from our obligation of service - minister to those seeking/needing it
- f. “Note, Wise and good men, though they covet to do good, yet are far from coveting to have it talked of when it is done; because it is God’s acceptance, not men’s applause, that they aim at.

2. Jesus fulfills the prophesy of the “Beloved Servant” - 17-21

This is also in harmony with Mt. 3:16-17 where at Christ’s baptism the Spirit comes upon Him and He is declared to be the “Beloved Son” - the “beloved servant” is the “Beloved Son”

Jesus had just glorified God for His revealing of truth to the lowly and this was how God had planned it all along - it is too easy to put ourselves as the focus of ministry when it is to be the purposes and even methods of God as He has revealed them

One can be soundly defeated in an debate/argument and still remain utterly unconvinced - most need a gracious reproach/ countering to be persuaded

That which man would naturally look to for potential and hope would not be His focus - He would focus on the discarded - this is one of the reasons we embrace our uselessness when we come to Him - He offers everything while we come with nothing

Yet it is in the littlest services to little people, throughout what is normally considered the mundane times of life that God will use the most - a life filled with highlights cannot be real - it’s the little, consistent “faithfulnesses” that are key

- a. Once again there is much debate over Matthew’s usage of Isaiah 42:1-4 - it does not perfectly match the known Hebrew nor the LXX though it is more than close enough to demonstrate Christ being the fulfillment of it - because of a reference to Israel in Isa. 41:8 many Jews take this text also to be in reference to the nations/people of Israel - but this is too detailed a description to be a “collective” and Matthew’s usage makes the proper exegesis firm
- b. Notice the entire Trinity involved in this work - the Father speaks of servant (Christ) and the Holy Spirit is “put upon Him”
- c. The specially “chosen” servant would go against popular opinion regarding how things should be done - He would “proclaim justice to the Gentiles” (see Mk. 3:8 as an example of His going into Gentile regions after leaving because of the Pharisees plotting) - He will not proclaim Himself, He will not be boisterous (asserting Himself as was expected of the Messiah)
- d. In His lowliness (based in total confidence in God’s control), He would not be argumentative (“He will not quarrel”) nor would he use variations of “loudness” to get a hearing - He knew completely that those who ought to hear would - also note that backing down from a fight is not necessarily as sign of weakness - many variations of “fighting” are ineffective even if continually won because it is quite often the weakest form of communication and persuasion - **attitude** is likely the greatest identifier between those wanting to learn and those wanting to debate
- e. He will be truly the “champion of lost causes!” - look at these analogies prophesied - “battered reeds” and “smoldering wicks” were examples of items that would normally be considered useless and at their end - if a “reed” was going to have any usefulness it certainly should not be “battered,” and a smoldering wick demonstrates by its smoke that it is at its end usefulness
- f. “Not the labor of my hands, can fulfill Thy law’s demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and Thou alone. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.” - from “Rock of Ages”
- g. This approach will be what ultimately affects “justice to victory” and will bring about Him being the “hope of the Gentiles” (the nations of the entire world)
- h. Even to our day, popular “Christianity” joins with the popular wisdom of our day in assuming that what will be most affective will be self-exalting, self-proclaiming, with a focus to get as much publicity and attention as possible - “for certain” some will say, “if you can’t get noticed and draw a crowd you’ll never get anything of lasting value done”
- i. “...justice to victory” - all will be made right and in the process, all that was presupposed to be right will be shown to be wrong (though most of human history tried to live by it)

ὄνοματι - name, character, reputation - not just trust what He said and stood for, but actually trust in HIM

- j. "In His name the Gentiles will hope" - He will be the one whose name becomes what the "nations" come to trust - God's plan was not local, but global - as the Jews, we must not allow ourselves to develop a perspective that sees Him as exclusively ours
- k. This is another text making it clear that hope is found only in Christ - many who have grown up in the church or in Christians homes allow themselves to get the notion that "hope" will /may be found in the "nations" (where they think they should place their expectation)

E. Against Christ or for Him? - vs. 22-37

1. The next dialog was stirred by another healing - in this case a man blind and mute because (apparently) of a demon - not much detail is described in this healing, indicating the focus is more on the revealed thoughts and responses and then the answer from Jesus - vs. 22-24

Often, religious leaders are an intimidation away from the Truth - they fear competition because they are not genuine - if they had been sure, they would have countered Christ on the content of His message and not the response of the people or the source of His miracles

- a. The crowds were particularly astonished at this miracle - they were asking "Can this be the Son of David?" (though more likely in the sense "This can't be the Son of David, can it?")
- b. Even though they had not settled it, they were considering the possibility and this reached the ears of the Pharisees - it may have been that the people were believing but were cautious in how they were voicing it (for fear of the Pharisees)
- c. Referring to the Pharisees in this account, Matthew Henry noted, "... Those who bind up their happiness in the praise and applause of men, expose themselves to a perpetual uneasiness upon every favourable word that they hear said of any other."
- d. The title, "Son of David" was a direct reference to the Messiah - it could also have been that it was in the form of a question because things seemed contradictory to them - they knew, based on the prophecies of Isaiah, that the Messiah would do these things, but they also were expecting one who would be able to overthrow Rome
- e. For the second time (recorded in Matthew), the Pharisees once again attribute His ability (which they are unable to deny) to Beelzebul (the leader of demons - Satan) - they, being deceitful themselves, tried to make Jesus look like a deceiver - they were motivated more by competition than they were the pursuit of the Truth
- f. Their choice of terms is also interesting - "Beelzebul" literally meant "lord of the flies" giving a picture of someone who lures in and controls pests which are attracted to death and decay

For most, as is often seen today, the political and miraculous are more desired than the truly spiritual

This group of Pharisees came from Jerusalem (Mk. 3:22) - the attention was now getting more serious

2. "Binding the strong man" - Jesus "plunders" Satan's "house" - vs. 25-29

Their intent to divert the conversation to proving more His authenticity - they essentially aided Him when they intended to hurt Him

Their case centered on the idea that Satan, in order to deceive, would allow some things to be done against his agendas - but Jesus was the antithesis to all of Satan's vices and to promote such and allow the ongoing "plundering" would not even begin to work - if Satan was aiding Jesus, he was self-destructive

It is not far-fetched to realize that many religious works and aspirations have been claimed as being from God when they are not - this is another scheme of the Devil to discredit God in the eyes of people

So there must be some objective standard to "judge" this beyond our own sense of things

Quite often what we think we're fighting is not what we are actually fighting - quite often we oppose God and if allowed to become a habit, opposing God's Spirit becomes who/what we are and do

- a. Knowing not just what they said, but the motives behind what they said (and what they were after), He counters their accusations with facts - some may look on this as a good tactic by the Pharisees (causing "reasonable doubt"), but it was a fundamental blunder (revealing their heart)
- b. Jesus explains clearly and succinctly how what He was doing could not possibly be of the Devil
- c. For, every kingdom that would truly divide itself into competitive parts (one against another) is "laid waste" (destroyed), and the smaller parts that make up that kingdom, if they are in opposition to each other (one taking from another), will not be able to "stand"
- d. Christ is describing real **damage** here, indicating that what He was doing was actual harm - He was casting out ALL demons; He was preaching/teaching right and selfless things, all of which were detrimental to the "kingdom" of Satan - it is debatable whether or not Satan can really perform miracles at all - there are a few references to what appeared to be (as in reference to the Antichrist, **will appear to be**) the miraculous which is then why each needs to not "legitimize" the miracle before "testing" the message (I John 4:1)
- e. Also, based on what is being said here and the severity of it before God, we dare not seek to ascribe a work to God that is not His either! It is clear, we don't want to attribute God's work to the Devil, but it is just as evil and diabolical to call a work of Satan God's work!
- f. He opposes them further, inquiring how **their** "sons" cast out demons - these "sons" were either their own disciples or in reference to the prophets - how would one discern the source of their ability? - "Let them be your judge" (as in reference to 7:1 - the standard by which we "judge" will be the same (one way or another) used upon us)
- g. "If" He does what He does by the "Spirit of God" then it is for sure that the "Kingdom of God" has come to them - then He is the Christ and what they are opposing is God Himself - even if it is excruciatingly painful to pride, better to face being wrong than to oppose God and the working of His Spirit (and it was "the Spirit of God" at work amongst them - now the magnitude of their wrong is coming to light)

To allow Satan to “plunder” us in any way is to live in denial of reality - He is a defeated foe and has no power to stop the plundering of his “kingdom” by God!

We strive to participate in the “plundering” of Satan’s “house” - not monetarily but in the arena of soul and spirit

Many who see themselves for Christ, actually have Him as one of many daily choices - He is one of many; He’s in their favorite “playlist”

Sadly, this type of “scattering” can happen in very moralistic and religious institutions - drawing people to morality and philosophy but not truly and fully to Christ

In this context, the Pharisees were attributing the work done by the Spirit of God (exorcising demons) to the work of Satan

compare with Micah 7:18 - “He delights in kindness”

As the Lord explained in John 16, the Holy Spirit would convict the world of “sin, righteousness and judgment” - one of the first signs of **not** standing against Him is repentance

The “unpardonable sin” is not just attributing the work of God to Satan (that may be a result) - it is a stance on and for one’s own righteousness/rightness against God’s revealed Truth

The first part of Hebrews 6 is an example of how this sin is and can be committed still - it is after much “gracious investment” by the Spirit in the life of one who opposes it and replaces it with his own solutions

There is sometimes seen a sobering similarity today in “Christendom” - some seeing the “good” in Christ but allowing the notion that there is “bad” also - they cannot, they will not fully commit

h. Jesus uses an example of one overcoming another - how can one go in and plunder a “house” (one of the parts that makes up a kingdom) unless he first “binds the strong *man*”? - this is a direct reference to His having overcome the Devil (as vividly seen in chapter 4) - as such, **He can “plunder” the house of Satan whenever and however He pleases**

i. What a concept! Jesus has so bound Satan in his own house (this age and the flesh), that He can and does take whatever He wills to take, and topple whatever He so chooses - the cross would be the final blow to what ever “hold” that Satan could hope to have - the Devil is powerful, but to focus on his strength compared to that of Christ would be ludicrous

3. There is no neutrality when it comes to Christ - vs. 30

a. This is a very clear statement - if one is not “with” Him (not “for” Him) the same one is then against Him - there were and still are many who claim to be “Christian” and yet are not truly **for** Christ as much as they are for themselves or others

b. And this “for-ness” is evidenced in acting/living in harmony with His “gathering together” versus scattering, by not assisting in uniting (in this case, His sheep, His harvest)

c. As with these Pharisees, one may “scatter” for their own reasons and need not necessarily be “for” the Devil - there are countless “causes” **against** Christ by drawing people to themselves and not unifying (gathering) them around Him (His truth, His Work, His Word)

4. The “unpardonable sin” - vs. 31-32

a. Much has been said regarding this text and its meaning has been made either an overbearing fear or has been disregarded altogether - neither of which is correct

b. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is essentially speaking against (κατὰ - down from (as if above)) Him because one is in conscious opposition to Him and His work (deliberately against)

c. It is a very deliberate sin, knowingly done - all other sins and even blasphemies can be forgiven - **only utter rejection of the work of the Spirit is unforgivable**

d. Regarding the misconception of this concept, R. T. France wrote, “This saying is a wake-up call to the arrogant, not a bogey to frighten those of tender conscience.” - the Lord’s first statements are in regards to all other sins being forgivable - there is great grace and mercy shown here first as well as profound wickedness in the rejection of it

e. But this sin, true rejection of the convicting, convincing work of the Spirit, that then makes all others sins unforgiven also, because they can only be forgiven in Christ - any not there (in Christ) at their death, will stand before God in their sin... all of it!

f. Even those “speaking against” the “Son of Man” can find forgiveness, but this cannot be done if they do not allow themselves to be led to the Son of Man for His saving work

g. At its most basic idea, to “blaspheme” the Holy Spirit is to see His working, be exposed to His Truth and work and then, in turn, deliberately speak/stand against Him - these Pharisees had seen and heard the work of Christ (done by the Spirit of God as He intimated), and in their defiance, attributed it all the Satan

h. To narrow this down even more, it would appear that this type of sin is evidenced in speech as the Lord will soon warn against the flippant use of words - this is the **exceptional** sin, not because God’s mercy has a flaw but because it is a sin, the sin, with understanding and full resolution/determination of what is being said and done.

i. “The Pharisees had not as yet done this; but in charging Jesus with being in league with hell they were displaying beforehand a malignant determination to shut their eyes to all evidence, and so, bordering upon, and in spirit committing, the unpardonable sin.” Gill

j. **There will be no forgiveness for this particular sin “in this age or the one to come”**

k. Note also, “Yet we may say that whoever fears that he has committed the unpardonable sin thereby furnishes evidence that he has not done so.” Lenski

5. What is done and what is said reveal the true heart - vs. 33-37

a. In verse 33, speaking still to the Pharisees he bluntly instructs them to be consistent - when saying, “Either make the tree good.... bad” He wanted them to draw a definitive line; either He was good or bad - yet His works and messages were good and beneficial to the recipients

b. “The tree is known by its fruit” - what is inside will come out in what is done and said

c. These Pharisees, the Lord reveals, were a “brood of vipers” (signifying them as being from the Serpent (Satan) the very accusation they had thrown at Jesus)

1 Kings 18:21

No doubt, the Pharisees saw good in Jesus but could not accept a growing amount of what He was saying - they were trying to build their case to reject Him since they could not, at this point, reject Him out right

“περισσέυματος” - the overflow of the heart (when it exceeds what is expected and must spill over)

Jesus is describing evidence of the heart and not the cause of the heart's condition

For “where your treasure is there will your heart be also” - Mt. 6:21

Anyone misuses talking (words) when it is unguarded and seen as something for which there is no accounting - the idea of thinking before we speak is to be looked on as non-optional

When one (as seen in Rom. 10) “calls on the name of the Lord” (with their mouth “confessing”), we also read that it is from the heart that the confession ultimately comes - those “justified by their words” will be those whose words looked to Christ

- d. Just as Elijah faced when dealing with Israel and the prophets of Baal, “And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.”
- e. The answer is actually simple - if the “heart” refuses to stand fully (committed) with/for the good, then it is most assuredly evil/vain - this is not dealing with ignorance but more so with deliberate refusal (too much hesitation to commit leaves the realm of caution and reveals the true sense of the heart) - we need to settle on what we will look to for Truth
- f. The rhetorical question the Lord asks essentially is “How can you be trusted to speak anything true and consistently good when your heart is evil?” - what’s in the heart (our innermost self (who we actually are) will “spill out”) - it may be concealed for a while, but sooner or later (usually under pressure) **the heart will be exposed for what it is by the mouth**
- g. The “good person” will produce good “fruit” from his heart which is “thrown out” (ἐκβάλλει) as if coming forcefully - the usage of “good” may trouble since none is truly “good” but God, though the usage seems to carry more the idea of one not self-focused, and are thus open to instruction, challenge and change (repentance) - this “good” is out of the “treasure of the heart” (what is valued most highly) and, as we come to learn, such a treasure is placed there by the Holy Spirit) - we treasure what we treasure based on our faith (what we “bank” on)
- h. So then also, those with an evil heart will find it “belching out” what it cannot hold back indefinitely - so the Pharisees were doing with their reaction to Christ because what they treasured was not what was (in reality) good
- i. There is a reckoning for words in “the day when men will be judged” - the phrase, “every idle word” is a good translation of the underlying Greek word ἄργον indicating something “without work” (useless, of no value) - the usage of words (language, our tongues) is clearly very high on God’s lists of priorities - just because the majority of mankind misuses speech and treats it as unimportant at times, does not mean that God does
- j. These Pharisees will certainly be “condemned” by their own words - the idea of being “justified” by our words does not trouble our doctrine of justification since we realize our words WILL be changed when we come to Christ since our hearts will be changed - those that worry over this text may find it is one of many that reveals an unregenerate state that has been masked in a regenerate persona (mask)
- k. We ought to take careful note of what we say (communicate) realizing that it reveals so much of who/what we are - plus **we need to value it to the degree God (the creator of the tongue) does**

F. The “evil and adulterous” seek for a sign - vs. 38-50

- 1. It was more like a subtle demand - it is characteristic of those predisposed (their “heart condition”) to make demands upon God, to then seek to hold it against Him - vs. 38

The majority of our practical (practicing) faith stems from our being constantly amazed by God work through and proving His rightness in ways we would not have anticipated - so to insist on “proofs” of our own making will not benefit us (even if they would occur)

God’s love is not vulnerable because it is not strictly emotional like so much of ours is

- a. These came to Him calling Him “Teacher” (which appears to be a type of patronizing)
- b. These “signs” would need to pass their scrutiny as to their legitimacy - this is so often what many do with God - they come up with items they believe would lend to their faith, if they could see or experience them - like these religious leaders, they are too shallow
- c. In Luke 11:16 we are told that these were asking this “tempting Him” - this type of “tempting” is the attempt to pull someone into arguing/proving a point, with the other needing to meet prerequisites that are designed to be unachievable (the motive is to be the intimidator) - there are those who still act as though they can somehow intimidate God

- As Jesus told Satan - we are not to “tempt the Lord our God” which involves our placing ourselves in positions with the intent to “force His hand”

- 2. To “this generation,” the sign they “crave” will not be given, but the one that God will give - vs. 39-42

It’s akin to those looking to be entertained not only having their “ears ticked” but their eyes also - this “drive” demonstrates and evil, unfaithful heart

These had become unfaithful to God and thus blinded to the presence of His son - His miracles to the lowly and dealing with sin were unappealing to these “elites”

- a. Even with their apparent attempts at being cordial, Jesus strongly responds
- b. It was characteristic of this group, or as it is here, a “generation” that was driven by the pursuit of “signs” (outward manifestations of impressive power) - God did use these at times and the evil is not in the signs/miracles, but in the pursuit of **only** the signs/miracles themselves
- c. Their particular evil is in their “adultery,” having left the only true God and His Word, they developed a righteousness of their own (a set of standards and objectives contrary to what God had given) - they were **similar** to what God had provided but were altered to fit their own proud and selfish pursuits - one is adulterous because he/she are controlled by self-gratification

Impatience with God is often a major part of those who are or are becoming critics of Him - spiritual maturity (in faith) takes time, usually a lot of time and difficulty/pressure

It should serve as a warning to us when we are bored with God's Word and work - it reveals that our interests are focused wrongly and if not dealt with, we might miss that which would thrill and encourage us more than any earthly "hero" or concept ever possibly could!

It is easy to justify ourselves in our own eyes when we do not compare ourselves to the right things - in this case, those with far less "light" repented while the Israelites of this generation were unresponsive to the greatest of light (and that mercifully given)

As in Luke 12:48, those who have been given much, much is required - neglect of God's graces is no excuse for our wrong-doing or even for our ignorance - God has given us His Truth and we should daily feel the weight to search it out!

We don't know for sure if these will actually come as witnesses against this generation if Israel but, as the Lord demonstrates, certainly could serve as witnesses against them

When one is confronted with the Truth and freed from their error and their sins, if they do not "stay with it" they will return to what they left only now to a greater degree

This is what makes apostates so vile in their dealings from there on out with the Truth of Scripture - they gave it a try they figure and may have sincerely hoped in aspects of it - but it did not meet with some expectation they had and is universally rejected

As Israel in the OT - most longing to return to the bondage they had left because the glamorized it while others longed only to press on to what God promised

- d. God's sign will be that of "Jonah the prophet" which would be used two ways - the first was the parallel with Jonah being in the "belly of the sea monster" for three days and nights - so He (the "Son of Man") would be in the heart of the earth (grave) - this would not be an acceptable answer to His critics at this point, seeing their demand for a sign as to be immediate - yet this sign was greater than any they could have anticipated (resurrection from the dead) - but these were not that interested in that which was the "cure" for sin since they were more interested in what would lead to their self - righteous pursuits
 - e. As today so it was then - many were unimpressed with the outworking of God's plan and power because it dealt with the actual problem (sin), which so many work to ignore and deny altogether - those who see their desperate need are those thrilled with "salvation"
 - f. Second, this sign from God would demonstrate the rightful condemnation of these religious leaders - to some, the resurrection of Christ was the height of joy and to others, a profound challenge to work around while attempting to maintain the status quo they had worked so hard to construct
 - g. It should be noted at this point that Jesus confirmed the accuracy of the account in Jonah - though skeptics would laugh at the thought of the account being genuine, Jesus used it as a definitive point (Jonah's experience actually happened - as would the resurrection)
 - h. Using the Ninevites as figurative witnesses, their response to Jonah so long before would stand in condemnation to the Jews in Christ's time - these Gentiles/Pagans repented at the message of Jonah of coming **temporal** destruction, while these Jews would not heed one far greater than Jonah (Who was offering the answer to the coming judgment on all mankind)
 - i. The second "witness" (as if in a court) would be the Queen of Sheba who (in I Kings 10:1-9) who came to hear for herself the wisdom of Solomon - while here was one far greater in wisdom than Solomon - this should give us sobriety regarding the resources that God has provided - we are accountable to what is accessible/provided regardless if we avail ourselves of it - these would not look into what He was saying/teaching (and doing), and those who stood against Christ because their religious leaders did, instructed/demonstrated their misguided trust and their lack of **seeing themselves as accountable** to search out what is true and false in life
 - j. She came a long distance to hear and see Solomon, while these had "the Christ" right in front of them, in their land, in their homes - many (like these) are more interested in one of two extremes - either they desire to hear only what supports the way things are, or desire only what is "far away" - it has been often observed that companies prefer to bring someone from out of state or even out of the country because they assume they will have more to offer
 - k. It is one of the greatest mistakes one will ever make when they reject the Truth of Christ as/when it is offered - none must ever presume that more opportunities will come
3. Temporal reformation only makes the situation worse - vs. 43-45
 - a. The Lord goes on to another illustration, using as an example something related to the demonstration of His power over evil by casting out demons - He had been clearing out demons from many people and many regions, but more would need to happen
 - b. When an "unclean spirit" leaves someone, they seek a new dwelling - it was commonly held that demons lived in "haunts," uninhabited or abandoned places - when unable to find a place to "rest" (a new habitation) the demon goes back to check on its previous dwelling - finding it "unoccupied" and made ready for a tenant, it brings along seven more spirits worse than itself
 - c. This is true with demons possession, but the point (the illustration) demonstrates sin personified by the evil spirit - when it (sin) is cast off, it becomes lonely and longs to return and when welcomed back, it brings with it more evils than before - many revivals and reformations have been followed by the deformation of what appeared to be a new person, only now the situation is compounded - with it will come bitterness and blasphemy of all sorts as they are disheartened at the **loss of hope** (and are filled with despair)
 - d. Their condition is worse than it was before (which, using this example of demon possession, was very pitiful) - so it would be with the Jews of that time as they considered the Christ and were temporarily delivered from so many troubles but would soon return to them for various reasons
 - e. So it is with those who come to know the Truth and find initial deliverance of sorts but do not fully believe, fully trust - coming to Christ is coming for life (never to return again)

The consequences of sin will always be far worse than we anticipate - dealing with personal sin is to be done with all seriousness

- f. Another key lesson to learn with this text is that sin only worsens - one may deceitfully comfort themselves in believing that sin in general plateaus - but evil grows!
- g. And so it was with that generation - accounts of the final days of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 are dreadful to read - there was more the opposite of repentance in the Jews living in Jerusalem at the time, and no hint of repentance - by the time of the destruction of the city, there were accounts of rampant sin, and even cannibalism as they sought to survive (avoiding surrender)
- h. Part of the deceitfulness of sin is our inability to truly measure how “deep” we are in it!
- i. “It is therefore impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men’s iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: That neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world.” Josephus

4. The real “family” of Christ - vs. 46-50

This was no usage of allegory - these really were His family and so are we (indicated by the same criteria) - our eternal family in Christ, as it was with our Lord, far outranks our earthly family - see John 20:17; Rom. 8:29 and Heb. 2:11-17

“Family comes first” can still be our motto as long as we remember who our family really is - the biological must not supersede the spiritual

Even as strong as genetic relations are, they ultimately cannot give enough purpose and focus to these relationships to be of significant depth - this only comes in the bonds formed by being “in Christ”

- a. As Jesus was finishing His words, His “mother and brothers” had come and had asked to speak with Him - no detail is given if the Lord went to them or not, because the point of the text is to stress the His usage of the situation to indicate who truly is His “family”
- b. He asks a question in order to answer it - who really are His “kindred?” - he that “... does the will of my Father in Heaven...” - this is the greater, eternal family - we all serve the Father and are to be characterized by the pursuit of His will in all things (especially IN ourselves (evidenced in our priorities))
- c. So much attention has been placed (by Christians) on meeting our family obligations here, that is has usurped the priority we are to (most definitely) have regarding our Father and brothers and sisters in Christ - this has led many to stray from the life focus of the pursuit of doing the will of God, because of the real and potential disunity it may cause in earthly relations
- d. This reality would have been, and still is, a comfort to those rejected by their families or who have no earthly family left - the bond we have with fellow Christians is the strongest we have, we just don’t often realize it until something occurs to make it evident - what binds us is eternal!
- e. As it was then so it is today - this reality transcends racial, social and financial bounds which have always had a bearing on cultures throughout history - this is how you could have Paul address a slave owner (Philemon) and challenge him to recognize his slave (Onesimus) as his brother

XXI. The Benefit of Discipleship - Truth Revealed and Explained - 13:1-23

A. The parable of the sower (four grounds) - vs. 1:1-9

- 1. A large crowd was still following Jesus - the crowd was made up of skeptics, the curious, those looking to have some type of healing and some seeking the Truth (the disciples)

Parables were given not just to teach but also to criticize and rebuke - Truth would be given but it was not expected all would understand the messages

- a. Jesus (and most likely His disciples) went into a boat just off shore, while the crowds stood on the shore to listen to what He would say
- b. This section is the beginning of many “parables” - these are basically picture stories (illustrations) that were also considered wise sayings and were often intended to be cryptic

- 2. “Behold, a sower went out to sow...” - there are many objects referenced in the parable, but the main focus is on the ground (how the seed is received by it, and what then becomes of it)

Spectators and general participants are content to just observe but lack a drive to learn - with some there is a God-given hunger to find the Truth while with others there is no drive to pursue

- a. The illustration is given and no explanation is provided to the crowd - again, this was not an uncommon way of communicating and perhaps it would be another way to distinguish the true disciples from just spectators - as seen in the disciples, there will be a pursuit of clarification and meaning by those who really desire to know
- b. Some seed fell on the “road” (ground packed down by being walked upon) - this seed became food for the birds since it did not “sink-in” - it was hard ground
- c. Some seed fell on rocky ground where there was little soil - these sprouted, as would other plants, but having no viable root to get water and other nutrients - as soon as the sun came up what little life there was withered away
- d. Some seed fell in ground where there were thorns growing (prickly plants) that already had taken root and grew at a much faster rate - this part of the field had not been cleared of these thorns and briars, so the seed that had sprouted here was soon choked of its needed resources to continue to grow
- e. Some seed fell on “good ground” which was so because it was prepared - this seed reproduced with varying results but they all produced a “crop”

Note that all three of these grounds received the seed but failed to actually produce any fruit for three different reasons (though the results were the same - these did not fulfill the intentions of the farmer)

True learners cannot “let go” certain questions - the have a sense or urgency to realize something important was said and they cannot rest until they understand - where is this today in most of Christianity?

- f. Albert Barnes commenting on the results of the good soil wrote, “That is, a hundred, sixty, or thirty “grains” for each one that was sowed an increase by no means uncommon. Some grains of wheat will produce twelve or fifteen hundred grains.”
- g. “He who has ears to hear let him hear” - as in stressing the need to pay close attention since, normally, most will miss the point and lesson in what was just said - it also stresses the need to look into it further - this would (as is about to be seen) be in reference to unique insight that comes only as God grants it (spiritual ears)

B. Why speak in parables? - vs. 10-17

1. The disciples asked why He spoke in this manner - again, it was not uncommon, but at the same time, it was not necessarily clear - allegory of this type usually needs special insight - vs. 10-11

It's at this point (because of humanistic influences) that some will begin to react because this is not how they would do it (it doesn't fit their idea of “fairness”

- a. “To you it has been granted...” - not everyone will have the same privileges and in this case, the answer to the disciples was first making known their opportunity
- b. “Mysteries” references special revelation from God - what cannot or may not be understood is revealed/explained to some - **it is to be looked on as an honor**
- c. These “mysteries” are of the “kingdom of heaven” as it is a kingdom in contrast to those of this world (the differing kingdoms of the ages of this earth) - these unknown truths (to this age) are those of life's true purpose and priorities, and their contradiction to those of man's
- d. It has/had not been given - this could either be a final conclusion (it had not nor would it ever be given to them) and/or it had not **at this time** but later would be given to some and God would grant them this special privilege in being used to share and reveal them

In the case here it is most likely a final declaration that those countering Christ would never be given the insight to see and understand these great truths - these would remain “mysteries”

2. Those that “have” will get more, while those that “have not” will lose all - vs. 12

This verse should stir in the skeptic, not resentment, but an urgency to avail himself of what he has been give at the time lest he become a “loser”

- a. Those who “have,” have what they have because it was given to them and will continue to grow and serve as a profit to them (perception grows as more light and learning come)
- b. Those that “have not” (because it has not been given them and they, by their natural actions and responses reject it anyway), will lose what little they have been given (or as indicated in Luke 8:18, will lose **what they think they have** (discernment, morality, righteousness))
- c. “Life is always a process of gaining more or losing more for weakness, like strength, is an increasing thing.” Barclay
- d. Teaching in parables uniquely demonstrates two things equally - 1. God does not dispense all things equally as we would define it, placing responsibility on God 2. Truth is “to be had,” if one pursues it, placing responsibility on the person - the rejection of the Truth, and the judgement that will come (in this life and the next) because of it, also glorifies God

As is about to be demonstrated, God had planned not only to “speak by means of His son”, but to demonstrate by the same teachings the evil of that generation (and even generations to come in their persistent rejection of it

3. So, why parables? - it defies the defiers and fulfills what God said of them - vs. 13-15

This is why great care should be taken in handling these parables - it is very easy to read into them and treat them like any other text - by these very statements of our Lord, these parables deserve our reverential caution

- a. He speaks more cryptically (also challenging) because of those that oppose (their posture)
- b. These were seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears the same things the disciples were seeing and hearing, but responded as though they did not see anything or hear anything - these were stubborn in their faithlessness
- c. Parables would be publicly taught but only those who were actually with Him would glean anything from them - its concept is comparable to those who have been given the “ciphers” to understand significant things while to others it looks like nothing
- d. As Isaiah was told by God at his commissioning as a prophet (Isaiah 6), that as he gave out the Word of God (prophesied), the people would see and hear him but would not see (perceive) and understand/discern the truths he would be giving them - and so it was still with the Jews of Jesus' day, and would continue as Paul references this same text in Acts acts 28:26-29 (and then confirmed that “salvation” had come to the Gentiles “who would listen”)
- e. These were described as having their heart become “dull” (ἐπαχύνθη - thick, fat and thus insensitive to what it should sense) - as a result of this callousing, they could barely hear what they should hear and actively closed their eyes
- f. Either way though, these would still be responsible for their intentional rejection of Jesus and all that He was teaching

Somehow this response of Israel fir God's providence and this was to happen then and during the time of Christ - this was supposed to happen - then, as a result, the Gospel would come to the Gentiles (as detailed in Romans 11)

4. The “blessed” eyes and ears of the disciples - vs. 16-17

- a. These were blessed because they were correctly fulfilling their purpose (eyes to see the truth and ears to hear and understand the truth) - this is in contrast to the eyes and ears of the pharisees (and their followers) that only pursued sensual, self-promoting pursuits

Often, the appreciation and respect we have for what we have been given comes from the realization that those who came before us longed to know what we are now able to know

- b. This privilege is clarified as such when the Lord reminds them that what they were getting to see and hear (both, with understanding) was what those that came before them would have loved to have seen and heard
- c. This is one of the many consequences of taking for granted something that God has placed before us, in our grasp and readily available - many have been bored and unimpressed with the treasure of truth that God has allowed our generations to have - see John 8:56, I Pet. 1:10-12
- d. See also Heb. 11:39-40 - When we also realize the direct connection we have with those who were before us and who have long since finished their earthly journey, we sense the honored responsibility that comes with it
- e. "Those who know something of Christ, cannot but covet to know more." Henry

C. The parable of the sower (and the varying results) is explained - vs. 18-23

1. The "hard ground" (the path/road) explained - vs. 18-19

This ground/heart is not receptive for a variety of reasons - these are either inattentive or reactionary to what they hear, looking to counter what they hear - the Word does not "sink in" because the hearer is determined against it (hostile)

Hardness in any form against the Word of God is always detrimental - One would then never come to know what they could have known!

"... they did not approve of having God in knowledge." Rom. 1:28

- a. Having just told them of their privilege, Jesus now tells them to hear the parable - use what you've been given, don't just be "happy" it has been given - the blessing comes not just in the hearing but in the seeing (doing/act on it)
- b. This part of the parable illustrates one who hears "the word of the Kingdom" but not with understanding - the Word reached him but takes no root - the heart is hardened (being bitter or prejudiced against it for some self-focused reason), or being bored and uninterested (so he does not work to listen and "put things together" (the underlying word being συνιέντος - considering fully what is being revealed)) - the problem is not the seed but the soil (heart)
- c. The "Word of the Kingdom" included what Jesus had been preaching and teaching since 4:17 (starting with the word "Repent") - it is God's rule over man's rule (or self-rule)
- d. Because of this firm resistance, the Word is "snatched away" by "the evil one" - what would be valuable if allowed to "sink in," is swiftly taken by "the Adversary" (Mk. 4:15) - he is evil because he is opposed to God and does what he can to take away (or keep away) the Word of God from people (compare to Heb. 2:1) - as hearers, these are negligent
- e. It is interesting to note that the Lord references the seed sown to the heart - the "seed of the Word" is intended to affect the heart, but a hard heart (the inner most part of a person (who/ what one really is)) is unreceptive - **disinterest is a heart condition**

2. The "stoney ground" explained - vs. 20-21

As will be seen, there is a "joy" (an excitement) but it is focused primarily on the "now" - there is an affection for the forgiveness of sins that is strictly selfish

These are "temporal" because they live for the temporal - compare this to I John 2:17

- a. This is ground that is mostly stones - a little dirt to allow for the initial growth, but not enough for roots - these are also hard hearts that prove to be "shallow" when it comes to growable content - there's the appearance of potential, but no depth
- b. The initial response is encouraging - the word is "received with joy" - there is an interest in the hope of the Gospel (sin is forgiven) - they see how God can support their agenda as long as He avoids (works around) their unmoveable goals and opinions (stones)
- c. This joy/excitement is short lived because "he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary" - on this R. T. France wrote, "...their enthusiasm is based on external stimulus, not on inner conviction, and so it will not last when the external is no longer there."
- d. When, "because of the Word" pressure and troubles come, they "fall away" (they are offended (scandalized (σκανδαλίζεται - ensnared)) - this is an interesting word picture, seeing in their attempt to be free from the perceived restraints/discomforts associated with Christ's message, they run into the snare of sin, doomed to face far worse
- e. In the crowd Jesus was addressing, this described a good majority of them, as would be later seen
- f. Much of the so called church today strive to appeal to these types who are easily offended by the Word so the Word is watered-down, reworked or neglected

3. The "thorny ground" explained - vs. 22

Note that these "hear the word" but never get around to doing the Word because of these higher priority distractions

- a. This is ground good for growth and is very receptive to the seed - the issue is not related to any hardness as was with the first two, but with the "competition" to the seed of God's Word
- b. The two competitors to the Word are the worries of the age and the deceitfulness of riches - the "worries" are the pressures of the era (the popular worries that come from society and the obligations to live up to them), and the lie that the gaining of wealth will live up to these expectations or protect from the need to worry at all
- c. These "choke" the word by taking up all available resources - some where initially provided but other priorities end up getting the attention/focus

see I Tim. 6:9-10 and Ecc. 5:10-11

- d. Part of the deceitfulness of riches is in the trust of them - one need not be wealthy to be caught in its deception - most spend their life's time, goals and ambitions in the pursuit of getting wealth of varying sorts (financial security is looked on as safe/reliable security)
- e. Because of this, these produce no fruit - it (the Word) was given a place but to no actual results (and producing fruit was to be the purpose, yet it only supported thorns/weeds)
- f. This happened because the ground, being uncultivated, was "wild" (left to produce whatever growths it naturally would, the output of which is of no value)

4. The "good ground" explained - vs. 23

"The three evangelists give three characteristics of the good hearer. Matthew, he understandeth the word; Mark, he receiveth it; Luke, he keepeth it." Vincent's Word Studies

The least amount of this crop (thirty fold) is very good

The objective is not a competitive measurable result - the goal is to be receptive, attentive and faithful

- a. This is ground that has been cultivated for the purpose to grow - it is not a path, stones have been removed as well as thorns/weeds
- b. This (as a person) not only hears the Word but understands - this one "considers" what is being said, not just thinking on it, but weighing/determining that it is most important - it is given top priority and becomes the defining purpose of the soil
- c. The three levels of results are not competitive, but are to be seen as a group - the first three (hard, stony and thorny) grounds produce no fruit, while the "good" does - this is the point - the Lord will go on to stress this very point in the illustration of equal pay for varying hours of work (20:1-15) and the "Parable of the Talents" (25:15-17)
- d. We must be careful in our attempts, defining and measuring "fruit" - much of what is considered fruit is not (possibly being just weeds) - some seemingly little results of God's Word are actually far more productive than we will ever know

XXII. The Kingdom of Heaven's Uncommon Characteristics - 13:24-58

A. The way God was going to build His kingdom and its influence would seem odd to onlookers - vs. 24-50

1. Man, in the establishing of their "kingdoms," seeks methods of conquering greatness

Compare this concept to I Cor. 1:16-31 - God chooses the weak and insignificant with the purpose to confound the wise and influential

The enemies of God will appear to have the upper hand many times but their doom is sure!

- a. They expect to strategize/plan/incorporate the usage of strength and powerful influences
- b. No one would expect the assured patience of God in its outworking, He not seeking the endorsement or the solicitation of man and his "genius"
- c. Ironically, part of God's plan would be to allow the internal presence of the enemy in its growth, making it clear that the "Kingdom of the Heavens" will be just as present and fulfilling God's purpose when the enemy has seemingly infiltrated it, as when it will be fully instituted at the day of judgment

2. The parable of the wheat (grain) and the tares (darnel) - vs. 24-30; 36-43

Satan, as the enemy, is portrayed as actively working to infiltrate and thwart the Lord's work

This demonstrates several things - that God was aware that this would happen and that it was a part of His plan - also, part of the cause would be the neglect and lack of alertness on the part of the slaves of the Lord as well as the ill-intent of the "sons of the devil"

- a. Having used an agricultural illustration to demonstrate the varying results of the "Word of the Kingdom" being spread, Jesus goes on to use sowing seed again, only now it includes the malicious sowing of the enemy
- b. This parable is presented in the first verses and then explained later - the sower is the "Son of man" and the seed sown (and resulting growth) are the "sons of the kingdom" sown in the field of the world - the "tares" are the "sons of the evil one" and the one who sowed them was the devil - this demonstrates that there are no neutral parties - all belong to one or the other

- c. In verses 25-27, we see the bad seed was sown while the men slept - then these same men ask the landowner if He has sown the wrong seed - we don't want to read into this text, but there does seem to be a strong inference that there was some neglect on the part of the slaves that allowed for this to happen, and then it looks like the questions of these slaves of the landowner could be taken as critical
- d. It was not until the wheat (barley/grain) began to produce fruit that the tares/weeds became apparent (either that they did not have actual fruit or that what they bore was obviously of no value) - the question of the slaves to the master was in the quality of the seed - "So" they ask, "how is it there are tares intermingled with the grain?"

As seen in I Cor. 15:25, He (Jesus) must reign and this reigning will be the bringing (over an extended period of time) all His enemies under His feet - this is happening even now - the successes of the enemy all lead to and lead to their failure - each victory of their's leads to their defeat since what they pursue and how they pursue it is wrong (philosophically, morally and spiritually)

- e. When realizing this is an illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven, it becomes apparent the main focus is on why the evil is allowed to flourish at all - this has been an ongoing question since the Lord came - we are not given the answer in this text, but it is clear that God will use even the wicked to showcase **His glory, power, holiness and rightness and these will be the contrasting backdrop to it!**
- f. It is the landowner that makes it clear that this is the work of the enemy (a conspiracy)

We see in our day religions forcing themselves on others with threats of various sorts - this is the results of a "weak god concept"

"...declaring the remorse of conscience, the tortures of mind, the sense of inexpressible pain, and punishment, the wicked shall feel; also their furious rage and black despair..." Gill

These "tares" are in local churches also often making it difficult to distinguish those truly righteous in Christ - "by their fruit you will know them" - Mt. 7:16-20 (what they "bear" are not the fruits of the Spirit) - as is characteristic of these types of weeds they live for self and no usable fruit is to be had from them - they compete for the resources for their own usage and not for that of the sower/farmer

We are sure to be misdirected if we seek God's working in the big and powerful - He uses what appears insignificant to most and uses time (usually lost of it!)

The outwork of God's agenda (His kingdom) will be dismissed by most (even many in the professing church) - This is why we are to hold close to what His Word teaches, walking/living by faith and not by sight

Jesus was revealing the way things really are and what's really going on - this is in contrast to the majority who rely on personal or public perception to discern the times, priorities and meanings of what is happening around them

The "rightness" of God's Word does not depend on our agreement or even our understanding of it - ignorance of or denial of the Bible never works to our advantage!

- g. Notice also that the reaping is not to be done until the "end of the age" - it is not the responsibility of Christians to forcibly rid the world/age of the "tares" - Church history has demonstrated the unchristian attempts of many to torture and put to death those that disagreed
- h. These "weeds" will grow along side of the "grain" (the results of the good seed) throughout time - when the Lord returns and the day of judgement arrives, **He** will do the judging/separating (by use of His angels) - Christians need not, at any time, subscribe to a philosophy that they must find a way to force others into Christianity (or Christian morality)
- i. "... they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers..." - vs. 41 - notice the two groups of "weeds" - those that cause others to sin (sin promoters/endorsers) and then those that participate in the sin - initiators and followers (the judgment of sin includes aggressors as well as passive - the influenced are judged with the influencers)
- j. Just as these tares are thrown into the furnace, so those who are in opposition to God (even the religious opposers, who like the Pharisees designed a religion of their own) will be thrown into the "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15) - and here, as the Lord declares, there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" - the ongoing/everlasting torment of pain, regret and rage (all encompassed in the wailing and the grating of the teeth in pain and anger)
- k. "It is not certain that our Saviour meant to teach here that hell is made up of "material" fire; but it is certain that he meant to teach that this would be a proper "representation" of the sufferings of the lost." Barnes
- l. When sin's influence and presence is removed from the creation, then the "righteous" will appear as they really are in Christ and shine like the sun, now being revealed in all its brightness after the clouds have dissipated - the children of the Kingdom are now clouded by the presence of sin and the unavoidable intermingling with unbelievers - the ongoing griefs we face, as a result of these contradictions all around us, should only intensify our anticipation of this coming event
- m. Again, "He who has ears, let him here" - listen and learn, for **it is the one who will be the Judge (the Son of Man) who is revealing this** - reference also Psalm 119:9 (how a "young man" can keep himself pure by "taking heed thereto according to thy word")

3. The parables/analogies of the mustard seed and leaven - vs. 31-35

- a. Here, Jesus uses two very small things to demonstrate how something so very small and seemingly insignificant can wield great influence over time - even though mankind is most impressed with what is large and powerful, God would grow His kingdom starting with that which is very small (and unimpressive at first)
- b. The mustard seed was the smallest of its kind, and yet when full grown (this type of mustard plant) it's big enough for birds to rest on its branches - there is no need to allegorize the birds since the point is to demonstrate "from small to great"
- c. "Leaven" (a "spreading influence which is typically concealed") also illustrates the "Kingdom of Heaven" at work on the Earth - both the mustard seed and yeast grow outward (it's visible in how it extends) while the leaven is also inward, and its influence is seen as it grows
- d. Jesus continued to speak in parables to this crowd and, as Matthew points out, this fulfilled Psalm 78:2 (Asaph being the "prophet" (seer - II Chron. 29:30)) - what would be uttered would be the truths "kept secret" since the foundation of the world - these truths being God's plan and how it would be unfolded - the Word of God then must never be treated as common and neglected, unappreciated and left un-researched by us
- e. Many end up reversing the correct process by interpreting Scripture by means of what they observe around them, superimposing the culture and popular philosophy upon the texts - yet the opposite is supposed to be the norm, where what is observed is interpreted by the revealed truth of God's Word

4. The parables/analogies of discovered treasures - vs. 44-45

- a. Having demonstrated that the outworking of the Kingdom of Heaven will be one mixed with the presence of "tares" and that it's initial appearance will be one of insignificant "smallness", Jesus goes on to illustrate the comparative value
- b. For instance, it's (the Kingdom) like a man finding a treasure in a field that is not his, and knowing now it's extraordinary value (that is unknown to others), he joyfully sells all he has to buy it

This "special insight" (insider information) is what we glean from Scripture

In these analogies we also see that the gaining of these treasures requires all they have - but they gladly and quickly do it because they recognize it is worth more than all they have

see Pro. 23:23, Php. 3:7-9

It is true that the Gospel will "pull in" but the "catch" will be all those who have come to Christ and thus are "in Christ"

Some, sadly, struggle with the idea that the good fish are saved to be eaten - but this more because of the shift in values in our culture - mankind is above all and it is to the greater purpose of a fish to be of use to a person and so it is for us to find greatest of purpose in being of use to God

Regret is most painful when there is not resolve of it - eternal condemnation is most painful because it will involve eternal regret with no possibility of relief

Note also that these should never cheat those under their responsibility by depriving them of the treasure by giving them anything of lesser value (worldly philosophies and priorities, all ultimately serving as counterfeit treasure because it is only of value here)

- c. Though others (including the current owners) would look on it just as a field, this person now has special insight and realizes **it is of greater value than all he possesses** - this fortunate revelation instantly revolutionizes his values structure
- d. In these verses, the treasure is the knowledge/truth of the reality of God's Kingdom where one devotes what they have to possessing it - not that it can be bought (that is not the point of the parable), but that all effort is made to "having it" over against having all else
- e. In the case of the man finding the treasure and hiding it, the hiding was to guard and protect it from being taken from him (he is urgent because he realizes the value)
- f. The "merchant" comes upon a pearl being sold and realizes the value of it more than the current possessor - just as with the original owner of the field, these parables demonstrate also that many who have the knowledge and potential possession of what is priceless disregard it and lose what they had (as the Scribes and Pharisees)
- g. The value of the truth and insight we have and the priceless value of being citizens of this kingdom should level-set our values in this life so much so that no cost is considered too great for what the Lord of this Kingdom would have us to do - what is "had" here anyway, will be lost in the end and what is gained "for" the Kingdom will never be lost!

5. The parable/analogy of the "dragnet" - vs. 47-50

- a. The Lord analogizes once more, only this time using the example of a very large net cast into the water to catch many fish in number and types - many see the need to make the net the Gospel (as the disciples were to be fishers of men), but it is more fitting with the example that the net is more a picture of the final judgment
- b. The likeness to the "Kingdom of Heaven" is, as it was with the weeds and the grain, a demonstration that both good and bad (worthless) will live together until the end
- c. Here though, the wording demonstrates a variety not only in number but in types - many types will be saved (people from all ethnicities and cultures) and of all those types many will also be found to be "worthless" for the purposes of those pulling them in
- d. As with the "tares," the angels of the Lord will come at the "end of the age" and will take out from among the "righteous" the "wicked" - notice the two descriptive words of those headed for judgment - as fish in this illustration they are "σαπρὰ" (useless, rotten) and are so because they are identified as "τοὺς πονηροὺς" (laboring at their evil - they "work at it")
- e. So, the Kingdom of Heaven as brought by Christ (His message, His work, leading to His absolute rule) will end this age (the time of the world under the affect of sin) with a judgement (a distinguishing separation of the good and bad), and He is the determiner of "good and bad" (which means our subjective definitions of such carry no authority)
- f. The significance of this is again seen in the eternal result of those uninterested, careless or hostile to the message and ministry of Christ - "weeping and gnashing of teeth"

B. The treasure of the "discipled scribe" - vs. 51-52

1. Now, having heard, Jesus asks if they understood (which is their privilege referenced in verse 19)
 - a. They answered in the affirmative - we see as things move on that they still had much to learn, but as far as the priority of the kingdom, they "got it"
 - b. As a parent stressing the importance of something just said, they often ask "Do you understand me?" or "Was this clear?" - this is followed by an expectation of some type of acting upon it
2. He again uses an analogy, only not of the Kingdom of Heaven but of their responsibility in it
 - a. He calls them to be "scribes" as a result of their discipleship - this term was often used of the Jewish scribes (lawyers and experts in the written Scriptures) - here it is used in its normal sense in referencing someone who learns and writes it down (to be shared with others)
 - b. These "discipled scribes" are to be like the head of a household who, in realizing their responsibility to provide for all those in the household, must use their "treasure"
 - c. In his treasure are not only "old things" (as the Scribes of their day did), but that which was "new" (and that being the explanation of all the "old" pointed to)
 - d. They needed to see that what they were being given and that they were able to understand it was now a responsibility that they needed to act on - as will be illustrated later, when one is given something from the master they are expected to invest/use it
 - e. The "new" also demonstrates they are ever learning

Many parents have been given this wealth and fail to invest it in the children God gave them

- f. This would apply to all of us as well, especially anyone (e.g. parents) that is responsible for others and placed in a position to affect others' "spiritual growth" - we waste these "treasures" when not seeking to invest them in others
- g. These teachings were to be used as money or other resources would be used to meet the needs of the household - compare with Pro. 10:20-21; II Cor. 4:5-7; Eph. 3:4-21

C. A prophet without honor in His hometown - vs. 53-58

1. He left off teaching the parables to go back to His hometown of Nazareth - vs. 53-57

This is another good example of why we don't place much stock in popular sentiment - they went from being amazed to resenting and despising Him in a short time

Many messengers can get so taken with themselves also that they soon come to see themselves as the authority - the danger (more than pride) is when they leave the Word to stand upon their own thoughts and opinions

As seen in the Luke 4 account, His message was most likely offensive because He would not deal with them on their own terms - it is common for us to place a higher authority on HOW we want something versus the actual WHAT it is

To this day people are still enamored by those "from out of town" - what they have been or become "used to" becomes something uninteresting

- a. "As was His custom..." (see also Luke 4:16-30) He taught in their Synagogue
- b. The response of the people was intense - they were at first "astonished" at His teaching which led them to question not only the source of His learning but that of His "mighty works" as well
- c. When asking the question "Where did this man get this wisdom..." they did what is typically human; disqualified Him based on what they could perceive of Him and His background as well as His lack of any "professional" training/credentials - this tactic is often used to avoid the actual message that is being delivered - many see the authority being in the messenger when it comes to doling out God's Word, when the authority is in the message (and its source)
- d. "It is a melancholy truth, that those who should know Christ best are often the most ignorant of himself, the doctrines of his word, and the operations of his Spirit." Clarke
- e. They then go on to clarify amongst themselves His earthly family, beginning with Joseph "the carpenter" - they failed to take into account the lineage of both Joseph and Mary, and (as Matthew began the Gospel with), had they done so would have seen He was of the line of David (the royal line) - so much of this type of criticism is profoundly uninformed!
- f. They treated Him as common - this was a fatal error! - this is what mankind has been attempting to do for centuries; make Christ simply human, with human flaws and weaknesses and only emphasize the parts of His teaching that magnify the importance of man over God
- g. Matthew records that they "took offense at Him" and in Luke's account, this was so strong they looked to kill Him - this adds even more force to Jesus' quote, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."
- h. Thus one of our adages, "Familiarity breeds contempt" - though true it reflects the immaturity and lack of genuine discernment (judgment) in most

2. Because of their typical response (common), not many miracles were done - vs. 58

Compare with Psalm 78:41 where Israel "limited" God - the underlying word for "limited" ("pained" in NASB) pictured limiting Him by demanding a sign - their imagination was limited, and seeking to force Him into it was like limiting Him

- a. Unbelief has far more consequences than can be realized - in this case, it was in the form of what they missed out on (they did not know what they were so vehemently turning down)
- b. Theirs, as reflected in the text, was one more of a reaction - as is normal with most stubbornness, they did not indicate they were interested in talking things through with Him
- c. The same goes for us - many "mighty works" of God are unseen and unknown because of our resistance to faith (lacking enough trust in Him and of Him to obey and entrust ourselves to Him)

XXIII. A Secular Assault on the Kingdom of Heaven - 14:1-12

A. So far, the opposition has been coming from the religious "circles"

1. Basic background - Herodias married her uncle (Herod Philip) the brother of Herod "the tetrarch" in this passage - by this marriage she had a daughter "Salome" - Herod was also known as "Antipas"

Herod was one of three sons of "Herod the Great" (the one who killed the boys in Bethlehem after Jesus birth)

Herod struggled with a lack of moral resolve either way

- a. Herodias left Philip to live with Herod, openly, without being married to him
- b. Herod wanted to have her as his wife but was openly rebuked by John the Baptist
- c. Not unexpectedly, Herod wanted John silenced so he had him imprisoned but feared to have him executed because he recognized that John was a righteous man - the underlying reason was a "grudge" that Herodias had against John - see Mk. 6:19-20

2. Herod was finally hearing of Jesus and feared it was John raised from the dead - vs. 1-2

One of the ongoing lies of sin is that it will be "worth it" to us and that we will get away with it

- a. Matthew uses this response of Herod to go back and explain what had happened to John
- b. It is remarkable to consider the "supernatural" and even religious thinking that will be a part of the thinking of the Godless when they are afraid or intimidated - he instinctively knew (as part of conscience) that he had done wrong and would have to give an account for it
- c. Though John was silenced, the Word of God was not - see Zech. 1:5-6 and II Tim. 2:9

B. John the Baptist is beheaded - vs. 3-12

1. For "Herodias' sake" Herod had John imprisoned - his first error - vs. 3-5

This by no means excuses Herod - everyone must learn to say "no" to sin and "yes" to responsibility

- a. It is interesting to consider why Herod did what he did - he personally had a respect for John, but his desire for sin was making demands of him - everything comes with a cost, especially sin!
- b. Sin seems to promise freedom and various sorts of liberty yet proves to be a demanding boss
- c. What John communicated was correct - it was not "lawful" what Herod was looking to do - he had not acted immediately, but was, apparently, slowly trying to bring it about
- d. Here, Matthew tells us that Herod feared the response of the people if he killed a prophet - as he was facing and would soon face directly, one sin was pitting itself against another (the love of popularity and the lust he had for Herodias)

2. For Salome's sake (daughter of Herodias), he promised with an oath - his second error - vs. 6-12

It is never right to try to make one sin obligate us to more sin

- a. At Herod's birthday celebration he is so taken with a dance he makes an unlawful oath (see Lev. 5:4) in front of the entire group - better to have broken the oath, but he feared "man" more than he feared God
- b. We learn in Mark 6:23, he offered anything (up to half his "kingdom") to Salome - yet, with such an offer, she, under the counsel of her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (in this case, resentment outranked greed)
- c. Herod regretted what he had done, but yielded and had John beheaded - the head was brought on a platter to Salome and she gave it to her mother - the triumph was temporary, for now Jesus was on the scene and declaring the same truths - it was inescapable!
- d. "...but this triumph over the faithful reprover of her, and Herod's vices, did not last long; for quickly after this, they were stripped of their honours and riches, and deprived of the kingdom, and banished to Lyons in France, where they died." Gill
- e. Some historical accounts of this incident describe Herodias poking a needle through the tongue, as if demonstrating final victory over the tongue that had so bothered her
- f. John's body was buried out of respect by his disciples who then reported it to Jesus

God was done with John so this was allowed to happen - but Herodias and Herod would be unable to escape their appointment with God later

The true battle was not with Gods instrument but with God Himself - many battle God's messengers not seeing the futility in it

3. This was a little more than a year till the Lord would be crucified - then it would be a combination of the religious and the secular leadership that would have Him crucified

XXIV. Jesus Continues to Minister, Teach, Perform Miracles and Challenge the Religious Leaders - 14:13-15:39

A. Upon hearing of the execution of John, Jesus goes off into seclusion - vs. 13

Notice we have no rebuking words against Herod upon receiving the news of John - it was truly a scandal (conspiracy fulfilled) but Jesus knew full well God's oversight of it all

1. Based on the description of this also in Mark 6:30-32, it looks as though Jesus did this to get a bit of time alone with His disciples and regroup after their mission (see Mt. 10)
 - a. There is some speculation that He also left the area of the rule of Herod Antipas
 - b. The tides of opposition would continue to grow as His crowds also increased - as indicated in His previous parables, this was all in keeping with God's design
2. The crowds, still determined to see and hear more, followed on foot - these would (as those who went to hear John) venture into more of a wilderness area to follow Christ

B. The miracle of the feeding of the thousands - vs. 14-21

True compassion is outward focused - it is our focus on our own needs and feelings that so often distracts us from proper focus on the needs of others above our own

1. Jesus is described again as being motivated by "compassion" upon seeing the crowd that had gathered again (in Mk. 6:34 His compassion was in seeing them as "sheep having no shepherd")

- a. The underlying word for "compassion" (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη) describes a deep-seated feeling/emotional affect on seeing them in their need
- b. His compassion is exceptional, seeing He had received so much opposition from many in their midst and had just heard the news of John's death

2. As Jesus ministered, the time progressed and the disciples became concerned for the practical needs

It should be an obvious point to all of us that when God is in whatever ministry we find ourselves, He will meet the need - if not met, then we can safely assume it was not a true need (at least not at this time)

- a. They pointed out that they were in a "desolate place" and that food would therefore not be readily available - from their vantage point, ministry would need to stop - we see in the Mk. 6 account that they asked if they should go and buy the food and that it would take 200 denarii (a lot of money to them) - they sought only the "proven" means that they were used to, but quite often our experience (and reliance upon it) limits our faith in respect to God
- b. The Lord directly tells them, "...give them something to eat!" - they have only a little bread (five loaves) and two fish
- c. Jesus had them (the food) brought to Him, had the crowd sit in preparing to eat and looking "toward heaven" he "blessed them" (and expression of thanks/gratitude) - as is about to be seen "little is much when God is in it" but also when received with gratitude

Sadly, we are often ungrateful for what God has given because the quantity is unsatisfactory to us - yet God ALWAYS provides enough for His all-knowing purposes

No one could have anticipated this is how the Lord would meet the need - the same is still true and we do not want to be those "limiting" God based upon our estimates or perceived methods to a solution

- d. "He gave to the disciples and they gave to the crowds" - all ate to satisfaction and, seeing there were 12 full baskets left over, it looks as though each of the disciples had a full basket remaining when all were filled (More than enough had been provided!)
- e. "He that could increase that small quantity so much had the power of creation; and he that could do that could create the world out of nothing, and had no less than divine power." Barnes
- f. There were well over 5,000 who were fed since the count was only of the men - we see His power showcased by the contrasts - overwhelming need (so many) met with the miniscule

C. Jesus walks on water - vs. 22-33

1. Jesus "makes" the disciples get in a boat and go ahead of Him - vs. 22-23

It is "typically human" to follow after God when we see how it does or might provide what we see as our needs, with very little difficulty on our part - Jesus knew their greater need and most wanted nothing to do with that - most want God "on their terms"

- a. John 6:15 sheds more light on the motivation - Jesus knew that they were about to forcibly "make Him king" - these were so taken with what had just happened, they were ready to make Him their leader - it is enlightening to see that (still in John 6), after He taught them more difficult truths they began to grumble (John 6:50) and most left off following Him
- b. Jesus (we see in our text) sent the crowds away also, and went off alone to pray in the mountain while it was the evening - it is possible He did this knowing full well the rejections about to come and having just heard the news of John - prayer was something our Lord did and needed, so we can be assured we will also need the encouragement that comes when bringing all things before the Father, alone in prayer
- c. Again, Jesus was not out for the popularity and the "crowds" - He was focused (as the supreme example) upon doing the will of the Father - consultants of our day would look on this as a grave mistake (because they look on popularity as the objective, and the ministry objectives as secondary) - meeting actual needs is most often a thankless job!
- d. We know it was a long time in prayer as it was until "the fourth watch" (most of the night)

Intimidation can find much of its source in the fear of disappointing people, just as "encouragement" (temporal) finds its source in the compliments of those having various forms of their vanity catered to

2. In contrast, the disciples were struggling with the weather on the sea of Galilee - vs. 24

As is about to be demonstrated, God allows such times to further showcase His power - these "challenges" demonstrate our weakness, His strength, our vulnerability, His protective presence

- a. They most likely should have been able to make it across in good time, but because of the high winds and waves, they were fighting to make any progress at all and therefore were out on the lake most of the night also (likely fatigued)
- b. They were a long way off from land being "beaten" by the waves (with the word carrying the idea of the waves coming up over the boat, rocking it fiercely)

3. Jesus comes to them in a way they would never have expected - vs. 25-27

Most would not be prone to look for Jesus in the storm - many look for Him in the absence of "storms" and **question** Him when difficulties come

When fear is able to grip us, we are likely to reach irrational or superstitious conclusions (in the moment)

The Lord's command, "μη φοβεῖσθε" (don't fear) is imperative middle or passive - a command to not allow yourself to fear or do not make yourself afraid - control your assessment - fear comes from improper assessments

- a. Notice the almost "matter of fact" way this is introduced - at the "fourth watch of the night He came to them...", which in most circumstances would be unremarkable, but adding "...walking on the sea" we can more readily understand the initial response of the disciples
- b. Upon seeing Him (which would have been difficult because of the darkness, though maybe there was lightning or it was not far from morning), they were "terrified," and in this fear they "cried out" (ἐκραξαν, "to shriek" (a word meant to sound like what it represents)) - someone or some of them yelled out "It is a ghost" (Φάντασμα - a disembodied spirit)
- c. Graciously, Jesus "immediately" speaks to calm them, "take courage, it is I" - what they feared as if approaching doom, was their Savior, their friend! - the precision of this short statement is key - the reason to be "emboldened" was not because of the circumstances or because they "had it in them" but directly because "it is I" - He makes the difference of one moment of terror and despair becoming a situation of courage, because of who He is over and above the storm
- d. Notice that the storm does not stop at this point - it still serves a purpose

4. Peter acts on the Lord's command - vs. 28-31

Presumption is characterized by acting unreasonably without being assured "the Lord is in it" - faith will look irresponsible (presumptuous), the only difference being assured the Lord has so instructed - presumption acts apart from informed instruction

- a. Most seem to use this text to ridicule Peter as a poor example, yet, taking into account what the Lord had just said ("be emboldened"), it seems right that Peter would act this way
- b. Peter, rightfully seeking permission (this was not rash) asks if he should come to Him - the Lord simply says "Come!" - then, as if simply stating the facts (without added drama (since, in light of the Lord being there it is a small thing)) Peter gets out, walks on the water to go to Him
- c. "But seeing the wind..." - for that brief moment Peter's focus was aptly focused on Jesus and then drifted to focus on the storm's affects - his "common sense" kicked in and he began to sink
- d. This is a profound illustration of life in general - focus on the Lord, and the storms are seen as a tool of the Lord and are unable to counter His will - focus on the storm and the circumstances appear dreadful/intimidating and we sink underneath their waves

So much of life pivots on comparisons - what do we compare our circumstances to? If to ourselves, we drown in them - if to the Lord, we are held above them

There is a profound comparison to this text in Psalm 107:23-32 - this describes what God is able and has done

This is to be recognized as an essential life perspective not a remarkably rare one - this is how it always is (we are always before the God of the universe and we are under His care)

Consider what happened - Jesus, still standing on the water, used His position on the water to life up Peter - this is illustrative of how one person's faith can affect the results of another's doubt

Because a "double-focused" person is unsteady (like being intoxicated) and unbalanced

Many wrongly look to worship to build their faith - we worship truly when looking at things through the "eyes of faith"

This would be key to remember (for the disciples) as things seemed to turn against Him - all things would still be submissive to Him

Emphasis is placed on touching just the "fringe" of His "cloak" - it demonstrates His immense power to heal

"Error" also has its "authorities" (experts) to deal with those their underlings are unable to handle

This seems like an insignificant issue to us today but to them it was very important - a common practice had had a religious significance attached to it (which was not in the Law of Moses)

The authorities of these peripheral laws had come to have an assumed authority of themselves and had also come to be more revered than the written Law given to Moses by God

e. Being afraid (focusing on the storm), he began to sink (just what anyone would believe should happen when trying to stand on water (let alone in the middle of a storm)) - many expect the worse because it has proven itself a reliable prediction (because of a life not looking to God's omnipotent hand in all things)

f. Imagine the scene! Peter begins to sink and Jesus (God in the flesh) reaches down and grabbed him - Jesus asks "Why did you doubt?" (after pointing out the issue) - it was not the storm, it was not the water, it was not even the "laws of physics" that were the issue - it was "little faith" even with the Creator of all right there with him ("no faith" is hostile)

g. From the disciples perspective, Jesus question seems odd in light of the storm and circumstances (why not doubt!?) - from Jesus perspective (seeing God as over all things) His question made perfect sense, and Peters' doubt was absurd

h. The word for "doubt" (ἐδίστασας) is only used twice in the NT and pictures one divided between two "stances" - in this case, there was faith (Peter was not one of "no faith") but he also trusted his limited perspective over against the Lord's welcome to join Him on the water

i. Compare this also to James 1:6-8 - when it reads, "...that man ought not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord..." it is more in dealing with the person's disappointed expectations and not the Lord's inability (and the significance of focused (undistracted) faith)

5. "You certainly are God's son!" - vs. 32-33

a. As soon as Jesus and Peter stepped into the boat the wind stopped - again, as before in the previous storm, there was instant silence/calm

b. Those in the boat "worshipped Him" and openly declared His divinity (for no one could do such things) - faith strengthened leads to worship and not the other way around

c. Jesus receives the worship - another evidence of His deity - familiarity with Christ, because of time spent with Him, will produce such worship! - up to this point, it was evidenced in "all things" being in submission to Him

D. Jesus continues to heal (remains focused) - vs. 34-36

1. After this miraculous crossing, Jesus continues to minister even though facing growing opposition

a. He was immediately recognized and word spread - even though healing was all that was being sought, He still healed them

b. In chapter 9 it was even more miraculous that He healed with just being touched, yet here all coming asked just to be able to touch him and they were healed in doing so

2. Jesus was the supreme example of ministering even when opposed - the self-focus of the people and the rejection of the religious leaders did not dictate His service - this ought to be the same with us - we serve, not for improved circumstances or recognition of our work, but simply for the need of others (that God has placed around us)

E. "Invalidating" the Word of God for the sake of "tradition" - 15:1-20

1. The misdirected accusation against the disciples - vs. 1-2

a. Pharisees and their supporting Scribes (experts in the Law) came from Jerusalem to confront Jesus - these high-ranking leaders in Judaism would have carried a lot of authority with these "common" people in the area of Galilee

b. The issue they decide to confront Him on is hand washing before eating - this was not a "sanitary" issue with them but a ceremonial one (ceremonial cleansing to counter any impure things the hands may have done or the impure people they may have touched with their fingers)

c. The authority being appealed to by these religious leaders was the "tradition of the Elders" - these were "oral traditions" handed down from the "ancients" and many had their origin in the attempts of the sincere to avoid even getting close to breaking one of the Laws God had given them through Moses - these were "peripheral" (fences) of protection

d. These protective instructions had become laws themselves by tradition, and soon came to have "fences" built around them as well - after centuries of this, these had accumulated into a massive resource of codes to follow (observe religiously)

e. Since these had been so long observed (and even documented) these Pharisees did not even consider their authority would be questioned - from their vantage point Jesus was cornered (since His disciples were not being corrected on this (one of many) essential)

f. So the accusation was "misdirected" because the authority behind it was illegitimate

2. Tradition versus commandment - vs. 3-6

These became so many and so detailed, there was not much effort to consult the Law of God

The honoring of parents was not to be looked upon as conditional - we honor them because they are given to us from God; they are His choice for us - to "revile" them is, in an indirect way, to revile God's choice for us

Since, they said, it was dedicated to God, they dare not take from it to help their parents - the "temple" work was of greater importance

Even Christians do the same to this day - they will be so focused on the "things of God" they will neglect other responsibilities that are also the "things of God" - this can be in other areas such as being so focused on family that other God-given instruction/commands are neglected

The "commandment of the Lord" (God's Word) is the authority, not traditions and labels

- a. Going first to their "authority" He asks why they break God's commandment in the keeping/observing of their tradition - as He is about to demonstrate, they were "religiously" breaking God's commandments (and their "pious" traditions were making it look like a "good work")
- b. Over time, the traditions handed down were "added to" by the ongoing generations
- c. The tense is interesting also - the Lord essentially asks "why are you transgressing God's commandment with your tradition?" (present indicative active)
- d. The command noted is from Deut. 5:16 followed by a warning from Ex. 21:17 to demonstrate the seriousness before God of breaking it - it was no small thing!
- e. To "revile" the parent was to speak evil against them, to curse them - "... and is to be understood, not only of giving abusive language to parents, but of slighting, as the Hebrew word signifies, and neglecting them, taking no notice of them, when needy and in distress.." Gill
- f. This was so serious it was to be punished by death - Lev. 20:9
- g. Their tradition was unrighteously clever - If a parent would appeal to their son for assistance (usually in their older years), they could say something along the lines of "What you have hoped to get from me (in aid) has been given to God (by a vow) and so it is not available to you."
- h. Ironically, they appealed to God's work as an "excuse" from their obligation to their parents
- i. This didn't necessarily mean they had vowed all that they had, just what extra resources they might have had to help support their parents in their time of need - either way, it was motivated by stinginess which finds its source in covetousness and greed
- j. Some believe that all or most wealth was "dedicated" to the temple, yet was still in the "care" of the son (who would need to deny any requests for any of it since he was now a "steward" of what belongs to God)
- k. We are to strive to be responsible in **all** areas, not just the ones we decide upon - Church families should challenge each other to all areas of the Lord's work, not just the ones that cater to the "corporate body" - much of what is done as "the Lord's work" is not His work and much that is neglected by churches/Christians is really the Lord's work!
- l. By such practices and teachings, they have made the Word of God "void" (ἠκυρώσατε - to annul, invalidate, make of no effect) - traditions then and now often come to take the place of the actual Word of God
- m. In Mark 7:12 He also said, "...then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.." - it was so abused as to free them from any such responsibility - a "tradition" became a lifestyle (way of life) in the disregard for a clear command of God

3. The diagnosis of hypocrisy - vs. 7-9

Typically, religious hypocrisy lived long enough, is shown for what it is because the inner ability to judge what is right/truth becomes disengaged

Like much of the film production make-up of our, masks can be so intricately done that they look real and become difficult to tell without close inspection

Jesus' quote is in agreement with the LXX in contrast to the Masoretic texts

This is actually a breaking of the foremost commandment - Deut. 6:5

We are seeing social emphases becoming the core content in Churches

- a. Jesus calls them what they are, "you hypocrites" - ὑποκριταί - someone play-acting while being concealed under a mask (it is interesting that the base word is κρίνω (to "judge")) - it is the attempt of man to appear before men as he ought to appear before God, only in this case, their choice of masks is contradictory
- b. This type of "mask wearing" can become so much a part of one's life, that they come to believe it is what they really are (until something happens (like meeting Christ) and either the mask comes off or an attack offense is mounted)
- c. In this instance, the mask had all the appearance of piety and selflessness, when in reality it was ungodly and profoundly selfish
- d. Jesus uses Isaiah's words to identify the issue - "...rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you..." - excellently, very well did he reveal the truth about them as he had done with their ancestors
- e. First the "heart of the matter" - as with their ancestors, these honor God with their lips (words/speech) but their heart is "far away from Me" - they outwardly/publicly "worship" God (and have the rhetoric worked out), but it is not genuine
- f. So their worship of Him is "vain" (empty) and in so doing, the unavoidable result is "teaching as doctrines the traditions of man" - as seen in this example, their motives were that of greed, laziness, neglect and lack of love - all of which also lie at the heart of why we see, in our day, "traditions" taught as though they are Scriptural doctrines
- g. "God has been effectively excluded from His own worship" R.T. France
- h. These "precepts of man" are the same things replacing true "doctrine" today

4. What is it that actually “defiles” a man? - vs. 10 - 20

Even Peter seems concerned at the absoluteness of Jesus answer (see vs. 15 where Peter asks for explanation)

A good deal of trust ends up being misplaced trust in religious teachers because these “trusting” are instructed to obey whatever is said without any “sense” needed - this truly is senseless trust!

As Jesus already clarified in Mt. 12:34 - “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” - so what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart (it is how the heart is expressed)

see also Rom. 14:17

It looks as though the Pharisees communicated this to the disciples (or the people) but not directly to Christ, which is often the response of those that cannot counter what they’ve heard so they play the “it’s offensive” card

False teaching can come in the form of popular trends that come and go if “waited-out” - but there are also those, as in our text, that last for generations and are passed on (weeds beget weeds)

compare to Isa. 42:14-22

“profligate” - utterly immoral and wasteful

This is another way to encourage better and more careful listening in the future - inattentive ears and minds miss what is valuable and needed to build the understanding

So this is a concept they are very familiar with - the food itself is not dealt with ceremonially (as if pure) so the “point of the matter” must be something else - the heart

If the externals are the only thing dealt with in a person’s life, their actual needs will never be addressed - “surface answers” and solutions never get to the “heart”

- a. Jesus now returns to what started this dialogue - the Pharisees were concerned regarding unwashed hands when eating because of the ceremonial defilement it would bring (since it was in opposition to what was being taught and practiced)
- b. Jesus “calls the crowd to Him” - it was probable that they had backed away out of respect for the Pharisees, and that the discussion would be “above” them
- c. It is interesting that we do not see any response from the Pharisees to counter Him
- d. Jesus now takes to teaching and explaining the root of the matter (which had been missed)
- e. The instruction “Hear and understand” is key - normally they had just been hearing their religious leaders and doing (blindly) - now they are to hear/listen and understand the “what” and “why” of the matter, and then be able to obey with understanding
- f. The wisdom/parable is simple - “It’s not what goes into the mouth that defiles (morally) the man, but what comes out of the mouth” - even considering those who would have argued back regarding the wrongness of eating forbidden foods, the substance of Christ’s answer would deal with it also - for to eat what the Law forbade would require a **heart** determined to do so (for the hands follow the command of the heart) - vs. 11
- g. What comes out of a man’s mouth is defiling because his heart is defiled, and in that lies the area that really needs to be addressed - ceremonial practices (as would religious traditions and practices today) are often used to hide actual bad character (these become disguises)
- h. The disciples come to Jesus to tell Him that the Pharisees were “offended” when they heard “this statement” (most likely the one that clarifies that what goes into the mouth does not defile)
- i. “Sore eyes cannot bear clear light; and nothing is more provoking to proud imposers than the undeceiving of those whom they have first blindfolded, and then enslaved.” MH
- j. The instruction of the Lord to them is “Let them alone” (“let them be” and do not heed their reaction nor their attitude) - these were not those that “the Heavenly Father” had “planted” (as playing off the parable regarding the wheat and the tares) - vs. 13-14
- k. One way or another, these “invasive plants” will be uprooted (either in reference to the final judgment or to just the nature “weeding” process” of the Father through the ages
- l. **“So far from being reliable expositors of the kingdom of God, the Pharisees were not even in the kingdom.”** Leon Morris
- m. So, the answer is to not heed them (disregard them) - it is sadly common for us to become obsessed with religious opposition, and spend too much of our resources arguing with them and researching answers to their proposed premise (which is flawed to start with)
- n. Look at the illustration of why they are to be avoided (and not followed in the least) - “They are blind guides of the blind” - these unseeing, lead those who cannot see; they have the worst kind of blindness ... not knowing they’re blind
- o. Over time, all blind leaders will lead their blind followers to “fall into a pit” - “If the minister be ignorant, he cannot teach what he does not know; and the people cannot become wise unto salvation under such a ministry - he is ignorant and wicked, and they are profligate.” Clarke
- p. Peter and the disciples wanted Jesus to further explain “the parable” - they apparently were struggling with the concept since the idea (that what they eat defiling them (morally)) was something they also had grown-up with (though were at this instance neglecting) - vs. 15
- q. Jesus’ question was one of a rebuke (educational, not condemning) - When asking “Are you still lacking understanding?” it pointed out that enough had been done and said by Him that they should have figured this out
- r. He removes all philosophical “clutter” from the concept of the actual food, to demonstrate the actual issue - food goes into the mouth, into the stomach and is “eliminated” - Jesus actual words in the Greek, “καὶ εἰς ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκβάλλεται” are more vivid than our English translation essentially saying that the food goes out from the body into the “privy” (the toilet)
- s. What comes from the heart is defiling - so God’s focus is on the heart not the food or the hands - for from the heart comes all sorts of genuine vileness, “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” just to name some - some of the most ceremonially clean (hygienically) people can also be some of the most filthy and vile individuals when examining their immorality

The conscience will convict even the evil heart and will respond, on its own either by resisting and pushing on in evil, or with self-defined moral (religious) deeds and philosophies to excuse or justify their guilt

- t. So it is the heart of a man that is the real issue and the real solution must deal with the heart - the real solution will be a “new heart” brought on by regeneration - the “new creature” is so, because of a heart of a different kind - this will need to take place apart from the man since, with a defiled heart, he will be unable to discern his own condition - see Jer. 17:9-10
- u. **“The whole bundle of popish religion is made up of designs and contrivances to pacify conscience without Christ”** John Owen
- v. It is important to also notice the origin of the sins Jesus lists - “... evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander...” are not the result of one’s environment (as we see so much of our “experts” trying to make a case for in our day)

F. Genuine faith seen in a humble response - vs. 21-28

1. Jesus left the area to go to some of the farthest reaches of Israel near the borders of Tyre and Sidon

This demonstrates a focus (despite modern disagreement) on the plan/instruction of God - Christ was sent to the “lost sheep of Israel”

This is important to know in properly understanding His response to the Canaanite woman

- a. In Mark 7:24, Mark also included the statement, “... And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.” - He was essentially in Gentile territory and, as He was about to say, He was not there to minister to them (at least officially)
- b. Texts such as Rom. 15:8 demonstrate not only God’s work to be done, but even the order - we do not want to become too creative in how we interpret or implement obedience of clear instruction in God’s Word - we are here to do God’s bidding, His way, and in His time to fulfill His will as He sovereignly decreed it

2. Jesus’ apparent harsh response to her, exemplifying humble trust and confidence - vs. 22-28

Clarke notes on the woman’s request

1. It is short; 2. humble; 3. full of faith; 4. fervent; 5. modest; 6. respectful; 7. rational; 8. relying only on the mercy of God; 9. persevering

Those who assume the innate value and goodness of “man” struggle with this severely - those who realize mankind’s utter depravity in comparison to God’s holiness are not reactionary, not trying to “force” the Lord at any point - though the Lord’s usage of the situation appears to be more than a “black and white” position and is out to showcase the significance of faith

Many of those bitter against God are so because of their impatience stemming from their lack of faith to “wait on the Lord and be of good courage”

Some, unnecessarily, try to lessen the sense of “dogs” by pointing out the underlying word indicates “small dogs” (puppies) (κυνάρια) that would be allowed in as pets - still, to be called any type of dog was demeaning!

Pure gratefulness comes only from hard truth of our condition and situation - God’s grace is profoundly amazing when we see more of who and what He is and who and what we are

- a. A Canaanite woman (Greek/Syrophenician) crying out to Him to “have mercy on me!” - her pain was because of her daughter - and even though she knew that He could cast out the demon and heal her, the mother asks for mercy (pity), not making any case for her merit or worthiness - her posture was correct and it is the obvious influence of humanistic thinking that causes some to approach God with a demanding spirit
- b. Her addressing Him as “Lord” and “Son of David” indicates she recognized/acknowledged Him as the Messiah (more than most Jews and Jewish leaders could discern)
- c. Her plea was based on her daughter being “cruelly” treated by a demon possessing her - she apparently had heard of Jesus and believed He had power over demons as well
- d. Then begins a section of Scripture that has troubled many, not understanding what was taking place - it all begins by Jesus not responding to her at all (ignoring her) - the basic answer was that He was, as it were, playing the part of a normal Jewish leader/teacher’s position and response to a Gentile - yet, as we will see, it was not for the sake to stand firm in such a practice, but to demonstrate exceptional faith, (again) coming from a Gentile
- e. The disciples become impatient because she then pursues them, “...she keeps shouting at us”
- f. They wanted her gone since she was so persistent, and it is likely they wanted the Lord to heal her daughter to be rid of her (they were not motivated by compassion)
- g. Jesus then states (to the disciples) that He was sent only to “the lost sheep of Israel” (which was a true statement (as He instructed the disciples in 10:5-6))
- h. Still in her persistence, kneels before Him and pleads, “Lord, help me!” - true faith places no requirements on the Lord, knowing He knows infinitely (especially when His ways look wrong and even hurtful in our eyes) - thus it seeks mercy/pity
- i. Then, when most would expect a sympathetic and tender response, the Lord uses what is considered to be popular sentiment by stating that it is “not good” to “take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” - the “children” being Jews and the “dogs” being the Gentiles - note, that to be called the “sinners” we are (and many other terms) is worse than being called a “dog” - sinners are worse than animals!
- j. Her response was remarkable! She seems to concede the point, though some says she is countering Him - either way, she “owns” (accepts) the position of the “dog” - yet even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table - her utilization of the Lord’s analogy was correct (for even for the dogs, there were some provisions) - again, this demonstrates one whose expectations were fully informed - many grumble and complain at some of the “hard texts” that “tell it like it is” regarding us and our unworthiness (native/natural vileness)
- k. Knowing full well how she would respond, He now openly praises her demonstration of faith calling it “great” (greatness seen only in the face of such direct and even “blunt” contradiction)

She took Him at His word, even though His words were difficult and seemingly harsh - He had the right to be hard, but she appealed to His mercy in light of His "holy hardness" which was appropriate

- l. This is a key example of faith in action for us - persistence and unflinching trust is at the core of real faith/trust - just as Abraham did not "stagger at the promise", though all but God's Word seemed to be against what he was looking for/expecting (see Rom. 4:16-25)
- m. This woman received was she was seeking so determinedly **in faith** - it was not her faith but the object that was key, for many have very strong faith, just misinformed or misdirected - see also Psalm 145:17-21 and the significance of "fearing" Him as a part of loving Him

G. Jesus compassion is demonstrated again, along with His limitless power - vs. 29-39

1. Jesus left the region and came nearer to the Sea of Galilee, and He reached "the mountain"

(possibly has the proper article because He had been there before or that it was well known) - vs. 29-31

- a. As soon as He is seated, large crowds come made up of generally two types of people; those that were healthy, carrying or assisting those that were in physical need - these were bringing the lame, blind and others and "laid them down at His feet"
- b. The crowds, understandably, "marveled" when they saw those healed that, just moments earlier, were incurable - these were likely most, if not all, Gentiles seeing they "glorified the God of Israel" - this, of course, was one of the primary reasons for these miracles
- c. Still focused on His purpose, Jesus ministers for three days

2. The feeding of the four thousand - vs. 32-39

- a. Many have attempted to make a case that this account is the same (a repeat) of the account of feeding the 5,000 - this, though, is in a different setting and with a different group - the first was used to demonstrate (as seen in John 6) Jesus as the "bread of life" while this one demonstrates the same miracle being done to and for Gentiles (plus, Jesus mentions both in 16)
- b. Jesus expresses His compassion to the disciples for the people - He felt for them, especially because they had stayed with Him for three days, and no longer had provision - these were desperate people sacrificing comfort and even remaining beyond their provisions - it had to be more than for healing, seeing that so many were not leaving afterward - their longevity demonstrated a sincere hunger (which seems severely lacking today)
- c. The care for their physical well-being as they would be leaving, demonstrates also another category of concern we ought to have for each other - granted, not the only area of concern and prayer, but certainly **A** concern nonetheless - the goal for us, often, is the meeting of physical needs to bring those with spiritual needs to Christ
- d. It would appear, at this point, that the disciples had soon forgotten what had happened not long before in the feeding of the 5,000 - they ask the Lord where they can get such an amount of food to feed so many - there are some that make a case that the emphasis seems to be more on pointing out their inability so as to indicate it would depend on the Lord
- e. Jesus, once again asks how much they have left (seven "loaves" of bread and a few small fishes) - As before, Jesus has the people prepare to be fed - He thanks the Father for the food and distributes it to the disciples who distribute it to the people - as before there is more than enough to fill them all, and the remnants gathered filled seven large baskets
- f. It is interesting that it was 7 baskets in return for the 7 loaves that were given by the disciples - as the Lord had stressed in Luke 6:38, in giving to God, it would be returned to them "pressed down and running over" (a picture of a generous return)

We're not told that this ministry to Gentiles was a result of the time with the Syrophenician woman - but her demonstration of faith was impressive and immediately after, Matthew now records Jesus healing Gentiles

There is no "racism" with God, only the order and perfection of His plan/decreed - the offer to Israel was not without purpose; even their rejection of their Messiah fit the purpose of God

Even though so many would turn on Him (in Jerusalem), a good number would stay consistent through further trials - genuineness is most often evidenced in the face of trials and challenges

It is more likely, though, that they just doubted - see Mt. 16:9-10 where Jesus asks if they have forgotten these instances when they forgot to bring bread for themselves

compare to Luke 18:28-30

XXV. Various Tests - 16:1-28

A. This chapter contains tests from the Pharisees/Sadducees to Christ, and from Christ to His disciples - vs. 1-4

1. As is typical of those doubting God, these came demanding a sign on their terms

Even with the multitude of impressive "signs" (miracles), these wanted to "test" Jesus by having him abide by their will in how they would choose to be convinced

- a. In this case, they wanted Jesus to "show them a sign from heaven" - this would involve something in the sky, or from the sky (as Samuel did in I Sam. 12:16-18, as Isaiah did with the moving of the shadow in the sundial with Hezekiah in Isa. 38:8 and Moses did with manna from heaven in Ex. 16:4)
- b. The fundamental flaw in their approach was their "front" that they would be convinceable - they did, as the text reveals, do this "testing Him" - even if some thought they would be convinced, they would not have - **it was never the "miracle" that brought faith... it was the message, the Word of God that did**

2. Jesus uses their forecasting the weather by signs in the "heaven" to counter them

We need to weigh carefully the consequences of uniting with philosophical/religious opponents on issues

Thus they really weren't focused on the future; just the past and present

In Mark 8 :12 we read that Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit" - such approaches to Him are grievous to Him

As stressed earlier, their problem is not a mind issue as much as it is a heart issue - even if the mind becomes impressed/convinced, they will/must reject it

And such is the fatal weakness of the Godless - they will never think /imagine "high" enough - their imaginations are bound to this world/age! (even their religions)

It seems odd that they were not confused as to the usage of "Pharisees and Sadducees" - yet we often hear only the parts our minds are "tuned-into" the most

"The dogmas and opinions of the two parties in question were not the worst of them, but the spirit of their life: their dislike of real godliness." F.F. Bruce

Demonstrating that a mind distracted by life's necessities (as though some day they will not be there), will miss far more important truths and lessons (learning) needed

- a. These have the ability to learn and recognize the "signs" of the weather (red sky in morning versus the red sky at evening) - these were well respected leaders and it's intriguing to realize these two groups were philosophical enemies - yet they united against Christ - this is often (not always) a sign that a belief system is more circumstantial than it is principled
- b. These were "signs from heaven" they saw and yet, because of their lack of genuine perception (from a lack of understanding God's Word), could not discern the "signs of the times" - these signs were the messianic signs prophesied in their Scriptures (but as evidenced earlier, traditions had become more important to them)
- c. Yet even now, so-called "seasoned Christians" are unable to see the working (or potential working) of God all around them - the overall, fundamental cause of this was that they were not looking - too busy seeking out the "signs" of economical or political movements/happening

3. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign..." - vs. 4

- a. Such a generation is characterized by their "demands" (what they "seek" for) to fulfill what they believe will satisfy them - though, such a generation does not discern itself, failing to realize that if their demands were met, they would still demand more
- b. It is doubtful that the intent of these religious leaders was the seeking out of convincing "proof", but simply to create a test that He could not pass - this is instinctive to the skeptic at heart, who will put forward scenarios to disprove **what he does not like** - this then becomes the crux of their reasoning against God, in that He does not, nor can He come up to their "high" requirements (though nothing ever could)
- c. Again, as Jesus stated the first time (12:39), the only sign that would be given to that generation would be the sign of Jonah - this is a sign/evidence that such a generation could not nor ever would have conceived of
- d. This sign from God would actually become the dread of the evil generation (as it is to this day) There is still a dread fear of the risen Lord, and an unavoidable accountability to Him

B. Missing "the point" as a result of little faith (little or misdirected trust/confidence) - vs. 5-12

1. The setting (so as to understand the disciples misunderstanding) - the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread with them on the next leg of their journey

- a. This is not making a case that they should have or needed to - they were following Jesus and had ample reasons to not be concerned about daily food
- b. So, when Jesus warns them, using an analogy of "leaven" the disciples, in their minds, immediately went to bread (as having leaven in it)

2. Jesus offers a double warning - "watch out" and "beware" - "Ὠρᾶτε καὶ προσέχετε" as saying be alert to see what is dangerous and be on guard against it

- a. Both words used together indicate the possibility one may see something and know it as harmful but may yet still be unguarded against it
- b. In this case, the warning was against the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" - leaven was typically referencing "yesterday's dough" to add to "today's dough" so it would rise
- c. Here, though, it was the infectious spread of their influence (in their teachings, priorities and overall approaches to God) - so lookout for and be on guard against self-righteous morality, security in it, and the pursuit of power and influence for the sake of pride
- d. The danger, as in the comparison with leaven, is that their teachings and influence have a natural tendency to spread quickly - it must be avoided, and as with yeast, must not be allowed to be added to the "mix" of one's life or thinking - thus is the nature of man-made religion and man's replacements (or "improvements" upon) of God and His word!

3. The disciples, trying to discern what He meant (διελογίζοντο), reached the conclusion that He was referencing their forgetting the bread

- a. Jesus references them (in a rebuke) as "little-faiths" because they were talking about not having brought bread to eat
- b. Yet, they missed that He was using leaven as an illustration, because they were still thinking of where the next meal would come from
- c. Jesus redirects their thoughts to two, recent miracles (of great magnitude) - He fed 5,000 and 4,000 with "little to nothing" - why now, having witnessed so much, would their thought go to food first? Food should have not been on their minds

It is this that affects our life's priorities - we miss what should be obvious because we are focused/worried about that which we should not be

Neglect to retain and implement what the Lord teaches us demonstrates a low value of it and it is devalued in our lives because we trust something else more

We must not lose sight of Matthew's focus in these texts (and purposes) so as not to mishandle verse 18

It is recorded that a great marble temple was built by Phillip the Tetrarch to honor the "god" - it was also named to honor himself

This is comparable to now in that many still think well of Jesus and associate Him as a "good man" - few look on Him as God incarnate and few accept all He taught

Identifying Jesus to be "the Son of the living God" also demonstrates that the "Promised One" was actually God in the flesh come to fulfill the work - it was not a man in the stead of God, but God in the stead of man!

Also note Mt. 18:18 where the same "power" is attributed to all the disciples (apostles)

A well-intended over reaction does not make any text the better - Peter being a "rock" of foundation is not troublesome seeing Christ is "THE Rock" and all of us, as Peter are "stones" also in the Church - see 1 Peter 2:5

When was the "Church" founded? We say it was at Pentecost and at its founding it was Peter who spoke first - this does not give to him any more "power" over any of the other apostles - Peter was its "founding", its "start" (beginning)

Matthew

- d. We are still often guilty of the same thing - we are apt to look upon the Word of God with eyes seeking only the *practical* and that which would influence the "now" versus searching out spiritual truths that will guide our thinking correctly, so that we will see things as we ought to see them
4. "How is it that you do not understand?" - vs. 11-12
- a. The way the Lord puts this question to the disciples clearly indicates they should have been able to, at the very least, discern that His statement was not in reference to bread
- b. Each of us should be learning and growing because of it - yet how soon we forget or willfully lay aside clear teaching and evidence of God's working in our lives - and we do so because something else seems more reliable or interesting (or, sadly, more entertaining)
- C. "Who do people say that I am?" - the test of popular opinion versus genuine spiritual insight - vs. 13-20
1. Matthew, in particular, is laying out a sequence to identify (clearly) the true identity of Jesus
- a. Here He will be identified as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God"
- b. He also, though not directly, is revealed as the sacrifice in verse 21 (detailed in Hebrews)
- c. Then, as He is transfigured before Peter, James and John, His deity is revealed visually
2. Popular opinion (as gleaned by the disciples) was favorable regarding Jesus, though limited - vs. 13-14
- a. It was at Caesarea Phillipi that they had travelled to and where this discourse took place - this was located near the foot of Mt. Hermon and was a place where pagan gods had been built at one of the sources of the Jordan river - Jesus was by no means dependant on a "religious" or "holy" locations/surroundings for His teaching and work
- b. The feedback of the disciples regarding the thoughts of the people is diverse (yet positive)
- c. He was thought of as John the Baptist having been resurrected; some thought He was Elijah as prophesied as coming again in Malachi; yet other thought He was Jeremiah (returned) - this one is hard to understand until it is considered that He may have been grouped in with the category of Jeremiah (as a prophet-type), but there is also ancient Jewish teaching that stated that Jeremiah would return with Isaiah before the end (II Esdras 2:18 - Apocrypha)
- d. It is interesting that no one was looking at Him as the Messiah - it is typical for even the religious to know or "know of" truths but to actually expect little of it
3. But, despite popular sentiment, who really is Jesus? - vs. 15-16
- a. When Jesus asks His disciples, Peter speaks up and answers that Jesus is the "Christ" (Messiah, Anointed One), who also is "the Son of the Living God"
- b. A tremendous amount is packed into these few words - He is of the "living God" as in contrast to all other pagan gods that have no life and are not gods at all - He is the One promised of God to redeem His people and who would even be the hope of the Gentiles - and in being the "Son of God", He is of the same essence/nature as God Himself (as any son of a man is of the same essence), thus He (Jesus) is declared as God
- c. With the uses of proper articles, Peter also identifies Him as exclusive - not "one of many" but "one alone" - He was not a choice of "gods" He was God, of/from God
4. The "foundation of the Church" - vs. 17-20
- a. Much has been attributed to this text, both extremes taking away from its natural emphasis
- b. Some (mainly the Roman Catholic church) reference it to make a case for the idea of a "pope" and then a succession of "popes" - this is completely unwarranted since there is never ANY reference to such successors nor the plan for such
- c. In an attempt to counter this, many have forced an **unnatural exegesis** on the text, trying to make a case that the rock upon which the church would be built is more in reference to the confession of Peter than it is to Peter himself - this is unnecessary
- d. Jesus had already used "leaven" and several other analogies, and "plays on words" as He does here also - He begins by declaring how "blessed" Peter is because the insight he just declared of Jesus was not of himself but given to him by "My Father" - we as the "natural man" cannot reach such insightful conclusions on our own (and never will) - any revelation is a gift/grace of God and we are fortunate recipients of such!
- e. As Peter stated who and what Jesus was, so now Jesus does the same by stating first Peter's "full name" (formal name - "Simon Barjona") and plays off then his "nickname" (Peter) and its meaning (a rock) to make an illustrated point - "upon this rock" must be in reference to Peter, since the natural grammar does not "naturally" point to Peter's "confession"

But Peter, as well as countless other people, would be used in the "building" of Christ's Church see Eph. 2:20

So, generally, this is in reference to all aspects associated with "death" (its intimidating approach, threat of its "touch" at any time, and its eternal victory over those who have died)

So both applications are feasible - the Church can "storm the gates of Hell" as it were, aggressively, knowing their assured victory and that, at death, their association with Christ will be victorious over "death" (the grave) keeping us in

This access was given to only a few (as only these were and would be "inspired") - we, today, are not "binding and loosing" but reference all that was restricted and encouraged by those to whom God had given such access - this is the only way we can know we are in agreement with the "kingdom of Heaven"

These phrases are in the future perfect tense as in what will be has already "been being"

It is believed and probable also, that the popular idea of the Messiah was strictly political and not spiritual - Jesus was not out to begin a political uprising (just as He still would not encourage for His Church) - when He comes again, He will conquer and not be seeking votes!

Jesus' words to the disciples demonstrate the contrast to our natural idea of truly "living" versus one that is focused on the pursuit (living in light of) and anticipation of true life

Patience in waiting out the revealing of God's victory (at every "turn") is one of the greatest challenges for us since it will involve faith/trust that He actually is winning (when the enemies are openly celebrating their victory)

Matthew

- f. The significance must not be placed upon Peter, since it was the God-given insight for which Peter was so blessed - also, in the next verses, Peter will be strongly rebuked for his "human" response to Jesus' informing them of His coming death
- g. No matter how this verse is taken, it is absolutely clear that it is **Christ that will be building His church** (His means of people are secondary (not to be looked on as primary)) - none of us is indispensable in this ongoing work and we seek to be so used for the sheer honor of it
- h. The phrase, "and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" is the more difficult of aspects of this text - "Hell" (Hades) is a general term for the location of "disembodied spirits" (the dead) - but it was also used to refer to (traditionally) the abode of evil spirits or "the grave"
- i. The "gates" of this place are said to not "prevail" (be of superior strength and thus an ultimate victor) against His church - much has been written on what these gates represent, but it seem best to take it at face value; gates being what hold some in and some out as a defense against attack, as well as a means to keep prisoners in (as oppressive countries in our day practice)
- j. These gates will be unable to hold-in those of the "church" because of Christ's victory over death - those not in His church will remain under the eternal grasp of "Hades" one way or another (the final location being the "Lake of Fire" in Rev. 20:14-15 ("death" and "Hell" are both cast here) and those whose names were not found in the "Book of Life")
- k. As in reference to a defense, these gates would not overpower the work of Christ (entrapping those in Christ who die, or being a life-long dread of such either (Heb. 2:15))
- l. The next sentence (verse) is also key in the underlying intimidation of those fearing this text as making a case for a "pope" - but its wording is very deliberate in its tense, placing the priority, again, where it should be (not on Peter, the Apostles and even the Church at large) - vs. 19
- m. The "keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" are in reference to the abode of God, His throne room - these are "keys of access" not of control or dictatorial powers - this verse is more in reference to predetermination and inspiration than it is to some picture of "power"
- n. First of all, the "binding and loosing" is in reference to things and not people - this was no authority of condemnation of people - the "whatever's" in this verse are in the neuter (in reference to things) - in this case things permitted and things forbidden
- o. "This is wrongly translated, shall be bound' and 'shall be loosed', seeming to make Jesus teach that the Apostles' acts will determine the policies of heaven. They should be translated 'shall have been bound' and 'shall have been loosed'. This makes the apostles' acts a matter of inspiration or heavenly guidance." Chamberlain as quoted by Leon Morris
- p. These verses are to be an ongoing encouragement to us to see, not only the means that the Kingdom of Heaven will be controlling and guiding while we live in this age, but that the Kingdom of Heaven is (as it was always intended to be) active in the affairs of this life (not just the next) - the Lord reigns now (as He always has)!
- q. Jesus strongly told the disciples not to reveal that He really was the Messiah (the "Christ") - the time would come when they would and should, but His greatest work as the "Anointed One" had yet to be accomplished (and this work would involve being rejected)

D. Human thoughts versus those of God - vs. 21-23

1. Writing of this text and beyond, R.T. France wrote, "They will not escape suffering and death, but they are being prepared to look beyond it"

- a. This section begins with a narrative of Jesus having to rebuke Peter when Peter responds in a protective manner to the Lord
- b. Jesus will go on to explain the "costs" of following after Him - which turns out to be the pursuit of real life (the "saving" of it versus the "losing it") and all this being opposite to human instinct

2. It was now about 6 months before His crucifixion - immediately following the declaration of His being the "Messiah", Jesus now reveals the plan of God for the Messiah - vs. 21

- a. These disciples had come to know a profound truth regarding Jesus, but all that the truth involved would be far more difficult for them to grasp - Messiahship, they thought, would include glorious victories, and though challenges would come, He would soundly defeat them before all, shaming the enemy publicly
- b. Knowing a truth and living it out or in light of it can be very different things

Jesus, Matthew writes began to δεικνύειν (point out, show) the disciples what MUST (δεῖ) happen as Messiah - as mentioned before, they would need to see beyond this to see where it was leading

- c. As the Christ, He would need to go to Jerusalem (the heart of the opposition and the place of greatest threat), and there “suffer many things” at the hands of the three groups representing Israel (and who would officially reject Him as their messiah)
- d. He would then be killed - this though, was not the final statement on the subject, but the one that seemed to grab Peter’s attention the most - Jesus was “showing” them this, giving a picture of more than just speaking of it, but of showing from the Scripture (revealing it to them) of how this was God’s **design** - this is what makes Peter’s rebuke so bad

3. Peter “took Him aside and began to rebuke Him” - vs. 22

As is still the case with us (normally) now - we speak of desiring and seeking the will of God but are repulsed at the idea of His will involving suffering of any kind (and certainly not any that would allow God’s enemies (and ours) to have any time of celebration over Him/us)

The best of intentions (unformed) can be in opposition to God Himself - we do not define “good” and “perfect” - He does!

Hebrews 11 providing a wealth of such examples

- a. To be fair (on human terms), Peter’s motive seems gracious - he would not desire to hear the Lord speak such, primarily out of love for Him, but also (and maybe primarily) out of self-interest - having “sided” with Jesus, they would not want to consider any failure (or even the appearance of it) before their enemies
- b. His initial content is “God forbid it” (or better, “far be it from you” (ESV)), though the underlying word, ἰλεώς, has more the idea of saying something like, “be good/merciful to **yourself**” - Peter did not want the Lord considering such negativity
- c. Peter’s statement, “This will never happen to you” sounds like what is often said by some making promises/statements they cannot possibly guarantee - Peter was, no doubt, sincere but he would not be fighting Christ’s enemies with his good intention (and even his courage), but would be fighting God (if he so dared) in looking to keep Jesus from this needed suffering
- d. These might have known, if the Scriptures were in the forefront of their thinking, the ways of God in situations like that of Joseph (his suffering to provide a salvation to Israel in Egypt) and Moses (his being born into such difficult circumstances and his best intentions failing, yet providing Israel’s salvation from Egypt)

4. Jesus confronts directly and immediately what Peter was saying - vs. 23

Peter, who had moments before been inspired of God to speak the truth was now being used by Satan to encourage what was against God

This is our action also whenever we take that stance “No Lord!” while standing firm on our well-reasoned disagreement with His ways)

Innumerable “good intentions” are “in the way” (as in blocking) the way of God - Jesus will explain the underlying cause

compare to Php. 3:17-21

- a. The phrase “Get behind me Satan!” would be like saying “Get out of my way, adversary!” (for this is the meaning of “Satan” - it may well have also been the influence of the Adversary (Satan himself) influencing Peter and the Lord’s address was to him - this was, after all, part of the final temptation in Matthew 4 (an easy, painless path to “kingship” with seemingly little **compromise** (which may seem more reasonable compared to potential pain))
- b. “None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character” Bruce
- c. The use of the preposition “behind” is telling, since Peter (the disciple) was now acting as one “out front” of Jesus leading/instructing Him - Peter needed to get back behind Jesus and follow Him, not seek to lead his master
- d. “You are a stumbling block to Me” (σκάνδαλον - a snare, that which is intended to trip someone) - Peter was being used as a means to try to block the path of God’s directing and a distraction from focus on His (Jesus’) purpose - we could phrase the idea of this also something like “You are in my way on the way; so get out of the way” and follow
- e. The cause was “for you mind the things of men and not the things of God” - you “direct your mind to think on what man thinks you should think on” (φρονεῖς - the “mind set”, its “bent”) which is in competition with what God would have you be **biased** towards and looking for

E. The “costs” of following Christ - the need for a proper “values system” - vs. 24-28

1. Having now seen what their Master must face (as God’s determined it), Jesus now tells them (the disciples) that if they are to follow Him, they will also suffer - vs. 24

It is intriguing to see that Jesus told Peter to get behind (ὀπίσω) Him and now He tells the disciples that if they are willing to “come after Him” (same word, ὀπίσω) they must begin by denying themselves

A true disciple of Christ expects to always push on till death, never looking to ease-up when “enough” has been done

- a. “If any man wishes” - the word for “wishes” here is “θέλει” meaning “wills” - **the will will be and must be engaged in such a pursuit** - this is more than “flirting” with the idea of following Christ or “trying Him out” (which so many do and then turn away - some are “willing” (initially determined) but have not considered the costs)
- b. The process of being a disciple (learner, student) is three-fold - deny himself, take up “his cross” and “follow Me” - this denial of self is a “leaving one’s self behind” and disregarding self’s ambition totally and finally - many have taken the first steps toward self-denial only to reclaim it later after some semblance of discipline - longevity is the true test of genuine commitment - many look back to their self-denial for comfort (false) while the genuine look at the present and future determined to remain so

This is in direct contrast to the motive of Peter just moments before - instead of avoiding such a "destiny", face it and live in expectation of its possibility (or even probability) - such a life focus will appear as repulsive to most who look on, but will result in a focused, well spent life (even if they are not martyred)

see also 1 Thes. 3:1-5

The description in Heb. 12:2 is informative for us to remember - He faced the cross, "despising the shame" - He did not fear the shame of the cross, but knowing full-well what He was doing faced it as though He despised it (belittled its seeming intimidation)

The majority of any age will be driven to preserve their lives and their "livelihood" many live long lives of relative easy, comfort and success yet have never truly "lived" and will lose what they could have never held-on to anyway

It is sad to see so many "noble causes" offered by our age that are careful to keep Christ out altogether or include Him only in the periphery to be able to affix "Christian" to its title - even ministries that were once truly Christ-centered have moved Him out of center so as to become more relevant or more widely appealing and "charitable"

The soul is forfeited in the pursuit of all he can gain from the world - it is a "no-win" scenario

The Lord is making a case to demonstrate the pure sense in denying self, taking up the cross the world will assign us as we live in contradiction to it in following Christ - we either "lose" our life here or we lose it there!

These "costs" are for our own good realizing they maintain life focus - without them, the costs/consequences are much higher - like charging in a credit card, putting off the "pain" till later

Henry

3. "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father" - vs. 27

- c. Second, as a part of self-denial, one willing (determined) to follow after Him (be His disciple, learning from Him to live for Him), must "take up his cross" - this was a vivid description since it (the cross) was a common and brutal form of execution of criminals - the death by crucifixion was shameful, painful (designed to be so over a long period of time) and was set aside specially for those whom Rome wanted to openly identify as lawbreakers (and as ones not to be mimicked or followed)
 - d. This "cross" is to be "taken up" by each - condemned criminals typically had to bear their own cross to their crucifixion (owning, as it were, their crime against society - bearing the penalty all the way through) - see 10:38 (one is not "worthy" of Him who is not so "willing")
 - e. And, then (thirdly), "follow Me" - this would end up being literal (in example) as Jesus would be crucified and would bear His own cross - it becomes clear why self denial (renouncing as it were, self) is essential, realizing our natural selves will run from such an idea, unless of course, the cause ahead of us is seen to "outrank" our own value
 - f. Note also that the underlying term, ἀκολουθεῖτω (follow after, accompany) is in the present tense as in indicating that this following is **ongoing from that point on** - this is no "side journey" or an occasional trip (it's a deliberate life trek)
2. A proper values-system is needed to maintain such a focus - vs. 25-26
- a. Those wishing (so "willed" and determined in contrast to willing to follow Christ) to "save" (preserve) their life will lose it (ἀπολέσει - "destroy" it) - hanging on to it will lead to its demise, for such a life perspective intimates that it is of the highest worth and that nothing else is worth its loss in ANY capacity)
 - b. Only those so focused on "losing" (same word ("destroying")) their life for the sake of Christ (for from the perspective of any age in which we live, it will appear as such to them - a waste, even self-destructive) will "find" it (true life discovery!)
 - c. Living to "save" one's life is more (in this text) than just staying alive - it is the life purpose to preserve and protect what one has while here - the follower of Christ must live, having yielded life's reputation, possessions and other comforts and securities already in their heart
 - d. It is crucial we focus on the yielding of one's life for "His sake" - many live for other "sakes" and never find life/living - each age will provide causes of its own that will glorify its "greatness", but each of these "glories" is passing and temporal - "The gain/loss antithesis reaches full crescendo, for the more kingdom values descend into gaining the things of this life, the more the loss comes at the other end." Grant R. Osborne
 - e. Take, for instance, the apparent "ideal" of any age; gaining everything it has to offer! - Jesus asks, "What will it profit a man if he gains everything in the world and loses his soul?" - the underlying word for "profit" has the core meaning of "usefulness" - if he loses/forfeits his soul, what good is even having everything do him?
 - f. Paul demonstrates the opposite in Php. 3:8 where he uses the same word that is used here for "lose", and in his case, his loss of all that the world loved was his gain
 - g. The second question Jesus asks deals with the heart of the issue - what exactly can a man give in exchange for his own soul? If he has lost his life (pointing to eternal condemnation after living to gain "the world"), what could he possibly offer (exchange) to save it? The answer is supposed to be obvious - the soul, once lost (forfeited for what is temporary), has no hope of redemption - the time to consider this is now, not then! - read Heb. 10:26-31
 - h. When considering life for what it really is in the "scheme" of eternity (versus the age in which we live on Earth), the values systems change - **it is the disregard of the "eternity priority" that makes one balk at the costs of discipleship of Christ** - Peter had been looking only at the temporal and not seeing beyond it; so much, when viewed with temporal values, looks to be too costly and destructive, yet when seen in light of God's eternal purposes, becomes more than "worth it"
 - i. "If the soul be lost, it is of the sinner's own losing. The man loses his own soul, for he does that which is certainly destroying it, and neglects that which alone would be saving, Hos_13:9."

Some may try to make a case that these are not "judged" according to what they believe but according to their deeds - but it is an inescapable face that what we truly believe (faith) will dictate what we do - knowing and believing/trusting are distinct things

Jesus coming with His angels also narrows this verse to the second coming of Christ to this Earth as conqueror - this concept will never "sit well" with world powers

Josephus mentions much about miraculous things seen at the Fall of Jerusalem (which many have tried to play off to attach to this text as well as the Olivet Discourse), but the apostles are not mentioned in these accounts as having seen these events

Christ's encouragement was not in their escaping death (or any of the pains associated with it), but in the worthiness of what they would live, suffer and die for!

- b. Stating the fact, "the Son of man is going to come", only the next time it will not be as the merciful savior but as the judging King - this is to be a foundational motivator for all that is done
- c. The "glory of the Father" is also in reference to the glory of the "Godhead" (as so described by Charles Wesley, "...veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity...")
- d. Even still in our day, many cannot (will not) see past the humanity of Christ and realize Who He really was/is and the responsibility that we are to sense because of His work **for us**
- e. The genuineness of our standing will be evidenced in our "doings" - He comes to "give back" to everyone in accordance with what is due their deeds/character - not according to what we profess or claim, but by what is actually done - see James 2:14-26
- f. "The rewarding of men according to their works is deferred till that day. Here good and evil seem to be dispensed promiscuously; we see not apostasy punished with immediate strokes, nor fidelity encouraged with immediate smiles, from heaven; but in that day all will be set to rights. Therefore judge nothing before the time, 2Ti_4:6-8" Henry

4. Seeing "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" - vs. 28

- a. This is another verse with many varying opinions as to exactly what Jesus was referencing
- b. Some say it refers to the Transfiguration (about to be described in the next chapter), while others say it refers to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. - the first seems too soon, the second unlikely
- c. Basically stated (without adding anything to what is stated) there would be some standing there with Him, at that time, that would not die until they saw for themselves "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" - this cannot be in reference to the final (second) coming since that would mean some of them would still be living to this day - it cannot refer to the destruction of Jerusalem (those that believed Jesus was seen in His coming to personally destroy it) since it is probable that none of these saw it happen
- d. It is most likely a reference to His "mediatorial kingdom" in the establishment of His Church - all but Judas would be alive (though Jesus Himself would face/taste death before this time) - He would be seen resurrected and ascending to Heaven by these before they themselves would face death - Christ is ruling now; His kingdom is also now (though the earthly kingdom has yet to be established but will also, assuredly happen)
- f. A key word in handling this verse correctly is "until" (ἕως) - they would face it, but not until they had seen for themselves the authenticity of all these things and of Christ's authority - this was a verse of encouragement in their "deny themselves and taking up their cross"

XXVI. The Glory of the Father is Revealed in Christ (the Transfiguration) - 17:1-13

A. This next text is the underlying reason for other key texts such as John 1:14, "And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth..." as well as II Peter 1:16-18 where Peter makes it clear, he and the other Apostles were not devising "cleverly devised tales"

1. The FACT that Jesus is God (sharing the glory of the Father) is important for several reasons

- a. One of which, He has "all power and authority" (Mt. 28:18) and that when looking to live out our lives, He is seen as the most reasonable and worthwhile authority (and purpose)
- b. Another consideration is the impact such a text like this has on our view of God's love and the love of Christ being directed at us - when we see other people highly honored publicly, our estimation of their attention to us rises - His significance is infinitely higher!
- c. And, we will not be prone to being overly impressed with the fading glories of our age

see Psalm 8:3-4 - we are less apt to marginalize His love of us when considering who it is that is loving us!

2. Matthew's goal in his writings is to make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised King

We are far too prone to be transfixed on the variety of "glories" this world offers, missing a glory that never fades - and as is true in driving, we typically steer towards what we are looking at

- a. Some have rightfully noted that the glorification of Christ is not necessarily His being made "brighter" than His surroundings to outshine them, as much as it is the dullness of this sin-infected earth being pulled away for a brief moment to reveal the underlying glory of God in Jesus
- b. Competing "glories" will need to be seen as the counterfeits they really are

B. The "transfiguration" account - vs. 1-8

1. The term "transfiguration" is referencing "μετεμορφώθη" which is a change in form - though we must wait till the resurrection till our "form" is changed, we are to have the form of our life changing as indicated (and using the same basic word) in Rom. 12:2 (made so by the "renewing of your minds")

- a. It was six days after Jesus' description of the costs of discipleship and the worthiness of it
- b. This all happened away from the crowds, high in a mountain with only three witnesses

This is a good example in demonstrating that His glory need not be seen to be real - God chose the time to reveal His glory just as He allows us to see examples of His power at work in our lives - either way, His power/glory are always there

Mark described it in his account as "... exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them"

All this reiterating all of this being God's design/plan - Jesus and His work is the focal point of all! This is humbling and motivating realizing our fortunate part in the result (linking us back so far in History with all that took place)

Both Mark and Luke point out that Peter did not know what he was saying - either that he should have kept silent (since he had no reply) or that he was just speaking to speak

see I John 3:1-3

See II Pet. 1:13-21 where Peter references this occurrence to emphasize the authority of trusting what he and the other Apostles wrote over all other "authorities"

It is this same relationship we now have access to! Why then are we so (more so) enamoured with other relationships? Imagine how honored these three felt to have any personal time with Him.

They still had not (nor would they) come to grips with His dying, until after He arose from the dead - their idea of victory was still fixed to the Earth, their age and not to the conquering power needed to conquer the universe (and the widespread influence/affect of sin)

Life's pains and disappointments only intensify our love of what is coming - why would such lessen or discourage our hope of the future in light of what we know?

- c. This account is also in Luke 9:28-36 and two more details are provided - Jesus was praying when transfigured and the three disciples were deep in sleep - the Lord will demonstrate Himself at times and in ways we could never begin to predict!
- d. The usage of the underlying Greek word for "transfigured" is explained in Vincent's Word studies - "Why, then, it may be asked, is a compound of $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\eta$ employed in this description of the transfigured Saviour, since the change described is a change in his outward appearance? It may be answered, because a compound of $\sigma\chi\eta\mu\alpha$, expressing merely a change in the aspect of Christ's person and garments, would not express the deeper truth of the case, which is, that the visible change gets its real character and meaning from that which is essential in our Lord - his divine nature. A fore-shadowing or prophecy of his true form - his distinctive character..."
- e. Moses and Elijah were with Him, talking with Him - vs. 3 - Moses representing the Law (law-giver) and Elijah representing the prophets (see Luke 24:44) - in Luke 9, he also included, "... who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." - the word for "departure" refers to His death (and ultimately His resurrection and ascension) - all of this in **perfect harmony** with the "Law and Prophets"
- f. It should also be noted that Moses and Elijah were not "soul sleeping" - It is true that Elijah was "translated" into Heaven but Moses died

2. Peter seeks to make it (the experience) continue longer - vs. 4

- a. Peter, as if speaking out of instinctive excitement, declares how "good" it is for them (the disciples) to be there - he offers to build three temporary dwellings (in Luke 9:33 he reveals that Peter said this as Moses and Elijah were about to depart)
- b. It appears as though Peter wanted this to continue - this was a "good" sense but he and the others still had much to do - this glimpse of glory is a reminder to us also of what we have to look forward to (an overriding thrill that we also won't want to end... and it won't!)

3. The overriding authority of Jesus pronounced by God - vs. 5-9

- a. Peter was not answered, instead, they were covered over with a "bright cloud" and a voice spoke, "This is My Son, --the Beloved, in whom I did delight; hear him." (YLT)
- b. First, their objective was to "hear Him" over and above all others (including Moses and Elijah, the "Law and the Prophets" - compare to Heb. 1:2)
- c. Second, they were to be more apt to listen for Him than to speak-up themselves - obedience would be evidenced more in their "listening and doing" than in their well-intended initiative
- d. To please God we follow "the Beloved" One, the One in whom He delights - this usurps all others that we look to for guidance/direction (including ourselves)
- e. Upon hearing the voice of God, they fell on their faces in fear - this is the normal response to an awareness of His presence - what a contrast to what was lost in Eden!
- f. Jesus comes to them, their faces still toward the ground and touches them - He instructs them "Get up, and do not be afraid" - it's then they see He is alone with them - imagine this account from their perspective - they've seen Him shine bright like the sun, speaking with Moses and Elijah, verified openly by the voice of the Father Himself - now, once again He is alone with them; their perspective, awe of Him had to be far greater than it had ever been
- g. For these, life was permanently affected, now not only having been told of who He was, but having seen it first hand - nothing else would be able to compete for their life purpose, for how could anything else compete?
- h. Jesus then commands them not to tell others of what they have seen until He has risen from the dead - in Mk. 9:10 we are told that these kept asking among themselves what the Lord meant in referencing rising from the dead
- i. The significance of His glory and who He really was would be more prominent after His crucifixion and resurrection - this is often the case in God's working with us also - suffering of different sorts must come even though we **now** also are "glorified" with Him - see Rom. 8:28-30 - "well-being" and comfort is no "proof" of God's grace at work in us - the sufferings of this life just magnify the stark contrast to the glory we **have** with Him and glory to come
- j. We should look to keep good accounts of the sufferings (and degree) we face here, expecting to contrast them to what we have in Heaven, looking back to what once was - there will be no "longing looks" backward when we are with the Lord

C. The Son of Man will suffer as did "the promised Elijah" - vs. 9-12

1. The disciples ask of the prophecy of Elijah since they have just seen him - vs. 9-12

On Mal. 4:6, Keil and Delitzsch states, "The meaning of this is not that he will settle disputes in families, or restore peace between parents and children; for the leading sin of the nation at the time of our prophet was not family quarrels, but estrangement from God."

It has been commonly believed that Malachi's prophesy also pointed to Elijah being one of the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11:3 - but the Lord's handling of this is quite clear - if we consider Elijah being one of the witnesses in Revelation, we should not use the Malachi text so conclusively

Godless families can be unified, just not around what is most important, genuine and lasting (eternal)

Note: when dealing with interpretation ("normal" and "literal"), we seek God's "normal" and His actual "intent" (literal) not necessarily the way something might be naturally taken - texts like this demonstrate this and why Scripture must be its primary commentary on itself

This demonstrates man's "norm" in contrast to God's "norm" - His will was accomplished while man's was further frustrated

- a. Jesus had just instructed them to not tell anyone what they had seen - interestingly, their first point of discussion is not regarding the details of what had happened, but more on a doctrinal point (was this the coming of Elijah that had been predicted?)
- b. This question makes sense if the interpretation of Malachi 4:5-6, "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." is pointing to revealing the Messiah also
- c. Their thinking appears to be questioning as to why they should keep it quiet - if now Elijah had come and if this is the fulfillment of Malachi's prophesy, should it not be declared?
- d. The Lord's answer was, as He had mentioned in 11:14, that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophesy and in that text He asked, "...if you are willing to accept it..." - there was, on their part, an expectation of something on a grander scale (their idea of "grand", not God's)
- e. Jesus clarifies that the Scribes had it right, "Elijah is coming" (as in quoting them) and will "restore all things" (ἀποκαταστήσει πάντα describing a reestablishing, restoring what was lost (as Elijah did when Israel was profoundly "off course")) - as alluded to in the quote from K&D, this would involve restoring the hearts of the fathers to the children and vice versa - not a direct emphasis (as we might take it) on restoring families, but restoring them back to God (unified once again around what ought to unify families)
- f. "But I say to you that Elijah already came..." - and when he had come he was treated in a way dictated by the standard, "did to him whatever they wished" - they dealt with him however they "felt" (desired and determined) - **they** being the standard/authority
- g. The "restoring" was not with a focus on man, but on God's agenda and definition - with man, more conflict and separations came; with God, the ultimate way of restoration (redemption) was established! - various forms of "blindness" come when living by "feeling" and intuition
- h. The Lord reveals also how that generation wasted their opportunity - an anticipated prophecy of one coming (in the spirit of Elijah, not the Elijah (the Tishbite)) - John was "inconvenient" to them and they treated him as such - just as many in our day seek to utilize the Truth only inasmuch as it comforts or is seen to "support" them and their agenda

2. So now also Jesus would "suffer at their hands" - vs. 12-13

- a. The reason John the Baptist was so mistreated was because they "did not recognize him" - they were looking for a man of their own making (**the source being their own imagination**)
- b. So also now with Christ - they do not recognize Him and Who He is and, as clarified in Mark 9: 12, He will "be treated with contempt" ("set at naught" in KJV)
- c. So, why keep quiet about what they seen (the "glory"), because it was God's plan that He (Jesus) would be rejected and suffer (one reason being that salvation would not be "of man" as demonstrated in man's natural response, rejection (even religious response))
- d. Then the disciples understood Jesus referencing John the Baptist as the one fulfilling what was predicted - what they had been shown was not for the building of their reputation or pride but to share later, after the Lord's plan was fulfilled and then, as further validation of Who He truly was while living out His life (leading up to His death and resurrection)

He would be treated like "nothing" (as a "nobody")

see also Isaiah 53:1-12

XXVII. Dealing With a Perverted, Unbelieving Generation and "Little-Faiths" In It - 17:13-27

A. Coming down from their "mountain top experience", they are immediately met with a crowd and a grieving father who is seeking a cure for his demon-possessed son - vs. 13-18

1. The father approaches Jesus in two ways (as the second mentioned in Mark 9:20-25)

In Mark's account Jesus responds, "If You can? All things are possible to him who believes" to which the father replies, "I believe; help my unbelief"

- a. The first, in our text, "Lord, have mercy on my son.." acknowledging it as a gracious service and not one Jesus is obligated to do - it is never right to approach the Lord in a demanding spirit (even with detailed expectations of how a request is to be answered)
- b. The father also (in Mark's account) requests this "if You can do anything..." now having doubts about Christ having seen the inability of His disciples
- c. This is one of the causes of the Lord's exclamatory response - unbelief does not just affect us but those we are sent to influence (and those around us watching)

Often we don't know the true problem and pray for or even react to what we think it is versus what it actually is - the answer may not be what we expect as well as the timing

- d. The father, as Matthew demonstrates, presents the problem as strictly a physical issue and the dangerous side affects (falling into fire/water) - Jesus will identify the core issue (demonic possession) and will then deal with the actual underlying problem - this may have lent to the issue the disciples had (not knowing the real issue)
- e. "... the failures of instruments shall not hinder the operations of his grace, which will work, if not by them, yet without them." Henry

2. "O faithless and perverse generation..." - vs. 17

The people were clearly "perverted" because of the "twisted" way they thought upon and approached life - humanism induces such perversion (man is the standard) and happenings like demon-possession would be expected

- a. Jesus, in an exclamation that would have come across as frustration, reveals the state of the generation at that time (and could still be considered so today) - they suffered with "no faith", and along with it (or because of it) were also "twisted" - this word was sometimes used to describe those whose eyes were turned in differing direction
- b. Their perspective of life was distorted (twisted because they did not see it for what it was) - and, to the "twisted", those who see/live clearly are looked upon as "twisted" - Paul instructs the Philippians in Php. 2:14-15 not to be complaining arguers with each other, with the purpose to be the right example of how things ought to be done before a "crooked and perverse generation" among whom they would "shine as lights"
- c. When Jesus asks "How long will I be with you?" it appears to have at least two ideas - first, in frustration, how long would He have to "put-up" with such contradiction to what is right/best - we often allow ourselves to have a high opinion of ourselves because we compare ourselves to each other and not to His holy person (how much He "puts-up" with our inconsistencies)
- d. Second, He expresses the urgency of their need to get serious (as it were) since His time with them was short, and they had so far to go in their growth - Jesus demonstrates patience through the amount of time and opportunity He was giving them by "staying with it", even when actively opposed and disappointed with a lack of growth in those that supported Him

Jesus expresses a frustration that will either motivate to change or will be met with mutual frustration by the "faithless" (unbelieving) - such spiritual and philosophical opposites cannot help but mutually frustrate

3. Once again, Jesus instantly/completely heals the boy - vs. 18

Jesus shows no sympathy for evil! This may seem obvious, but in a generation that is "twisted" (perverted), it is often that way because it forms an affection or comfortable acquaintance for evil

- a. Jesus "rebukes" the demon which was the cause of the boy's seizures and violent actions towards himself - the word for "rebuked" (ἐπετίμησεν) is an interesting word which carries the idea of rendering to one their due (what they deserve) - it could be positive but in most of the NT uses it is translated "rebuke" (they deserve it!)
- b. The boy was "cured at once" (no gradual healing or recovery) - the Lord had done what the rest could not do, for this apparently difficult case - but as is about to be discussed, the extremity of "the case" does not limit the power of God - it just showcases it more - the solution (what they should have done) is not revealed to be more effort on their part, but more dependence /reliance upon God (the essence of true prayer and fasting)

B. Genuine faith is not so much quantity as it is quality (and its usage) - vs. 19-21

1. The disciples, perplexed by their inability to help the man and his son, ask why they could not "drive it out" (literally, "why did we not have the power to throw it out?")

- a. They were sincere, the situation was presented to them, they had been told they had the authority to do so (and may have done so - Mt. 10:8), but here, without success
- b. The key (and power) would not be found in their determination or in their assumptions

2. The "littleness" of their faith was the cause - but what is this "littleness of faith" describing? - 19-20

At least "a little" of true faith is needed - so when they have "little faith", it is more like "microscopic" trust, because their doubt is greater (more controlling of focus and action)

- a. Many look on this and begin to focus more on quantity (that if they can somehow get "more" or "strain" themselves for more, it will "work") - but the comparison to the mustard seed (size) was not to give them an amount to aim for, but to demonstrate, if there is but very little of true faith, whatever needs to be done, can/will be done

It should be noted that some self-generated "faiths" fail because they believe in what they believe God will do - not just believe whatever He does is right - misdirected faith competes with true faith!

- b. They had a good deal of opportunity and apparently "drive", but their genuine faith was lacking in competition to their doubts, or their confidence in the wrong things (possibly themselves and their own authority to do what needed to be done) - **"little faith" may be "little" in strength because trust/confidence is focused elsewhere**

- c. It cannot be stressed enough, that the object of faith is the key - truck loads of misdirected/misinformed faith would be ineffective and useless to do what is actually needed, while a seeming speck of genuine faith (dependent on/trusting in) the right source, can accomplish the seeming impossible

- d. Mountains could be moved and "nothing will be impossible for you" - just as He clarified when

And so many mountains have been moved, but they are the wrong mountains, moved to the wrong place utilizing man made "earth-movers" - they get the effect, call it faith and propagate further wastes of time, effort and resources!

This is evident because the disciples had seen so many miracles and were still doubting - it's not always doubt in ability but doubt of His genuine attention to our best at any given moment - faith trusts His knowing what that is!

This may be why fasting has become more a health focus than a true spiritual response to life in many Christian circles

Both demonstrating a sense of great need and their response to it, and not acts of conjuring to bring about miraculous events

We are not told of hard times to come (in God's Word) to dishearten us, but to graciously prepare us for what can be faced as "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" Rom. 8:37

It seems it would be safe to assume that because of their love of Him they also grieved - but even the deepest affection for one should not usurp our submission and obedience to God's work and will

This is an excellent example of not holding so firmly to one's theological "benefits" that they so utilize them so as to contradict and be unnecessarily offensive - sometimes the best evidence in being "right" is doing what is better than what is theoretically acceptable - there is to be a focus on the "bigger picture" as our Lord did here

using the same comparison of the mustard seed and the "kingdom of Heaven", these (the kingdom and faith) need not be large in size (they will not be outwardly impressive and possibly will go unnoticed (as the source) because of the magnitude of what is done) - this has been seen throughout Church history, as many are "taken with" results without being able to identify the actual "source"

- e. Faith is unreserved confidence in God and we find it, too often, to be weak or lacking in us because we do not see/recognize God's profound working all around (and in us) daily, either because we are not looking for it or because we, as many must have done in Jesus' day, explain it away - faith is trust, and trust is not developed without some form of ongoing/growing communication /interaction
- f. Mountains, especially in their day, were enormous obstacles - these obstacles are in the way of responsibility and are never to be looked upon as opportunities to "wow the crowds" with the greatness of our faith/abilities, but to have ourselves "wowed" by God's greatness, regardless the interest of the crowds

3. Prayer and fasting as an act of faith - vs. 21

- a. There is a consensus that this verse was not in the originals because it is not found (as of yet) in the earliest manuscripts that have been found
- b. We will treat it as though it does belong, and in light of what was discussed, prayer and fasting are acts of dependence (acknowledging personal inability dependent on His ability) - these are not "works" to draw attention to ourselves, nor are they to be looked upon as being methods to "force" the hand of God - if either are insincere (not sincerely prompted) they are likely to have little to no value
- c. Prayer is an act of dependence, in that one (we) prays most when most aware of their need and God's omnipotence in comparison to it - fasting in such cases usually occurs as a response to an urgent focus on a need **and not eating is a by-product of the urgency**

C. The "Son of Man" will be raised after "they kill him" - vs. 22-23

- 1. Once again Jesus tells the disciples what is coming - this was not with the intent to discourage them, but more with the purpose to prepare them and give them focus

- a. As a part of the purposed plan for the "Son of Man" (the Messiah), He would be delivered "into the hands of men" - this picturing His being handed over as a criminal would be
- b. These same would "kill Him" - it was this and the previous statement that seemed to capture the focus of the disciples the most, because they were "deeply saddened" - the underlying words picturing great grief (sad exceedingly)

- 2. Yet, the focus should have been upon the resurrection beyond the death, and that only on the third day after - this describes the most miraculous event they would have ever seen (or conceived)

- a. This is still the "norm" for us also - we know of God's unstoppable victory over all the evil that is to come, but we find ourselves wishing not to face the conflict at all (failing to realize its part in magnifying the glory of what God will do)
- b. In retrospect we can see that, if grief were to be felt, it should have been in the realization that His suffering and death was for our/their sins (in our stead)
- c. Peter, nor any of the others sought to counter Him on this point (this time) - in Mark 9:32 we are also told that the disciples did not understand it and were "afraid to ask Him"

D. Jesus pays a temple tax He did not have to pay so as not to "trip-up" others - vs. 24-27

- 1. Coming into Capernaum, Peter was met by the temple tax-collectors asking whether or not Jesus would be paying "tribute" (two drachma)

- a. This was an expected and reasonable tax for the support of the temple and it was to be paid by any Jewish male 20 or older (for the support of the upkeep of the Temple)
- b. Peter confirms that Jesus did/would - upon returning to where Jesus was, Jesus asks Peter (Simon) if the family (sons) of the King must pay taxes - the answer was "no"
- c. Jesus makes the case that being "sons" they are not obligated to pay - so, theologically they have no apparent moral obligation to pay the tax - so, should they?
- d. The reason it would be paid would not be to demonstrate Jesus and His followers were not "sons" of the King, but for the reason to not "offend" those watching - His motivation (and example) showed them the greater need - this "right" was to be yielded for the benefit of others

Jesus demonstrates the privilege is not to be used to disregard the needs of others - it should make us note it better

To the faithful, service is a benefit/privilege

This was a combination of manual labor and the miraculous - Peter still needed to catch the fish - laziness and irresponsibility are not to be expected characteristics of the "miraculous" working of God

This reveals something of human nature - before the Lord they knew it was wrong, yet with each other, they thought it OK to compete for position

Some concepts we know are not right though we look on them as harmless to consider and dwell on - yet, in this case, it demonstrated a fundamental flaw in their character that needed changing quickly!

There is no reason this "posture" (dependent child) should change after salvation - we are as dependent on the grace of God as we ever were

We, following this guide, actively seek to "humble ourselves" (which must be internal, how we think, if it is to be genuine) - false humility is still pride, and will not "fool" God

Pride is being "full of self" and said "self" lives in the urgency of imposing itself on and over others - this is in direct opposition to the tenants of God's kingdom

"What a kingdom is this, in which every man ascends by willingly going down!" Spurgeon

- e. The word for "offend" (σκανδαλίσωμεν) carries the picture/concept of entrapment or to cause one to "stumble" - it is not explained to us how this would cause them to be "tripped-up", just that Jesus voluntarily paid the tax for their good
- f. Avoiding paying the tax may have also distracted from His message, seeing others did not know yet who He was - sacrifices of all sorts will be required of us all if we are set on representing the Lord (rather than living to leverage "benefits")

2. The extraordinary means used to precisely meet the need - vs. 27

- a. Peter (who had made the verbal commitment that the tax would be paid) was told to catch one fish and get the needed money out of its mouth
- b. This is remarkable on at least two counts - first, it was money in a fish's mouth (the first one to be caught, the only one to be caught), and it was exactly the price of the tax for Jesus and Peter
- c. Second, it demonstrates either the omnipotence of Christ or His omniscience (or both)

XXVIII. The Greatness of the "Little" in the Kingdom of Heaven - 18:1-14

A. Correct priorities are essential in "the kingdom" partly because of their influence on behavior - vs. 1-7

1. It sheds more light on this account when you compare it to Mark 9:33-50 - In Matthew's account, he deals with the initial question, "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- a. Putting it in basic human terms, they wanted to know who would be the most significant, important, and elevated in the coming kingdom (or as it "stood" now) - who "ranks" highest?
- b. In Mark's account, the disciples had been discussing it on the way to Capernaum - they kept quiet (out of embarrassment) because they had been arguing over "who was the greatest" (apparently who was or would be most important among them)
- c. The idea of "greatness" is about to be contrasted (the standard, that the age in which we live uses, does not match that of the "eternal age")

2. Since the disciples wanted/needed to know, Jesus illustrates true "greatness" - vs. 1-4

- a. He summons a child (apparently already in the house) to Himself and situates him/her in the middle of them all - in Mark's account he writes that Jesus "took him into His arms".
- b. Jesus lays out the reality of the severity of what they were dabbling in - not only would none of them have "great positions" in the Kingdom, but they cannot even enter it without a genuine "turning" so as to be like "little children"
- c. Unless you "change" (στραφήτε - "be converted" (**thus convinced**)) - to become "as children" carries the idea of being lowly (of position), knowingly dependent, with the expectancy to be told what to do (not being the one telling others what to do)
- d. This may sound too stringent, but considering the example it should be obvious - first of all, how will someone come to God with any hope of "entering the Kingdom" if they don't see themselves as utterly dependent? - God resists (stands in opposition to) the proud - James 4:6
- e. Since this a prerequisite to citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven, why would one treat it as optional or disregard it? This "turning" is a total change of thinking and how one looks on something - ***humble dependence becomes the objective in growth and "greatness"***
- f. The one that seeks the greatness of the kingdom must do what seems opposite to greatness - he must "humble himself as this child", yielding all supposed rank/position considering his/her purpose whatever the one over them (in this case, the Lord) deems best
- g. Also note, "To permit oneself to be called, led, loved, without pride and without doubt, in simple trust, that is childlikeness even as this is the nature of children who possess nothing but need everything; who are able to do nothing but receive everything; to earn nothing but receive everything as a gift..." Lenski quoting Besser
- h. Greatness in the greatest kingdom is lowliness - making no claim to personal rights and making no demands (but is inwardly submissive and in a state of yieldedness)
- i. It has been pointed out by some that God fills only "empty vessels" (the emptier the better and the more "filling" will be had)
- j. When do we think we should start living in preparation for the coming Kingdom? The answer is to be clear (as it was supposed to be for the disciples - we live this way now, now being those who are the "children" of the Kingdom)
- k. Ironically, our aspirations are actually to be "low"! (aiming at lowliness)

3. It is a dreadfully serious thing to exploit these “children” - vs. 5-6

It is not uncommon for us to take these texts as though they are addressing just children - but the Lord is still discussing all who are “like children” in their self-perspective before God

Also, with the Lord, this is not a figurative statement/concept, we actually do receive the Lord when receiving His children with open arms

There is a tendency by the proud (dominating personalities) to look to influence those who are not dominating and self-willed - this is a particular warning to them - in such pursuits, they have no idea they bring on themselves special judgment!

This, and what follows, is a solemn warning against doing such a thing (even indirectly) - these “little ones” who “believe in Me” are to be treated with great caution and care (which we as church participants must take with utmost seriousness)

But the Lord does not appear to make such allowances - just a dreadful warning against such

In any Godless system, these “temptations” are often seen as opportunities (a variety of offerings from which to choose)

Our objective even as “normal” Christians is to “...stimulate one another to love and good deeds...” (Heb. 10:24) - we’re to always be looking to encourage others in a maturing walk and — not contributing the spiritual “delinquency of a minor”

- a. It would naturally be looked upon to be a vulnerable position to be so “lowly” - the instinctive response (inwardly) is to **fear** being misused or harmed
- b. For those who might consider such exploitation of these that are actively/purposefully humble, remember **Who** is really being dealt with
- c. These “humble” ones are to be received (welcomed, treated graciously) not because of their humility, but “in my name” (for His sake) - such gracious treatment is not for the goodness of one’s character, but for the respect and honor of the Lord - for whenever this is done “receives Me” (to take these in (as it were) is akin to treating Jesus the same) - see Mt. 25:31-46
- d. This is meant to be a realistic incentive to good treatment of “humbler Christians”, just as it is also to be an incentive not to deal with them unkindly (ever, no matter what we might consider is an **excusable** reason why we might mistreat His lowly children)
- e. The warning against those who cause any of these “little ones” to “stumble” is very strong!
- f. Consider first what “stumble” implies - the word is *σκανδαλιση* describing the lending to or causing one to sin, be tripped-up in their spiritual walk/growth, “...to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey...” and/or to entrap them or lead them into a trap that will hurt or hinder them - sometimes the motive may not be deliberately vindictive, but may be motivated to justify one’s self in his/her wrong by steering others into the **same** vices (by means of a forceful will)
- g. These are also referred to as “deathtraps”, set up deliberately to bait and ensnare these “little ones” of His - Jesus uses a form of punishment that was not done in their time, and would have seemed extreme - to have a “millstone” (which would have been massive in weight) tied around the neck was quite a picture! (drastic, to make the point as profound as possible)
- h. Jesus stated that such a scenario would be **preferable** to one (having this stone fastened to their neck and then be cast into the sea) than to actually finish causing one of these to stumble - such a scenario would have been certain death (which is the point - better to have certain death than to face the **wrathful** consequences from God for such a deed as this)

4. So, clearly, those who would embark on entrapping (causing to stumble) are not “as one of these children” and are acting out of their pride and self-importance - “greatness” in the Kingdom is truly in humility, and we can then see that **pride will have no place in His Kingdom**

- So it definitely should not be looked on as a normal part of Christianity (for sometimes it is grouped into “we’re just human” sins - this is when it is openly acknowledged as wrong but **mutually** considered allowable since none of us is “perfect”

5. “Woe” to the world because of its “temptations” and to the one by whom they come - vs. 7

- a. Regarding the word for “woe” (Οὐαὶ), it is an exclamation of grief or denunciation/condemnation - these “temptations” are in no way commendable, though they are “inevitable” (because the world (the “order” (κόσμῳ) is infected with sin and infectious))
- b. The world and its systems are to be grieved over because of these stumbling blocks - but more on a personal basis, truly “woe” is to the one by which these come - see also Luke 17:1-4
 - The tendency of believers to sometimes wish for opportunities to indulge in these “temptations” is one that must be seen for what it is; a **dangerous** naivety!
- c. None of us should ever think it allowable/acceptable on our part to be one who leads others, in any way, to “falling” into sin (“addictive distractions” away from the Lord and the Faith) - sometimes this occurs “religiously” under the guise of “graciousness” and not wanting to come across as “legalistic” - we are to be patient and gracious, but never to the point of “excusing”!

6. It should be noted that though Jesus uses children as an example, the “object” itself still applies also - those who harm children deserve special judgment and condemnation

- a. A society that looks to not only **morally entrap** these children of the Lord, but who literally look to “entrap” them and destroy them, will face special judgment from God
- b. Hebrews 11:36-40 deals with this when describing the mistreatment of those “of faith”

B. Prioritizing personal purity - vs. 8-9

1. It is sometimes our fault in our neglect that we “stumble” and lend to our own fall

- a. Jesus begins by demonstrating the priority with comparisons - using what is most precious, physically, he belittles it in light of “eternity” - one loss is far better to face than the other!

Matthew Henry

These are to be separations with resolve! The urgency is to be the motivator

- b. "It is certain, the inward lust must be mortified, though it be dear to us as an eye, or a hand."
- c. Whatever is motivating one to "stumble" or to lead others to "stumble" (temptation), should be dealt with quickly, harshly and in a way that is permanent ("sever" so as to make the separation permanent) - this aspect is crucial, since our tendency is to "store" such things away and allow them to be used on occasion
- d. The neglect is shown here in what is **not** done - yes, it may be the hand, foot or eye that is "doing" evil, but the issue is that these have not been strongly and effectively dealt with - and, in this context, not only do they lend to personal failure, but can be contributors to others "stumbling"

2. "Cut off", "tear out" and "throw away" vs. 8-9

For some could reason that they should just kill themselves to avoid sin altogether - but the point is to continue on with effective, strong, definitive action

see Col. 3:1-10 and II Pet. 1:9-10 (where Peter focuses on the absence of growth - fostered/excused sin is never justified or endorsed!)

These deal with personal sin, — considering our actual condition before God - vs. 15 and on deal with the sins of "a brother"

Christ's illustration points more to internal/personal tendencies to sin and not an emphasis on external/societal influences - sadly, we are likely to blame the externals and not deal with the personal

We might readily agree to the removal of a limb to save the rest of our body from a disease - seen in the right light, one easily outweighs the other

- a. It should be noted that even in the Lord's graphic illustration, He is not suggesting a total incapacitation (as in both hands, both feet or eyes), but something that would seem drastic for the purpose to bring "the wrong" to an end - this is speculative on my part and just an observation
- b. Some may question this as lending to the idea that salvation pivots on "not sinning" (or some concept of sinless perfection (practical) on our part, and so "play it down") - but the core idea still fits, realizing that anyone refusing to deal with sin in their life, does not distinguish themselves as a Christian (internally and externally) and the "evidence" points to "eternal fire"
- c. So life's values/priorities must be evaluated as to whether or not they lend to avoiding pit-falls or whether they are active participants - better to be inconvenienced (even profoundly so) in this life, than to have our "whims" catered to now and we suffer eternal loss
- d. Matthew Henry noted also, "Many prevailing temptations to sin arise from within ourselves; our own eyes and hands offend us; if there were never a devil to tempt us, we should be drawn away of our own lust: nay, those things which in themselves are good, and may be used as instruments of good, even those, through the corruptions of our hearts, prove snares to us, incline us to sin, and hinder us in duty."
- e. This is a concept that requires forethought versus "living in the moment" - why would we **not** yield to "fleshly desires"? Because we consider where it leads (for us and potentially our part in the downfall of another) - discipline overall, and discipline of focus needs a purpose - discipline for discipline sake will be short-lived!
- f. If we consider the three examples Jesus uses, we could (categorically) conclude that anything that badly affects what we do (hand), where we go/direction (foot) or what we see (eye), we forcefully part with it! - these three (at least) ideas are included - **Thought, action and direction** should be regularly scrutinized for "viruses", so that the entirety of our lives does not become "mortally infected"

C. The high value of "each" - the Father is not willing that any one of these should "perish" - vs. 10-14

- 1. These next verses describe the value that the Father places on "each of His" - one might entertain the thought that God might be given to majorities (statistical victories), yet these statements from our Lord demonstrate that each is precious to Him... **and not one will not be lost!**

This places a whole difference on "getting it right" with others - we do not want to be in a group where a millstone around the neck and drowning is what would be better

- a. Those who would consider trying to "bring one of these down" need to come to realize, because of their value, they will be in opposition to God Himself
- b. These verses should also be sobering to any in "spiritual leadership" and are looked to for guidance - they should sense the weight of responsibility to guide rightly, as the Shepherd would (and not according to their own sense or set of guidelines)

2. Don't look down upon, belittle, or regard as of no value any one of these "little ones" - vs. 10

As in Hebrews 1:14, these are "ministering angels" - these same ones serve these "little ones"

- a. This is in reference to those whose confidence is on God and not themselves - they (as the child Jesus used as an illustration) depend on the Father, and those that are "their angels" are the same that are before the throne of God who "always see the face of my Father"
- b. The term "always see the face of my Father" is a phrase used to describe the highest of privileged positions (those who have direct access to the King at all times) - if such as these serve "these little ones", who are we to belittle them and their dependent faith - of course, we are to be one of these "little ones"

Humble dependence is specially protected and avenged by God Himself - His care for us surpasses our ability to comprehend and our doubt of His care at any time is grossly wrong!

- c. If those who are charged with ministering to these are actually before God, we must then realize that any mistreatment or intent to lead them "astray" will not go unnoticed

3. The example of the 99 sheep and the 1 that wandered off - vs. 11-14

- a. Verse 11 was likely not in the original manuscripts based on much textual evidence

The litany of reasons that could be presented as to why the shepherd should not trouble himself only lends to the point about to be made

We are never more like Satan than when we play the part of "accuser" (condemnor) or when we lead others into temptation

Sadly, if we could translate this to now, we would see the other 99 rejoicing that the one "left" the fold and would feel superior in themselves - our attitude towards a wayward brother ought to be one of grief with expectant watching for the Father to bring them back rather than "write them off"

Our goal then, with any of these "little ones" that have been made to stumble is to act in harmony with our Father in participating (as we are enabled) to bring them back

- b. It looks as though it was borrowed from Luke 19:10 - the concept fits there and so it does here as well - the "Son of Man" came for this very purpose - to "save" (reclaim) what was lost (to be "lost" carries with it the necessity to already belong (rightfully) to the seeker)
- c. To illustrate, Christ begins, "What do you think?" as He tells of a shepherd who, having a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off - one may naturally assume he might disregard it since it is only 1% of his herd, and would not be worth the trouble - and so the significance of this illustration stands out!
- d. What does this shepherd do? He leaves the 99 to go search and retrieve the lost one (**not being able to bear the loss of even one**) - This is the Father's "feeling" toward all His "sheep"
- e. This is a significant comfort to those that are His - the point of sharing this, though, is not to just provide comfort to us, but to reiterate the Father's love for those that are His - realizing this, we would never want to even begin to lend to the wandering of our fellow "sheep" (since this is what the enemy does)
- f. In this illustration, if the shepherd is fortunate enough to find the lost sheep, because of its value to him, he "rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine" - the point is not that he loves the one more than the others, but is presented this way to place the stress on the joy of finding the lost sheep - this also illustrates that God's approach to our wanderings is not condemning, but more of a loving, urgent "search and rescue"
- g. One of the most comforting verses is here in verse 14 - the Lord plainly puts it that it is NOT the will of the Father that one (any one) of these "perish" - **those that are His are always His!**
- h. Literally, "οὐκ ἔστιν θέλημα ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Πατρὸς" (not/no existing will before the face of your Father), as if saying, such an option (their perishing) is not a concept even seen as a possibility before your Father! - His retrieval of them is certain!
- i. Before anyone might think that the "eternal security" concept would be a type of "license to sin", let's not discount what would be involved with the Shepherd tracking down and bringing back the lost sheep - He does not wait and allow it to work its way back, but goes and brings it back - those leaving the flock that never return were never the Father's to begin with (for He retrieves ALL that are His)
4. So, each of these "children" are significant to God and we also strive to be so "little", to promote such "littleness" and defend/stand with those being attacked or threatened - the motivation is in keeping with the priority of God Himself

XXIX. Dealing Appropriately With Wrongs and Offenses - 18:15-35

A. The process to follow when dealing with "a brother who sins" - vs. 15-20

1. This next section fits the flow of thought that just proceeded - part of caring for these "little ones" (and each other) will involve dealing with sin - vs. 15

There is a responsibility that comes with seeing another sin (ἀμαρτία) - "missing the mark" by neglect or by misdirection (heading the wrong way)

This should be followed strictly, though we often go to others first to expose the fault - if we are unwilling to confront the offending brother we must not share what was done with others - note though, this is sin and not irritations or just personal offenses

"Love" that "covers a multitude of sins" covers them by forgiveness and not by excusing them - read James 5:19-20 and 1 Peter 4:8

- a. "If your brother sins against you" is most often how this is translated since there is some question as to whether or no "against you" (εἰς σὲ) was in the original manuscripts - this has little bearing on how it is handled, since it is clear that the scenario begins with one brother seeing another sin
- b. The Lord's usage of this word for "sin" is key since it pictures more inability, error, neglect or waywardness than it does a deliberate step to do the wrong thing (though either would still require action on the part of the observing "brother")
- c. If seen, or the "wrong doing" is directed at "you", the first course of action is to go to him, one-on-one (privately) and point out the sin (expose it, confront him (ἐλεγεῖν - a direct word indicating an attempt to convince another of their wrong (point it out))
- d. The objective is to "win him" (ἐκέρδησας - gaining by not losing) - the purpose and approach are never for the condemning of the brother or the elevation of the one pointing out the sin - it is serious and potentially saddening because of what is at stake (the loss of a brother!)
- e. But the sin must be revealed as the sin it is, because to leave it excused will not be a help to them at all - the overriding objective is to keep them from stumbling (and **inaction can actually be lending to the fall of a brother**)
- f. What is won is of very high value (not winning the "argument" but winning the friend, and a true friend will "wound" (Pr. 27:6) when needed, because they genuinely care for their welfare)

We must allow for the possibility that we may have not assessed the situation correctly and that no sin was done - the goal is to get it right and do it right!

- g. Go alone to them first because there is no good to be had in sharing it with others, without first getting to know the “motivation” or thought processes of the “sinning brother” - plus, if it is made “public” first, they may become defensive for their pride’s sake, and then we’ve only assisted in compounding sin upon sin - see Psa. 141:3-5 and Pr. 25:9-10

2. What if he/she “does not listen”? - vs. 16

We should assume the others that are brought along are mature in the faith and not brought along to “attack” - they seek to persuade or to witness - the “witness” would be needed when it is brought before the “church”

A Christian apologist challenges his team, “remember, behind every question is a questioner” - consider the person

compare to II Cor. 13:1-10 - Here, Paul would need to get very stern

- a. If the individual will not “listen”, then they either will not give a hearing at all, will not concede to what has been said, or will be argumentative and unrepentant (they have not been “won”)
- b. The instruction from the Lord is to bring one or two more to serve as “witnesses” and confirm all that is said - this is not just to be able to rightly identify the obstinance of the sinning brother (though that may be required), it is also with the pursuit to “win” them with others, and help them change their ways/thinking - the goal is persuasion
- c. The seriousness with which this is to be taken is clear - these witnesses are to be able to account for the words spoken (in detail) - also, these verses are in the imperative - if we see (or know) the brother sinning, **we are responsible to act** - this is not a suggestion
- d. Most often, the counsel of others is to be sought - we’re dealing with one we are to be looking upon as a brother - the actions and caution both reflect the urgency!

3. If he still refuses to repent/heed, take it before the assembly (church) - vs. 17-18

This person refuses (παράκουσῃ) to hear/heed - this isn’t describing as much an ongoing dialogue, but one that **will not** discuss it - this response is seen today as many will try to avoid sin issues by saying, “I don’t want to talk about it”

So much of the opposite is seen in churches today - those openly sinning are not confronted and are treated no differently (leaving their problem unaddressed and potentially disregarding their eternal condition!)

Many decisions/conclusions have been reached by those professing to be “the Church” but are not (primarily identified in their disharmony (contradiction) to the Scripture)

The “shall have been bound” and “shall have been loosed” phrases are in the “perfect tense” in Greek, describing that has already taken place with lasting results

- a. Stubbornness to defend known sin, or to refuse to identify a sin for what it is, needs to be brought openly before the church once the previous two approaches have been unsuccessful
- b. This verse (and the previous) are the basis of most of what has been considered “church discipline” over the centuries - the purpose is to either restore the sinning brother, or to officially categorize them as those who are outside the church (not “in Christ”) - this is not an official condemnation, but an identifying of what one (at the very least) appears to be or not to be
- c. The person who refuses to listen and deal with their sin is to be “**as**” (ὡσπερ) a “Gentile” and a “Tax Collector” - the “Gentile” being one who is not one of them, and the “Tax Collector” representing one who has forsaken good character and willfully gone against conscience - it needs to be noted (in light of the next verse), this is not pronouncing this person as “unsaved”, but that they are to be dealt with **as though** they are
- d. “Reproving a brother who had sinned was a positive command under the law. See Lev_19:17. And the Jews have a saying, that one of the causes of the ruin of their nation was, “No man reproved another.” Clarke
- e. Once again (as in Mt. 16:19), Jesus repeats what He said, only now he says it to all the disciples (Apostles) - in this context, the Lord is stressing the significance of what the Church (assemblies of Christians) represents - the key in handling the usage of this texts pivots also on understanding that this applies to real Christians in the real Church
- f. **The sinning “brother” should take serious these encounters with those of the Church and those of the Church should see their responsibility as being directly linked with Heaven** - this is by no means a “power-trip” for confronting believers - for, as stated to Peter, whatever they decide to “bind” (restrict) on Earth “shall have been bound in heaven”, and whatever they decide to “loose” (lessen restriction on Earth) - **note this, in the strictest sense, is applicable to the Apostles which is one of the reasons why we count their writings as Scripture also**
- g. But this is stronger motivation for us to “get it right”, realizing we’re not dealing with topics that reflect our opinions, but we are to reflect what was revealed to have already been bound and loosed in Heaven, and identified as such because the Apostles confirmed it

4. The encouraging power of united prayer - vs. 19-20

Thoughts of giving-up should be reminders of the need to bring these pressures to the Father

- a. Working off of what He had just said, Jesus now applies it to their prayers (asking)
- b. If any had been sinned against (or were discouraged and doubting because of what had happened, or what they witnessed), they can and should bring it to the Father - much discouragement finds its source in keeping such incidents to themselves, and not bringing it before the Lord, or with others (who should be ready to do so) with them
- c. The number of those agreeing and praying need not be many - the Lord shares these truths, not to empower wrongfully the few dissenters, but to demonstrate we need not to get a great number praying for our particular petitions or concerns in order to lend it weight before God
- d. These “two or three” are characterized as “gathered together in My name” - to be gathered

A key word in this text is "συμφωνήσωσιν" which is where we get our word for "symphony" - the objective is to be unified (in harmony) with each other in what we should seek and ask for - the Lord works through the unity of those that are His, even if it is just a few that are truly unified around what truly represents "the Lord's name"

This is the goal, and since we are easily distracted with "self", we are apt to need to continually work toward this end - "agreement" will be found around a harmonious conclusion of God's revealed Word

B. Since there will be "offenses" (wrongs done to us), what should forgiveness look like? - vs. 21-35

1. The rule - how often are we to forgive those "brothers" that wrong us? - vs. 21-22

There is a formal response as a "church" that is to be taken and then there is a personal response to the failings of others with us

These "sins" addressed here are dealt with now from how we look on them - when others "let us down", neglect us and disappoint us - this "covers more ground" than just the "sins" that are deliberate wrongs against us

"The man who asks such a question does not really know what forgiveness means." Plummer

It is noted in some resources that "ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ" may actually be "77" - this is not significant since the Lord was making the point that each should expect to forgive countless times

An instinctive response needs to be developed to correctly respond to the pain of wrongs against us - maybe it should be thought of along the lines of the old game of "hot potato" - as soon as you receive, the objective is to get rid of it as quickly as possible (so as not to get "burned")

If an accounting is to be had of sin debts, here's what it would look like before God - the point is leading to the absurdity of our keeping account of the wrongs done to us

- in His name is more than a profession of such, but describes those that are actually His and are agreeing and praying over what both recognize is in harmony with God's will
- e. This also counters any notion that the more we can get to pray for a request, the more "power" or influence it will have with God - the Lord clearly demonstrates the opposite - God is not impressed with numbers, and numbers have no part nor power to "sway" Him
 - f. Then, these two or three that confronted the sinning brother, should realize the ever-present Lord with them (providing comfort in the pressures associated with their responsibility, while also giving them a stronger sense of responsibility to not do what they do, of their own "whims", **but to take care to do it as the Lord would have them do it**)
 - g. This also keeps us focused on who the actual leader (boss) really is - if we could see Christ come in among us, which of us would look on themselves as "in charge"? - with such a picture, it helps us envision what should really happen when we are together (in large numbers or small) - we are seeking the Lord's will, His way, His truth, not our personal wills or the cumulative wills of the majority

- a. Peter seeks clarification as to how many times would be good (even generous) to forgive one that sins against him (seven times would be considered very generous) - this is clearly dealing with offenses (sins) against ourselves, and not so much sins in general
- b. "There is a proneness in our corrupt nature to stint ourselves in that which is good, and to be afraid of doing too much in religion, particularly of forgiving too much, though we have so much forgiven us." Henry
- c. The word for "sins" in verse 15 and the word for "sin" in verse 21 are the same underlying word (ἁμαρτάνω), indicating not living-up to what one should do - this definition (this particular word) even effects how we think on the wrong of another - in the general sense, we (as a church) seek to **deal with the failings of not doing what we ought** (often seen by the lines that are crossed, morals compromised, but the perspective is still the same - they're not pursuing what we/they should be) - focus is on helping each pursue what they ought
- d. Peter's question already indicates a basic misunderstanding of what forgiveness (ἀφήσω - to send away, let go) means - even to track sins to just seven, demonstrates the previous are still held "in account" - it might be argued that we cannot forget wrongs against us, but this must be countered with, "then we must continually practice forgiving and forgetting"
- e. Kept in context, forgiveness will also be necessary in the "winning" (restoration) of the "sinning brother" - the actions, lack of reactions and the responsibilities are many in dealing with the faults of each other in the church (expect lots to do)
- f. Christ's response demonstrates no limit is to be established as to how many times one forgives
- g. Seventy times 7 (70x7) (or also 77) is a way of saying "have poor accounting standards when it comes to the wrongs done against you" - see also Luke 17:3-4
- h. "Peter's question was misconceived; if one is still counting, however "generously," one is not forgiving" R.T. France - if one is counting (keeping track) it is in no way associated with forgiveness - it demonstrates a calculated limit to then justify retaliation
- i. Possibly the exact phrasing was used in Gen. 4:24 by Lamech, only that context was how many times Lamech thought he should be avenged for wrongs against him - Lamech's response was typical thinking while Christ's was Godly - after all, how many times have we "missed the mark" before God and He forgives? - see also Rom. 12:14-21

2. Forgiveness of the "debts" against us in light of the incalculable debt that was forgiven us - vs. 23-35

- a. How is forgiveness done (what is it like) in the "Kingdom of Heaven"? - this is again presented in such a way so as to contrast the kingdoms of this world
- b. The Lord begins His illustration with a king who decided to call in the debts of his "slaves" - slaves could be in all sorts of positions and income levels under these types of systems - the first one owed 10,000 "talents" - the word for 10,000 (μυριάων) was often used as a word to describe what was countless, innumerable - one commentator (France) compared it to our saying "zillions" (this is where we get our word for "myriad")
- c. This is an excellent representation for the immeasurable debt we owe before God

This is important to realize because those that look on the "debt" to God as manageable (and that they can pay it down themselves), are likely to be hard/harsh with others - we must see God's forgiveness for its magnitude

This helps demonstrate the subjectivity used in the estimating another's "debt" to me - better to keep a good idea of the debt we owe to God (for our active and passive sin)

This is illustrative of those trying to payoff their sin debt before God, not seeking forgiveness of the debt, just time to "work it off"

Though this man, even after receiving mercy remains unchanged in his character - mercy offered to such is not valued (as those who seek mercy but not a change of heart/character as a result)

The debt was a legitimate debt and this "just forgiven" slave was within his rights in his treatment as far as the law of his culture was concerned

This is similar to those who have been wronged and refuse to allow things to be "worked out" these desire to hod the wrong against the other and not let it go

Merciless in the face of mercy is wicked - so is unforgiveness in the face of forgiveness - it demonstrates a particularly evil heart that can and does respond as such - yet, in a practical sense this is done often (when refusing to forgive wrongs against self)

This text has been referenced by Roman Catholics to make a case for "Purgatory" - if it is, the problem would be that this debt was insurmountable - if someone would actually go to such a place, they will never get out (having forfeited the only saving force... the forgiveness of the Master)

Jesus' application is the focus - we know that if we do not forgive the "debts" (sins) of our "brothers" against us, we are not forgiven

- d. The account continues where the master looks to utilize a law where he can sell the man and his family to work to pay off the debt (and to sell all he possessed) - with a debt this size it was not probable it would be paid-off in his lifetime (or that of his children)
- e. Considering our debt (and any thought that it might be paid-off) to God, John Gill clarified, "...a debt of sin cannot be discharged by a debt of obedience ; since God has a prior right to the latter; and in paying it, a man does but what is his duty. Sin being committed against an infinite God, contracts the nature of an infinite debt, which cannot be paid off by a finite creature."
- f. In the present context, one of the purposes of this is to keep our focus off wrongs done to us (watching-out for "these little ones" and using consistent, urgent caution when dealing with the sins (failings) of others)
- g. The man humbled himself, acknowledged the debt and his purpose to pay it all - this was a plea for mercy and that for something he could never repay - the purpose, though of this account, was not whether or not it was feasible for the slave to pay this back, just that his debt was enormous
- h. "Patience and forbearance are a great favour, but it is folly to think that these alone will save us; reprieves are not pardon . Many are borne with, who are not thereby brought to repentance (Rom_2:4), and then their being borne with does them no kindness." Henry
- i. This "lord of the slave" released him (from being sold) - Alfred Plummer made a point related to this when he wrote, "A man cannot confine the consequences of his sin to himself. Even those who have had no share in his guilt will be involved in the misery which it produces..."
- j. This "king" was moved with compassion, feeling pity for the man's situation and how he was brought to such a state of pleading (when his debt was calculated) - note that (in comparison), sinners who are never confronted with the debt (guilt) of their sin, will not come to sense its weight, **until it is too late** (and it is finally calculated)
- k. The debt forgiven and he being released, he found someone (a fellow slave) that owed him "100 denarii" (essentially a fraction of the debt amount he himself had owed) - as seen in his demanding response, this aggressive slave appears to actually be seeking a type of vengeance against the one owing him - it pictures one trying to instill fear/dread in others watching
- l. Just upon meeting the fellow slave, he "seized him and began to choke him" - he was reactionary (so obsessed with what he figured was due him, he was merciless from the start)
- m. The fellow slave makes an almost identical plea as the first, "have patience and I will repay you" - the "evil" slave would not relent (he was unwilling to wait) and had him thrown into prison (which at the very least would make it much more difficult to pay back the amount) - it seems likely, restitution was not sought; as mentioned, this was more an act of revenge/cruelty - **no thought seems to be given to the mercy just shown him**
- n. The news of this is reported (by the other slaves) back to the king - these fellow slaves were "deeply grieved" by what they saw - even they realized the immorality of the situation, and that this was not in keeping with what their lord would have
- o. Once summoned, the king calls this cruel slave "wicked" (it's in the vocative in Greek meaning it was what he called him, and not just how he described him) - he sums up the situation concisely - he references the forgiven debt and the pleading this same man had just recently been doing - should he not have demonstrated **the same mercy** as was shown him (with so great a debt)? What moral right did he have to act this way? (though he had legal right)
- p. Gal. 4:31-32 makes the point also our Lord is driving to - those who are most aware of the great debt forgiven them, live poised to forgive all offenses against themselves
- q. The master, angered at the evil of this slave, hands him over to the "torturers" - many debate this term and its literal meaning; regardless here was a man with forgiveness "in his hands" and yet, in his demanding personal "justice" he in turn **received what he had deserved**
- r. Then, the sobering words of Christ that any who refuses to forgive "his brother **from your heart**" will have the same judgement on them from the Father
- s. Some struggle with the notion that the debt was forgiven and then reapplied - does this represent one "losing salvation" (because they refuse to forgive debts against them)? - when dealing with parables, not every aspect is meant to be applicable (some details are just incidentals) - in this account, the earthly King could only deal with one after discovering their heart - God already knows the heart and the future

Many situations involving forgiveness do not remove the consequences - our perspective though, is to forgive sincerely and not hold the offense against the offender

Rather than trying to explain away this and other "forgiveness" texts, let's face it and never see forgiveness as an option - this will involve many "death to self" sessions and a "mortifying" of our pride!

- t. **An unforgiving heart is evidence of being in an unforgiven state!** It's supposed to be an obvious fact that any who knows their debt is forgiven by God, MUST also forgive the offenses against themselves - this is not presented as optional!
- u. It should also be mentioned that it is not ours to forgive offenses against another - for instance, my forgiveness of one's sins against God do not settle the account with God - this is also why when someone commits a crime against me, and I forgive what was done to me, the civil authorities (in most cases) must still enforce the law and the penalty
- v. Note also - the forgiveness is "from the heart" - it is inward and not just outwardly displayed - this will involve examining our own thoughts/hearts on these matters - am I nice outwardly but bitter inwardly? Bitterness is not hidden long and affects like an infection - see Heb. 12:15
- w. Unforgiveness, with all sorts and degrees of offenses done to us, can be one of the many ways we "despise" these "little ones" that our Lord protects - our bitterness can be one of the causes leading to their stumbling and injury

XXX. The Divorce Question - 19:1-12

A. The this text has been one of the most highly argued texts in the New testament - most of the argument does not surround the actual purpose or content of the statements, but around the so-called "exception clause"

1. Before we break it down, we need to realize a few key points so as not to stray from the context

Subjectivity has been a large contributor to the uses of these verses to legitimize the remarriage of someone who has been wronged - the objective with any text is to always understand what is says (regardless of how I feel or my circumstances), and live with the results

- a. Jesus is not looking to legitimize /sanction any aspect of divorce - this is clear in His first response to the questions from the Pharisees (trying to entrap Him)
- b. Much of the concluding thoughts regarding remarriage are, at best, assumptions imposed on the text and not direct statements - the Lord answers regarding divorce and adultery
- c. We need objective truth (especially from God's Word) - once the pursuit of truth is sought to endorse a position (no matter "how gracious" the intent), it will be slanted (unless the pursuer realizes they are themselves in need of correction/alteration and not the text)

2. Judging by the response of the Disciples in verse 10, we should realize that they were shocked at Jesus' response to the question (that it was very strict)

B. Jesus enters Judea and is greeted with "testing" questions - vs. 1-3

1. Jesus was leaving Galilee for the last time (till after His resurrection) and headed to Jerusalem

- a. Large crowds were still following Him and (most likely) were doing so for healing and for the provisions He would provide - this will become more evident in their "change" at the trial and crucifixion - many still follow after Christ for "benefits" and part with Him when inconvenienced
- b. Jesus still met their needs and still taught uncompromising - He was not motivated to maintain the crowd - just to fully minister to them (regardless their motives)

2. The Pharisees' motive in asking Jesus the question regarding divorce was their form of a "litmus test"

The Lord actually does not side with either group even though many believe he sided with Shammai because of His answer involving the issue of fornication - but His first answer IS His answer

- a. They did it "testing Him" - the test was to see which "camp" He would agree with regarding what allowed for divorce - tradition tells us the two "camps" were that of "Hillel" who basically allowed divorce for any reason that a man was dissatisfied with his wife - the other group, Shammai, held that a man could only divorce if his wife was adulterous
- b. Since we're told they did it "testing" Him, we know they thought it advantageous to get Him associated with one or the other group (maybe to lessen some of His support in the group He did not agree with) - this was like the political wrangling that takes place now where the intent is to reveal the detailed position of a candidate
- c. Their question was "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" - Jesus' answer will be (generally) two-fold - the first will clarify the intended permanence of the marriage before God, and the second will answer the "lawfulness" of divorce

This demonstrates more a "political" motive than one actually seeking the legitimate answer to a legitimate question

The mention of remarriage is only in association with it being adulterous

C. "What God has joined together, let not man separate" - vs. 4-6

1. Jesus begins the answer by going back to the foundation of the institution of marriage - vs. 4-5

- a. Their focus was on the divorce process, by-passing the original plan - Jesus references Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:24 - the first statement lays the groundwork for what was known to be foundational - God made male and female and then made one, each for the other (in marriage)
- b. Just as God made "male and female" so He also made marriage between the sexes and one for or the other - in our day we see a blurring of the lines between the sexes, and the loose handling of the concept of marriage by even Christians has contributed to the devaluing or marriage, which led to the redefinition of marriage, which has contributed so-called "transgenders"

And such is an example of the "devolution" of mankind as they wander away from God and His absolutes - seeing this, should we not seek to treat with utmost caution the institution of marriage?

We know this is the case because of the question that follows from the Pharisees, "Why then did Moses...?"

This summarizes God's design precisely, and any distortion or alteration of it is perversion- there are variations that seemingly "good" people have sought to justify and make as "norms" - divorce is at the heart of most of this!

It is probable that some of the big issues in marriages stem from an unwillingness to fully invest in the new family - "in-laws" should not look to discourage or distract from the proper priority

"Note 'what,' not 'whom.' The marriage relation God has made." RWP

The realization that we're discussing God's institution should cause believers to approach it with the highest of unfeigned caution

There had been some arguments that were framed in such a way so as to make divorce the morally obligated thing to do

Both were playing off of what the text seemed to infer more than what it was actually stating

There will always be those trying to make God's Word (and Law) sanction evil

This is where so many who appeal to the "exception clause" go off course - they believe the unfaithfulness of the other legitimizes the divorce - Christ makes it clear, God is still not for it

- c. Jesus begins (as He has before) asking, "Have you not read?" - this was a very forceful way to address those who were recognized as experts concerning the Mosaic law - Jesus lays out (from what Moses wrote) the **permanence** of the marriage union as it was instituted - so the Lord did not side with either party; He simply quoted from the highest authority, and in so doing did not get pulled into the "fray" (which usually is not after truth, just seeking **distinction**)
- d. First, God made one man and one woman - there was no divorce option, there was no polygamy
- e. Based on this (because of this purposed design of the Creator), the man leaves (καταλείπει, forsakes, abandons) father and mother (he leaves his family to have his own family) - this is done by being "joined to his wife" (κολληθήσεται, to be "glued to") so closely, so as to be "one flesh" - this is far more than just what is in the physical union; it describes the souls being knit together, and the result is the "one flesh" (also carrying the idea of a unique flesh from what they had before, a new (unique) **family**)
- f. In this verse there is a clear separation from one family to have a new family - there are some so close to their initial families, that they are unwilling to fully commit to their new family - the "leaving and cleaving" are both essential in following God's design - this, of course, does not mean they have nothing to do with their original families, just that the focus and overriding priority is to their new family together

2. It is God's institution of joining and not man's system to **manipulate** - vs. 6

- a. It must be stressed that the emphasis on the "one flesh" picture is to stress the focus on their being one entity (and so the thought of them separating, or that either would define themselves separately, is to be unthinkable, absurd)
- b. If that is not strong enough, then Jesus declares that what God has joined (or what has been united in His institution) mankind must not seek to sever it - note also that the underlying word χωριζέτω is **present imperative** (don't be separating or withdrawing - either of those in the marriage or any other from without) - one cannot use this text to say "God did not join us together" since this described the **marriage** itself and not the people - Vincent also wrote, "Not those. Christ is contemplating, not the individuals, but the unity which God cemented; and so Wyc., that thing that God enjoined; i.e., knit together."

- c. This is foundational and all else must "work off" of this truth (if the desire is to "get it right") - impassioned subjectivity can only be managed with unshakable **objectivity**

D. Then why did Moses provide for divorce in the Law? - vs. 7-9

1. This was a reasonable question to ask - if God instituted it as such, then why did God, in the Law given through Moses, provide for a "certificate of divorce"?

- a. It must be recognized at first, the choice of words the Pharisees chose to use when describing this - they used "commanded" (ἐνετείλατο - to give orders) - these were seeking to give it more force/emphasis than it actually had
- b. This is typical of mankind - there is an attempt "spin" God in such a way that He is made to **appear** to be for what He is actually against

- c. The Pharisees are referencing Deut. 24:1 (which was at the heart of the debate over divorce in their camps) - The conservatives focused on the narrow definition of "some indecency" while the liberals focused on "finds no favor in his eyes" (which is what makes the "indecency")
- d. When the text is read in its entirety (verses 1-4), the intent is clear - it is not laying out a standard of divorce as much as it is a standard for remarriage (of a woman who has been divorced)
- e. So the entire debate was surrounding the notion that divorce was **commanded** in the Law and they were trying to conclude the circumstance in which it should be enforced

2. The reason for the "certificate of divorce" was in response to the "hardness of your hearts" - vs. 8

- a. Christ's counter word was "allowed" (permitted) versus their "command" - divorce under a single situation was PERMITTED, **but by no means was it endorsed/encouraged**
- b. And, the only reason Moses permitted it was because of the "hardness of your hearts" (making it clear that even though the wife had been immoral, her immorality did not make the divorce a God-**endorsed** act)
- c. In following closely what Jesus is saying, because (in this scenario) the husband of the immoral wife is unforgiving (hard-hearted), he divorces his wife - he is allowed to do it (under the law), but this does not make it the truly moral response

It seems that most discussion surrounding the topic of divorce focuses on the "offended innocent" party and what they have a "right" to do - yet the previous verses dealing with forgiveness should be considered and stressed first before clouding judgement with misdirected focus

- d. There are, for instance, financial laws regarding debts, that though the debt collector is in their "rights" to use certain means to collect on the debt (within the law), it does not make it the truly "right" response
- e. As stressed by the Lord, "from the beginning it has not been this way" - clarifying the literal meaning of this phrase, Vincent clarified, "The verb is in the perfect tense (denoting the continuance of past action or its results down to the present). He means: Notwithstanding Moses' permission, the case has not been so from the beginning until now. The original ordinance has never been abrogated nor superseded, but continues in force."

3. Whoever divorces his wife and remarries another, commits adultery... always? - vs. 9

It is very important to use the text as intended - Jesus is countering the proposition as to whether or not a man can divorce his wife for any reason - why does He then go on to add the "remarriage" aspect as a part of His answer?

- a. The Lord begins, "But I say to you..." indicating his clarification (the definitive answer)
- b. A majority of the focus on this verse is usually given to the so-called "exception clause" - it is put forward that the answer Jesus provides is limiting divorce only to the reason of "adultery" (or "unchastity"), and that if the divorce is for any other reason than that of this particular evil, then to "marry another" would be adultery
- c. Then, the focus is often turned to discuss the remarriage options of the one that divorced their wife (because she was unfaithful) - this is the crux of the debate nowadays
- d. Succinctly put, Jesus' answer is that a man cannot divorce his wife, except for the reason of immorality, and if he remarries, he commits adultery - the *assumed* restatement of this verse is, "If a man divorces his wife because she is immoral, if he remarries, he has not committed adultery."
- e. Clearly, Jesus opposes the notion that a man can divorce his wife for any reason that he is displeased with her - the question is whether He allows remarriage after a divorce for unfaithfulness
- f. There are several issues related to the idea that remarriage after a divorce (even for adultery) is permitted by the Lord (in His clarification) - the first, and hopefully most obvious issue, is related to what He had just mentioned before - marriage is to be looked upon as indissoluble - the common response to this is that adultery does dissolve the union (and since it was punishable by death, the offending spouse is looked upon as "dead" anyway)
- g. Another issue is also related to our context - this usage of the "exception clause" is not in keeping with the topic of forgiveness just covered
- h. And then there are the two parallel texts in Mark and Luke (Mk. 10:11-12, Lu. 16:18) - in both these texts there is no "exception clause," telling us at least two things: first, the addition of the exception clause by Matthew must have a very specific purpose (twice), and second, the *emphasis* in both is on the adultery involved in the *remarriage* after the divorce - to say that remarriage was assumed/implied is to again read into the text what is not there (and should we not "err on the side of caution" with such a serious topic?) - yet many are reactionary to this because the focus is placed on the "condemnation to loneliness" (placing the greater authority on the relationship (feelings of it) higher than the purity of the institution of God)
- i. Another issue is seen when considering the "legitimizing" (legalizing) a remarriage after a divorce based on unfaithfulness - if divorce (because of "unchastity") dissolves the marriage, technically they are both free to remarry (and if one objects to this conclusion, stating that she cannot remarry because she was at fault, then how exactly does the man that marries "her" commit adultery if her previous marriage is dissolved? How is it adultery if she really is no longer married?) - to add to this, only (then) an adulteress wife could remarry, while any other woman divorced for other "causes" would not have the right to remarry
- j. If divorce (in all cases) is seen as separation (versus a dissolving of the marriage before God), these verses become more clear and consistent (especially in light of the Lord's initial response as well as the startled response of the disciples later)
- k. One more issue to consider is the unusual usage of the word πορνεία (immorality, unchastity) when describing the sinning wife, instead of the normal word for this sin in marriage, μοιχᾶται. (commits adultery) - some argue that these words are interchangeable, but Matthew himself uses them distinctly in the same passage (see Mt. 15:19) - this point will be discussed later as one of the possible explanations for the usage of the "exception clause"
- l. Then, there is Paul's reference to the Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage in I Cor. 7:10-11 where he clarifies to the woman who leaves her husband "must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband"

*Sometimes the best way to handle a controversial verse is to first determine what it **can-not be saying** based upon other unquestionably clear texts*

*Reading into what Christ has said and trying to incorporate the Law to pave the way for remarriage is shaky at best and reckless - **if they are to be considered dead, then the only option is divorce***

Again, the right to remarry after a "legitimate" divorce must be assumed (by its supporters) since it is not directly stated - plus, a good number of divorces are considered necessary because the couple has "irreconcilable differences"

Proponents of the view that it is acceptable to remarry after divorcing one who was unfaithful, would not hold to this view/conclusion, but to stay faithful to the initial interpretation, this conclusion is (technically) a "must"

This is at least a hint that there is more than meets the eye in the Lord's response - it is a very specific word in contrast to adultery (especially when discussing the marriage relationship)

Some will counter this pointing out the usage of the phrase "not under bondage" as a freedom to remarry - as discussed in the I Cor. study, this is not the meaning (see pages 37-38 in that study)

4. So why the “exception clause”? - vs. 9

Essentially the Lord is making at least 2 key points - first, to divorce a wife for any other reason that “unchastity” is committing adultery. Second, to marry another is to commit adultery - we have a hard time seeing this (normally) because we see adultery as more the joining with another person rather than it being in the leaving the one with which they are “one flesh”. But based on Jesus’ beginning statements in answer to their question (regarding divorce), divorce is very serious and is adulterous in itself (even without remarriage) - this is indeed far more strict than any “camp” but is in keeping with the institution that makes two “one flesh”

This point may have some questions that need more detail, but it does provide a reasonable answer to why Matthew uses this word specifically realizing he uses the word for adultery also (which would be the word to use referencing sexual sins in marriage)

This should be seriously considered by any young couple considering marriage - not that they should fear it to the point of avoiding it altogether, but that they not enter into it “unadvisedly” or irreverently, but “in the fear of God”

Counsel using unquestionable truth is better than counsel seeking to first make the recipient feel better - much of the best counsel makes us feel worse (at first), forcing us to face a greater truth than our “feelings”

In John 8, Jesus is confronted by the Scribes and Pharisees with whether or not an adulterous woman should be stoned - He does not say she should be - how does this harmonize with the argument that adultery ends a marriage because the offending spouse is “dead”

This would again be assumption and would not fully explain the answer the Lord gives the disciples (His stressing the remaining unmarried, using examples of “eunuchs”)

Matthew

- a. Is Jesus’ usage of this clause an agreement with the Shammai group, or is its inclusion used in a more stricter sense? The answer to this sets the groundwork for how it is interpreted
- b. “Exegetes agree that in verses 3-8 of Matthew 19 Jesus has slammed both the liberal Hillelite and the conservative Shammaite views of divorce by affirming the strict indissolubility of marriage. Then suddenly in verse 9, according to Erasmians, Jesus backtracks allowing real divorce for immorality as the Shammaites would... It is most unlikely that Matthew would have allowed Jesus to contradict Himself so blatantly in adjacent verses. If, however, Matthew understood verse 9 to allow for separation but not remarriage, then there is no contradiction... Jesus was being much stricter than Shammai, so the disciples’ astonished reaction in verse 10 is quite understandable.” “Jesus and Divorce”- Heth and Wenham
- c. What is unique with Matthew’s handling of this incident is not his addition of a clause to justify a remarriage - he actually is adding to the severity of divorce - essentially making the point that divorce is tantamount to adultery (though if one separates because of immorality, that is not adulterous for the one divorcing)
- d. This will, on the surface, appear to be (by opponents to this strict view) to be “exegetical acrobatics” - but it must be considered that up till the 1500’s, the Church (early church Fathers till this time) taught that remarriage after divorce was always adulterous - a more “modern” outlook on remarriage (in certain circumstances) has made the exception clause come to appear (normally) to be a justification of a remarriage (of the “innocent party”)
- e. If we can see that divorce in itself is adulterous, we can see the points made - one who puts away his wife commits adultery (unless its for immorality) - and, one who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery - both statements are true (the first dealing with the divorce, and the second dealing with the remarriage after a divorce)
- f. It is possible also that the reason Matthew uses the phrase “μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ” (not on/for immorality) instead of the usual reference to the sin of immorality in marriage (μοιχᾶται - adultery) to narrow down the singular instance a proposed marriage (betrothal period) could be separated - Matthew is the one that made the case for Joseph, “being a just man was mindful to put her away” - how could he be “just” and put her away if all divorce is wrong? - unless this dissolution is of the betrothal, before they were truly “one flesh” before God
- g. So, did the Law provide for divorce? Yes. Did the Law regulate (essentially allowing remarriage after a divorce)? Yes. Does Jesus allow for divorce (as in the dissolution of the marriage bond)? No. Does He allow for remarriage after a divorce? No. Does He directly (unquestionably) state that remarriage after a divorce (a dissolving of the “one flesh”) brought on by “unchastity is permissible/good? No - not if He is keeping with His original statements about the permanence of the marriage union
- h. The entire disagreement on the various “takes” of this text comes down to the underlying motive we have in getting to an answer - is the main purpose to provide comfort to the hurting (which is noble indeed), or is it first (primarily) to understand God’s purpose in the marriage union (above our purposes)?
- i. A few more considerations - first, **it is the one divorcing that is adulterous** (which fits with Mt. 5:32 and is in harmony with Paul’s counsel with those in I Cor. 7 that are not “bound” to force a marriage where the “unbelieving spouse” is divorcing them) - second, if “adultery” ends the marriage bond, then based on Christ’s teaching in Mt. 5 regarding “lust”, a large number of marriages have already been dissolved because of the lustful thoughts of the husband

E. This is “acceptable” only to those to whom it has been given - vs. 10-12

1. Curiously, this text has been often taken as independent of what has been just stated, and has been looked upon (and used) as a stand-alone text regarding celibacy

- a. Yet, it is clear that the disciples have just reacted to what the Lord stated regarding divorce and remarriage and have reached a conclusion (that will be refuted by the Lord)
- b. The disciples react to what was just stated by concluding it is better to never marry at all if the “relationship of the man with his wife is like this” - what is the “like this” referring?
- c. Many purport that the disciples had “bought into” the Hillel belief that a man can divorce his wife for anything that displeases him, and that if he can only divorce her (and remarry) for adultery, this is too narrow and it would be better then to never “risk it” and marry

2. The Lord does not “exalt” celibacy here, but uses it to demonstrate that there are those who live their lives unmarried (for other reasons) - vs. 11-12

- a. “Not all men can accept this statement” - many have taken this as if it is making what He has just stated optional - as if saying, “If you can handle this (can agree with it) then follow it, but if you don’t agree with it (can’t handle it) then you may disregard it”
- b. The key, though, to understanding its meaning/intent, is to realize this pattern of speech that Jesus has already used previously - He is not making a case that there will be some (Christians/believers/disciples) who will be able to follow this, but that there are those “to whom it has been given” to follow this command (all of them are expected to follow it)
- c. Notice the wording in Mt. 13:11, “To you it has been granted to know...” - here, Jesus is answering the question as to why He speaks in parables - His word for “granted” (δέδοται) is the same word used here for “granted”
- d. So this statement by the Lord should not be taken as differentiating between believers, but between believers and unbelievers - unbelievers (those not in Christ) will not accept this, but believers have been granted such an “acceptance”
- e. So, was Jesus responding to the disciples statement directly, or was He clarifying the impact of His conclusion in 19:9? He is not making a case for “not marrying” but instead, a case for remaining single after a divorce - if you get married and then there is a divorce, singleness is a viable option demonstrated by others who have never been married
- f. It is intended for “only those to whom it has been given” - many take this to be a special “gifting” (gift of celibacy) basing it off of the final phrase in verse 12, “ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω” (literally “the enabled receiving (recipients), receive”) - this is not the standard word for “gifting” (which root is χάρις (grace))
- g. Why not take this to mean that those (in Christ) that find themselves in such as situation, will be able to accept this standard and will remain single? - the 3 “celibate states” are those born this way (no desire to marry, so never would have married), those “made so by men” (who also would not have been married), and then those celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”, which would have the desire to marry, but willingly submit to the betterment of the “kingdom” over their own natural wishes
- h. There will many other difficult “callings” we must face that God will give is and in so doing, will enable us to accept it for His purposes over ours - see also Mt. 19:26

Actually, as will be discussed, all believers have been given this ability (to obey it)

Note also: if Paul, in I Cor. 7:25 where he states, “Regarding virgins, I have no command from the Lord...”, why would he not reference this text if its intent was to make a case not to marry (in response to the disciples statement)?

It is taken to mean “those who feel like they can handle/accept it, accept it”

These “wronged” spouses would be enabled (δυνάμενος) to accept what was “given” to them (in this case, the circumstance) - their joy in purpose would be directed to the Kingdom of Heaven over themselves because of what the Lord of this kingdom has stated

XXXI. The Value and Character of Living for the Kingdom of Heaven - 19:13-30

A. “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” - vs. 13-15

1. Children were brought to Jesus to lay His hands on them and pray for them

Clearly the Lord valued highly children and stressed the priority we also should have regarding them (even while they are still little children) - it is a fundamental error to devalue, disregard or underestimate their significance at all stages of their lives

- a. This was apparently a custom - these parents wanted their children to be seen, blessed and prayed for by Jesus - **this should still be a desire for parents, exposure to Him over all else**
- b. We should take note, also, that Matthew records this as happening after what had just been discussed regarding divorce, remarriage and remaining single after divorce - it would be wrong to discount the benefit of the presence of God’s blessing of children (even in the situation of a divorce) - no doubt many who have faced divorce have had comfort with the children that blessed the marriage, and in many ways, make remaining unmarried worthwhile

2. The disciples “rebuked” the parents (and possibly the children) when they were coming to Jesus

Children and any considered “lowly” by our society ought to be valued highly for the Lord’s value of them, and we are not to be guilty of allowing the societal statuses and “people groupings” to guide the priorities and attentions of our part in the outworking of the Lord’s work

- a. There are many assumptions that could be made as to why the disciples were doing this, but it is apparent that they thought them a nuisance and a waste of time
- b. Jesus (in Mark 10:14) is said to have been “indignant” with His disciples over this - this was the extreme opposite of what he was seeking and valued!
- c. He tells them to not hinder the children from “coming to Me” - The command to not hinder them in coming to Him is key, even now with any parent or one that would influence children - if there is a sensitivity to the Lord and a pursuit of Him, do not look to put a stop to it!
- d. Still in connection with what he had said of the child in chapter 18, He makes it clear that the Kingdom of Heaven “belongs to such as these” - their simplistic faith, lowly station in life and a looking to come to be “blessed” of the Lord
- e. His kingdom is made up of those that this age belittles and chronically overlooks!

B. "Eternal life" (Kingdom of Heaven) is not achievable by good works - only by God is it possible - vs. 16-26

1. Jesus is approached by a young man who is described as being rich, he was said to be a "ruler" in Luke's account, and we also learn that he was apparently very "religious" - vs. 17

This man would have seemed to be a "good" man" to most - this is key as it will demonstrate that even "good" people have their failings and cannot count on their "goodness"

This also illustrates that any "works based salvation" will have its doubts - even though he is able to affirm his consistency to Jesus, he is not sure - saving faith can never be directed and dependent on self - even though we defend our arguments, we know they are not omniscient and might be flawed

- a. He would appear to have been exceptional, seeing he was a young man who had a position of authority, and yet was one who was clearly conscientious in his abiding by the Law - so he would fit the idea of being "successful" and accomplished in many ways
- b. This is one of the rare encounters where Jesus is approached by a sincere man who seemed to be humble in his approach (not "testing" him, nor coming in a proud fashion)
- c. It is also interesting to note that in Mark's account (Mark 10:17), this man came running to meet Him - he was urgent, yet as will soon be seen, another urgency (a temporal one) outweighed an eternal one
- d. His question, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" shows he still was uncertain and also explains why he was so urgent - this type of urgency is always good to see, but is not a guarantee that when the answer is given that they will "receive it"
- e. He clearly believed that "eternal life" was obtainable by his efforts/accomplishments

2. Jesus answers his question 2 ways - He reveals a misconception in the man's thinking/philosophy, and then shows a lack of perception in himself (a character flaw) - vs. 17-19

It's another way of making the point that if the man chooses to use the term "good" (and in Mark's account he called Jesus "good teacher"), he needs to go to the one who defines what qualifying "good" really is

- a. "Why do you ask Me about what is good?" - this seems (at first glance) to be a strange response - Note: some translations make it look like Jesus asking as to why the man would call Him "good", but Jesus essentially asks him, why are you asking me about what is good"
- b. The reason for Christ's answer is seen in His next statement - "Only one is good and that is God" - so "if you want to enter life, follow **His** commands"
- c. As to clarifying the keeping the commandments, John Gill wrote, "... that is, perfectly: he must do not only one good thing, but all the good things the law requires; he must not be deficient in any single action, in anyone work of the law, either as to matter, or manner of performance; everything must be done, and that just as the Lord in his law has commanded it."
- d. When the young man asks "which ones," Jesus lists some from the second half of the "Ten Commandments", all of which have to deal with how we deal with others - He summed it up with "You will love your neighbor as yourself"
- e. It may be, that in one way or another, this man was failing in the true spirit of each of these (especially as clarified by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount")
- f. From this man's sincere perspective, he had kept them all (and had been striving to do so), and Mark (Mark 10:21) tells us, after the man responded and before Jesus responded, that Jesus "loved him" - His response to the man would not be a rebuke, but a loving revelation - we see a trend now, where it is being looked upon as unloving to point out one's flaws (ever)
- g. A.T. Robertson in his thoughts on verse 20 mentioned that the young man, "... thought of goodness as quantitative (a series of acts) and not qualitative (of the nature of God)."

see Gal. 2:16 - these did not know yet of "justification" - see also. Rom. 3:20, 28 and 4:6

Externally, and from his vantage point, he was keeping these - and yet he still had doubt!

If what is said is true and is out of genuine care (seeking the best) for another, then it is loving - the opposite being a lack of care and the usage of flattery

3. "What am I still lacking?" - vs. 20-22

This is most often the result of exposure to the Word of God - we find our righteous assessments of ourself not as significant as we initially measured and find that we still must improve (though, not for salvation, but for "maturity") in our salvation - time apart from Scripture usually ends in our self-assessments getting blown out of proportion again and we settle into our comfortable neglect of "growth pursuits"

- a. This could be taken two ways; either of all these things, "how have I failed to "keep" them?" or it could be "having kept these, what else is there for me to do?"
- b. Jesus' answer may be an indication that this young man had failed in the first commandment in that he had allowed his wealth to become his "god," in that it met his needs and gave him security and significance (all of which come from God)
- c. It could be also that he had not met the true heart of "loving his neighbor as himself" in that **he would not part with such a sacrificial amount** - he had his limits!
- d. The clear message though, is the priorities change that was still needed if he truly was looking to be "complete" - he had many of the fundamental "basics" of the Law but was unaware of their intent to "bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24) - here he was "brought to Christ" sensing (by his attempts to keep the Law completely that something was lacking), but would not let go (because he immediately calculated he had so much more to lose and not what he had to gain in following this instruction)
- e. The offer of Jesus was immense! It's easy to (as the young man did) focus on the "sacrifice" of riches and then to miss the significance of what Jesus was offering - **first, there was the "treasure in Heaven" and then there was the "follow Me" (discipleship)**

It was the gaining Christ that would have been the greatest "treasure" of all! This is not a text advocating that all give up everything and live a life of poverty - many others who were wealthy followed Christ with still their wealth, but for this man, this was what he needed

compare this to 1Tim. 6:17-19; Heb. 10:34

Many, when confronted with their sinful state will wilfully choose it over eternal life - depravity indeed! Ironically it finds its confident decision to do so in self-righteousness (one, using themselves as the standard can calculate how their decision is the right one)

So it is possible for such to enter God's kingdom, just that obstacles must be overcome

So now it looks impossible! Jesus is making a solid point regarding how anyone will actually get to Heaven

Such a response is an ongoing demonstration of how mankind is driven to find a way to save themselves (or at least have a significant part in it)

Realizing the numerous life distractions, the disciples knew that most, if not all would have their life's gaze set on the temporal - It is human to be inconsistent and distracted with lesser things *flawed* at valuing the most valuable; loving the :fleeting" and bypassing the eternal

For God does not potentially saves, He **absolutely** saves!

- f. Practically speaking, there would ultimately be (for him in particular) a freedom that would come in being released from his unseen bondage to what he figured he owned - then there would have been the thrill of meeting so many needs - but this all pales in comparison to what he still would have gained for himself if he had yielded all to follow Christ
- g. It is necessary that we realize that to follow Christ in our lives, it will assuredly involve a giving-up (sacrificing) what is dear to us (to follow Him) - but as illustrated in chapter 13:44-46, when one is enabled to see the value in the "Kingdom of Heaven", what they currently possess suddenly loses its value to them, and as was illustrated, those in the story sold all they had to gain what they had discovered (hidden treasure and a significant pearl)
- h. Based on the love for this man in particular, that Mark mentioned, the Lord was making an offer of discipleship (there was a "genuineness" in this man, but as the Lord would demonstrate, it had its limits) - we see this in our day also, where many who sincerely seek to follow after Christ will do so up to self prescribed or "yet to be known" limits
- i. When the young man heard this, he went away grieving (λυπούμενος, a word describing deep emotional pain, profoundly troubled) - what a picture into an aspect of human nature! **He went away, knowing what he was walking away from** ("entering life"), because he could not bear to part with his present (but temporal) comforts/luxuries
- j. He was facing an internal battle with himself, one desire against another - yet as seen here, **we will always choose what we truly desire the most** - this is why repentance is an integral part of salvation - the heart/mind must be changed, and thus affecting how we calculate our "values system" - the Lord showed him that his property was his treasure, and as clarified in chapter 6:21, where one's treasure is, their heart will be there also

4. The disadvantages of "wealth" and the ever-present need for the grace of God - vs. 23-26

- a. Jesus declares formally "Truly I say to you..." that it is with extreme difficulty that a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven - this was just demonstrated before their eyes - the grip of the love of wealth is one that pulls away from "kingdom thinking"
- b. Then to illustrate how difficult it is for such to enter heaven (life eternal), Jesus states that it is **easier** (in comparison) for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for such to enter the "kingdom of God" (lest anyone think that there is something this person (or any person) could "do" to get to heaven)
- c. Over the centuries there have been many attempts to make this seem more "doable" - some say the underlying Greek word was really in reference to a "cable" (a thick rope), thought this was still not possible - then others came to the idea that the "eye of a needle" was in reference to a smaller gate to a city that a camel could enter on its knees
- d. The disciples knew what He meant and, being startled ask, "Then who can be saved? - this is an interesting response, because it shows us that they essentially "lumped" everyone in to this impossibility - they realized that the same struggle the rich man had is universal (for even the poorest person can struggle with the love of wealth and the dread of losing even what little they have) - the core of the issue is misplaced love and faith
- e. How is such an impossibility to be faced? Then, with a simple yet weighty response, Jesus sums up the source of all salvation (taking the focus of it off "What can we do?", "What must we do?" and on to "What will God do?")
- f. What a usage of this situation! The young rich man demonstrated a flawed premise from the start of his question to Jesus - he was looking for something else "TO DO" because he was relying on what he already was doing and would continue to do
- g. When it comes to being "saved", Jesus makes it clear that with "people, this is impossible" - so for anyone to enter God's kingdom, God will need to act/intercede
- h. The word for "impossible" is ἀδύνατον, making it clear that it is not "improbable" that is meant, but that it is not possible because man is "without power and ability" to do so
- i. But with God, "πάντα δυνατά", all, the whole, every kind is possible - this is the underlying core of the idea of "grace" (not just God's benevolence, but His "empowerment")
- j. There might be some freedom to see that there is a reference that possibly even this same young man would come to God (by God's power) - not just because of what Jesus has just said, but that the man left grieving (at least there appeared to still be an internal "battle" happening

C. All “sacrifice” for “My name’s sake” will be more than worth it - vs. 27-30

1. From one extreme to another - The disciples had gone from “Then who can be saved?” (in vs. 25) to now Peter’s question regarding what they will receive in light of their sacrifices - vs. 27

It is important to not assess the value of what we give or lose “for the Lord”, just that we hold nothing of higher value than the privilege of following Him

There will be no need at all for money or “wealth” in Heaven

see I Cor. 1:26-31

- a. Having been assured that with God it would be possible for any to be “saved”, Peter now boldly asks what they can expect in light of what they have given up
- b. Clearly, from an earthly standard, what they had “forsaken” was very little in comparison to what the rich man had - yet it was what they had to “lose” for Him
- c. The concept of seeking “treasures in Heaven” is not to appeal to our greed or pride - neither will be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven! We must realize that part of the appeal of wealth now is the apparent provision (to excess) it can provide - yet, in the new Heaven and new Earth, there will be an abundance of all that we could need or desire (as in the Garden of Eden)
- d. The drive for greater “glory” than others in eternity is strictly carnal and should have no place in our thinking/motivation! The thought that one could entertain the concept of having a “bigger mansion” than another should be foreign (and repulsive) to us! The purest drive, is the privilege we have to lend **any part at all** to the glory of our Lord and His work/purposes

2. So, will it be “worth it” to have “left everything” - vs. 28-29

This is a key point to work through because many who have written off a literal reference to Israel as a people have allegorized it as the “Church,” and so they handle this text as well - this will also affect some of what is discussed in chapter 24

This is a very brief synopsis of this concept and it merits a more thorough overview - but the “judgment” assigned to these disciples fits well into this concept

Such “judging” is like what was seen in the book of Judges - it will be in harmony with the Lord and not at the individual discretion of each of these

Many are not apt to follow Christ because of what they have, and until it is yielded or lost, they remain distracted

Some lose these things for other reasons even though they hang on to them as strongly as they can - what is yielded for “His name sake” is gained many times over - see Mt. 16:25

- a. Yes! More than worth it, though the focus of such reward is placed “in the regeneration”, that time when “the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne”
- b. When is this and what is this referring to? It looks like most take this to be a reference to the New Heaven and New Earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), though this text and many others fit well with the reality of a “Millennial Kingdom” (the thousand year reign of Christ on this (renewed/renovated/reborn) earth) - for if we look at the Isaiah 65 text we see that this “new earth” (as some would hold it is) would still have death (65:20)
- c. The term “Millennial Kingdom” references an earthly kingdom, ruled by Christ Himself on this earth - the thousand years time frame comes from the text in Rev. 20:1-10 - note: some have concerns that the Kingdom prophesied to Israel will be an eternal one and question the 1000 “limit” of this; this should not be an issue as the “Millennial Kingdom” is at the onset of this, and is included in the point Paul made in I Cor. 15:25-28 (Christ’s reign until all enemies are “subjected to Him” and He then “subjects” Himself to the Father)
- d. As part of their reward for following Him, they will (at the future time) sit on thrones along side Him “Judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (this is not a figurative “Church” but actual Israel)
- This “judging” is likely in reference to part of their oversight of Israel during the earthly reign (this is in harmony with the Lord rewarding faithfulness with greater responsibility)
- e. Notice that Jesus does not reference what they have “forsaken”, just their following Him - the **reward for them** (as it would have been with the rich man) **is the following Him** - Paul realizes this in Php. 3 where he is excited at the loss of what was once a “gain” to Him, because of its loss of appeal when compared to “knowing Christ”
- f. The Lord lists the most precious groupings of the time (these would normally be considered uncompromisable) - Family, home and one’s homeland (people) would be considered the fundamental priorities of life - yet the Lord promises they will receive a “hundredfold” - note also that in Mar. 10:29-30; Luk. 18:29-30 such benefit is not only in the life to come, but even now (as in what is gained will far outweigh what is lost)
- g. How could family be increased so substantially? Many have seen throughout the ages, that the loss of biological family is filled with the gaining of an eternal family, and the inheritance of **eternal life is** (which the rich man desired) **infinitely longer than the healthiest person will ever live here**

3. The “last will be first and the first will be last” - vs. 30

Again it is “many” because there may be a few people of significance in this age that God will choose (see I Cor. 1:26-29)

“Christians” should look to be and expect to be “lower class” here, last in priority and esteemed importance, desiring others to be “before them”

- a. “Πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι” - literally, “But many are firsts lasts and lasts firsts” - not all, by a majority of those that are “first place” here/now will be “last place” later - as to whether or not this is an indirect reference to “saved” versus “lost” is not clear, just that the priority structure (e.g. “classes”, “castes”) is not the same in the kingdom (now and later)
- b. The “values systems” and “social structures” of this age are not in line with those of the Kingdom of Heaven and pale (drastically) in comparison to the value/values we have in Christ

XXXII. The Kingdom of Heaven Is Focused on Grace not "Greatness" - 20:1-34

A. Each age throughout Earth's history has had its "greatest" people and varying standards of what it was to be great (no age is exempt) - As will be seen in this upcoming text, significance and reward are often anticipated based upon personal effort and measurable achievement

1. This is supported with each ongoing generation, as the notion that "hard work" will equate to success

It is possible to earn the praise/admiration and even "debt" of other "servants," but this does not make for "success" - we, in Christ, live by His grace, always, in all ways

- a. While it is true that hard work is often a major part of each age's "measurable success" (and the means to get to it), the flaw in such philosophy is the definition of success
- b. The Lord is about to illustrate the fundamental flaw in such thinking - success/reward is not determined by the assessment of the "workers" or servants, but by the "Master"
- c. In this chapter we have a clear yet "difficult to accept" (by most) illustration of "wages", followed by Jesus foretelling the initial path He would take to fulfilling God's plan (which would look like a path to failure by most); then there is discussion on the pursuit of true "greatness" and God's path to it, and the chapter ends with the compassion of Jesus on two blind men the crowd were trying to silence (the overlooked nuisances became His focus)

Such pursuits are difficult to pursue and maintain because of the flood of opposition to it from society, friends and even churches

2. As contradictory as these concepts will seem (naturally), it is very important for us to learn them and stay focused so as not to lose sight of where our significance actually lies

B. The parable of the landowner and his hired workers - vs. 1-16

1. Once again Jesus begins by stating that what He is about to describe is "like" the kingdom of heaven

God, as is being illustrated, does not work off a "merit standard" like we would naturally be inclined to think (as in "more work must equal more grace, love and reward")

- a. This is a simile (a comparison) to help see the "wage" system of such a kingdom
- b. He uses a system we all (to this day) are familiar with - being hired, working and being paid
- c. It is normal to expect that one will be paid according to the difficulty and time put into the job, but this is not the case as far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned

2. The landowner goes out early in the morning and hires workers to work his land all day for the wage of a "denarius" (which is a typical day's wage) - vs. 1-7

No matter how we look on this illustration, all were expecting to work (not begging but expecting to do the bidding of the boss) - even though we are saved by grace and not based upon "works", it is still expected there will be work (for all else would be presumptuous)

- a. Having much work to be done (and finding more workers), the "boss" goes out again at "the third hour" (9:00 AM) and offers to pay them "whatever is right"
- b. Again at the sixth and ninth hours (Noon and 3:00 PM) he hires more to work his land
- c. Finally, at the eleventh hour (5:00 PM) he finds more workers who have been "standing idle all day" and sends them into the field to work - this is basically sending them to do an hour's worth of work - from the worker's perspective, they must have been desperate for work (or more work) which is why they would be still standing at this place (at such a late hour) looking for work - **it is key to realize they were looking to work**
- d. Matthew Henry noted on this verse, "Till we are hired into the service of God, we are standing all the day idle; a sinful state, though a state of drudgery to Satan, may really be called a state of idleness; sinners are doing nothing, nothing to the purpose, nothing of the great work they were sent into the world about, nothing that will pass well in the account."

3. At the end of the day (about 6:00 PM), the landowner had the foreman call the workers to pay them - vs. 8-16

The work's importance should be the greatest consideration by the workers and not necessarily their pay and certainly not the pay of others

- a. He began with those that had come last (and worked an hour) and paid them a "denarius" - it has been observed that if this "crop" consisted of grapes, the timing of the harvest was critical, thus the work itself was the greatest consideration
- b. When those who had worked all day saw how much had been given to those that had worked only an hour, they reasoned that they would receive more - it seemed "fair"

Their response is telling as it demonstrates how most respond to what they perceive as wrongs to themselves by "superiors" - they are apt to whisper it but reluctant to openly discuss it - even if done out of "respect" it isn't respect to grumble either

- c. Yet all received the same wage - seeing this, those that worked longest "grumbled" (and the underlying word comes from γογγύζω, indicating a whispering complaining (an irritation they are comfortable sharing with each other but not (out loud) with the landowner)) - this response has also being described as a "smoldering discontent"
- d. These consider their complaint justified since they calculate the matter based upon how long and hard they worked, and that through the "worst of the day" - after all, "If I work harder than someone else, I should get paid more than they do, right?"

Their self-serving expectations had gotten the best of them

- e. But this is not how it works with God - Jesus goes on to explain how the landowner answered the grumblers, making it clear that they had agreed to work the day for a denarius, and they had received the denarius - **no wrong had been done**

f. Actually, when considered from the perspective of the master, is it not his prerogative to give to the others what he chose to? Could he not be generous as he desired?

- g. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" The answer is, of course, "yes", and then it is followed by another question regarding their focus; "Is your eye envious because I am generous?" - the word for "envious" being πονηρός, a common word for evil
- h. So the problem arises when the workers take away from the "rights" of the master and compare themselves among themselves
- i. **We must be careful not to allow ourselves to become "judges" over how God should rule over His work** and how He chooses to reward and be generous

see II Cor 10:12-18

4. In answer to Peter's question (19:27) then, the Lord demonstrates that those who have been "in the work" the longest (and from the start), are not considered more meritorious than all those that will follow

Our "judgement" with each other is one of "discernment" to aid in "the work," and not to make any aspect of ministry competitive with each other - if we are faithful to what God has given, we are successful and ought not aspire to another's work/calling

The work is inevitable, we just dare not start placing one work category above another - all done for God's work/purposes is of eternal value - many "works" are concocted by religious people and yet have no eternal value at all because they are not the Lord's work at all (they are another's "vineyard")

- a. It will be natural (though wrong) for us to rank the worth of "service" and the ministry of each other, but our rankings of significance are not to be looked on as having any authority
- b. If we look at Romans 14:1-12 we see (in another context) that we are not to stand in judgment of each other, and our standing as servants of the Lord - we answer to Him and not to each other - we leave the value of the quality of work to God (the Master)
- c. Before God, the "last" and "first" are alike - first in time, in quantity and even in "quality" as WE would judge it - He determines the quality and significance of all aspects (all details) of the work He gives us to do
- d. And lest we entertain the notion that we need not work then (since we will all get the same inheritance), it must not be overlooked that all the "players" in this account worked and were looking (expecting) to work
- e. "In the distribution of rewards no distinction will be made between the first and last. The devoted servant in the twentieth century may equal the devoted servant in the first. The devoted servant of half a lifetime may equal the devoted servant of a whole lifetime." Plummer

C. The bold, gracious and sacrificial work of the Lord is foretold - vs. 17-19

1. The truths regarding how some would measure "first" and "last" having been covered, the Lord now, again, reveals the plan of God for Him to do - it will be looked upon (by most at the time) as the "least" and the lowest path to victory that one could take

Jesus was the supreme example of not just submission to the Father but of unshakable resolve to do so - his focus was not affected by the fears of those around Him struggling in their faith

- a. In the account in Mark 10 (particularly Mark 10:32), we read that Jesus was walking ahead of the group when this event took place and that they were looking on Him in amazement (as they were themselves likely experiencing fear)
- b. This was so, because they were impressed with **His lack of timidity** and **His resolve** to be heading to Jerusalem where He would have so many powerful enemies seeking His death
- c. The atoning work of God in the crucifixion is also the supreme demonstration that God's paths to the greatness of His work, cannot be measured by man's natural sense of how greatness is to be won/achieved

read Acts 4:23-31

2. On their way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells His closest disciples what God's plan is for Him

This is noted to point out that much of God's work for us (in us) is that of submission to what He has done to us (what He brings us to and through) - this is seen throughout the life of Christ, and we should expect the same

- a. He details (more than before) what will take place - He will be "delivered to the chief priests and scribes" (the highest religious leaders), and they in turn would condemn Him to death, deliver Him over to the "Gentiles" (the Romans) who will mock Him, scourge Him and crucify Him
- b. Notice some of these verbs - He will be **delivered** over to (passive) the Sanhedrin who will **condemn** Him (active), and will **hand Him over** (active) to the Romans who will **mock, scourge and crucify** Him (active), and then on the third day He will be **raised** (passive) - what is Jesus doing in all this? He submitted and endured all that God had for Him (all "action" was being done by others)
- c. The word translated "delivered" is παραδοθήσεται, which also carries the idea of being betrayed (handed over, and in His case, He had not done wrong) and the same ones He would be "betrayed" to would also "betray" Him to the Romans - it's interesting the same word is used, indicating they (Scribes and Chief Priests) had not done their "job" rightly
- d. These "gentiles" would mock Him (make fun of Him) and flog Him - emotional torture along with physical torture - then (and Matthew is the only one that records this), they would "crucify" Him (He foretold the type of execution He would face)
- e. All of this would be discouraging except when seen in how the Lord (again) "capped" it all off - He would be raised again the third day - He would be victorious over it all (and would demonstrate the victory over the greatest enemy of all, sin!)

Being betrayed by those who should not do so (who even should know better) was what God used here, and in other incidents to work His will - bitterness, on our part towards the instruments God uses to get us where He wills to place us, is wasted energy!

What the gentiles would “mock” would be what God honors most

- f. This all would serve as a perfect introduction to what was coming next in this text - the working of God and His “greatness structure” is the opposite to most of mankind’s “greatness” structure (which usually focuses on self-promotion and not on the betterment of others)

D. Seeking the wrong kind of “greatness” the wrong way - vs. 20-28

1. The mother of James and John came to ask that her sons be given special positions in the kingdom

Jesus had just told them (19:28) that they would sit on 12 thrones - now they wanted to be sure they would get the thrones closest to His, one on either side of Him

This lies at the heart of why we are reluctant to “honor” others’ service to God - we never want to encourage a motive where it is lending to a “glory” of self, distracting away from the glory of the one we are serve

- a. In Matthew’s account he makes it clear that the request for these special “seats” of position came through their mother - Mark (10:35) mentions only James and John making this request
b. The positive side of this is that she and they all were assured of the coming kingdom, and they acknowledged the power/position of Jesus in it (her request He “command” it)
c. The negative side was their self-ambition to be better “ranked” than all others (“ranking” as the world would see it)
d. The desire to be close to the Lord is a good thing, but to desire it **to be seen by others as greater than others** (even in closeness to the Lord), demonstrates pride - many religious demonstrations can be done for the purpose to impress onlookers, and not for the purpose to truly be closer to God (which makes it useless)
e. Her request was reverent, respectful and sincere (and it was not for herself per se)

2. Jesus lets her know she does not know what she is asking for - vs. 22-23

Many desire the “honor” but not the process to get to it - this is why so many lesser religious “honors” have been invented to provide a sense of satisfaction

And so it is, to some degree, for us also - see Php. 1:29

- a. Her request was based upon the traditional way she would have recognized a “kingdom” where those in higher positions were “over others,” and these “others” would serve them
b. Jesus, ready to clarify what it would really entail, asks if they can “drink the cup I am about to drink” - this reference here may be best interpreted by the Lord’s usage of it in Gethemene (Mt. 26:39) where it is connected with the suffering of his beatings and crucifixion
c. It is important to note that the Lord does not rebuke them in their affirmative answer “We are able” - He instead, knowing what was coming, knew also that **they would be so honored as to “drink the same cup” He would drink** (that being the suffering and martyrdom in association with Him) - note though, that these still will sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel in His earthly kingdom yet to come - just that there would be this “cup” they would have to “drink” beforehand

Our “usage” pivots more off of His grace than it does our understanding or sincerity - these come, just not always first

It is possible to consider that this is still in reference to Mt. 19:28 and that it deals with the Millennial Kingdom though I could not find any other support for this from other commentators - no matter, there will be no envy in eternity (Heaven)

- d. Note also that even though these did not know what they were really asking for, they still would be led into and through what would be necessary - full understanding is not a prerequisite of being taught, used and even honored by God
e. To sit on the right hand or on the left hand of Christ (in His kingdom) was not Jesus’ to grant - not because He did not have power or because He was “just a man” (as some have attempted to conclude), just that it was the Father’s to appoint and He had already established who this would be ahead of time - so, such positions of “Christ’s kingdom” honor have been determined, and based upon the following statements, these will be those characterized by humility and not self-greatness - again, there is no pride of this sort in eternity

3. Greatness/leadership is servitude - vs. 24-28

Pride in one is often evidenced in an angry reaction to the display of pride in another

So much of our pride is seen in our “how dare you look to be better than me” attitudes

To be able to tell others what to do and have authority over them is what is and has been promoted by each age as what is to be pursued and where true “greatness” is to be had

- a. The other ten disciples became indignant when they heard/saw this take place - this was wrong also, for why would they be concerned if these two had these special places, unless they were self-ambitious also?
b. Note that the underlying word for “indignant” (ἠγανάκτησαν) at its most basic sense means “to grieve much, hence to be indignant” (picturing a regret (grief) that another might get what I want or do what I wish I would have done first)
c. Jesus calls the disciples to Himself and teaches them again by first illustrating the common thinking (among the nations/peoples of the world) - these of the age “lord it over” others when in positions of authority, and are seeking to be over others because of it - and such require positions and levels of authority to be “great” - with the Lord’s kingdom this is not so - position is not needed since service is what is aspired to reach
d. This section does not discount positions of authority, since these are needed and even ordained of God - just that these do not automatically equate to any “greatness” and that at the heart of such should be a responsibility to serve and remain humble (in heart)
e. “He will be the most distinguished that shows most humility, the deepest sense of his unworthiness, and the most earnest desire to promote the welfare of his brethren.” Barnes

- f. "Every kind of lordship and spiritual domination over the Church of Christ, like that exercised by the Church of Rome, is destructive and anti-christian." Clarke
- g. He that θέλη ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι (desires (present subjunctive active) among you to become (aorist infinitive middle) great/significant), ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος (be (future indicative middle) your worker (literally picturing one who "kicks-up the dust" because they are busy/active doing what needs to be done for others) - **think now about your future self looking back**
- h. "He that is currently desiring and willing to **work himself** (middle) into having been considered important among you, let him **work himself** (middle) **now** into being characterized (from here on out) as being the servant of you all" - the opposite concept being one who "works at" others serving him, and defining "greatness" by the number of those in one's service (and to some degree, how **little** of the work they have to do themselves)
- i. **Doing the work itself is the key to greatness** - telling others to do it or how to do it, is far secondary (yet many equate true ministry with seeking to motivate others into service while they lead by word/command/instruction, and not by example) - it has become too common for believers to equate knowing what should be done with saying what should be done, and yet without the obligation to **actually do** what should be done
- j. And, to use the strongest possible picture of what He is describing, He amplifies what He just stated, for "**first**" (πρῶτος) outranks (is higher than) "great," and "**slave**" (δοῦλος) is lower than "servant/worker" - "And he that (now) wishes to be most important (as measured by "Kingdom standards") he must work, from here on out, to be "your slave" - the slave finds his purpose in the service of others (again, the **work** is the greatness, not the rank)
- k. This is true greatness before God (not a facade of servitude, but actually being a servant/slave at heart, and in *lived* conduct - it is who/what we are) - we are not to live with the focus that others must bend to our will and desires, but that we are to yield our rights and even desires for the **sake** of others (I **expect** to work, not **expecting** others to be doing the work)
- l. **So, the objective is to aim low to "go up" on God's scale of importance** - it is odd that we have (naturally) landed on the idea that those most important do the least work
- m. The supreme example of this is the Lord Himself - He ("the Son of Man") did not come to be served but to serve (literally He did not come to be "waited on" but to "wait on" others), culminating in His "δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν" (to give/offer-up His life as a ransom (paying the required price to set a slave free - and this by "buying them"), and this done in the **stead** of "many" (it was "substitutionary"))
- n. He (the one) gave (willingly, of Himself) His life for many - the "many" is not used here in a sense to that it was not "for all", just that it was one for so many others
- o. In His paying the ransom, this ransom price was not determined by Satan or any other entity - God Himself is the One demanding the price in answer to the rightful judgment demanded for sin - Jesus paid God's price and so it is paid **fully** for those in Him, nothing lacking

E. The "Son of David" shows merciful compassion on two that others saw as irritants - vs. 29-34

1. As they were leaving Jericho, large crowds were following Jesus, and two blind men heard of it

- It has also been noted that there was an "old Jericho" and a "new Jericho" - It might be that one identifies His coming into the new while the other noted His coming out
- a. Some may point that in Luke's account he mentioned they were coming into Jericho while Matthew mentions they were leaving, though Luke's account in 19:1 uses the words "εἰσελθὼν διήρχετο" which could be translated "having entered, passing through"
- b. Matthew identifies that there are two men while Mark and Luke only mention 1 (his name Bartimaeus) possibly because he spoke-up and instigated the cry for help
- c. These begin to cry out, but Matthew makes it a key point (mentioning both times) Jesus being called "Son of David" (a Messianic term), and He receives it and responds to it
- d. The crowds try to quiet them ("sternly") but they cried out all the more - these were desperate men and Christ was their only hope - by way of analogy, it is illustrative that when looking to Christ for help, one should not be **intimidated** by the crowds

2. They cried for mercy, not for justice, nor were they making a case for their deserving aid - vs. 32-34

- a. Jesus stops (hearing their cries) and summons them to Himself
- b. He asks what they desire of Him - on this, the pulpit Commentary notes, "...God knows all our necessities before we ask, but he will have our prayers, that we may cooperate with him in the work which he purposes to accomplish."

So what I wish to be able to look back regarding myself (to have been (important)), I need to realize my future (from here on out) needs to be characterized by my **working to work** for others in the Lord's service

It seems common now for leadership to miss the first part of the word, "lead" when considering their responsibility - to lead is to be out front **with** those you are to lead, setting the example Why say "your slave"? It is the focus on being such to those we are with, those around us - it's not the aspiration to serve others, (somewhere), it's actually serving others in your sphere of contact

Many get too involved in complaining about "the service" and end up not ever ministering themselves - or, some serve and use it as "moral leverage" to be critical of those who do not serve as they do - this is not justified

see John 8:31-44, Rom. 5:15-19; Titus 2:11-14; II Cor. 5:21

Those who (practically) are looking to pay the price for themselves are indeed paying their sin debt (religiously) to Satan, the chief of all "cons" - their self-righteous deposits are invested in a "ponzi scheme"

It has also been noted that there was an "old Jericho" and a "new Jericho" - It might be that one identifies His coming into the new while the other noted His coming out

It is instinctive in the majorities to be so self-focused, others are looked upon as competitors and not seen in light of their need

This also reminds us of some of the purposes behind afflictions... proof of God's power and grace

With such genuine compassion for others, one would never need to be "pushed" into helping others!

As it was then, so it is to be now; Jesus is not to be sought just to "fix" our lives... He is to be followed

- c. Some had noted that these blind men may have been motivated by the prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 35:5 (and so called Him "Son of David") that He would heal the blind - throughout his Gospel, Matthew works to make it clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah - God keeps His promises and they are not contingent on perceived circumstances!
- d. In answer to His question as to what they would have Him do for them, they desired their "eyes be opened" (which, when thought upon), meant they then could work (and not beg)
- e. Jesus was "moved with compassion" (literally, He felt the compassion in His inward parts) and healed them - ***His compassion was felt not just thought*** (He *felt* for them)
- f. (He) Touching their eyes, they immediately regained their sight - again, not a gradual healing but an instantaneous "fix"
- g. Having received what they asked, they followed Him - this was not just a "quick fix" for them; it changed the course of their lives (as any true encounter with the Lord does!)

XXXIII. The Triumphal (Yet Humble) Entry Into Jerusalem - 21:1-22

A. When Jesus had reached the Mount of Olives (at Bethphage), He prepared for His special entrance - vs. 1-11

1. Here, Jesus is about to be hailed as a king would be hailed, though it is most probably that He was looked upon more as a political king than the promised Messiah/King

Even though the praise would (mostly) be done for the wrong reasons, He was more than worthy of their praise - He would magnify the power of meekness as one of God's conquering "tools"

- a. One of the parallel texts to this is in John 12:12-19 and there, John has Jesus getting the donkey as the crowds are forming and beginning to lay down palm branches
- b. It is likely that, not just to fulfill a prophetic text, this was done to signify (clearly) as to what "posture" He was taking as He entered Jerusalem - He would not come in as a conquering king on a horse of war, but on a common, lowly donkey

2. Jesus sends two disciples to get the donkeys - Matthew is the only one that records there were two - the others just mention the colt that Jesus rode

These would be borrowed and returned (see Mark 11:2-3) - the owners of these animals did not know the significant usage of them that was about to take place (fulfilling precise prophecy from long ago) - neither do we know how God will use anything we have, even the seemingly insignificant

- a. This would be even more in keeping with the precise fulfillment of prophecies in Zechariah
- b. Jesus told the disciples exactly what they would find, and exactly what to say when they found the animals and were asked of their purpose
- c. This was done to fulfill Zechariah 9:9 - the "daughter of Zion" (inhabitants of Jerusalem) is to be know that their King is coming to them "πραῦς" (meek, gentle, humble), and that demonstrated by His riding (being seated) upon a donkey, and not just any donkey, the colt of a donkey (that Mark and Luke point out had never been ridden upon)
- d. Some try to make a point that Jesus would had to have ridden on both to fulfill the prophecy, when, in reality, it just shows He would ride on the colt - this would also make it significant why Matthew records that both were with Him on His entry into Jerusalem - it demonstrates that He was truly riding a colt and that the "mother" was still needed to accompany it (even it was "humble", symbolic of non-aggression (timid))

Though He came humbly, those opposing Him were threatened by His Truth - Truth is threatening to those that are evil, though it be given humbly and graciously

This statement prompted by the mention that the King is "coming to you", not you to Him

- e. Luther notes of this, "*He is a peculiar King: thou dost not seek him, he seeks thee; thou dost not find him; he finds thee; for the preachers come from him not from thee; their preaching comes from him not from thee; thy faith comes from him not from thee, and all that the faith works in thee comes from him not from thee*"

3. The crowds create an exuberant processional

So much excitement, joy and belief which would soon dissipate based upon changing circumstances - we, like these, are often thrilled with what we believe the working of God to be only to cringe back as we see it head in directions uncomfortable to us

- a. These began to spread palm branches/leaves and their garments down in front of His path to "carpet" His way into the city - there were apparently two crowds, one following along with Him and the others going ahead of Him, proclaiming His arrival
- b. These were also shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" - the term "Hosanna" literally being a cry for saving (and also one of joy), and the phrase "Son of David" being an open acknowledgment of His being the promised Messiah
- c. He also is called "Hosanna in the highest" (as in saying He is to be considered for His significance/greatness all the way to Heaven) - though they did not know the full magnitude of the one they were praising, He was worthy of it all and more
- d. Those in Jerusalem that heard of this commotion inquire as to who this is - such a gathering would naturally attract the attention of most, though once they come to know of Him more, things would quickly change - many are thrilled with their own idea of their "ideal" and when God does not "measure up" their enthusiasm wanes

It is natural/human to bore of what does not match our ideas of excitement and popularity, though our ideas of such are in need of change, not the Lord

In Luke 19:40-44 we read that Jesus wept over Jerusalem at this time also

- e. The city was “stirred up” asking “who is this?” - the word for “stirred” (or “moved”) is ἐσεισθη picturing more Jerusalem being in an “uproar” - the sheer draw of popularity and curiosity was making the crowd grow
- f. When the crowd answered back that this is a “prophet,” they were correct and some may have been basing this on Deut. 18:15-17, the “Prophet” that God would send - and it was supposed to be “... it is to him you shall listen...”

B. Jesus ministers in the Temple (the Temple grounds) - vs. 12-17

1. This “ministry” was one of a strong, active rebuke - vs. 12-13

Traders of animals and money-exchangers would have fulfilled a practical role for those coming to the Temple for the Passover sacrifices and offerings and Temple taxes

And we still see such practices today - Churches are not “temples” but Christians and congregations are to be reverent still in the things of God - many “serving God” do so out of greed and the pursuit of profit and prestige - greed and pride are at the heart/motive of much we see today (the antithesis of generosity and humility)

“Business” was revered more than God (even as ministries themselves can become more revered than the Lord)

Sin will often affix itself to religion and religious/moral practices to rid its slaves of the issues that come with conscience/guilt - religions that allow and consecrate sins are loved by the godless of any age

In Luke 19:47 we read that afterward, He kept teaching and that the religious leaders were plotting to have him put to death - as many contradicted by the Lord become His enemies

To these passionate, sincere and scholarly religious leaders, these things being said of Jesus were blasphemous - such indignation will be displayed by their like from there on out towards the followers of Jesus

These religious leaders were not aware that they were competing with God Himself in this matter - though powerful and determined, their reached goals would only lend to the outworking of God’s will

As indicated in Psalm 2, God will bring appropriate praise to Himself even from those who cannot speak (especially when grown men who should, refuse to do so

- a. This section is typically referenced as the “cleansing of the Temple,” and it is also often not realized that this account in Matthew is the **second** occurrence - the first time this happened is detailed in John 2:13-22 (there are many differences with the other three Gospels)
- b. Jesus began His ministry with this “act” and now He is doing it again toward the end
- c. This was not something that would endear Him to the religious leaders and certainly not to the “traders” who had (no doubt) paid their dues to have their “booths”
- d. He “drove out all” that were conducting their “temple business” - it was not just those selling but those that were buying - there was a use for such things but they (first of all) were not to be done in this location (set apart for prayer and worship for all peoples) - second, the moral character of those running these businesses was corrupt (as those living in a “den of thieves”)
- e. “Money changers” were there to handle the monetary exchange of foreign currencies (for a fee), and those that sold doves did so to allow for the poor to offer sacrifices - it would have easily been “justified” in the eyes of most that these were “religious” businesses
- f. In this instance, the Lord quotes from Isaiah 56:6-8 (foretelling of His Temple) and its purpose (in this courtyard “of the Gentiles”), that it would be a “house or prayer for all the peoples” - these had made this place, set aside for prayer/worship of God, a place for profit and the same type of commerce one could find elsewhere in the common places of Jerusalem
- g. He quotes from Jeremiah 7:1-11 where God sends Jeremiah to rebuke Judah for their pretence at worshiping and dishonoring God while serving other gods and declaring themselves still yet “delivered” (and yet still do “these abominations”) - this was not now called a “den of thieves” just because there was unlawful “profit,” but because it was a place where (as in a “den of thieves”) a criminal could be at ease and find refuge (to continue his work)
- h. “The church is no refuge for sinners who go on in their sin and think that they are safe when they go to the church; and certainly not for the sinners who support the church by desecrating the church and justify their desecration by crying, “It is for the church!” Lenski
- i. We must not forget that ministry is primarily ministry for God (His service, His ministry) and not ours or others - when **others** are seen as the primary “ministry,” we are apt to have popular sentiment dictate what ministry is to be - with the Lord being the aim of our service, we will assuredly serve and minister to others, but not on their terms.. His alone

2. The blind and lame are healed by Him in the Temple and He is criticized for the praise received - vs. 14-17

- a. Jesus now utilizes this area of the Temple courtyard for one of its true purposes - rather than the business of self-service, the focus was on selfless-aid to others
- b. The Chief Priests and Scribes saw Him do these things and also heard the children repeating what they heard “Hosanna to the Son of David;” they became indignant (pained/aggravated) - it was not in keeping with **how they figured** things should be done
- c. These were bothered that Jesus did not stop the children from saying what they were saying
- d. Jesus confirms what the children were saying by quoting and applying Psalm 8:2 to the scenario - their question “Don’t you hear what they are saying?” was met with another question, “Have you not read?” (are you not perceptive and informed?)
- e. The same that would desire others not to hold-back praise to them, feel it their moral duty to restrain the praise here to the Lord
- f. “... by applying these words to the case in hand, Jesus signified that the meanest of God’s works are so formed as to declare the greatness of his perfections; that as the Father does not refuse the praise which arises from the least of his creatures, so the Son did not disdain the praise which was offered him by children.” Benson
- g. God does not seek praise from the “worldly great” **more** than from the insignificant of this age

XXXIV. Jesus Continues to Teach and is Challenged - 21:18-22:46

A. The significance of the barren fig tree and the Lord's response to it - vs. 18-22

1. The Lord was coming (early in the morning) to Jerusalem (from Bethany (likely from the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus)) and is hungry - this leads to an illustration and teaching

- a. The Lord was a good example of some of the practice of what is seen in Deuteronomy 6, where children are to be taught throughout the day in all situations
- b. Jesus "became hungry" on this short journey to Jerusalem and spotted a lone fig tree by the side of the road (it was no one's particular property)
- c. Because of its many leaves, it gave the appearance that it might have fruit, though as Mark indicates in his narrative, it was not the season for figs (they would not have been ready for harvest)
- d. He, finding no fruit, speaks to the tree and essentially "curses" it (that it would never bear fruit again)
- e. Matthew wrote that the fig tree "at once" withered (dried-up) - the evidence of it (as seen in Mark's account) was not till the following day
- f. It is true that no specific teaching/clarification is made by the Lord on the barren tree, though its context makes for some probabilities

His hunger is another indicator of the reality of His humanity

There is much discussion in the commentaries as to the purpose of this, but it was clearly mentioned by Matthew to make a point

2. The Lord expressed disdain for the appearance of fruit and its result

- a. The fig tree is often associated/illustrative of Israel throughout the Old Testament - one such illustration is seen in Micah 7:1-8 and, similar to this account, the prophet expresses disappointment on seeking grapes and "the first ripe fig" and finding none ("that I crave")
- b. Israel had all the signs of a thriving religion and faith yet producing no fruit from it - it was all the appearance without the content (which is typically called "hypocrisy")
- c. This is repulsive to the Lord (to this day) because it is not in keeping with reality - what line of thought would continue down a path of fruitlessness without some absurd underlying reason, or out of some form of ignorant blindness?
- d. **True fruit** (and not just the "leaves") is a result of **true life** and fundamental to being a **true fruit tree** (unless something is very wrong) - for the believer, such fruit is, as seen in Galatians 5, a result of the Holy Spirit and consists of produce such as love, joy, peace, endurance, graciousness toward others, and self-control
- e. Religious formality can easily become the enemy of actual Christianity and can either crowd-out "true fruit" or be widely accepted in its stead

Micah goes on to indicate (as part of this illustration) that "the godly person has perished from the land"

It could also be that "fruit" has been redefined (as we see in our day) - observable, impressive results have become equated with "fruit"

Yet, systems have been designed to allow for pseudo-fruit, outwardly definable and measurable without requiring inward genuineness or even the Holy Spirit Himself

3. The disciples were more taken with the miraculous speed of the withering - vs. 20-22

- a. They asked how it withered "all at once," seeing this was not a natural occurrence
- b. Jesus uses it to reiterate the significance and power of **true faith** (trust) in life - to do such as this, though, the faith/trust is more focused on what God would have done and what He will do, and so "do not doubt" - the word for "doubt" being διακριθῆτε, indicating a going back and forth in thought/discernment (as in do not "stagger at" or "contend with")
- c. Jesus uses a far grander illustration of what could be done (the mountain being moved into the sea) - no account is ever given of this actually happening, demonstrating it being illustrative of what could happen
- d. "The proviso *"if you believe"* excludes the bringing of purely selfish requests, for they are no part of the outworking of faith. But Jesus is saying that the believer who looks to God for anything at all in the path of Christian service can be confident of an answer to prayer: *"you will receive."* Leon Morris
- e. All that Christ did in His miracles was done with purpose and not ever for "show" - here it was an illustration, and at other times it was to help others and get a hearing for the message of Truth and Salvation (both lacking in their highly religious society)

If they are "in tune" with God in this fashion, they will do greater things than what was done to the fig tree (as He taught in 17:20)

Spiritual, emotional and life issues are often far more a significant issue than a mountain would be - they are, in a sense, personal mountains in themselves hemming us in

B. The authority of the Lord is challenged - vs. 23-27

1. Jesus is confronted regarding His source of authority (His credentials) to do and say what He did

- a. No doubt they were growing concerned at His rise in popularity and, as we have been made aware, these chief priests and elders were looking for His death
- b. We are not told if their question was sincere, and it is likely they were looking to either entrap Him, discredit Him or both - from their vantage point, if He said He was a king, they could hand Him over to the Roman authorities; if He were to say He was not a King, they would have sought to discredit Him with the people

The topic of Him being a king would be included in the mockery at His crucifixion - these were determined not to believe Him (He did not fit their personal agendas, which were "tops" in their priorities)

There are earthly (Church) authorities but they are not absolute - these religious leaders were looking to leverage their authority to stop Christ (an action attempted throughout church history)

Not liking what was said, they question His right to say anything at all

John was popular (though not universally "liked") and was regarded as a prophet - many will honestly identify something as "of God" and will still disagree with it

They could argue for a lawful position and yet were missing the point of the Law and the entire revelation of God in the Scriptures

Even now there are those who cannot bring themselves to say something is not "of God" and yet will not submit either - there is a "pseudo-righteousness" in priding one's self in not reaching a conclusion

Remember, this was happening at the "seat of power", the Temple in Jerusalem and they would have felt the most compelled to oppose Him at this point now more than ever - they did not want things to change and Jesus was bringing the biggest change of all!

A promise is not nearly as important as the practice - many "promise" and don't act on it (and may continue to make more promises to appease conscience or challenges)

Such approaches to religion leads to those measuring their "standing" by how far they are from the "un-religious" - the problem then being compounded as the ungodly drift further into immorality, these "religious" follow downward keeping what they deem to be a "safe distance"

And such are so many professing Christians - they seek for and work for the appearance of righteousness but oppose its actual implementation in their lives - lives become filled with "righteous symbols" (practices, associations and philosophies) without the reality of it life changing affects (change in life/living direction)

- c. The point of authority (versus content of what He was teaching) becomes the point - if He said He was from God, they would accuse Him of blasphemy (which they would end up doing anyway) - if He claimed any other source of authority, they could appeal to the processes already in place, to grant or deny authority to teach, or to act officially
- d. The **content of what He said and did** should have been the point of discussion - but since they were unable to deal with that, they took the approach "what right have you to do this?" - this is often the response today by those who do not like what they hear but cannot counter it with truth - also, these days popularity has become the authority sought-out by those looking to determine "legitimacy"

2. Jesus illustrates the actual motive (and heart) of the chief priests and elders - vs. 24-27

- a. Jesus makes a "deal" with them, that if they answer the "source" of John's baptism (by what authority was he doing what he did) then He would answer their question
- b. This was genius, because in answering this question they would have to answer their own question regarding Jesus (which they quickly figured out)
- c. Jesus is demonstrating that their motive was not in the pursuit of the truth, but more to try to trap Him and/or get Him in an endless debate - they would have been in a position to argue from their "authority," established by tradition and even segments of the Law - yet Jesus reveals that **they were fundamentally wrong** on how they "came at things"
- d. These had "their segment" of being able to "connect the dots" as to their authority, and yet had lost sight of what their "lawful" positions were designed to be - yet even the Pharisees, whose founding long before was to bring Israel back to God and His Word, were "pushing" a practice of self-righteousness in opposition to the Word of God (even "the Word" Himself)
- e. If John's baptism was "of God" then why did they not believe him (especially in his pointing to the validity of Jesus being the Promised One)
- f. And yet, if they revealed their honest conclusion, the people would not like it, since John was still popular with the people (possibly enhanced by his being martyred) - these would have others "face the crowd's" hostility, but not themselves (these were not principled people, seeing they feared the people more than doing (and being) what is right)
- g. Their lack of true authority was demonstrated in their answer - true authority does not seek to "please the crowd" in such pivotal answers, but would speak their answer boldly - instead, these lied, indicating they didn't know the answer (they knew their answer)

C. Two parables picturing the actual "state" of the Jewish religious leaders (and their followers) - vs. 28-46

1. Two sons, two answers and two responses - vs. 28-32

- a. Matthew has this parable coming right after the Chief Priests and Elders would not answer Jesus regarding the ministry (baptism) of John the Baptist - it would be directed at them
- b. A father tells each of his sons to go and work in the vineyard - the significance is not so much the vineyard as it is the responses - the first says he will not do what he is told, but later changed his mind (also translated as "repent" in other verses) - the wording of the first son is "Οὐ θέλω" indicating he was not willing/desiring to do so
- c. The second agrees and says "I go, sir", not only showing submission, but respect - yet he does not act on what he agreed to do - he may have even been sincere (at the moment) - though the emphasis on "I" (ἐγώ) seems to indicate his stressing **his** response in contrast to that of his brother - as in "look at me, I will and he won't"
- d. When Jesus ask "Which of the two did the will of his father?" they answered correctly that the first had done so (even though his initial, outward response was in opposition) - practically speaking, this should cause us to be careful how much stock we place in what someone says (over against **what they will ultimately do**)
- e. Jesus explains His pictures - the "prostitutes and tax collectors will get into the kingdom of heaven before you" - such have a higher likelihood of changing (truly coming to God **in need** versus in self-righteousness) - these religious leaders had all the appearance and outward expressions of obedience (doing God's will) while not actually doing it - they acted agreeable but were not so on the "inside"
- f. This was seen in their response to John (whom they refused to reach a conclusion regarding his legitimacy) - John came with **true** righteousness (by repentance)

It requires "belief" to submit - these were unrelenting because they would not believe John (in spite of genuine evidence of salvific change)

There is a fine line (in such cases) between cautious skepticism and stubbornness - in this case, power and independence (self-determination) usurped evidence

The vineyard itself was designed to be a protected place (fences and towers) to keep out intruders - yet, as will be seen, the worst of enemies were within the fences and were the ones responsible for its protection and care so it could be productive

Their initial motive is not revealed, just that they were cruel to these slaves - they clearly had no respect for the owner and had come to look on things as their own, and acted as those unaccountable to anyone outside themselves

Inner conviction is often at the heart of "mean" responses - the conscience and guilt are very difficult to fight and restrain!

"Enough of serving, it's time to be our own boss!"

Many still hold to the possession of God (His work) in their position but have (in their heart and actions) rejected the Son and treat the "Church" as their own

see Mark 2:15-17 - the "self-righteous" will not be reached - the first step in salvation is recognition of the need for being saved!

And such reasoning is behind so many self-righteous sinners today - when no apparent consequence is seen, they "push for more" in their sinning

- g. "And even when you saw it..." - when seeing the repentance and "change of life" in these sinners, they were unmoved themselves - the first son, who refused his father, even afterward repented and did what he ought (submitted himself)
- h. "John was a conservative in religion not less than the Pharisees. He differed from them only by being thoroughly sincere and earnest. They could not, therefore, excuse themselves for not being sympathetic towards him on the ground of his being an innovator... The meaning thus is: He cultivated legal piety like yourselves, yet, etc.—*ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες*, when ye saw how the sinful took John's summons to repent ye did not even late in the day follow their example and change your attitude." Expositors Greek Testament

2. The vineyard workers versus the vineyard owner - vs. 33-46

- a. The Lord gives another parable to illustrate, from another perspective, the disobedience and rebellion of the Jewish religious leaders - the first shows their hypocrisy and the second shows the magnitude of their defiance (demonstrates what was actually happening)
- b. There are four basic "players" in this account - 1. the vineyard owner, 2. the vineyard workers/tenants, and 3. the servants sent by the vineyard owner - the owner is God, the tenants are the religious leaders (who are suppose to tend to the vineyard) and the servants are those coming to collect what is due the owner (the prophets) and finally 4. the son of the vineyard owner (Jesus Christ Himself)
- c. When the owner sent some of his slaves to collect the "produce" due Him, the "vine-growers" beat one (*ἔδειραν* - to flay or flog someone), murdered another and one they "stoned" (killed as a criminal) - these slaves of the Master, there on the Master's business were treated not only as intruders, but dangerous intruders - it may also have been that the term for "stoned" refers to throwing stones to keep the servant away
- d. The parable uses a scenario that defies reality (to make the point) and the Master sends another (larger) group who meet with the same fate - this clearly illustrates the true wicked nature of the vineyard workers - Israel's history had many examples of such treatment of the prophets God had sent to them - and such are those professing to be Christians who treat Christianity as subject to their own authority, and treat with contempt those bringing the message of the Lord - like these, the endeavor to hold control can cause us to become unbridled in our responses to those God sends our way
- e. Again, using a situation that seems unimaginable, the Master sends his own son, believing such would have to respect him since he was **THE** son - this is illustrative (to make the point) and does not cast doubt on God's foreknowledge since Jesus Himself is predicting His own death
- f. Yet, such only translate the situation as one of opportunity for themselves - if they can remove the "competition" then they (theorize) can have the "inheritance" for themselves - they may have reasoned that since no force was being used against them by the Master that they had the advantage and would make the final blow against him in this act, and that they would be free to govern themselves (on their own terms)
- g. The symbolism (in verse 39) is key - they "threw him out of the vineyard" (as Christ was forced out of Jerusalem), "and killed him" (as done to Jesus) - "sinners" who knew themselves to be sinners were repenting while the supposed "righteous" who were duty-bound to be righteous, were putting to death the very one they were to be looking to and for
- h. These clearly evil men represented the religious leaders, demonstrating that one can be wicked and still see themselves as righteous and moral (in their own estimation)
- i. So, the Lord asks, what will happen when the owner of the vineyard returns? Contrary to the conclusions (assumptions) of these vineyard workers, they would be held accountable - at some point they must have determined they would not answer for their crimes and became emboldened in their sinful actions
- j. Their answer was very accurate - "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end" - "The order of the Greek words is also striking: Miserable men, miserably he will destroy them." Vincent
- k. The conclusion is also put forward that **other workers** would need to be brought in to work the vineyard and "pay the proceeds at the proper seasons" - they recognized that even though horrific things had taken place, the work would need to continue and that, obviously, these current workers would have to be replaced in the work - vs. 41

- l. This also is a good reminder of the purpose of the work of the Lord - it is His work for His profits - it is to be remembered that the "harvests" are always seen as His and what is properly due Him - even in our day there are many supposing themselves to be working "His field" but look upon the proceeds as being theirs (in one way or another)
- m. "Did you never read in the Scriptures..." begins an explanation of what has been and will take place, and also demonstrates how often God works out bringing about His will - vs. 42
- n. The Lord quotes from Psalm 118:22 - there is much discussion as to the time when this Psalm was written (by David or in the time of Nehemiah), but the Lord's usage of it is demonstrative (and it need not be directly applied to the "Messiah", though likely was so intended)
- o. Learn from Scripture that, as a stone would be scrutinized - the phrase ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες indicating the builders testing (from δοκιμαζω) a stone for use in their construction, and have found it deficient (by their standards) - in this scenario, it ends up that this very stone becomes the most important stone of all in the construction (it was directly opposite to the assessment of the "experts" initial analysis)
- p. And such working "came about from the Lord" and as such, is "marvelous in our eyes" - the Lord is demonstrating that this is how God has and will continue to work out truly "marvelous" (an awe-evoking sight) - it is typical for us to anticipate that we can effectively know how God will perform His will (so much so that we can struggle with our attitudes when He does not do it as we expect) - we are not looking to be "professionals" in our planning as much as we are to be so in the living/walking by faith (trust in His outcomes and means as we focus to obey)
- q. Jesus had already demonstrated that their analysis was flawed, as seen in their lack of response to the working of God in the changing of sinners they could see - their scrutinizing process and purposes were not as they should have been (and would soon come to be proven as such by the very core of what they rejected (found as flawed) - it would become the most significant part of God's "building") - see I Pet. 2:4-8
- r. Therefore, the "Kingdom of God will be taken away from you" - many take this as God taking the Kingdom from Israel (as a people) altogether, yet this whole dialogue is directed at the religious leaders of Israel - R. T. France concluded, "We may rightly conclude from 8:11-12 that this new "nation" will *contain* many Gentiles, but we saw also at that point that this is not to the exclusion of Jews as such, but only of those whose lack of faith has debarred them from the kingdom of heaven." - Romans 11 goes on to explain further what is coming
- s. The work (objective) of the Lord would be fulfilled no matter what, "producing the fruit" (the workers planting, watering and nurturing and **the results/fruits are the Lord's**)
- t. The two-fold resistance to "the stone" and the two results - following again with the "stone" reference just used - any opposing Him will "stumble" and fall (a reference back to Isa. 8:14-14 (the "stone of stumbling")) and will be "broken to pieces" (rendered helpless, not having been any true threat to the stone) - those upon whom the stone falls (in judgment), referring to Dan. 2:34-35 when the image of the coming nations of the world is pulverized by the stone striking it - and so, while this world continues as it is, in rejecting Christ, all opponents will break until the final judgement where Christ will come in judgement, ending the reign of man and his world-powers and will reign Himself - all such will be "blown to bits"!
- u. The Chief Priests and Pharisees understood that He was referencing them, though, once again acted opposite of repentance and looked to arrest Him - it is always like this with those determined to oppose the right/Truth; they will look to stop its proclamation rather than yield to the Truth
- v. They were restrained from acting on their anger because of their fear - **Jesus had reached the people with the Truth in spite of these religious leaders** - they would look to take Him more privately and follow that up with a "campaign" to taint His reputation
- w. It is truly a sad thought to realize that even professing Christians are those who do not realize such an application is directed at them as well - they, in thought and practice, stand in opposition to Who Christ really was/is - they do not see (as these also) that they are the enemies to Christ and His cross, evidenced by their own version of distorting the reputation and reality of Christ - rather than submit, they choose to "alter Him" to their own image

This reference is not necessarily utilized a prophetic fulfillment as much as it is that this is a means used by God (and that means a "wonderful" one!)

The "experts" quite often are in the wrong when it comes to theological/spiritual matters WHEN the work/planning/assessing is ABOUT them - the sooner we admit wrong (when truly wrong) the less progress will be hindered - much delay is to be had because of personal pride!

It is not necessarily "marvelous" because it could not have been anticipated - it could have been and was so "marvelous" because it reiterated the rightness of God's Word all along - it can be a very different thing to have confidence in the genius of God versus that of faith in the genius of the "servants" of God (the two often being confused)

Those that see no more place for ethnic Israel, reference this as indicating that the "Church" has replaced all that used to reference the use of "Israel" in Scripture

The "Stone" rejected by man will be an obstacle throughout all the world's ages and, though opposed in each age, such opposition will bring down its instigators (religious as well as secular) - as pictured in Daniel, all world powers and the strength of all nations past will end in defeat by Christ

This will always be characteristic of those stubbornly opposing Christ (even in religious "Christian" circles) - they will fight to the end, even as those around finally falter to "reality", they will not stop their resistance

D. Insulting the dignity of the King - 22:1-14

1. Once again the Lord uses a parable to illustrate an aspect of the “kingdom of heaven” - vs. 1-3

It is tempting to run with the wedding picture too far and speculate regarding the bride - but the gist of the illustration is the invitation to an honored event and the rude, disrespectful refusals and neglect

- a. Here it is compared to a king giving a feast for the wedding of his son - such would have illustrated not just a festive time, but one of highest significance in anyone’s life; and in this case it was the son of the King
- b. In this situation, it is illustrating those “invited” to the kingdom, but in such an invite, he would actually need to desire to attend (come), recognizing the honor of such an invitation - those detailed in this account not only disregard the honor, they despise it (some violently) - such may seem absurd (as it is supposed to be), realizing this is how it really is in light of what God offers, and the “ **insane** ” refusals
- c. The synopsis in verse 3 lays it out that many had been invited already (and likely would have already accepted the invitation, since now they are being called) - this would parallel well with the son in the previous chapter that agreed with his father and then did not act upon it (did not obey) - obedience/honesty toward someone demonstrates an honoring of them
- d. The core of the issue is revealed in the short phrase, “they were unwilling to come” - simply put, they didn’t want to come (they had **competing** interests)

It is not a demand (order) to come to some dull or difficult royal duty, but an invite to a celebration - such was one of the highest honors - one of the overriding purposes in this parable is to demonstrate the disrespect they had for the King and the honor he was offering

2. The parable continues with another group of “slaves” sent to bid them come - vs. 4-6

Such response not only demonstrates the sinful nature of these religious leaders, but of sinners in general - any consideration of the unkindness of God are ridiculous in light of such pictures!

- a. It is stressed in this message to the invited, that everything is ready - the details of some of the feast are given, picturing the urgency in an immediate response to come (not desiring anything to spoil) - “everything is ready” is supposed to relieve the guest of any inconvenience (the situation could not be more ideal, all to illustrate the profundity of not only their neglect, but the violent response of some so focused on self-interests)
- b. The initial words of verse 5 are astounding; “But they paid no attention...” (and so, as in the KJV, they “made light of it”), and did so, because they were more interested in less important affairs, though important to them (placing themselves in importance **above** their king)
- c. The first went to “his own” farm, more taken with his possession (love of things) than with the honor that his king had given him - the second ignores this third, urgent invitation because he is going to his “business” (ἐμπορίαν - a business trip for trading)
- d. Then there were other invited guests who “mistreated” and “killed” some of these slaves - word for “mistreated” is ὕβρισαν describing an insult and showing spite - and if not this, they put them to death (the most extreme thing they could do) - this is hateful disdain for the king!

This is not intended to indicate that the “farm” or that the business” weren’t important, just that they were more important - their priorities of life were grossly out of balance

3. The enraged king sends his armies to destroy the city of these murderers - vs. 7

The majority of Jews and a majority of Gentiles still hold such a disdain for God and His servants - the “stone” referenced earlier will topple all world nations/powers in the end

- a. This looks to be a direct reference to what was coming in the destruction of Jerusalem about 40 years later - there is a smugness that accompanies such disdain for God, His Word and messengers, that exhibits itself in an irrational, unfounded **boldness**
- b. In light of what had just been described, these deserved what they received - though such do not see themselves as deserving judgement (nor those sympathetic to their “cause”)

4. The invitation to all others (evil and good) to the wedding feast - vs. 8-14

This invitation is not without restriction - it is wide open to any and all that would respond (Jews and Gentiles) - yet even this will include those who will come “evil” and remain “evil”

- a. The seemingly “worthy” (qualified) guests proved themselves not to be worthy (those religious leaders, and those outwardly (only) righteous “Jews”) - it is not necessary to assume that these new guests to be invited are Gentiles only (though they included them)
- b. The previous proved not to be worthy by not acting on their invitation, and by neglect and hostility towards it - these next invited guests have no obvious qualifications to such an honored feast and yet are privileged to be so called
- c. Verse 10 brings us to a wedding hall filled with wedding guests “both evil and good” - had the account stopped here there would no doubt have been many who would use it as a type of “universalism” (that God saves all one way or another) - but it does not stop here
- d. As would be expected in such a setting, the King (the provider of the feast) comes in to view the setting and the guests - He sees a man not dressed in “wedding clothes” - there is much written regarding the source of such a garment, but the point is clear; such a garment is required
- e. The man, when confronted by the King is left speechless - he is without excuse - it is safe to assume that he could have had it but went along without it - it is important to note that this also can be a picture of the self-righteousness of the “wicked” (that even when faced with mercy and grace, refuse to access it and come “as they are”, calculating it as “enough”)

This man could have seen how out of place he was - this is how it is with so many presupposing upon God’s mercy that they see the invitation and its apparent acceptance as “proof” enough - they seek no other righteousness

Extreme, unending regret and anger look to be one of the more horrific tortures of an eternal Lake of Fire - these appear to have hoped to still get to inherit and participate though on their own terms

The word for "chosen" is just that, those selected - the intent then is to demonstrate how these chosen are distinguished (it being what they are)

Notice also the absence of repentance and the pursuit of forgiveness by this invited guest - regret yes, but regret is not repentance!

This example reveals as well that though Churches are filled with those "called" as such, yet they are not "chosen" and will be seen for this in their response to all aspects of the Gospel

- f. Even though the treatment of the man seems harsh, the violation of this man is worse than most realize - **it was a deliberate offense to the King**, to his Son and to the entire wedding party - his "self-rule" and "deciding for himself" was more important to him than the required protocol
- g. The description but the Lord is graphic - the man is bound hand and foot, and thrown out into "outer darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" - this is in contrast to the brightness of the banquet hall in this account, and describes the gloom and overwhelming **regret** (grinding of teeth, though this could also picture extreme anger/bitterness)
- h. It is telling to realize that when it states that this man was "speechless" that the word in Greek is ἐφίμωθη, and means to "muzzle" (to be rendered unable to speak, not because they cannot speak, but because they have no answer to give) - as much as many might think they will have a legitimate argument against God, **they will be without defense**
- i. "Many are called (κλητοὶ) but few are chosen" (ἐκλεκτοὶ - "selected out of") - such are **evidenced** by what they do, as, starting with the beginning of the parables, two sons were "called", the vineyard workers were "called" and the guests were "called" and yet out of all of them, few were "selected"
- j. As the attending guest at the wedding feast came to realize, just because there is an invitation does not equate to being of the "chosen" (and since they are such, they would not desire to be a part of the actual "kingdom" of God, since it would be an eternal contradiction to their **independence** and self-rule)
- k. Writing of this "outer darkness", Spurgeon in his final work (Commentary on Matthew) wrote, "It will be no place of repentance, for the tears shed there will not be those of godly sorrow for sin; but hot scalding streams from eyes that flash with the fire of rebellion and envy burning in unsubdued hearts. The "gnashing of teeth" shows the character of the "weeping". The outcast from God would gnash his teeth in all the fury of disappointed hatred, which had been foiled in its attempt to bring dishonour upon the King in connection with his Son's wedding."
- l. The Pharisees were about to become living examples again of these truths, as they seek to trap the Lord - they would send some to feign interest, but whose goal was simply to **discredit** Him before the people (so as to maintain their personal "authority")

E. The pursuit to entrap and discredit Jesus before the people and Rome - 22:15-46

1. The Pharisees attempt to get Christ to entrap Himself before the Roman government - vs. 15-22

"Vivid picture of the effort to trap Jesus in his speech like a bird or wild beast." RWP

This demonstrates that Jesus (the Truth) was the greater enemy in the eyes of the Pharisees- even Rome would be more helpful to them than Jesus

The best protection against such entrapments is genuine humility of heart/spirit - such tactics are only effective on those looking to be elevated by others - the "poor in spirit" are safe because they see themselves rightly before God and significance is found in God's purposes and uses, so they are unimpressed by the lauding of men

The core issue is found more in the heart than it is in the mind - such will become argumentative with the Truth because inside, their will is seeking only excuse or justification for its innate desires

- a. The Pharisees grouped together (literally convened a council (συμβούλιον)) to strategize how they could get Jesus to entrap Himself with His own words
- b. They would utilize "their disciples" (so they would not go themselves, planning that He would not recognize them and would look on them as sincere seekers) - these would be accompanied by "Herodians" who were most likely loyal to Herod's dynasty and loyal then to Rome - such would normally be enemies, but joined forces to entrap Jesus and looked to get Him in trouble with Roman law by getting Him to speak against paying taxes
- c. These would-be "entrappers" use flattery to attempt to draw Him into an unguarded dialogue, for such is often at the motive of those who utilize flattery (insincere compliments), and such also attempt to **say** what they believe the "target" would like to hear said of them - they did not realize though, that what they intended as flattery was all true - their "extremes" in their compliments were actually all true - He actually was "...truthful" and He did "...teach the way of God in truth..." - He also was not given over to the preferential treatment of people - yet **such flattery has no control over those who are not driven by pride**
- d. There are still such, even in churches and other religious organizations, that believe they can somehow discredit (and therefore disqualify) Christ in His teaching (what He said), that is in opposition to **popular** thought
- e. These had rightly stated what would distinguish someone who would give the best answer - one who is consistently "truthful" (literally not concealing something) and teaches the "way of God" accurately (in truth) without being motivated by the acceptance of those they are answering (literally not affected by their appearance/faces) - but insincere inquirers do not mix with truth-tellers - **some love the appearance of seeking truth yet have no real desire to get it**
- f. "Tell us then what do you think?" - this is the "springing of the trap" because their question was pointing Him more to the idea "is it lawful before God" since it clearly was lawful in Rome

As many religious "zealots" has argued over the centuries, so these were believed it wrong to just give money to a government that was not God-honoring and which did not honor His laws - but Jesus would not be in agreement with them

And such can be identified in their attempts to discredit genuine Godliness (or the pursuits of it)

in their "evil", they were seeking to trip Him up (by diverting attention away from the primary issues/topics)

Even though a government may be corrupt, there is a responsibility to live obediently under it and to pay the taxes it levies - much is argued over fair taxation and laws, but this underlying principle must be the starting point for such discussions

Rendering (giving back) to God what is His is to be an overriding guide to our lives; for what would we have apart from Him?

Yet, in this case, they seemed to think this was a time to obey God over man - but God would have them pay the tax as the Lord made clear

There truly is no "competition" when going up against Christ! We all should learn from this and other examples the futility of disagreeing with God on any point

And such is the case with us (often) - we are prone to disagree with a Biblical teaching when our "denomination" does not support it, and this is done without personal research

As with the Sadducees, many today can think up apparent contradictions with Biblical teaching (based on what they know) and then comfort themselves in their opposition to it

- g. The tax they were referencing was a specific "poll tax" (κῆνσον) and it was levied on all the Jews - it was a tax with which there was no "return" to them - it was demanded as a tribute to Caesar in recognition of his authority/power over them - they may have been motivated by Deut. 17:15 where Israel was instructed not to set up a king over them that was not assigned as such by God - plus, Caesar proclaimed a type of "god-ness" and was not a follower of God's law
- h. The word they used in reference to paying the tax was "δοῦναι" which carries the idea of offering or just giving the money
- i. Before Jesus answers them, He identifies their true motive - He identifies them for what they really are; "hypocrites" (mask-wearers, play-actors) - these are they that put on a "front" for others while being something completely different from what they are presenting themselves to be - many (as these) become experts at putting on "spiritual airs" (spiritual pride) while being fully "carnal" (of the flesh) inwardly
- j. "Why are you testing me?" is His question - the type of testing here was one to entrap and is still used today by those setting up their own scenario for God to fail (in their estimation) to attempt to legitimize a position they desire to hold
- k. Jesus, even after identifying their ill-intent, answers their question fully (to such and extent that they are confounded) - He asks for them to show the coin (money) used to pay this particular tax - the denarius, as the Lord asked them to describe, had the image of Caesar on it - then Jesus makes a solid point that such a coin, struck with the image of Caesar demonstrated that it was (without question) of Caesar's government - these Jews, though defiant, used the roads, enjoyed some protection as well as general order as a result of having a government (civil government which God ordained - Gen. 9; Rom. 13)
- l. Jesus does not just tell them to "pay" (offer) the tax - He uses the word "render" (Ἀπόδοτε, meaning to "give back") - Jesus counters their idea that it is just a "gift" of sorts to Caesar; it is actually due him (as representing the civil government and what is due it)
- m. This is essential to properly handle so as not to miss the greater point of "rendering" to God the things that are His - if one excuses (at least) some responsibility to an immediate authority, they are likely doing the same before the ultimate authority!
- n. It has been noted, that as Jesus used the illustration of the image of Caesar demonstrating what belonged to Caesar, so we bear the image of God and are to thus see ourselves as His
- o. This does also make it clear that if "Caesar" is looking to enforce that which is truly against God (and what is His), then we are to obey God foremost
- p. These left him being amazed at His answer - of this Matthew Henry noted, "There are many in whose eyes Christ is marvellous, and yet not precious. They admire his wisdom, but will not be guided by it, his power, but will not submit to it."
- q. "By this decision, Caesar is satisfied - he gets his own to the uttermost farthing. God is glorified - his honor is in every respect secured. And the People are edified - one of the most difficult questions that could possibly come before them is answered in such a way as to relieve their consciences, and direct their conduct." Clarke

2. The Sadducees try to demonstrate an inconsistency in His teaching - vs. 23-33

- a. Again, the best of the "experts" conspire to discredit Jesus and here, His teaching - their tactic is to point out an absurd conclusion that is reached if you follow one concept of the resurrection through - their problem though, was that they did not understand the concept themselves that they had already written-off
- b. The Pharisees tried to subtly entrap Him and now the Sadducees use one of their best arguments against the concept of the resurrection - these did not believe in an afterlife at all (especially a resurrection of the body) - these were not only a part of the "upper-class" but also a part of the intellectuals, and this would be a way for them to taunt Him with what looked to be an unanswerable scenario
- c. These came "on the same day", looking to continue the bombardment on Jesus (apparently because they were all becoming desperate)
- d. These did not believe in the resurrection from the dead - they did not believe there was any accountability beyond this life - to make their point, they use part of the Law of Moses regarding a brother's responsibility to marry his sister-in-law if his brother dies (with no children)

This is a result of losing the perspective of a student; when one sees themselves as knowing enough, they are unteachable - this does not mean that all our beliefs are held in doubt, just that we are not overcome with fear when they are challenged - some fear out of pride and others because they do not like where it may lead - in this case, the resurrection would mean an accounting of life and probable consequences

see also Acts 23:8

"Note, The ignorance, disbelief, or weak belief, of God's power, is at the bottom of many errors, particularly theirs who deny the resurrection." MH

Some may resist this concept, but just because there is no marriage does not indicate there is no love - marriage will not be needed for close relationships - we will all be close (unhindered by self-focus, needs or any affect of sin at all)

*In texts such as Gen. 13:15 and 17:8 it showed that God made personal promises to Abraham and to his offspring - these were not fulfilled in his lifetime yet were still Abraham's - **physical death is not the end!***

God had again used the challenge of those corrupt and in error to impress those looking for answers but who could not/would not challenge the leadership/status quo

Ranking the importance of ideas or things is easily looked upon as a subjective thing to do - in most groups, if such conclusions are requested on weighty subjects such as "religion", debates and divisions are common and can derail any genuine pursuit of the best answers

- e. This is a good example of "pitting" one text of Scripture with another - just as Satan did, so these attempt to use Scripture for their own personal "cause"
 - f. It's also an example of how the Bible is often approached - many place such a high value on their perspective, that if any text/concept does not harmonize with it, they look for a way to discredit it, rather than (first) looking to validate whether the texts that appear to be in conflict actually are in conflict
 - g. Regarding the resurrection in general, Albert Barnes wrote, "They probably denied, as many have done since, that God could gather the scattered dust of the dead and remould it into a body. On this ground they affirmed that the doctrine could not be true - opposing reason to revelation, and supposing that infinite power could not reorganize a body that it had at first organized, and raise a body from its own dust which it had at first raised from nothing."
 - h. They chose a scenario that if not impossible, was at least highly improbable - this is also a common tactic today where one uses extreme examples or scenarios to start their argument - in some cases, the desired result is to have the "non- norm " become the "rule"
 - i. Seven husbands for the one woman (one at a time) was theoretically possible, but it did not lend to their position since, as the Lord indicated, "You are in error because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Their case may have seemed "airtight," realizing the Jews permitted polygamy but did not permit polyandry (many husbands) - so, if there was a resurrection (they put forward), how could this situation be lawful and right - there have been many since, that make a moral case against God's Word based on their ignorance of His power and Word - He is limited by their reasoning (which is no fair comparison!)
 - j. They did not know the power of God because they refused the possibility of the resurrection of the body, and they did not know the Scriptures because they assumed that life would be identical to this one (if there was a resurrection)
 - k. As to their basic question/scenario, the answer was easy - "in the resurrection" (the afterlife) there is no marriage and "giving in marriage" as it is with the angels - married relationships and procreation are for this side of eternity only
 - l. Then, answering their doubt of the reality of the resurrection, Jesus masterfully quotes from Moses (Exodus 3:6,15), though many have suggested other texts that would appear to better prove the concept for the resurrection in the Old Testament - Jesus uses a text all would have been familiar with, and that the Sadducees would have often used, and yet missed a glaring truth in it (demonstrating their inability to see obvious conclusions)
 - m. Christ introduces the text as "...spoken to you by God" (the God Who clarified Himself as the "I AM" (the eternal, self-existent one)) - "I am the God of..." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and seeing no retort by the Sadducees, we know that the Lord's point was clear that God was still, at the time of saying this to Moses, the God of these - so God IS NOT the God of the dead but of those living
 - n. The crowds were astonished at His teaching - they had heard teaching before, but not so clear, precise (in refuting a false notion) and insightful - the Sadducees had been "silenced" (vs. 34), which was no small feat, seeing they were scholarly and the "experts" on the Scripture
3. The Pharisees try to get Him bogged-down in debates over the Law - vs. 34-40
- a. Having heard that their rivals had been silenced (ἐφίμωσεν - literally muzzled/gagged), they come again to "test" Him - one of the Law specialists (the Law of Moses) also attempted to trick Him - we are not told exactly what they hoped, neither do we see their response (other than they did not) - His answer was too good for them to refute or leverage for their purpose
 - b. The specialist asks which commandment is the "greatest" (either which one in particular (most likely)), or categorically, what makes a command greatest (since they ranked the numerous laws into levels of importance) - this was intended to draw Him into arguing limitless details (for them) or to get Him to categorize one of the many hundreds/thousands of laws higher than others might think they should be
 - c. Jesus immediately answers with Deut. 6:5 - to love "the Lord your God" with all that you have is the most important of all the Laws of God - the greatest obedience-pursuit of all is the active preference of God over all else one could desire, long-for, imagine or crave - it is a prioritizing Him above all else, especially all else one deems most important to him/her

- d. Many “moralists” can list-off several of the most important things to not do and things that must be done - but many focus more on the details that make up the laws, rather than on the reason for the laws of God - the Sabbath, dietary laws or tithing would have been expected (by these) to be nearest the top of most lists
- e. Jesus masterfully answers this “setup” question by first answering it in truth and second, by not following the line of reasoning or the popular/traditional way such issues were usually addressed - it is still often expected today that long, detailed answers are the best - Jesus’ answer is short, and summarizes the overriding priority to all the other laws of God
- f. Loving God (Who is to be “your God”), is to utilize ALL the heart (with its emotions, feelings, adorations, infatuations, longings, etc.), and ALL the “soul” (with its aspirations, the entirety of the will (thus in a constant submissive/surrendered state) - here “τῆ ψυχῆ σου “ (the soul/ life of you) is the whole of self - and ALL the “mind” (the thought/thinking processes, governing incoming information and dictating opinions) - such describes more than just a preferring of God, but more **a guarded priority of God and all that pertains to Him kept uninfected from competing influences** - such makes the next command “correct” (right)
- g. This command is the “greatest” (biggest, most encompassing of rightness) and the “first” (as in foremost, coming before all others - if any command will “slip” NOT this one)
- h. Jesus then gives a second that is expected to work in harmony with the first (they are inseparable) - “The second is like it” - this command is equal in importance but cannot be obeyed without the first
- i. “Love your neighbor as yourself” - “τὸν πλησίον σου” (the “nearby one of you”) describes (in its most basic form) anyone who happens to be near us - as the Lord demonstrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, the “neighbor” is anyone who is need that we come across
- j. There is a natural “preference” (priority, deference) to self, and the Lord uses that as the standard by which we love those near us - “preference” is at the heart of the concept of love, and as we would seek to be preferred, so we should prefer others the same - this becomes a distorted command because of the wrongly defined idea of “love”; it is more than an affection, and is not a pursuit of all that another desires (especially if we know what is desired is harmful) - love seeks the best for another (even if the other does not know what “best” is)
- k. There are many who would claim to love God (as so commanded here), but do not love their neighbor as they do themselves - it is not possible to love God and not love our “neighbor”
- l. On these two commands “hang the Law and the Prophets” - take both or either away, and the rest of the moral guides (priorities and purposes) fall apart (drop) - how we respond to God and to others sum up the content of all Scripture - this also demonstrates that the commandments were intended more to be practiced than just known - these prided themselves on the nuances of the Law, but were far from prioritizing them into their daily practice - some were out to so “love” God (or at least appear to do so), that they were unable to love people
- m. There is no mention of a response, though Jesus now “turns the tables” and asks them a question which would finally demonstrate His authority over Scripture

4. The Messiah; was He David’s son or more than just David’s son? - vs. 41-46

- a. Jesus asks their thoughts of the Messiah - whose son is He? - they answer correctly (and in line with their teachings and traditions”) that He would be David’s son
- b. The question then goes to the particular situation referenced in Psalm 110:1 - if the Messiah is David’s son, how is it that David calls Him “Lord,” and that such will sit at God’s right hand and God will subdue all His enemies “under your feet” - if the Christ is David’s son (from the line of David, after David), **how is it David addresses Him as “Lord”?**
- c. This question (and the necessary answer) is more than just that the Christ would be more significant than David, though that becomes clear - also, neither would the Messiah subdue His enemies as David did - the Father (Yahweh) would do it
- d. Plus, David pictures Yahweh as talking with David’s “Lord” (Adonai) at that time - the Messiah must pre-date David (pre-existed) and, taking the text at face value, would have to essentially be equal with God Himself - clearly, these religious leaders were not willing to grapple with the idea of “divinity” in the Messiah, nor had they thought through this enough to provide a solid answer - these “scholars” researched so many lesser areas to the neglect of the greater

Notice again that even though these were all being answered beyond their ability to answer back (or get Christ in a debate), they would not concede - truth was not their objective

The Greek word for “all” here is ὅλη, indicating the “whole” of something, holding nothing back

It’s been noted that it is likely that the lawyer (who was a Pharisee) likely had this text in his phylactery - a “law” showcased externally but neglected internally, since it was not a part of why they were doing what they were doing

“Love” is preferring, only in this case the comparison is given (love as we love self)

Some would try to argue that there are those that do not “love” themselves and are therefore incapable of loving others - in reality, all love themselves (in the sense here), even those that kill themselves do so because their preference of self (feelings, priorities)

see 1 John 4:20-21

The Pharisees would regroup to try again, but the Lord would out-do them in not only a deep theological question, but it’s Scriptural source - one, that at first appears to be a contradiction, yet fulfilled by Christ Himself, in His eternity and incarnation (both needing to be seen together to have a reasonable answer)

In this question and clarification, Jesus verifies Psalm 110 as written by David, as being a Messianic Psalm, and as being inspired by God’s Spirit, for David wrote this “in the spirit”

There are, no doubt, several reasons why some deny Jesus' deity, but one of them most certainly finds its roots in humanistic thinking - fallen man, at his core, resists salvation from any other source other than humanity - there are undertones of desires to keep Him human (or, at best, a demigod)

- e. They were silenced by His question, either because they did not know the answer, or (more likely) they knew what the answer must be and would not admit it - to this day there are those who profess to be "Christian" and yet still deny Jesus as God
- f. "Note, God will glorify himself in the silencing of many whom he will not glorify himself in the salvation of. Many are convinced, that are not converted, by the word." MH
- g. None "dared" (ἐτόλμησέν - had the courage to risk something) to ask Him anything else - none of them were confident enough to try to entrap Him - and as is usually the case, they sought to eliminate Him instead (which is a direction some take when they have no answer and cannot see themselves yielding)

XXXV. Seven "Woes" to Hypocritical, Religious Leadership - 23:1-39

A. Why deal with just the Scribes and Pharisees and not also the Chief Priests and Sadducees? - vs. 1-3

1. This is a fair question since all these groups had some connection to a "religious" emphasis

But as is about to be explained, these did not represent the Law of Moses (or Moses himself) very well, and were then not to be followed - false teachers and hypocrites may use some Truth, but their usage of it is to be held in close scrutiny

- a. Yet, these two groups specifically dealt with the Scripture and the teaching of it - it's one thing to "put forward" a religious front and come up with a religion of your own making, but to present teachings and practices claiming to be based upon God's Word is infinitely more serious!
- b. These "sit on Moses' seat" - they were then to be speaking for Moses, and it was in that sense, when/if speaking from the Law of Moses, follow what they are saying
- c. "The scribes are never accused of corrupting the sacred text, which, indeed, was scrupulously guarded, and kept pure and unaltered. It was their treatment of the doctrines thereof that was censured." Pulpit Commentary
- d. This was the reason they were such a "threat" - they were supposed to be trustworthy, and some of what they would give would be something to be obeyed - this is true with anyone claiming to teach from Scripture (or even those giving the impression that this is their "source")

Just because proclaimers of Scripture are inconsistent does not justify following their bad examples

2. Out of honor, do and "keep" what they say (from Moses), but do not live as they live

It is sad to realize how many who are in a formal position of representing God's Word are so often poor examples; they proclaim without personal practice

- a. This is a good text to stress the point that God's Word is to be followed, honored and obeyed regardless the faithfulness of the messengers - too many allow themselves to excuse themselves from obedience because those "in-charge" are inconsistent or even contradictory
- b. "Good doctrine is not the worse for being taught by bad men; nor are good works to be slighted and neglected, because they are not done by all that teach them; but it must be owned that examples are very useful and forcible, and practice greatly recommends doctrine; and it is to be wished, that they both always went together. John Gill
- c. "...for they say and do not." - they instruct others in what should be done and then do not do them themselves - this is the heart of their hypocrisy - compare to Rom. 2:19-24, Titus 1:15-16
- d. And, as James points out in James 1:22, those that are "hearers of the Word" but who are not "doers" are those that live in self-deception (the worst type of deception)

Jesus masterfully ensures reverence for the Scriptures by not disqualifying these men completely - their position is acknowledged but not as in having absolute authority in themselves

B. Beware the pursuit of position versus humble responsibility - vs. 4-12

1. These Scribes and Pharisees were characterized more by their "lording it" over others, their personal lack of accountability, and their catering to their pride - vs. 4-7

Some of speculated that these "burdens" were regulations that would have been more difficult for most but easier for these who lived a more "scholarly" life style (e.g. laws of cleanliness)

- a. These "tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders..." - this was a picture of what many would do with loads being prepared for their animals (or slaves) to bear - here, these religious leaders had added so many regulations in the observances of the Laws, that they became unbearable - this included many of the "traditions" that had been established
- b. These "overseers" would no so much as lift a finger to assist/help - they were proficient at "piling-on" burdens, with no assistance to be offered in keeping them - Christ emphasized the "easiness" and "lightness" of the burden He brought (Mt. 11:28-30)
- c. Such an approach finds much of its motivation in pride (weeding-out (as it were) the "competition" in the arena of their idea of outward evidences of righteousness and importance)
- d. And the outward displays of obedience these do are exaggerated so as to be seen by others - they "broaden their phylacteries", these being little containers with texts of Scripture in them worn on the forehead and the upper left arm - they would make them "bigger" so they would not be missed by those who would see them - such we see even today where "acts of righteousness" are magnified and "performed" in public in the attempt to impress others with their goodness

The seeming opposite can also be done where there is a competition for who has the best "display" of liberty from righteousness

There will be some times where our obedience will need to be in public, but the majority of our truest acts will be secret, seen and known by very few (or, ideally, but God alone)

Jesus wore these tassels (Mt. 9:20) (though not lengthened) so these and possibly the phylacteries were a fine practice - the answer to counter these was not to stop doing them in a righteous protest, but to continue to observe rightly and humbly - many discount such disciplines because the proud misuse them

It was expected those of lesser importance would greet those of higher "class", thus they sought to be addressed but not to greet others themselves

Among believers this should not be so practiced - we must not be guilty of making emphasizing such distinctions and very careful in how we receive honor from each other

The I Tim. 5:17 text ("double honor" due elders) is in reference to their being cared for and not in their public honor

The underlying meaning for "apostle" is one who is sent out - the sender has the authority and not the messenger - the message outranks the messenger!

"It makes a distinction among ministers. It tends to engender pride and a sense of superiority in those who obtain it, and envy and a sense of inferiority in those who do not; and the whole spirit and tendency of it is contrary to the "simplicity that is in Christ." Barnes

Any believer that is in a spiritual oversight position (in Church, family or other ministries) should not allow themselves to be so exalted, and to become more the object of love and respect than the Lord - this is not good for any, as it leads to pride and misdirected faith

Those referenced as "rulers" over the church (in Hebrews 13) are rulers in as much as they must give an account to THE RULER - Heb. 13:17

see also Mt. 20:26-27 and the example of Christ Himself in Php. 2:5-8

- e. These would also "lengthen their tassels" on the hem of the garments (in obedience to Num. 15:38-39) - these tassels were worn as they should be, but **lengthened to draw attention to their particular practice of it**
- f. What these "love" (φιλοῦσιν) is telling also - they adore the "place of honor" at celebrations/banquets - this is where the most honored guests would be seated, and would ultimately communicate to others their importance - they wanted celebrations to "be about them" not desiring to have honors bestowed **elsewhere** (true "self-ness")
- g. They loved the place of prominence when at times with others, and even at times where the focus was to be God (the synagogues) - here they loved the "chief seats" (places of distinction on a stage or behind the place where teachers spoke or prominent seats in front of the benches where everyone else would sit - see James 2:2-4 as an example)
- h. They also were motivated in their pursuit of honorary greetings in the "market places" and being called "Rabbi" (a term indicating one is of higher rank/importance, as well as that of a highly educated teacher - terms today such as "reverend" would be similar)
- i. It is easy to look on these as extremes, but this is because following generations have developed different terms to **measure** importance openly (an importance thought legitimate if earned, and so it is deserved and expected to be so acknowledged in public) - it wasn't necessarily bad to show honor, **but the love (or even demand) of it was wrong**

2. "But you.." is the direction of the next statements from the Lord - you must not be like them - vs. 8-12

- a. In your ranks, do not "be called" "Rabbi" (master, teacher), for you really only have one true teacher (the Lord Himself) - this does not mean that there will not be other teachers/professors (seeing we have them in the writings of the New Testament), but that **such** are not placed as **higher** than all the others
- b. After all, "you are all brothers" (on the same plane of importance, not one above the other) and as such, the honor is directed to the Father - many in ministries today insist on their titles (professor, pastor, doctor), but this text should stop such a practice - the positions of "Apostles" and others, was more in line with "gifts" to the Church, servants given by God, and "Apostolic authority" being in their **teaching** and not of themselves personally - such ministers and teachers are to point to the true Teacher and not seek to draw attention to themselves
- c. Even in Paul's day, dealing with the church at Corinth (in I Corinthians 1) he had to deal with such partisanship - many were distinguishing themselves by the messengers more than the actual messages - this has always been a problem, as it is in our day
- d. Still in the context of "religious" leadership, Jesus tells them not to call anyone "your father" - this is not including earthly (familial) fathers, for we are instructed to honor them - but, as was a custom with the Jews then and even now in some areas of Christianity, some teachers are called "father" (as Roman Catholics do and even evangelicals often reference the "early church fathers") - these even referenced as "divines" - we are grateful for such **"gifts"** to His Church, but we must not honor them **too** highly
- e. Some have argued that much of the application of this verse and the previous, is likely to condemn all ecclesiastical "rule" - this is not the case since there are legitimate "ruling" positions, but **those who hold them must not, themselves, be held highly - for such are to point to God as the authority and His Word is to be honored**
- f. Still restricting what these should do (in contrast to the Scribes and Pharisees), they were not to allow themselves to be called "καθηγηται" (master-teachers, as in "mentor") as there is but one "master", "the Christ" - He is the "absolute leader-teacher" in the Church - such church "leaders" are only so in that they are following Christ and **bidding** others to do the same (keeping it clear Who is being followed)
- g. In stark contrast to these others, the "greatest among you" (having the most significant (and genuine) importance) will be your "servant" - this is the word "διάκονος" (deacon, "... properly means 'to kick up dust,' as one running an errand." A.T. Robertson) - these are those doing and sharing in the work and not those deemed of such importance that they are above it
- h. This is the true spirit of one of Christ's - they are not after the exaltation of man, but after (singularly) the "ὑψωθήσεται" (lifting up) that God does - those working at promoting (lifting up) themselves will be lowered by God (which is still His gracious act)

Because of sin, our perspective of what true "greatness" is has been distorted - we seek the notice of mankind above that of God

Ironically, in the deceitfulness of pride, we allow ourselves to believe that we can keep our pride in check - it's a vicious, consuming, blinding cycle!

Such are not only unreliable and untrustworthy, but aggressively evil and detrimental to those they influence - these are not those "just looking on things another way" and as such treated as offering other "viable options" - philosophies have consequences - to deny such is foolish

Another danger associated with this is that these "masks" of righteousness become norms and soon come to be looked on as "proofs" of genuineness (and salvation)

Counterfeit "Christian" concepts have flooded our society and have such a long line of tradition (as these Pharisees did), that they are taught as "truth" - the result is that the Truth becomes "heretical" and considered the enemy

In this context, also note that not only did these have the key at their disposal, but they were literally at the door - the Lord Himself was right there

But futility against the active fighting of the will of God does not excuse accountability for their actions

- i. The goal/objective to is humble self to receive proper "exaltation" - this is in harmony with 1 Peter 5:6-7 (where the humbling is done by "self" with the realization that God will "exalt" at the proper time) - this is not a legitimizing of a roundabout path to pride, but a path to what genuine "exalting" really is - this is what it is to be "greatest"
- j. So many of the issues with pride that occur with those supposed to be His ministers, find their roots in the misdirected praise and admiration that belongs to God (because of His truth, grace and power), which gets applied to people instead - then, these are overcome with the temptation to accept the adulation and become ensnared with the addictions of pride
- k. This is deadly (profoundly dangerous) as we see next with the "woes" on such a group

C. Seven exclamations of grief and opposition to the Scribes and Pharisees - vs. 13-33

- 1. There are eight "woes" listed in most translations, though often bracketed or footnoted to clarify that verse 14 is not found in the earliest manuscripts, and likely not an actual part of Matthew's account - it is probable these were added later by those looking to harmonize it with Mark and Luke (since this wording is found in Mk. 12:40 and Luke 20:47)

- a. These expressions of grief by our Lord demonstrate not only an air of astonishment at such evil, but one also of grief/sadness
- b. Jesus uses strong words in describing these religious leaders - He calls them "hypocrites", "blind guides", "blind men", "white-washed tombs", "serpents, brood of vipers," demonstrating not only their character but their dangerous affect/influence
- c. Their danger lies in the fact that they are looked-to for direction, and as having reliable authority in what they say and teach (and do) - and such leads others to a boldness in life and the "hereafter" which they should not have! - **these are the greatest dangers!**

- 2. The first "woe" - those "slamming the door of the kingdom" in the faces of those seeking it - vs. 13

- a. Here gain the Lord calls them "hypocrites", those wearing a mask, to hide who they really are for the purpose of the view of those looking-on - the focus of such a term is on the fact that what is done, is done for the "audience" - the goal of a hypocrite is concealment and "mask-designs" that are current with popular trends (which, with such, controls what falls under their definition of what is "relevant")
- b. The phrase "you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people" is mainly in their opposition to Christ (the Messiah, the door to the true Kingdom) - and this continues to this day, where even those professing to be "Christian" reject the actual Christ of the Bible and concoct one of their own (to be more in keeping with popular ideologies)
- c. In Luke, we are given another clue as to exactly what this references when he quotes, "For you have taken away the key of knowledge..." - Truth was the key to "the kingdom" and these would not allow it - the Truth is suppressed in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18)
- d. Their religious work is shown for what it truly is - their followers are "shutting the kingdom of heaven in peoples faces", not necessarily out of fully knowing what they are doing, but because they are not "entering yourselves" - having rejected and publicly withstood Christ (THE ANSWER), they are left with only misdirection
- e. The end result being their active "sending away" of those looking for the entrance - they were more playing the part of one sending away from the truth than those pointing to it - **these play more the role of "roadblock" than they do "road"**
- f. "They use their keys to shut rather than to open the doors of the Kingdom." Cambridge Bible
- g. Truly (even today), "Woe" to the one that has access to the Truth and not only shuns and resists it, but actively works to keep others away from it
- h. This is not a "proof-text" for making a case that the eternal destiny can depend on the faithfulness of people (over that of the Holy Spirit) - even though these religious leaders were resisting, many still came "to the kingdom" **in spite of them**

- 3. Again, verse 14 does not have manuscript evidence for being in this text, though this text does fit the context of the Lord's rebukes against the Scribes and Pharisees at this time (Luke 20:46-47)

- a. They did "devour widow's houses" - they would exploit and essentially rob some of the most vulnerable in their society, all under religious pretenses - they utilized the needs of others for profit and greedy pursuits - they gave, only to get
- b. And such pray "long prayers" for show - length of prayer does not make it more "holy"

It doesn't get more serious than this!

- c. The underlying word for "pretense" is προφάσει, meaning "pretext", indicating that they use the act of prayer as a means to display their significance - they do not pray to talk with God, but to put on a show - they seek to utilize God for their own, proud objectives
- d. And in so doing will "receive the greater condemnation"

4. The second "woe" - religious service/sacrifice that actually secures converts to Hell - vs. 15

- a. Once again Jesus addresses the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them "hypocrites," and explains why they are - here, they go on "missionary journeys" to get "just one proselyte," but the result is to compound their deadly errors by two
- b. These "religious" place a great deal of time and energy (effort and expense) even if just to gain one convert - these were dedicated/committed, but what they were "winning them to" was Pharisaism (self-righteous elitism, "professional" mishandling the Scripture)
- c. "Why is he twice as lost before? He was already lost; now he is religious and lost. Still lost, but he thinks that he is saved." Yeager (RNT)
- d. Such are also twice the "sons of Hell" because it is common for the student (the new convert) to be doubly-zealous as one who taught them and already had something all their life
- e. Such committed dedication to their "cause" would be admired by many today - but here, though, the content of the converting message far outweighed the effort
- f. "Briefly the idea is : the more converted, the more perverted" - Expositor's Greek NT
- g. "The converts became doubly the children of hell because, seeing the iniquities of their teachers, they learned an evil lesson from them, "engrafted the vices of the Jews on the vices of the heathen..." The Pulpit Commentary
- h. These were truly motivated to win these converts to their sect more than to the Truth - it is still seen even in Christian circles, where there are those seeking to convert "the lost" to their "denomination" or their "take" on Christianity rather than the actual Gospel
- i. The reference to "Hell" is a vivid reminder that these have an eternal impact, which when forgotten, causes a lack of caution with the influences of other belief systems

Everyone is indoctrinated in their life by some influence - the content of that "doctrine" is far more important than many realize - here, the Lord makes it clear that such compounded error has horrific consequences

There is an ongoing need to scrutinize what we know and believe, and ensuring it is in harmony with the "the Faith" as found in Scripture - Complacency (not learning at all) can become a way of life we pass along as well (by example more than word)

It is possible to convert while never evangelizing

5. The third "woe" - parsing out degrees of sincerity/obligation - vs. 16-22

- a. The Lord had taught in 5:33-37 not to make oaths at all, but speak the truth always (and be so characterized that your "yes" is binding, and that you can be completely trusted)
- b. In these verses, Jesus reveals their entire practice of setting degrees (distinctions) of oaths and the utter futility in how they were doing it
- c. Here the Lord references them as "blind guides" (as He had in 15:14 describing the end result of the blind leading the blind and all ending up in a "ditch") - this is truly a "woeful" situation where not only do you have the blind, but those who would lead them cannot see either
- d. The Scribes and Pharisees promoted various oath standards, that once properly scrutinized before God, are revealed to be ridiculous - but even the absurd can become formalized and certified by "authorities" to make them appear legitimate
- e. The examples: swearing by the temple was not binding upon the oath taker, but swearing by the gold of the temple was - and the same with the altar in the temple, not as binding as the gift upon it - there is a sense of self-service and greed in these types of distinctions - gold (either in the construction of the temple or as was brought as an offering) was given more importance than the temple itself
- f. Religious institutions and their "ministers" can become entities to themselves, losing sight of their obligation before the God they portray themselves to serve - "Corrupt church-guides make things to be sin or not sin as it serves their purposes, and lay a much greater stress on that which concerns their own gain than on that which is for God's glory and the good of souls." MH
- g. Jesus adds the word "fools" in His rebuke of them (μωροὶ - dull, ignorant, stupid) - they could know better than to act out these practices (just using basic logic/scrutiny)
- h. These logistics allowed for lying and deception under the guise of holy associations - if one would, for instance, swear by the temple and the one to whom they are making the oath does not know this, will expect that they can be trusted - if the liar is confronted later and brought to these religious "authorities", he/she can be vindicated in their lie because it did not include the gold of the temple
- i. They were so distracted they could not even see "holy connections" (how one is "set apart" by another)

This illustrates that many overly legalistic practices are often covering "loopholes" created to excuse and cover evil intents

This is a common occurrence in humanity - there are many would-be leaders who have no perception of where to go, but have all the confidence that attracts followers

The giving of gold (and the love of it) and the giving of gifts (which would be utilized by the temple leadership) had become the objective over the actual purpose of the temple

God and His Word are never to be looked upon in any way so as to serve our selfish or proud purposes - this is profoundly irreverent and blatant sin!

And this is just one of many examples where God's institutions have been hijacked for the purpose of creating a "moral safe haven" for sins - churches are often guilty of protecting and even "Christianizing" sins

These are truly "evil" in that they utilize "holy concepts" to mask unholy intents/purposes

- j. Notice that the use of "fools" is directed not at those who could not know better, but at those who should and could understand - at best they were guilty of neglect
- k. So, why make an oath invoking anything created, realizing the thing invoked cannot be called to witness? Such oath-taking is a **diversion** and already an indicator that the "swearer" cannot be trusted - better to see all as before God and so be accountable for all that is said

6. The fourth "woe" - Neglect of the "majors" for the sake of the "minors" - vs. 23-24

This is a practice likely based on Lev. 27:30 - they were very meticulous in this area

This is not an uncommon mental game we play with ourselves - we focus on our actual "good deeds" while taking great care not to venture onto other areas of responsibility lest we feel guilt and a sense of more "work"

The "big three" being "τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴν πίστιν" (the judgement, the mercy and the faithfulness) - this is harmonious with texts such as Micah 6:8 as to what God was looking for them to place the majority of their focus

Obedience is not to be looked upon as subjective (subject to the whims of my will) - the objective is to follow what God has given, AS He has given it

They take great care to avoid tiny "wrongs" while practicing enormous "wrongs" - they would flinch at swallowing a bug, but gulp-down a camel!

These were not concerned with what people could not see (in them) nor what could not be measured

Overall, this describes them as self-indulgent - the "cleansing" practices are for show only and have no impact on their contents

An incorrect diagnosis will not lead to a solution - their issue was not outward conformity but inner depravity disguised by religious traditions

- a. Here their hypocrisy is demonstrated in their attention to the minute aspects of tithing, but to the neglect of the "weightier things" - they demonstrated how they were so conscientious of tithing (giving a tenth of all of their income) that they even tithed on their herbs
- b. These herbs were generally used for their aromas (not necessary as food would be)
- c. These focused on a good thing (this was not bad for them to do), but they did it to the exclusion of what should have been a greater part of their life's focus - they picked an area (areas) in which to obey God with all they could, yet apparently used obedience in one area to excuse disobedience (neglect) in another
- d. They should not have neglected the "weightier" (βαρύτερα - "heavy", "burdensome") responsibilities of justice and mercy and faithfulness - these weren't necessarily more important (for obeying all of God's commands is significant), but that these categories were harder for them to obey (which looks to be why they avoided them) - these were not pursuing "judging/treating rightly" (properly discerning and treating fairly all others) - they were not merciful, but instead were characterized by holding others' wrongs against them (permanent grudges) - and such were unfaithful to God and their responsibilities to those they were to serve ("unfaithfulness" essentially being one giving themselves over to something other than their obligations (being "true" to their calling))
- e. Such significant "disciplines" should have been done, while not forsaking (altogether) the tithing - following God's instruction is not something we approach with the perspective that they can be "swapped in and out" at our leisure, but that we are to follow **all of them** (religiously), majoring on what He majors on, and minoring on what He minors on
- f. The Lord addresses them as "blind leaders" - those without discernment (unable to distinguish the truth) who offer themselves as guides to others (who may be blind themselves) - how is it their spiritual blindness is evidence? It's seen in their behavior
- g. Jesus describes them as meticulously straining out a gnat (as from what they would be about to drink (and not desiring to accidentally consume an unclean bug)), yet do not see how they "swallow a camel" (also unclean and drastically larger) - they took such care (in appearance and outward practice) not to consume something "unclean," but had no issue with behaving in an "unclean" manner (drastically)

7. The fifth "woe" - focused on the externals while undisciplined inwardly - vs. 25-26

- a. Jesus references their strict observance of washing their dishes before putting food into them (see Mark 7:4 also) - this represents their "externals" (the outside of the "cup" or bowl, while not considering the content and its cleanliness that they put into them) - clean dishes do not make what is vile, good
- b. On the inside, these are filled with "ἀρπαγῆς καὶ ἀκρασίας" - they are inwardly consumed with and motivated by **greed** (looking always on how they can get something for themselves **using** others to do so), as well as filled with "**lack of restraint**" (intemperance) - the underlying word means "without power" indicating these had now power over themselves to control themselves - they had a reputation of discipline but had none internally
- c. "You blind Pharisee!" - the obvious is missed when one's own, made-up character is believed by the "pretender" themselves! - it should be obvious that if the inside (of them) is clean, the outside will be also (because, as should be obvious, the outside facade does not work its way inward, but **the inward reality works its way out**)

8. The sixth "woe" - an outward attractiveness while being a corrupted influence - vs. 27-28

Evil is often covered in the look of purity and "rightness"

- a. The picture Jesus uses to again describe these hypocrites is "whitewashed tombs" - great care is taken to whiten them (these tombs) so others don't mistakenly touch them and become defiled - their "standing-out" should not attract but should caution others
- b. Their "innards" are not visible so as not to reveal what corruption lies within

- c. "... It is possible for those that have their hearts full of sin, to have their lives free from blame, and to appear very good. But what will it avail us, to have the good word of our fellow-servants, if our Master doth not say, Well done?... or it is the day when God shall judge, not the shows, but the secrets, of men. And it will then be small comfort to them who shall have their portion with hypocrites, to remember how creditably and plausibly they went to hell, applauded by all their neighbours." Matthew Henry
- d. On the inside they were full of playacting, which was necessary (their own inner-deception and pretending) to cover their "lawlessness" - it may seem ironic to use such a term with those so outwardly committed to the Law - but true **lawlessness is self-rule** (being the final say on what is right and wrong) - these evidenced themselves as such by the emphasis of some laws and the ignoring of others

And, it is interesting to note that death and decay are the result of self-determination (lawlessness) - the picture is both figurative and literal!

9. The seventh "woe" - embracing symbols of righteousness while inwardly the enemy of them - vs. 29-33

- a. These enjoyed associating themselves with the God's prophets of the past, yet not only did not follow what they taught and proclaimed, but opposed the One they were pointing to - **these honored the memory of the prophets but disregarded their message**
- b. "Their very preoccupation with the tombs shows that their real interest is in the internment of those men who spoke from God, not in heeding the messages they gave." Leon Morris
- c. It was easier to associate with the memory of the prophets than it was what they declared and their stance against hypocritical living
- d. The Lord turns their words back on them that they "are" the sons of those that "murdered the prophets" - not just that they were related, but that inwardly they knew what they were planning (despite any outward "front" of objectivity they were portraying)
- e. Such demonstrates the resolve of so many - they would rather put to death the one they cannot effectively counter rather than repent
- f. Verse 32 literally reads, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers" (ESV) - as in Jesus **instructing** the inevitable, that they will act in the same "measure" as their fathers (also as in finishing what was at the heart of their evil intent) - to act in complete opposition to God, fully identifying as His enemies, while **outwardly embracing His "cause"**
- g. History does seem to demonstrate that it is quite difficult to break away from the "sins" of our families - it is not impossible, but full of inner and outer opposition - practically, this finds many of its roots in the affects and results of "ways of thinking" (patterns of thought)
- h. These disagreed with what their ancestors did, but still acted the same (blind that they were still the same) - many find fault with their parents and grandparents, only to end up following in their same footsteps
- i. Restating part of John the Baptist's message (Mat. 3:7), Jesus again calls them what they were and still are; "serpents" and "brood of vipers" - they were warned by John of the coming judgment and now, about 3 years later, are warned of "the judgment of hell" - such a place of torment and separation is what lies ahead of the self-righteous - open sinners had a better "chance" to be saved from this that these self-righteous men!

The enemies of the prophets were those living for the present and the advantages of the moments in which they lived-accountability was declared by these prophets and such accountability these religious leaders hated

It is an easy game to play inwardly, to pretend our mind is not made-up when it was long before

The greatest enemies to the Gospel and all associated with it will be those who are "within the ranks" and are disguised as friends

Each generation likes to see its situation and circumstances as being different from others, and so their action, though also in opposition to God's Word, is justified (they believe) above those that came before them

"He is not the most loving who speaks the smoothest words; true love often compels an honest man to say that which pains him far more than it affects his callous hearers" Spurgeon

D. The continued killing and persecuting of God's messengers yet to come (be sent) - vs. 34-36

1. "Therefore" (διὰ τοῦτο, literally "on account of this") I am sending more...

- a. The "therefore" (as we have it translated) is there to indicate that as it has always been (that God's messengers have been killed and persecuted), so it will continue
- b. The Lord will send them "prophets, wise men and scribes" - those that will be able to directly say "thus says the Lord" (prophets), those that are well-studied in the Scriptures of what God has said (wise men), and "scribes", those writing and continuing on what God has said
- c. The Lord made it clear that some of these would be "crucified" (because of the very people He was addressing), some will be "scourged" (flogged/beaten) in their places of meeting (it will be public, formal and done in a way that is accepted as "lawful" because those ordering it are in charge); and others they will "persecute" (hunt down) from city to city, making God's messengers fugitives from their "law" - these will be dedicated in their pursuits of God's servants and in their drive to stop the message from getting out
- d. This generation would get the bad notoriety that "upon you will fall all the righteous blood shed on the earth" - this is because they would put to death the Son of God Himself!

Such are gifts from God, but since many recipients are the enemies of God, His messengers will be counted as enemies as well

We have no reason to conclude that such treatment has ceased - God's messengers will always face such if they truly proclaim His message - many claim to but conform and it looks like such persecution has ended

e. These people, in particular, had been given much in having the Lord with them in person - because of this, much more is “required” (Luke 12:48) - what they would receive (in 70 A.D.) would be fitting to their crime

2. Abel represents the first “righteous” person murdered and Zechariah was the last recorded martyr in II Chronicles (which would have been their last book of the Scriptures) - that Zechariah’s father’s name is different in the II Chron. account has many theories, though it is likely his father had two names (which was common)

- a. Both were killed because of their relationship with God and their service for Him - those who killed them, did so because they resented and even fear what they stood for
- b. In the account in II Chron., Jerusalem is destroyed as a result of their actions (and that of Joash, who had lost sight of the good done to/for him by God’s servant Jehoiada) - even worse would be the “lot” for Jerusalem and its inhabitants after having the Son of God crucified!

And such, for that generation, would happen in many ways, including the final destruction of the Temple with Jerusalem

E. The Lord’s expression of grief over the refusal of “Jerusalem” - vs. 37-39

1. The expression of grief is real - even though the Lord knew (as will be seen in the next chapter) that they would not only reject Him and His gracious offer and truth, He still deeply felt (and expressed) sorrow for them (for these prophet killers and stoners of those sent to them by God)

Paul demonstrated the same in chapter 9:1-3 of Romans (before demonstrating how all depends upon God’s choice/grace) - he then reiterates his prayer for their salvation in 10:1

- a. This is a supreme example of pity and emotional pain in light of what MUST take place - grief does not justify the avoidance of what God wills (in His omniscience) to occur - we are prone to **so** trust our emotions that we can be guilty of equating our “good” (happy) feelings with all that is good and our emotional pain with all that is bad (neither of which is consistent with reality)
- b. This is a reminder that there are moments in life, in the face of God’s will at work, that we are supposed to feel pain and sorrow - this is good! We do not desire God to be limited in any way to our “feelings” (as though He ought to change because it hurts us)
- c. Our Lord was resolved to what had to happen (knowing fully the greatest of good it would bring, and the necessity of it happening)

Note also His sorrow over what they could have had and ultimately missed (gave-up)

2. “Jerusalem” means “place of peace” and was (and still is) a focal point in the work of God on this earth

Sins and the love and rest in them, is at the core of such vicious responses to the truth - if what is declared is known to be error, there is no dread fear of it

- a. Here it is grievously shown for what it is - a place characterized by its killing those sent by God to give the truth (those fearing or hating the truth typically respond like these)
- b. Benson, writing of Jerusalem killing prophets and soon to kill Christ wrote, “**The former was a sin without remedy; this was a sin against the remedy.**”
- c. The long-suffering of the Lord is indicated in the usage of “how often”, multiple times over was His desire to gather together “your children” in the same way a mother bird shields her chicks under her wings (to protect them from oncoming danger)
- d. Jesus put it “ἠθέλησα” (I was willing) but you were “οὐκ ἠθέλησατε” (not willing) - the offer of hope is always “put forward” this way in the Gospel, and is why we seek to do the same (not just in seeming contradiction to a “predestination” doctrine, but in the face of an apparent unbending will against the offer of the hope of the Gospel)
- e. Some look on this text as “Jerusalem” representing the religious leaders not allowing the “children” to come to Christ - but “Jerusalem” encompasses them all, for even the followers of the religious leaders were motivated by their sin (evidenced in fear of loss, or in the ever-present yielding to (and following) popular opinion)

God alone knows the end from the beginning - ours is to seek to mimic our Lord in all things, even a compassionate heart toward the enemies to the Gospel

3. As a result, “your house is being left to you” and so it will be “desolate” - vs. 38-39

As is the case with all institutions of Christianity that no longer have Christ - they are desolate of life

- a. There is a great deal of discussion in commentaries as to what “house” here refers to, though it seems (because of the entire context, into chapter 24) that it references the temple (which was now more “their house” than God’s)
- b. And so it would no longer “see” Jesus anymore (as He leaves it in the first verse of chapter 24)
- c. The next phrase, “until you say” is actually predictive of what would (will) take place later - many older commentaries spiritualize this or strive to make a case that this was not a prediction of what would happen (many, because there was no possible way they could envision an actual temple in an actual nation again of Israel, with Jerusalem again at its focal point)
- d. The Lord will again return to Jerusalem and even the temple and, because of God’s gracious Spirit at work, they will declare once and for all, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” and that in reference to Jesus Christ!
- c. Texts such as Zech. 12:10 seem to picture such an event well - see also Rom. 11:25-36

A normal handling of this text and what follows fits well with the realization that God will still restore Israel and Jerusalem

XXXVI. The End of the Age - 24:1-51

A. The coming destruction of the Temple - vs. 1-2

1. While leaving the temple, the disciples were pointing out the buildings themselves of the Temple, apparently being impressed with the entire setting

The disciples are quoted as saying "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" in Mr. 13:1

And why it is a gracious act of God to remove such places and ideas to refocus on His kingdom above this fleeting age

- a. This looks to be another indicator that Christ was referencing the Temple that would see Him no more (until He was received again with an open welcome)
- b. Jesus then tells them that a time is coming when there will not be one stone left on top of another - it was easy for the disciples to be surprised at this, for apparently the structure was very impressive and the stones used in its construction were enormous - such "works of man" can be looked upon as being permanent (eternal) - such thinking typically lends to the perspective that what we see around us (in this life) is what life is "about"
- c. It is commonly believed that this reference was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman general Titus finally conquered Jerusalem - this was, in light of all that has been recorded by Matthew up to this point, rightfully deserved - as will be discussed in this chapter, it would be the first of many prophecies pointing to the coming establishment of Christ's Kingdom (on Earth)

2. The study of prophecy is always worthwhile - It is easy to count it a futile effort to study the detailed prophecies, not only in this discourse, but all the ones detailed in Daniel, Zechariah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and more, yet these are given for a reason (which we should be obliged to search out)

The study of the end of the last days and its sobering results are summed up in II Pet. 3:11, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness..."

- a. At the very least, such studies turn our focus to the future, which if done enough, will/should have a positive, motivating **impact on how we live in the present**
- b. For example, one of the characteristics of the "mockers" in II Peter 3:1-4 is their belief that, as things have always been the same, so they will continue
- c. The study of future things not only helps us realize things can change quickly, but that these changes are "headed somewhere"

B. The end of the end will not come until the gospel of the kingdom reaches "throughout the whole world" - vs. 3-14

1. The disciples ask Jesus what will be the sign of His coming and the end of the age - the Lord begins by providing the initial signs of the oncoming of the end, but that "the end is not yet" and that this is the "beginning of birth pangs"

From what we see in this context, all the things mentioned in this section look to be intensified as they lead up to the Great Tribulation

- a. What is described in these initial verses often begins a confusing or misdirected approach to the entire chapter - it is true that what is mentioned will happen continually throughout the time following Christ's resurrection, and this is typically applicable to all; but keeping it strictly in context, we conclude this is what precedes the end of the age
- b. Understanding this lends to properly interpreting verse 13, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." - this verse has been abused over the centuries because it is utilized as a soteriological verse rather than a practical reference to surviving to the end

2. It is interesting to note that some of His disciples came to Him privately - it is likely this was done because the topic of the destruction of the Temple and all the practices associated with it, would be a volatile topic (as it was with Stephen in Acts 6:14) - vs. 3-4

Many have used the interest in "last things" and the end of time as we know it, to influence others away from the Truth and even away from Christ - wars and other afflictions will be a norm, but at the end, these will become exceptional

- a. The first words Jesus answers them are, "See that no one leads you astray" - this is important in this text, in **how what He tells them is to be taken/received**
- b. He goes on to make it clear that many will come after Him, and will profess to be Him and will do just what He is warning against; lead many astray - and in light of this context (in contrast to all other times throughout Church history), He is providing particular details of the end of the age so they are not "led astray" (by assuming the end is present and become susceptible to "false Christs" (erroneous religious movements))
- c. Back to the point of coming to Him in private, in their case, there would be an intolerable response to any "doomed end" or judgement - such is the nature even today, of many, who have been lulled into a train of thought that leads them to conclude the coming end will be free of judgment, and full of ease and reward

3. Many will come, in the name of Jesus, claiming to the "the Christ" - vs. 5

The literal idea of "antichrist" is "in the stead of Christ" (and so they will be ones "over against" Christ)

- a. This is a very interesting way of stating this - many will come claiming to be the "Messiah" (the one anointed by God to save His people and conquer their enemies), and some will do this associating themselves with Jesus Himself
- b. Some have done this by professing Jesus, and setting themselves up like Him or in His place

The word for hour is "ώρα" which indicates a limited period of time

Seeing it will be "many" is also a reminder that crowds typically "have it wrong" when it comes to "religious" matters - numbers are often a tool utilized to deceive

Throughout history there have been "wars" (battles/fightings) somewhere in the world - true peace could never be had without an omnipotent ruler (which only God is, but the concept will apparently be attempted by the Antichrist)

The Lord groups these together as "... beginning of the birth pains." - they are all indicators of what will become far worse in the end and indicating the arrival (as in a coming birth) of the end of the age

Many have limited a great deal of this text to the first century believers, though we must realize, that as we near the end of the age, there will be those (especially Jews) who will be reconsidering Jesus as their Messiah and will consult this chapter in particular, and will heed the advice (since this is the group particularly addressed (per the reference to the yet to come "Abomination of Desolation"))

We see in our day precursors to apostasy - when the professing church is more impressed with the hopes and securities that can be had now, by mankind's ingenuity and "goodnesses" we can see how when the world unites around an earth-bound savior, they will be prepared to follow him

And, as the end nears, their paranoia will seem more justified as things grow worse

In Rev. 16:13 and 19:20 we are told of the "false prophet" who will be the ultimate promoter of worship of "the beast"

- c. This was a point that John stressed in I John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour." - he demonstrates that those in the first century knew the "season of the end" was upon them - we know now it was still afar off, though each is to live in light of its coming
- d. "Counterfeit Christs" will be the norm to the end of time, and will culminate in the arrival of THE Antichrist himself - such deceivers will be welcomed by many because many will know little of the true Christ and will be easy "prey"

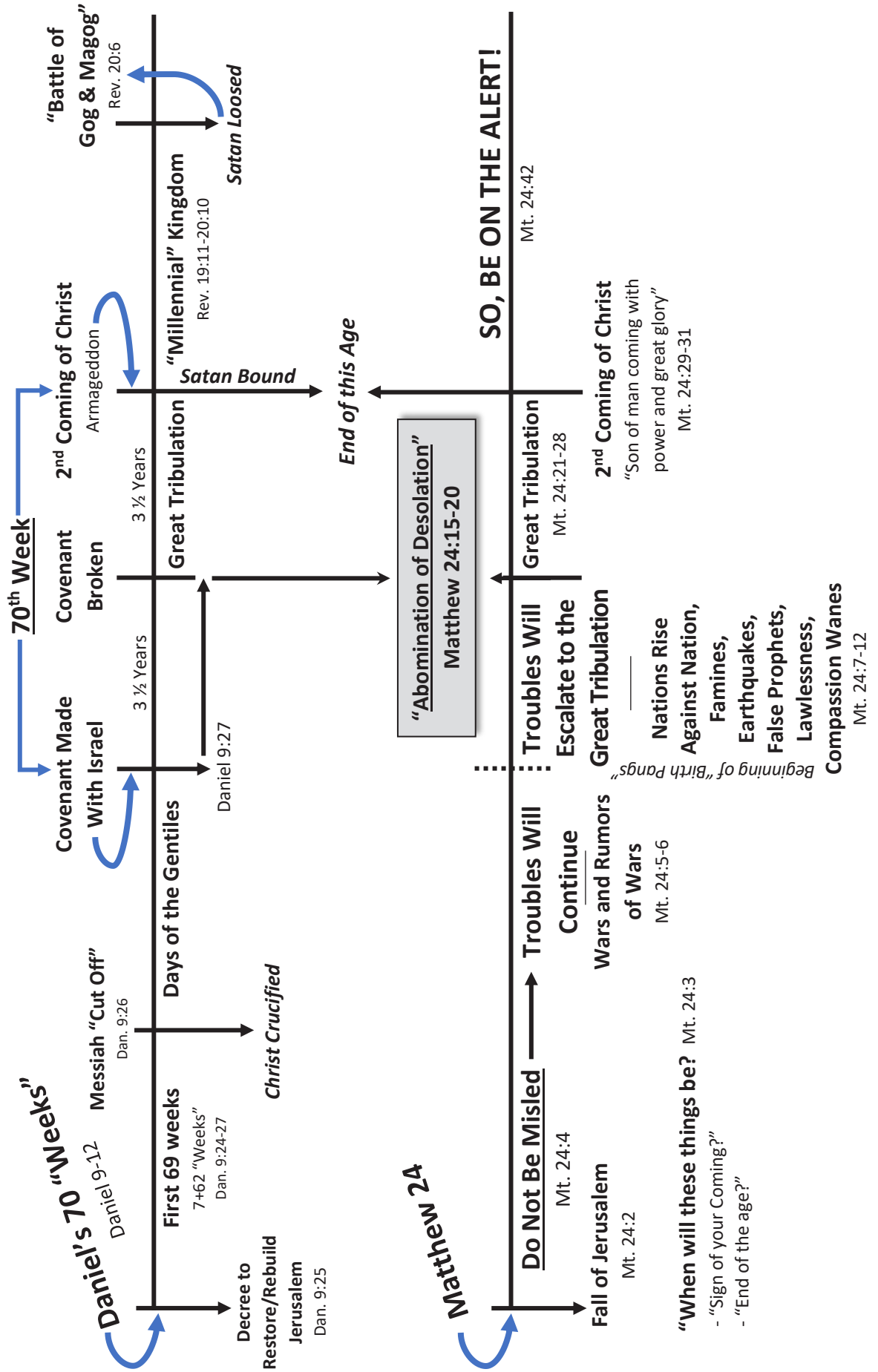
4. Ongoing troubles will continue, indicating the progression to the end of the age - vs. 6-8

- a. Wars and the rumors (threats and news of more) of wars will happen through the rest of the age, but, "...the end is not yet" - **the Lord is going to point out the key indicator that the end has come, and wars between mankind will not be it**
- b. This demonstrates that mankind will never reach complete peace - even in times of "peace," they will be more like "cease-fires," for the threat of war will always remain
- c. Don't allow these "wars" to "alarm" you (to disorient, frighten, discourage or distract)
- d. Verse 7 begins with "Nation will rise against nation..." - this would seem to be looking beyond the rule of Rome since they dominated the world at the time (there would need to be "nations" and "kingdoms" to fight each other - since the fall of Rome, that has been the case, and we have seen it escalate into the last century with the first two world wars)
- e. There will be earthquakes, famines (and disease) in various areas (they will be widespread)
- f. All these will particularly characterize the first 4 "seal judgments" mentioned in the verses of Revelation 6:1-8 - it will be helpful to compare the details Christ gives in this chapter and find their parallels in the book of Revelation - this is also very useful in making a case for the seals, trumpets and, to some degree, the bowls overlapping - comparing Scripture with Scripture is always wise, but in handling texts that deal with prophecy, it will be essential!
- g. The word "ὠδίνων" is used for birth pains, which has a positive connotation of something new coming as a result of the pains (and **these pains being necessary** for it to happen)

5. The progression from bad to worse - vs. 9-12

- a. It is important to not lose track that we are in a text that is answering what the signs of His coming and the end of the age are - these next verses cover things that would continue to happen as stated in 23:34, and will be at what we might say is a "fevered pitch" at the end
- b. "They will deliver you to tribulation..." - the "they" are those in opposition to Christ and the Gospel, and this did happen in the first century and beyond - in the parallel text of Mark 13:9-11, they are told not to worry about what they will say, since the Holy Spirit will give them what to say - this was true then, still true and will be true to those at the end of the age
- c. Because of the name of Christ (and the association with Him) they will betray and abandon Christians to and for "persecutions" and will "kill you" and these will be hated (detested) by all "ἔθνων" (nations, ethnicities) - this will increase especially at the end, and is likely by the world church/religion, and Christ's uncompromising declaration of exclusive truth will also likely be at the core of why His followers are so hated
- d. Because of such threats "many will fall away" (σκανδαλισθήσονται - the first part of this word is where we get our word for "scandal," demonstrating those who end up contradicting something they once seemed to stand for) - this is in harmony with the "apostasy" of II Thes. 2:1-4
- e. The "postmillennial" view (what remains of it) remains in error when they entertain an idea that things will progress better by the spreading of the Gospel, and the kingdom will be ushered in as such progress reaches its height
- f. Those who considered themselves "Christian" "betray one another and hate one another" - living in contradiction to the "love commands" of Christ, these will live for themselves, and such will all be motivated (at their core) for self preservation
- g. "False prophets" would arise, and such has been the case for all of Church history - a "false prophet" is one who claims (in so many ways) to speak for God, and countless over the centuries have been misled by various false "gospels" promising all sorts of appealing concepts, and a good majority of these in the name of Christ - those not taught the true Gospel from the Word of God are prime targets for such "messengers of error"
- f. The word for "mislead" is "πλανήσουσιν," and from the root we get our word for "planet" (wandering body) - such false prophets lead and direct others to deviate from the right way)

Daniel's Prophecy and Matthew 24 Intersect



"When will these things be?" Mt. 24:3
 - "Sign of your Coming?"
 - "End of the age?"

Again, these would be professing believers - and now, we can see how a progression away from God's laws (standards), selfless care and affection in "churches" is fading

compassion will fade

As demonstrated in Luke 21:28, "...lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ("redemption" could also be "deliverance")

Compare this to I Cor. 1:4-9

Pressure to conform to what is wrong (sinful thoughts and practices) is a regular contributor to the life experience of a Christian - this has been magnified at various times in history and will reach its peak in the last 3 1/2 years of this age

There are texts that can be used to indicate this possibility such as Col. 1:6,23

It, of course, could encompass both ideas without an issue - the point being that everyone will have heard (or had it made it available to them) this Gospel before His return - its purpose though (as a witness) needs to be considered

There are things that must happen before the end will come, so don't get lured into a "coasting" mode by these bad influences - stay focused, alert, and productive

The handling of this event is where so many divide and go their separate ways in handling concepts of Prophecy

- g. And so we see it clearly indicated that the focus of these verses is professing Christians who are not genuine in their faith, and these times will reveal it
- h. With "lawlessness" growing, the caring love of many will wane (become coldness rather than warmth) - on this point the Pulpit Commentary remarks, "Impatience of rule and discipline, connivance at and imitation of heathen practices, reacted upon the faith of believers, undermined steadfast adherence to principle."
- i. It is interesting to note that with the increase of sin there is the inevitability of the decrease of selflessness (true love) - lawlessness is driven by selfishness

6. The ones that "endure to the end will be saved" - vs. 13

- a. This verse is difficult to narrow down to just one concept - it could be that the "enduring" here is that through the tribulations that Christians will suffer through the "Great Tribulation" (those that are believers at that time), and that make it through alive, will be "saved" (as in rescued) at the coming of the Lord
- b. This verse has often been used by many to draw on the reality that they that do endure life's trials (during any age of the world), and that do so to the end of their life, will be "saved" (not a salvation based on personal resolve, but one that is indicated (indicative) of those that are "being saved" because they are in Christ)
- c. If this is taken as specific to Israel and those that are preserved through all the attacks and wars on Israel/Jerusalem, then it would be specifically dealing with the end of the end times (and this handling would be in harmony with the details coming in verses 15-24 (and on))
- d. Either way, the underlying idea of enduring versus giving-in (and thus being given over-to) the persecutions (designed to pressure those that resist into submissive harmony with "the wrong"), is fundamental to the thinking of a believer in all aspects of life - we expect/anticipate resistance! (salvation **will not come** from mankind and his "solutions")

7. The heralding of the "Gospel of the Kingdom" to all the inhabited world - vs. 14

- a. There are many that take this as a reference to all the known world (at that time) will have heard this message of the kingdom of the Lord before the end comes, and the "end" is looked upon as the destruction of Jerusalem
- b. This would fit if the next few verses are interpreted as being at the time of (or just before) 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem - as we will work-through, this is not possible if we take the description of the "Abomination of Desolation" in the literal way the Lord depicts it in this text
- c. Taken at its most basic idea, the Lord makes it clear (in answering the final part of the disciples question in verse 3) that before the end of this age can come, the "Good News" of the Lord's Kingdom (His ultimate rule and its certain coming) will be proclaimed to the entire world first
- d. There are basically two general ways this can be handled - first, it could reference that the Gospel message in general (which certainly includes the kingdom) will have reached the entire world by the time the end comes and/or second, it could be seen in the fulfillment of Rev. 14:6-7 where an angel of God proclaims "an eternal gospel" to all those that live on the earth just before the second return of Christ
- e. This world-wide presentation of the Gospel, all the way to the end of this age (and that being thorough and current as in the Rev. 14 text), will serve as a "witness" (μαρτύριον) to either serve as a **convincing influence**, or as a **witness against** those who have rejected it
- f. "...then the end will come." - the previous verses all lent to what leads up to the "end of the age" - don't be deceived by those indicating the end is "now" because of the troubles that are occurring (similar to what the Thessalonians were struggling with)

C. The "Abomination of Desolation," the indicator of the start of the "great tribulation" - vs. 15-28

1. It is absolutely essential that this event and what it involves is determined - the Lord makes this the pivotal point/sign that the final progression to the end has started
- a. A major reason for these next points is to help the hearer/reader not be misled
- b. There will be a time when "those in Judea" should run and not look back
- c. If the understanding of this specific event (singular event, and not a "multiple fulfillment") is calculated as being another time/event than what the Lord is referencing, then there will be "misleading" to some degree
- d. The Lord handles this as a future event, which should disqualify associating it with the event that took place under Antiochus Epiphanies

Verse 21, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." is also a clear indicator that A.D. 70 is not what the Lord is referencing

The Antichrist looks to be the leader of "the beast" and so is identified as such in Rev. 13:2 (where the "beast" looks to be a conglomerate of several nations)

This also then does not fit this being the Romans at the Destruction of Jerusalem since no one set themselves up as above all other gods

Also, those that would attempt to make this reference 70 A.D., must fit it all into that time frame since later Jesus mentions, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (24:34) - they're then forced to fit it all in (the sun/moon darkened, stars falling, heavens shaken and the coming of the Son of man and "all the tribes of the earth will mourn")

Basic necessities nor sentimental things should be the priority - immediate response will be based upon a complete trust (faith) in what the Lord has revealed and instructed for those alive and alert (and aware) during this time

There need not be a "posture" of just surrender to ones "fate" when this occurs - there will be a fight to survive lifestyle by those alive during this time along with a constant focus on God's sovereignty (and an awareness that these things MUST be

- e. Based on what the Lord describes, this cannot be in reference to 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem - many will note historians, indicating that many had already left the city shortly before Titus finally took it (as if heeding this warning), but this warning specifically notes the "Abomination of Desolation" as being the sign, and any defiling of the Temple (by the Romans) took place later - see Luke 19:41-44 for the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem
2. The "Abomination of Desolation" is **a specific event** used by the Lord to mark a specific time - vs. 15-20
- a. It was described by Daniel in Dan. 9:27 and 11:31,12:11, and comes after a 7 year covenant is made (established) with Israel - half way into this agreement, "sacrifices and offerings" are ended (strongly indicating the presence of the Temple and the observance of ceremonial Law)
- b. As seen on the chart, this takes place midway through the 7 year covenant (which is also the "70th week of Daniel" and what is commonly referred to as the "7 Year Tribulation Period")
- c. The phrase "standing in the Holy Place" here and in Mark 13:14, give a "normal" sense of this being a man and not a group - the "Antichrist" will be someone that exalts himself as God and will be worshipped by "all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life" (see Rev. 13:8)
- d. The term "abomination of desolation" describes something detestable (hated) by God (abomination) that, because it is done, makes the place "desolate" because it has become desecrated (as in something sacred used in the most unholy way) - see Dan. 11:20-12:4 - Much will happen leading to this point and following (as shown to Daniel) - his rise to power, his associations with the "holy covenant", his turning against it, his continued victories until his final defeat - Dan. 11:36 may be in reference or associated with this time that the Lord describes (this man setting himself up as "God" in the Temple/Holy Place)
- e. Problems with taking these verses in Daniel as referencing Antiochus Epiphanes - (1). Though many attempt (because of the writings in the Maccabees) to say that Daniel 11:21 and on reference what he did, yet Christ still makes this event future; **this is the biggest reason to reject this stance** (2). Antiochus never exalted himself above all "gods" (Dan. 11:36-37) (3). Antiochus set up shrines to Zeus, not himself
- f. Then the statement "...let the reader understand" looks to be pointing to the reading and understanding (correctly) of what Daniel prophesied - there is no solid reason to not take this as being said by Jesus - it is stressing the need to understand what is being referenced (as in reinforcing, "Let no one mislead you") - to misunderstand (as it looks like the majority have done) is to place this as a past event, already fulfilled, and thus will not be something to serve as a definite time of the final approach to the end of the age (which the Lord was explaining in answer to the questions of the disciples)
- g. Seeing this specific event occur, "those in Judea" are to immediately run "to the mountains" - the parallel to this text looks to be in Rev. 12:14 where the "woman" runs to the wilderness and is nourished for 3 1/2 years - see also Luke 21:21
- h. The urgency is stressed in verses 17-18 - the immediacy of the great tribulation is directly tied to this event - so much so, that those in Judea (and likely elsewhere), should not look to gather belongings from their house (if they are at their house when knowing of this), and one working a field should not "turn back to get his cloak" (a picture of a farmer who began his work early, removed his outer garment)
- i. An exclamation "Alas" begins the next phrase also demonstrating that women who are pregnant or nursing infants will have it particularly difficult (not that they should not have children, but that the urgency will be more than an inconvenience for them) - running will outrank all other practical priorities
- j. These verses do demonstrate not just a desire to run and hide, **but an obligation** - it is not weak or absent faith to run and hide when the Lord instructs it - there will be needed faith in their trusting their care to God
- k. Regarding the praying that this day not be in the winter nor on the Sabbath day, looks to be more a prayer that they not be so inconvenienced by either situation (the weather or the difficulties of such a quick move and response on a "day-off" (and one treated by most as sacred))
- l. This reference to prayer also indicates that there needs to be a looking for this event and all the surrounds it to happen (and to be ready to act) - this will be a key part (preparedness) in the "Parable of the Fig Tree" and the "Ten Virgins"

Those in other places may also need to run and hide, but may also have more time since the initial response looks to be local

- m. It looks clear that no opposition will be (or should be) mounted against this - the "Abomination" himself (the "man of lawlessness", the Antichrist) will be set to move ahead for a little while (very little while) without opposition - this is all in keeping with God's plan/will
- n. Note also, taken plainly, this is in reference to those in Israel (the area of Judea) - this does not necessarily apply to all the world at that time (though there may be residual affects)

3. The "Great Tribulation" - vs. 21-28

The upcoming verses deal with the coming of Christ, the darkening of the sun and moon - there does not look to be a reason to restrict this to just Jerusalem from here on out (for instance the "elect" in verse 31 are from "the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other") - Jerusalem is certainly the focal point, but the impact will spread from there

A major part of being misled (especially in texts like these) is by means of similarities and common coincidences being taken for the actual foretold event - one will not need to stretch any text when the events come - plus, too much is left out (as though only partial fulfillments, though God will fulfill fully!)

"It is a second-class condition, determined as unfulfilled. It is a prophetic figure, the future regarded as past." RWP

Notice some of the tactics - they offer many "saviors" and the objective is to lead away from THE answer, not needing to provide an answer themselves - to distract is a far easier goal than to convince/prove

False "christs" will point to themselves while false prophets will point to another - either way they offer what they cannot deliver

As we see even now, erroneous teachers and teachings are countless and their sheer number are enough to discourage most from a sincere pursuit of the Truth - many look on it as impossible - oddly this calculates out to be "since there are too many offering answers there must not be an answer"

- a. Then, upon the heels of the Abomination of Desolation, will come θλίψις μεγάλη (trouble/distress that is immense) of such a magnitude that the world has never seen anything like it nor ever will after it - this is one of the key reasons why we do not take this as 70 A.D. and the fall of Jerusalem (that was very bad, but certainly not the worst the world has ever seen)
- b. "... if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved.." - those placing this as a dealing with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. interpret this to mean only the Jews in the city and that if it had not been stopped, all would have died - but this is not the best handling of the text - the use of "human being" or "no life" (πᾶσα σὰρξ - all flesh/bodies) would survive is a far greater scope than just Jerusalem; it is the **entire world** (the flow of the **following** context demonstrates this) - this also is in harmony with the accounts of the judgments poured out on the whole earth in the account in Revelation - vs. 22
- c. "That Titus in A.D. 70 is not the fulfillment of this prophecy, even though he became a local illustration of it for those that lived at that time, is clear from the fact that Messiah did not return to setup His kingdom 42 months later, as the Daniel prophecy clearly demands." Yeager
- d. The Lord clarifies that "for the sake of the elect" (the "chosen" of God) this time of judgement/tribulation will be cut-short (stopped) before all mankind is wiped-out - this reinforces the magnitude of how bad it will be (and that it is as bad as it will ever get)
- e. Also, key to note, when the Lord says, "if those days had not been cut short" He speaks in the past tense, though referencing a future event - this looks to be an indicator of the foreordained will/plan of God where the tribulation of that time is **already** "cut short" for His purposes to be worked out then
- f. Even at this time (especially at this time) if some say "Here is the Messiah" don't trust them - the coming of the Lord will be distinct (though a surprise, like a thief, it will be visible to all)- the enemy will be fighting at every possible moment, all the way to the end (and a major part of this is to continue to redirect/distract the attention onto counterfeit saviors) - vs. 23
- g. "Pseudo Christs" (ψευδόχριστοι) will come with "signs and wonders" (miraculous works, whether real or not, they will be profoundly convincing), so much so, that IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, even the "elect" would be deceived (led astray, cause to wonder off course) by them - even in our day, seeming miracles are used to deceive people away from the truth and over to a lie (a replacement for the Christ of the Bible) - vs. 24
- h. "Such was Mohammed; such were the founders of Buddhism, Mormonism, and other so called religions, who based their views on special revelation given from heaven for the purpose of improving the existing faith or introducing a new one." Pulpit Commentary
- i. "False prophets" will also be readily available working "signs" (some form/method to authenticate themselves as being genuine) and "wonders" (a seemingly supernatural work to impress and convince onlookers)
- j. How is it that the "elect" will not be deceived by these? The Lord stated "if it were possible" and the only way to guarantee it not be possible is if God is the guarantor - on our own, any of us would sooner or later fall for a deception, but are protected against such because of His power and grace - and if the deception is so profound, then it is for certain that all others will be completely deceived, becoming firm advocates for these counterfeits
- k. As in Romans 1:28, these non-elect are given-over to a "reprobate" mind (literally "ἀδόκιμον νοῦν," describing a mind that "fails the test" of a real mind or what a mind should be able to do (discern, come to an accurate conclusion)) - thus the results of basing faith (trust) on externals and not the absolute revealed truth in Scripture)
- l. "Take note, you have been forewarned" - as is often stated, "To be forewarned is to be forearmed" is true - such deceptive tactics and attempts are expected by believers - many that are tricked, trust the nature of mankind or trust their own perception too highly

When Jesus returns (for the "elect" as we will see further still in this text), everyone will see it (in contrast to the first coming in Bethlehem) - as seen in Rev. 1:7, "... He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him..."

It does not help us determine the meaning of any text when we are looking to superimpose an idea or meaning on a text before we seek its "native meaning" - so is the temptation regarding the return of the Lord (for His elect) as well as the picture here of eagles/vultures encircling a corpse

This handling would seem to fit a little better also with the same phrase used in Luke 17:37 - though this usage in Luke may still better be a usage of the proverb to illustrate a coming together (though again, the gruesomeness of the scene is not a pleasant portrayal of an event we would expect to be glorious)

- m. Each is to be watching for the signs of His coming and the coming of deceivers - so if they come and say that "he is in the desert" (as if here on Earth but in a difficult place to find him (as some in the past sense the "realness" in making a journey to their "wise man")), or "he is in this room" (right here, easily accessible), don't go to either place nor believe - vs. 26
- n. The main reason not to ever believe any of these signs and wonders, these false messiahs and false prophets, these indications of His being on earth now, is that His coming will be blatantly **obvious** - vs. 27 - "It will be universally observed. No one will find it necessary to go anywhere in order to see Him, anymore than it is necessary to move to a better vantage point in order to see the flash of lightning which shines from one end of the heaven to another." Yeager
- o. This is the only "coming" the Lord references in answering the questions regarding the end of the age, and is further described in the upcoming verses (30-31) coming "in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" while gathering "His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" - such will be unavoidable for all to see!
- p. Verse 28 has many differing handlings by commentators and teachers alike - to try to determine its purpose and meaning in this text we need to grasp the proverbial saying as **simply** as possible - as with any proverb the picture must be understood before it can be applied
- q. The basic concept is that if there is a carcass you will know where it is because, from afar you can see the vultures/eagles - at this most basic idea, it would be a reinforcement that when the Lord returns it will be seen "from afar" - though the use of vultures/eagles over a dead body may seem unusual or even inappropriate when thinking of Christ (unless it pictures a coming in Judgement)
- r. It may also be still in reference to the false messiahs and false prophets as in their being like creatures that feast on the dead and dying, circling them, knowing they will die soon - such "**prey**" on others as part of their nature - it is not unusual for a proverb to be used in more than one way to make a point (in differing contexts)
- s. It should be noted also that those that believe this context is dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, look on this proverb as referencing Rome (the eagles) circling Jerusalem waiting for the "kill" - this would seem plausible if it weren't for the surrounding verses, especially the next three (which were not fulfilled after the fall of Jerusalem (at least not without having a wild imagination))

D. The "coming of the Son of Man" - vs. 29-31

1. Verse 29 parallels Rev. 6:12-17 in what leads up to the second coming of Christ

Barnes goes on to say that such figures are used to describe other calamities; though when looking at the ones he cites, they all can be in reference to the ultimate end of the age/world as mankind knows it

Looking at the prophecies in Isaiah 13-14 regarding the destruction of Babylon - might it be that it could be tied to the same Babylon (in some way) described in Revelation? What about the description of the "Star of the Morning" (Lucifer) in chapter 14?

We could speculate (as others) that possibly this will happen by means of something in the earth's atmosphere blocking the light (and changing the color of the moon), or that because the sun will "be darkened" (literally), the moon cannot be lit either - the Holy City will be lit by God's glory (no sun or moon); just a thought to consider (but also see Isa. 30:26)

- a. The Lord focuses here on the "powers of the heavens" being "shaken" - it is an ultimate time of the end of this age and of imminent judgement
- b. Those having chosen to see this entire context (or the majority of it) as in reference to 70 A.D., find themselves forced to analogize these next verses as Albert Barnes who writes, "The images used here are not to be taken literally. They are often employed by the sacred writers to denote "any great calamities.""
- c. It would do us well to **revisit** some of these references in the Old Testament and see if they are not all referring to the ultimate end, and not just the immediate end of those nations - true, these nations came to an end, as predicted, but not to the degree as many of the pictures/descriptions used - what if our tendency to opt for figures and analogies causes us to miss texts that would normally be clear (and have clear connections to the end of the age) if we took them more literally?
- d. Sooner or later such a description as we see in verses 29-31 must happen as described, and no manipulation is required to see this text in association with so many in Revelation
- e. The timing of what is described here is "immediately after the tribulation...", after the "tribulation brought on by the Antichrist and all other "tribulations" associated with the ongoing judgements (seals, trumpets and bowls in Revelation)
- f. If we don't allegorize this verse and the other descriptions regarding the coming of the Lord, then the sun and moon will be affected in such a way that they will "be darkened" and not "give light" (see also Rev. 6:12-17)
- g. "The powers of the heavens will be shaken" - the use of the plural for "heavens" is interesting - might his involve all levels of "heavens", outer space into "Heaven" itself (spiritual realms)?

2. The coming of the Son of Man - vs. 30

There will be precursors to His coming (signs), but THE sign is His actual coming - the time will have arrived

Sproul did add that this was in addition to the coming return in judgement on the world as well - but this demonstrates where some "land" on this text because of how they handle the earlier part of the chapter (and even in how they handle Israel)

The world will mourn as well, though it will be one of regret of His coming versus repentance

There is a mourning that leads to repentance, and there will also be one that is just the grief that one has lost (the "unsaved")

compare to Daniel 7:13-14

- a. This is now the direct answer of the "sign" of His coming - there are varying opinions on what the "sign" is, though it looks to be (most obvious) that the "sign" is His actual coming (versus seeing symbols in the sky or other supernatural phenomena as is often speculated)
- b. Below is a stance taken by R.C. Sproul regarding Christ's coming in 70 A.D., which is the position of some, yet to take such a position requires a tremendous down-playing of the descriptive language in these verses - **these verses deal directly and singularly with the second coming of Christ** (the first being in Bethlehem)
- c. "The coming of Christ in A.D.70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation, indicating the end of the Jewish age and the fulfillment of a day of the Lord. Jesus really did come in judgment at this time, fulfilling his prophecy in the Olivet Discourse." (The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 158 - R.C. Sproul)
- d. "... and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn..." - this is the response of all the Earth (the word for "tribes" (φυλαί)) - this could be in direct reference to all the "tribes" of Israel (literally here the "tribes of the land" (τῆς γῆς)), or it could be in reference to all the world and all its inhabitants (both easily fit)
- e. Taking Zec. 12:10 and Rev. 1:7 in consideration, this would likely be in reference to Israel, and as predicted, their mourning will be in repentance in the ultimate fulfillment of Rom. 11:26 ("all Israel will be saved") - see also Rom. 11:25-29
- f. The word for "mourn" (κόψονται) pictures a beating of the chest in grief - it is far more than sadness - it's more like a painful **awareness of an error in the worst degree** - this is the beginning of fulfilling Mt. 23:39
- g. "...and the will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds..." - His coming will be seen by all and will be accompanied with displays of power and glory as the earth has never seen! - this is in harmony with Acts 1:6-11, where Jesus ascended into Heaven, in a cloud, and the disciples were told that He would return "in the same way you saw Him go"

3. The "gathering of the elect" - vs. 31

This begs the question as to whether or not there is only one "rapture", and if not, where would another be?

Paul does provide further details, but the general descriptions match without an issue - some note that this text seems to describe only a "meeting in the air" and therefore is not the same event, but that is still an assumption not necessary in the answering of the question Paul was dealing with - no matter what, we will "ever be with the Lord" wherever that may be

Because of the various discussions over the years regarding the timing of the "rapture" (Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation and Post Tribulation), there are many disagreements, especially by those seeing what is described in I Thes.4-5 as being an event separate from what is in Mt. 24

Why would we be inclined to assume the "restraining force" is the Church? - we are salt and light seeking to be used to spread the Truth - we are not ever described as a policing force in the world or even for the spiritual realm

Matthew

- a. At His coming, the first thing done is the sending of His angels to "collect" or "gather together" the "chosen" (the "elect") - this is the "rapture" (a word not found in the Bible, but describes a "catching-up" of those in Christ at His coming)
- b. How does this text compare to the other texts dealing with the Lord's return, and are they same or different? This is described as a **gathering** of all the "elect" from the "four winds" (from around the entire world), from one end of heaven to another (picturing a **gathering in the sky (clouds)**) - this is preceded by a **trumpet sound**
- c. Compare this to other texts describing the coming of Christ, such as I Thes. 4:13-5:11 - in this text, Paul is looking to comfort the Thessalonians regarding the "dead in Christ" in relation to the "Day of the Lord" - they were unsure as to what would happen to them - in this text the Lord descends from Heaven, there is the **sound of the trumpet**, there is a "**catching-up**" (the living follow after the dead in Christ who are raised first) "**in the clouds**"
- d. So the encouragement to the Thessalonians was that those that had died, when the day of the Lord comes, they will be raised as well - this is in perfect harmony with I Cor. 15:51-52, explaining the "mystery" that not all will die, but when the day of the Lord comes, "... For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."
- e. Our Lord describes the event for those who have "endured to the end" (still alive ("alive and remain")) providing more detail in verses 40-41 of **how** this will happen
- f. When we consider what Paul also taught the Thessalonians in II Thes. 2, we see him describing the same events as we've seen here in Mt. 24 - the "man of lawlessness" being revealed by exalting "... himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."
- g. Some point out in II Thes. 2:6 that what "restrains" him from being revealed is the presence of the Church or the Holy Spirit (or both) - it is an assumption at best to assume the Church, and it is also difficult to then say that when the Church is raptured, that since the Holy Spirit is associated with the Church, so He will go also - this reads too much into the text! - There will definitely be believers in the Tribulation, so then also must be the Holy Spirit

If we were starting a study of these texts without a presupposition, it is not likely we would end up picturing the rapture **before** the Tribulation - the concepts of "not destined to wrath" and the question, "Where is the Church in Revelation?" will be considered

The seeming absence of the Church in Revelation (describing the Tribulation) can be compelling, but to argue from absence or silence is not the strongest argument

It is believed by some that being ready for the coming of the Lord must be a readiness at any time - is it possible that readiness, as taught in these texts, is for the entirety of the "day of the Lord" and all that it entails? Could it be the statements of our Lord dealing with not knowing the "day or the hour" truly mean "day and hour"? We will be instructed in our text to be watching for the signs of the seasons of His coming

Some have tried to bypass parts of this problem by assuming there will be multiple raptures (some for the "elect" and others for the condemned) - this ventures into confusing discussions as many connections and assumptions need to be made to make it fit

see John 21:18-19

Some try to get around this simplicity by making this "Day of the Lord" the Tribulation Period only and the rapture as a separate entity in itself (though this is not easily seen in any text)

There has developed a form of elitism or intellectualism, in that only those specially trained can spot these truths, and the "layman" must be walked through texts from various areas before they can see it

Even in death we have a solid hope, not FROM death, but THROUGH it - for us, it is truly a door to glory!

E. The lesson from the fig tree - vs. 32-35

1. As will be discussed in the upcoming verses, no one knows the "day or the hour", so rather than be inattentive, we are to be watching for the "lead-up" to things coming - we should know the "season"

To too narrowly define the picture of the fig tree is to miss the basic illustration of just knowing a certain "season" is upon you, indicating that certain things are coming, though we do not know **exactly** when

- h. We will not be answering all objections in this particular study, but will take a few more in the attempt to make a case for this text, Matthew 24, being in reference to the singular "rapture" of believers (Elect) and its timing, in our context, as being toward the **end** of the Great Tribulation - there is a far greater "burden of proof" in making the references in I and II Thessalonians a separate occurrence
- i. There are many good questions that are asked that seem to lend to a "pre-trib" position of the rapture - "Where is the Church in Revelation?" for instance, and it is stressed that it is not mentioned beyond chapter 3 (as far as being on the earth) - the "elect" are mentioned though, and so are the "saints" - the Jews that are in Christ now are in His "Church" and those that come to Christ in the Tribulation are a part of the Church (if not, then **we would need a clear reason to make a distinction** - some have been described but are not very clear)
- j. The reference to I Thes. 5:9, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." is often mentioned, though this is in reference to our eternal salvation and not to be taken as a "salvation" **from** the Great Tribulation - there are some specially protected in Revelation
- k. One of the strongest cases for a pre-trib rapture is what is commonly called **imminency** - this makes the case that if certain things must take place before the Lord returns, then the coming of Christ cannot be imminent and cannot come "today" - it is reminded that "no one knows the day or the hour" and as such then, the coming can be at any time and we all should live in light of that fact
- l. We need to consider any initial issues with the concept of Christ's imminent return before we rest in what looks to be its merits - First, we already know from our text, that the whole world would need to hear the Gospel before the Lord's return, and that had not happened early on (nor does it appear as though it has happened yet) - so His coming could not have been imminent (at the very least) in the first **several** years - see also Acts 1:8
- m. We also know, based on the prophecies of Daniel, that the Temple would need to be rebuilt, and that sacrifices would need to be re-established and then cut-off before the Abomination of Desolation - since we know this was future (and still is), all events leading to it have to be in place before the Lord returns (even if Pre-Trib, it would have to be 3 ½ years before this time)
- n. We have the foretelling to Peter of the death he would face as an old man - this would not take place for a while, so the coming of Christ was not "imminent" then, in the sense it used now
- o. Paul states it clearly in II Thes. 2:2-4, and begins in a very similar way as the Lord in our text, "Let no one deceive you in any way..." because there were and will continue to be those distorting the concept of the future - no matter their motive, **holding to a plain/normal handling of these texts is vital** and needs to be done with great caution - "That day" (the Day of the Lord) will not come unless two things have happened - (1), The apostasy of the **professing** Church and (2), the "Man of Lawlessness is revealed"
- p. Much more could be said on this topic, but following the natural flow Matthew 24 would not lead us to a conclusion that there is a "catching-up" of believers before this time begins - the stark absence of **any** text plainly indicating that "before these things, you will be "caught-up" is impossible to avoid (if we are looking to the Scripture as our primary authority)
- q. Our comfort and ultimate security is never to be based upon an idea that we will not meet with death (natural or execution); we may, but this is not our hope! Our hope is our being with Christ, and all else is a **competitive** "hope", such as has led many to despair and disillusionment in the past, because, it is then used to cause some to look on God as unfaithful and untrustworthy

Such instruction is very helpful in always living in light of the Lord's return and His work in it and control over it - thus, all our days are lived understanding His control and His coming, and that the age in which we live may be the last

As with so many texts throughout Scripture, the idea of "bad things" occurring can have an entirely different effect on believers

Those that take this as describing 70 A.D. note that it was about 40 years later - but the rest of what is promised in this text did not happen at that time - the "generation" referenced in this text could possibly be ours!

They see 70 A.D. as being the end of the focus on Israel (the end of that age) and now the Kingdom of Christ is established and what we know as the "Church" is the replacement of what was known as "Israel"

There is no lasting and sure security in anything but a restored relationship/fellowship with God - all created things will have an end and all will be "... naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Heb. 4:13

There will be lesser versions of these things occurring, but will pale in comparison to this final time - so don't be led astray in these precursors and certainly not during the final "push" of the enemy against Christ

- b. Verse 32 just uses the fig tree as an example (παραβολήν - an analogy, illustration) - you know that summer is near when the leaves appear (essentially, you know something is coming because something has happened, which is usually based on experience, though here, it is based upon the word of our Lord)
- c. Whether or not these things happen in our lifetime, there is instruction to be looking for them (as literally and as plainly as possible, not sensing the need to explain them away for the sake of some other application) - the application is basic; **be looking for these things so as to know the Lord's return is very near**

2. These verses are pointing to "when you see these things" - vs. 33

- a. "These things" is in reference to all that is associated with what the Lord was describing in this chapter, with special attention on verse 15
- b. You (those alive during that time) will know that "He is near, at the very gates" - it is likely that when worldly troubles are seen (as described earlier in this chapter), that part of the hope of the believers seeing them, would find encouragement that they might be signs of the coming "of summer" (the end of the age, with a singular focus on His return)
- c. "His being "at the door" is frightening to the godless, but thrilling to those whose hope and purpose is focused on Christ

3. As all else "passes away", the Word of Christ never will - vs. 34-35

- a. Jesus uses this context and the "passing by and fading out of site" of this creation (as it is now) to stress that the only constant on which to rely in such a reality is His words
- b. The timing of these things will be within a "generation" and that particular generation (in which these things occur) will not "pass away" - "ἀμὴν" truly (for sure) this will happen
- c. This is absolutely reliable information because, even though "heaven and earth will pass away" (this being all we would see and know of this universe), we can still "bank our eternal souls" on what He has said (all of it)
- d. Even those that will never face such hard times and circumstances as described here, will still have what they know "pass away" in just the passing of time - so nothing other than "His words" are truly lasting (compare to Pro. 30:5; Isa. 40:8)
- e. Some have taken the phrase that "this generation will not pass away" as in referencing the generation (race) of Jews and this being in conjunction with the ending of the Jewish era (for ever) and the beginning of the "Church" era - we disagree with this conclusion
- f. The Lord is stating a fact - Heaven and Earth WILL PASS AWAY (fade out of sight) and the new heaven and earth will take its place (Rev. 21:1) - note also Rev. 20:11, where at the Great White Throne Judgement we are told, "From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them." - clearly, there will be people at that time, yet no earth or "heavens" remaining (and nowhere to hide from God's direct judgement)
- g. This has also been clarified to mean, "The world shall pass away and my prediction of it shall not fail" (McNeile).

4. So, learn the lesson that the signs/evidences the Lord has presented are ones to act upon and fully believe when they are seen - as will be stressed again, don't be distracted away from the anticipation of the Lord's return

F. Of "that day" no one knows the day or hour, so be "on the alert" - vs. 36-44

1. Recapping what has been taught so far, the Lord began in answering the disciples questions by warning them not to be misled in considering the time of the end of the age

- a. Many troubles will precede the beginning of the end, and their escalation will indicate the time is nearing - and when the time comes to a "peak" there will be at the "Abomination of Desolation" at which point, it will be evident the end of the end is upon us
- b. The time of "Great Tribulation" will be limited for the sake of His elect (to basically three and a half years), and will include not only the Antichrist, but many others and their false prophets (all including physical, mental, emotional and even philosophical tribulations)
- c. Then the Lord Himself will return in the clouds with a great display of power, while "gathering together His elect" in the sky
- d. So be watchful to the signs of this "season of the end" coming upon you, for what He has said will assuredly come to pass

This entire chapter has a great deal of controversy associated with it, but these next verses have even more- our goal is not to continue to build on our position, but to truly understand what we are supposed to understand

This is a fair question to ask and should be considered as to its purpose - the context is about to focus on readiness and preparation, so watchfulness will be important for several reasons

So much attention is given to trying to answer this seeming contradiction, that the point being stressed is missed - there is something as to the timing of the final day of this age that is kept unknown, and it is to motivate us to stay on the alert to the last moment

*Much of impatience is not just an unwillingness to wait, it is also caused by a self-determination that something should have happened "by now" - but the "by now" is **never** ours to determine on the issues/concepts Jesus deals with here*

In Gen. 6:12 we read that the earth was "corrupt", though it is not the evil of their actions that was key; it was their lack of change (repentance) when a warning was given - so it is here; to not be alert is to be caught unaware

The "rich man" in Jesus parable became a firm believer and was even evangelistic at heart (his concern for his brothers) - Luke 16

The context is essential to keep in focus - the Lord warned of those unaware and not alert to what was coming - then, He speaks of a dividing of peoples (taking one leaving one), followed by an exhortation to stay alert in watching for Him

- e. So how does this transition into the next section? Is the Lord about to describe another section or is He now clarifying (building-upon what He has just taught them)? This is important to answer, so as not to end up with new ideas introduced to the detail that the Lord has provided (as some do, as in seeing into these next verses another "rapture", only this one to judgement)
- f. This next section is detailing more about what has already been stated as it begins with, "But of that day..." (the "day" He has just been describing)

2. No one knows the "day or the hour" of "that day" - vs. 36

- a. The first question that could be asked is "Why state this fact?" "How is this relevant to the context?" - it is easy to understand that no one but the Father knows the precise day and time, but since we will be seeing "signs" that will let us know it is close (within at least 3^{1/2} years), why make this point?
- b. Much of the controversy surrounding this verse deals with the phrase "nor the Son" - It is often explained that it is a focus on His humanity (seeing He was truly man and truly God), **but it is not required we be able to explain it** (or defend a position at this point) - How is it that Jesus did not know (at that point) the day and hour? We don't fully know, other than it had something to do with His submissive "state" before the Father, and that it was the Father's to know alone - this is not a question as much on His omniscience as much as it is an indicator of His submission to the will of the Father
- c. A similar concept is stated by the Lord in Acts 1:7, where He is answering the disciples question as to the time He would "restore the kingdom to Israel" - "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."
- d. Since the angels also do not know (those who serve God before His throne and in His work), then we know it is truly on a need-to-know basis - the key is not knowing exactly when; we are told to know the "what" and then to be watchful for signs of its coming
- e. So, in attempting to ask the "why," we are told no one knows the day or hour, it is likely that when the time comes (all that precedes it), there will be counterfeits galore and, to those focused on remaining faithful to the end, there is a motivation to continue to wait and not determine the "time it should have come" as having already come and gone
- f. The case made for a pre-trib rapture often points to this verse indicating that no one can know the time, though in this context, **we do know** it is close and there are signs, yet the actual day and hour we will not know till it occurs

3. "As in the days of Noah" so it will be at the "coming of the Son of Man" - vs. 37-39

- a. This text is often referenced to make a case for "immorality" being the norm (at a heightened level) when the Lord returns (and at the coming of the end of the age)
- b. It does seem likely that the morality will be low (maybe almost nonexistent as far as the "morality" described in Scripture), but this is not the focal point of this text - Jesus makes the comparison to that generation being caught by surprise at the judgment that came on them
- c. In the days before the flood came, the people were carrying on their lives as normally as they could (eating, drinking and being married and giving in marriage (continuing to expand their families), all as though it would continue on without end)
- d. Even in the last of the last days, there will be an attempt to keep on with any normalcy of life (as is often seen in those in our time that face tragedy, and try to get on with their "normal" lives as quickly as possible)
- e. Those in Noah's day did not "ἐγνώσαν" (come to realize) until the flood came and they were "swept away" by the flood waters (which insight **at this point** did them no good)
- f. So it will be at the "coming of the Son of Man" - unbelievers will be surprised at His coming

4. Two carrying on life, one is taken the other left - vs. 40-41

- a. This is a difficult text! It has commonly been assumed that this references either a "rapture" of the elect to meet the Lord, or that it is a "taking away" of the ungodly to judgement
- b. In a very general way, these two verses demonstrate a "50/50" statistic - is it a "statistic" of those dying in judgement or a "statistic" of the overall categories (groupings) of people in general (both doing the same things as far a practical living is concerned) and yet still divided (as in the "wheat and the tares" and the "sheep and the goats" illustrations earlier in Matthew's Gospel)?

This will all be "gruesome" also for the ungodly and for the age in which this occurs (but for the believer, it will be the signs of the Lord's return, which will be sustaining)

Just as in the days of Noah, people were continuing on with life so those will be trying to do in the very end, those prepared will be taken, those unprepared (un-alert/ignorant of what is coming) will be left

Those that come against Jerusalem will be destroyed (Zech 14:9-21) but many of the people of those nations will survive (still back in their homeland)

The illustration of the head of the house knowing a thief is coming (though not knowing precisely when), will be on the alert all night - this is the focal point of these verses

see I Thes. 5:6; Rev. 3:1-6

The emphasis is to not be caught off-guard by something we were supposed to have been ready for - this point is that we have been warned - see verse 25

This cannot mean that since we don't know the day or the hour (the "time of night"), that we do not have to be watchful - based on what Jesus has shared in this chapter, if we remain alert in looking for the signs of His return, we will not be caught unaware

*The verbs are in the present tense, so this is always to be our "posture" in life - we are to be alert to be looking for the indicators the Lord has provided **because** we do not know the precise time*

"Keep an eye on yourself" so that the abundance of life/living and the concerns to maintain them don't distract from what's coming

Matthew

- c. So is this a recapitulation of the "rapture" of the saints? When referencing Luke 17:34-37, verse 37 makes this sound like a negative event, when the Lord quotes the proverbial statement, "Where the corpse is, there will the vultures gather."
- d. Luke 17:37 is not in reference to just the "one taken and one left" passages - when the disciples asked "where Lord?" it was in reference to the entire context (as in "Where will all these things take place that you are describing?") to which the Lord just indicates the "where" will be known from afar (as one can see the vultures circling a corpse) - this will all culminate in the ultimate "feast for the birds" in Rev. 19:21, 14:14-20
- e. So, it is not unreasonable to take the term "taken" (παραλαμβάνεται - to receive to one's self, take with) as being in reference to the gathering of the "elect" from "the four winds," and this being part of the separation of the "wheat from the tares" and the "sheep from the goats"
- f. The wording fits well with this picture and does not exclude the "judgemental" aspect of the context, if we see the "being left" as judgemental (for we do not see a "taking away" of those at Armageddon (in the Valley of Jehoshaphat)); just a massive amount of death !)
- g. This is technically needed, because we must consider (in light of our Eschatology in harmony with other texts) as to who will be left to enter the earthly kingdom era of the Lord's reign on this earth - if all the wicked are taken, where will the Gentile nations referenced in texts like Zech. 14:16 (these survivors) come from? - and we need to consider that if the "elect" are taken (vs.31) and then those taken in verse 40-41 are the "un-elect" then who's left on the earth?
- h. Our hope is in God's saving us, period - if we die, we are "at home with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8) and if we live to see the very end of this age, we will be "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (I Thes. 4:17)

5. Be on the alert! - vs. 42-44

- a. These next few verses are also difficult for us to keep clear, because we fail to consider the **entire context** (and the illustration that serves to clarify the meaning) - the Lord says in verse 42 "...you do not know which day your Lord is coming," and then in verse 44, "...the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect" - so does this mean just that we will never know, or that because this is the normal condition for us, we need to have an alert state of living in preparing for His return? (the second is a better answer)
- b. Because these events can occur (start to unfold) shortly, stay awake! - the word is "γρηγορεῖτε" and it is imperative, commanding each to remain watchful (versus drifting off into sleep, oblivious to what is really happening around them)
- c. This attitude of life is essential to us throughout life - we "drift off" into a type of slumber in day to day living, losing focus on why we are here, and what we are to be doing - the dreams of life (this life) become more what some live for than the realities of the life to come, and the accounting it will involve for the "race" we were to have run in this life
- d. Does this alertness just reference the coming of the Lord (the actual day and hour), or is it in reference to being alert, in looking for the signs of His coming referenced in this chapter? - the second is more in keeping with the context, and would make better sense in light of the next verse (43) - **either way, we are always to be on the alert**
- e. The Lord uses the example of the "head of the house" not knowing (being alerted) that a thief would be coming to his house, to steal from him at a particular time in the night - Jesus' point is that (in His scenario) if the head of the house had known "what time of the night" the thief was coming, being on the alert (versus sleeping), he would prevent the robbery
- f. As this "man of the house" needed to be ready over an extended period of time, so we must also be ready ("γίνεσθε ἔτοιμοι", come to be prepared), realizing "the Son of Man" is coming at an hour "you do not expect" (δοκεῖτε, "seems to be apparent") - the stressed point is that alertness is required (above natural instincts or typical "every day living")
- g. **Again, this is stressed by the Lord, not to emphasize the unknowability of the day and hour, but to make it clear the need of alertness in watching**
- h. "Christ chooses to come when he is least expected, that the triumphs of his enemies may be turned into the greater shame, and the fears of his friends into the greater joy." MH
- i. Compare this text to Luke 21:34 - But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap."

- j. The competing influences for our attention seem endless! Alertness then is a needed ongoing discipline - even if “that day” does not come in our lifetime, our day to go to Him must not come on us and we be unprepared
- k. One more note on this: it can’t be missed that Jesus, when referencing “...at an hour when you do not think...” it is meant more not to state that the time depends on us “not thinking it will happen” as much as it does to warn that, left to our normal course of life and activity, we would be unprepared BECAUSE we had left off thinking/considering His return

The next verses demonstrate this by comparing one, who though he does not know when his master returns, behaves as though it would be at any time

G. The “faithful” slave versus the “evil” slave - vs. 45-51

1. This is discussing two possible scenarios of “slaves” (δοῦλος) - the first scenario is a slave described as “faithful” (trustworthy) and “sensible” (smart in the sense of realistic priorities) - vs. 45-47

Notice that the service is, in this case, to the “household” and deals primarily with the service to the other servants and those of the household

- a. “Who then?” as in what do you think (as in consider what I’m about to say) - this also may indicate such a slave will be rare
- b. The slave who can be trusted to fulfill his duties without direct oversight, and who serves in the awareness of what his responsibilities (are and what they aren’t) is so, because **he lives in light of his master’s return at any time**
- c. In this illustration, the servant (or servants) is set over the household to provide them food at the “proper time” - many believe this is in particular reference to those who will be recognized as leaders/providers over the Church
- d. Note also that these are “appointed” slaves - this is where they have been put in life (so it is key to observe what each does with what they were families), not what they dreamed-up
- e. The “blessed” slave is the one who is found doing what he was given to do when his master comes - he was not watching at the door for the return of his master, but, knowing his master would return (though not knowing when), was busy doing what he would be doing if his master was present (see also I Pet. 4:10-11)
- f. Such a slave will be fully contented (blessed - μακάριος), as in not regretting how they lived - the opposite will live in eternal regret (because they lived for the moment, with the disregard of the future accounting)

Some faithful to their calling and others, hypocrites

This is the main identifier of a truly “faithful” (πιστός) slave - knowing the imminent return of the “boss” he wisely (sensibly) lives as if He is arriving at that time (always)

Many are hesitant to truly live for the Lord because they believe they will regret it later

g. This slave will be rewarded (this is the natural course of things) **with greater responsibility**

2. What if the same slave thought on things differently? - vs. 48-51

There are two separate responses to not knowing something for certain (in this case, time) - One is conscious of responsibility (and purpose), the other knows responsibility, but calculates a longer time estimate as opportunity for “me-time” - this is one of the perils of youth!

- a. What if, instead of a drive to be faithful at all times, he yields his sensibility (prudence) because he figured that the master would be gone a long time, and that because of this, he was not as accountable (or that he could put-off responsibility for the time being)?
- b. This is an internal issue, not necessarily one outwardly evident at first (literally he speaks in his heart that his master is “taking time” (Χρονίζει - from “chronos”) so will be gone a while)
- c. Notice that this slave and the first do not know how long the master will be gone, so the scenarios start the same but the response is different - the “evil” slave may not seem “all bad”, but figures there will be time to be responsible later - he thinks it’s worth the risk, yet many who live this way, soon come to see no risk at all
- d. “Within a generation scoffers will be asking where is the promise of the coming of Christ” RWP
- e. This slave “begins to beat his fellow slaves” rather than serving them, as he was instructed to do - it is odd to realize that many “ministers” (servants) end up “lording” rather than serving
- f. Not seeing himself as presently accountable, he eats and drinks with drunkards - his associates become those that cater to their desires, live for the enjoyments of life and indulge in them - “drunkards” are those who drink themselves to intoxication (lacking self-control and discernment)
- g. “Many have thought themselves shrewd enough to indulge their wickedness and have imagined that they could call a halt in time and thus escape. But every yielding to indulgence blinds the moral sense and only helps to make a greater fool.” Lenski
- h. The day of accounting will come when such a slave does not expect (because he was not living in light of the master’s return) - there was a need for alertness, but because he was unfaithful, he receives the severest of punishments (he is “cut into pieces”) - those who see the master overreacting, fail to consider that crime of the slave - the work is too important!
- i. This slave is “assigned a place with the hypocrites” (those who put on a front of a reliable slave of the master but were not found to be what they portrayed themselves to be - this will be a place of never ending pain and regret!

These that he wounds/beats are “συνδούλους” (slaves together with him) - he is one of them, not above them

Such live life for themselves and look to ease the pressures and disappointments of life with various intoxications (including alcohol, drugs, entertainment, and frivolity)

This might seem overtly harsh unless we take into account the value the master placed on the service/responsibility

This is a stark warning against "play-actors" (who may have convinced themselves of being the slave of Christ but are not - this needs to be realized before the time of judgment)

- j. Luke uses the word "unbelievers" instead of "hypocrites" which reveals the underlying reason someone is a hypocrite - **they don't actually believe**, but want to come across (for some reason) as though they do
- k. John Gill on the "weeping and gnashing of teeth", "...declaring the remorse of conscience, the tortures of mind, the sense of inexpressible pain, and punishment, the wicked shall feel; also their furious rage and black despair."

XXXVII. Prepared For The Final Judgment - 25:1-46

A. The analogy of the "Ten Virgins" - vs. 1-13

- 1. There is a strong temptation to analogize every part of this illustration of the Lord, but the point is in keeping with the instructions from the previous chapter and this point is once again "readiness" - only here this readiness is illustrative of forethought (planning ahead)

Some are prepared and some not - the "oil" is not to be assigned more meaning than "oil" (some associating it with grace, which can then be used to distort areas of soteriology)

Just because the Church is compared to the Bride of Christ elsewhere does not mean it must be taken as such in this text

- a. The synopsis of this illustration is that there are 10 virgins awaiting to escort the bridegroom, and as part of this, they have "lamps" for when it is dark - the bride is not the focus and neither is the bridegroom - **the 10 virgins are the focus and are contrasted**
- b. There is a temptation to make too much emphasis on Christ as the Bridegroom (though He ultimately is in other accounts) - then there is temptation to narrow down who the virgins are (of the "church" or not), though this is not necessary
- c. Texts like these (as well as even the circumstances in our lives) are often exploited for personal agendas - this may be evidenced when what is meant to be plain and simple, is made out to be more complex - this is a hermeneutical concept

- 2. The Kingdom of Heaven is compared to 10 virgins getting ready for the Bridegroom - vs. 1-5

The "Kingdom of Heaven" (as seen "this side of things") will involve those who are actual citizens and those that are pretenders

Many are a part of the "Church" that are not actually a part of the "Church"

- a. The Lord last illustrated the Kingdom of Heaven back in 22:2, and now takes it up one more time in conjunction with preparedness for a coming - and such it is with us, part of being "kingdom citizens" is to be ready for the accountability it involves
- b. As the scene is laid out, the Lord reveals that of the 10, 5 were wise and 5 foolish, and what distinguishes them in either category is the focus - It was common to have 10 people (either participants or witnesses) at such occasions (as Boaz in Ruth 4:2) - so, one would assume all 10 are genuine and necessary - though this is not the case in this account
- c. The difference is identified right away - the "foolish" did not take extra oil with them (they only had what they had in their lamps, which apparently were already lit) - they were foolish because they did not allow for a longer period of time for the coming of the Bridegroom - the "wise" took extra oil (in their containers) - they did not presume to know the exact time he would come
- d. They all became drowsy and fell asleep when the bridegroom delayed in coming - this just describes the natural course of things and not irresponsibilities - if anything, it demonstrates the fatigue that naturally comes in waiting, we wait nonetheless and are planning on the "long haul"

The sleeping is not criticized, just the lack of preparing to have enough oil

- 3. The time finally comes and those not prepared scramble for options, to no avail - vs. 6-10

Religion can have many similar traits amongst its participants, yet time and challenges are needed to begin to reveal genuineness - being prepared for the final event of judgment is still the focus of this example

God has defined the processes and responsibilities and they are not ours to alter so that others (that have been irresponsible) could feel better - this places them above the Master - remember the greatest command is to love God, followed by loving others (both necessary, but one supersedes the other)

- a. These are not those that are still "saved" yet lose reward (as in I Cor. 3), but they (as in the previous chapter) are those who are hypocrites and, as will be stated by the Bridegroom, are not "known" - the "Kingdom of Heaven" (as seen here on earth) is within a "mix"
- b. The scenario has, at the start, all the same responses - the call of the Bridegroom coming stirs them all to action (they all, in this situation, have the same "call"); they all "trim their lamps" (which are likely still burning) and at this point it becomes apparent to those without extra oil that they don't have enough
- c. One of the most interesting parts of this illustration is the request of the "foolish virgins" to share the extra oil that the "wise virgins" brought - to do so would mean none of them could escort the Bridegroom (as many well-intentioned "religious" might seek to do) - **each will account for themselves in the end and will borrow nothing from another person** (other than what is the borrowed righteousness purchased by Christ for us)
- d. In this scenario it is needful also to recognize that the serving of the Bridegroom is of highest importance - to share the oil would mean the service to the Bridegroom would end up deficient (and this was unacceptable) - it is not justified to compromise responsibility to help another cover for their own irresponsibility
- e. The Bridegroom comes (while the 5 foolish were seeking out more oil) and the time they were supposedly preparing for came and went, and they missed it

The opportunity to participate in and attend the wedding feast was a privilege and would not have been looked upon in any way as being "about" these young ladies - it was about the Bridegroom and the 5 foolish girls were foolish also in their not taking the opportunity serious enough

The context though, and other uses in Matthew make this more a matter of excluding versus including - these, because of their negligence, are excluded

Daily considering, "Will what I plan for today lend to my preparation for the Lord's coming?"

For the "knowing" in this text is one of a relationship (and the Bridegroom has none with such as these)

- f. The time to prepare is BEFORE the event comes - many "religious" will put-off actual preparation for the Lord's return, presuming either on His mercy or upon circumstances just working out (like "they always seem to do") - they all had come to feel a sense of security in their readiness (they all nodded off and fell asleep) - the ten wise were justified in their security (readiness), but the foolish were not - their pre-assessment was inaccurate
- g. Those "ready went in with him to the wedding feast" while the others were back to what would have been preparations - there was one "chance" and having missed it, the "door was shut"

4. "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" - vs. 11-13

- a. "Later" (after the Bridegroom arrived to the feast and the doors were shut) the 5 foolish virgins arrive appealing to be let in (after all, had they not been invited and their initial intentions were honorable?)
- b. The Bridegroom (now master of the house) hears them, but his answer may seem harsh to someone unfamiliar with the picture Jesus is using and its importance
- c. He tells them, "Truly... I do not know you" - seen from his perspective (which is the one that counts), his not "knowing them" would be similar to our response if someone we thought we knew demonstrated a lack of reverence for something that **demand**ed it
- d. "Be on the alert then..." - in this illustration, alertness is not the watching for the Lord's coming as much as it is to have planned ahead - taking steps to be prepared (as in living life with the forethought of His coming) and the difference it makes in the moments I am living now
- e. In this use of not knowing the "day or the hour" it is more a motivation to be busy with actual productive work (for some "business" is futile (of no lasting value))
- f. In summary, the foolish are those who are a part of what would be seen as the "Church" and yet, will be revealed to not actually be when the Lord returns (they professed a faith yet lacked the works as James references in James 2 - this is emphasized in the next example)

B. The analogy of investing "talents" - vs. 14-30

1. Jesus continues likening the kingdom of heaven to a few slaves and how each was given resources and what was done with them - vs. 14-15

The illustration the Lord is presenting regarding the kingdom of heaven, is to show (at least) that there are rewards for faithful usage of what has been given and that not using/investing what is provided as a serious sign of coming judgment

- a. It needs to be noted that the word for "talent" (τάλαντα) was a large weight of gold or silver - our usage of "talent" is not too far removed from it (as in being gifted), though this account deals strictly with the use (or non-use) of large amounts of money
- b. The scenario is a man (with an apparently large amount of money) who is about to go away on a journey, and while gone, entrusts some of his money to three of his slaves for them to invest it
- c. The context shows us that he does this, expecting what he gives to be utilized to return a profit to the owner (even if just banked to earn interest (vs. 27))
- d. Each slave was given (entrusted) with a certain amount of money, "each according to his own ability" - **the focal point is not on the amount given as much as it is on what is done with what was given - the master knew what to give to each**; he expected it to be used

2. The master returns after "a long time" and calls them to account - vs. 16-30

"... not mispending, but simply making no use of it. Nay, his action seems that of one anxious that the gift should not be misused or lost, but ready to be returned, just as he got it." JFB

It is easy to value one's self by comparing what we have been given (for the Lord's work) with what we see others having been given - neither should make this a competition of any type - both faithful servants received the same reward

- a. The first two servants doubled what they had been given - it is important to note that the first servant is described as "immediately" going out to trade (he started right away, no delay, for he would not have known how much time he had to invest the money before his master returned)
- b. The slave that received one talent, went and dug a hole and buried it - we do not know all the motives (other than he professed that he was "afraid" (vs. 25), maybe of mishandling it or losing it) - he had no self-confidence, yet his confidence was supposed to have been in his Master's entrusting such a sum to him
- c. We could speculate that he compared what he received to what the others received and deduced he was incapable because so little was given him in comparison - we do not know that this was a factor, but such is often the case with us
- d. When the master returns, he "settled the accounts with them" (συναίρει - a "lifting up together") taking up the matter
- e. The first two slaves are commended and entrusted with greater responsibility (what they had been given was described as "few things" and now they will be managing "many things")
- f. He commends them for being "faithful servants" not for the degree of their fruitfulness - none of us will be judged on "how much", just whether we were faithful with what we were entrusted

This time could also be called a "day of reckoning" - **daily** reckoning is needed for the final day of reckoning

The slaves used what the Master had given and invested His money for His purpose (increase of his "estate") - this is what we are all to be doing and how we are to look on what God has given us

"good" is proven by being faithful - apparent "success" is not necessarily evidence of genuine "goodness" and faithfulness

It is key to realize that such works (faithfulness) is the "proof" of genuine faith that James describes in James 2 - any can profess faith but its reality is seen in "faithfulness"

Though there is a variation in what was given to each slave, the point about to be made is more along the lines of the thought processes and how they were used in excusing of self from responsibility

The lazy, self-righteous "religious" people look on God as harsh, demanding, unreasonable and unfair (by their own assessment)

If one is self-righteous, they come to see true righteousness as morally wrong and it is used to justify all sorts of immorality or the general sin of omission, which is disobedience

This is one of the end results of estimating self-worth and personal perspective too highly

The "fear not's" that come from the Lord are actually commands and not the suggestions many take them to be

Such tactics are used throughout mankind and throughout history - the fault must rest on someone else or something else but not on myself!

The Master begins with "Πονηρὲ δοῦλε" with Πονηρὲ being vocative - it is how he addresses the slave, calling him as in a name "wicked"

- g. There is a lesson also in this illustration, that we are to be busy working while waiting - till the Master returns, we are to be working - when he returned after a long period of time, he reviewed his accounts with them - this describes an accounting of resources given and where they currently stand (what was done with them and the final balance)
- h. The first two slaves doubled what they had been given - "How beautifully does this illustrate what the beloved disciple says of "boldness in the day of judgment," and his desire that "when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming!" (1Jn 4:17; 1Jn 2:28)." JFB
- i. The longer time away was opportunity for the slave to invest (versus being distracted or given to procrastination) - the extra time was opportunity!
- j. Both slaves are commended for being "good and faithful" - "good" in the sense of keeping the Master's priorities/purposes in focus and so leading to "faithfulness" (which is the consistent work at responsibility) - this is a day-by-day quality since "**faithfulness is not sporadic - to be faithful**" one must stay consistent over the long period of time provided to do the Master's work
- k. The reward for the first two slaves is greater responsibility (proven in faithfulness over "lesser" things) - this looks to be in reference to the "work" we will be given in the coming kingdom (on earth and into the New Heaven and New Earth) - note also I Pet. 1:3-9
- l. The infamous statement "Enter into the joy of your Master" is usually associated with the entrance into "Heaven" and in this context, is still differentiating between those that appear to be in the service of the Lord and those that actually are
- m. The phrase could also be translated, "enter into the joy that is your Lord's" as in having the same joy that your Lord experiences (the same privileges as in becoming an heir)
- n. Then, coming to the third slave, we see the other lesson to be learned - "At this point there is an instructive contrast between the parable of the virgins and the one before us. There the foolish virgins failed because they took their duties too easily; here the servant fails because he thinks his duties too hard." Expositors Bible Commentary
- o. The third slave, as he comes to give his reckoning, begins with his "excuses" - what he states of his master is his own perspective and he seeks to use it to excuse his lack of investment - he begins as many of those who dislike or hate God begin, by evaluating the master as being a "hard man" (as in being harsh and likely one not to be easily approached)
- p. The slave adds that he sees his master as one who "reaps where he does not sow" (possibly implying one who cheats by reaping from others' lands, or that he reaps profits of labor he himself does not actually do (included in the idea also of "gathering where he did not sow") - we can imagine a case being built in this slave's mind of a self-righteous reason why he refuses to participate in the business of his master - such a picture certainly fits so many that consider themselves as "enlightened" and the "God of the Bible" as archaic being a cosmic bully - though not true, the slave was still obligated (**opinion does not dictate fact!**)
- q. "Observe, reader, many go very securely to judgment presuming upon the validity of a plea that will be overruled as vain and frivolous" Benson - so we see the danger of settling such an "argument" in one's own mind, and living out the rest of one's life resting in the answer they plan to offer at the final judgement
- r. "I was afraid" is where his initial statements were leading (as though such an answer will excuse all) - such fear that leads to disobedient inactivity is based in faithlessness - he was to obey his master by using the resource that was entrusted to him - such responsibilities end up revealing the true nature of the slave (as it does with us)
- s. The slave then seeks to make the case that no harm has been done since he can now safely return what was given to him back to the master (after hiding it in the ground, figuring it was best kept hidden, thus left unused) - his defense of fear and his depiction of his master as harsh, all lent (he supposed) to his own righteous response in protecting what was unwisely given to him (blame has been shifted to his master for his (the slave's) own actions/inactivity)
- t. The statement "Here you have what is yours" is like saying, "Here, take back what is yours, I didn't want it anyway. Your demands upon me were burdensome and unnecessary"
- u. The Master's response "cuts through the chatter" and reveals the real, underlying problem - the servant is "wicked" and not "good" as the others, even though he tried to make a case

The "best" of reasonings against God that mankind can create will still be used against them — ingenious arguments for what is wrong, no matter how scholarly are still unable make wrong into right!

The opportunity had been given to the slave (for a very long time) and his inactivity demonstrated he had no plans to use it

For all else he had was his master's anyway

Even the upcoming verses that deal with the final judgment have more to do with what is not done than what is done - faithfulness is not to be looked upon as optional

We live in a time when "intentionality" is often mistaken for actual faithfulness - "meaning well" is not the same as "doing well" - if we are truly in Christ, we are not our own, we have been purchased at the highest cost; and to live as a Christian while sensing no obligation, is a greater crime than most religious institutions will admit

This is in harmony with Daniel 7:13-14

Such an account diminishes the significance of all others who would seek to be an ultimate judge - His sentence will be forever!

see also Rom. 14:10-12; Rev. 20:12-15; Mat. 13:47-51

There will be similarities between us (as with sheep and goats) but they are not the same (there are differing natures)

As in other "judgment" texts, what was actually done/lived (works) is focused upon (the "output" being the result of what one really was (not as the **means** but as the **proof**))

Such "reign" will not be "bossdom" but will be oversight of something

Matthew

- v. The servant clearly did other things with his time and other resources during his master's long time away, so he is also called "lazy" (or "slothful") - it is the word "ὀκνηρέ" which describes one reluctant, unwilling to act - he did not like what he had been given, so excused himself from service (just as many do in our day - they reason that what has been given as not enough or **incorrect** and therefore they cannot, they **must** not act)
- w. Using the reasoning of the slave, the Master makes it clear that even if true, he still should have, at the very least, put it in the bank to draw interest (which was **at least** as easy as digging it and hiding it in a hole and would have **at least** returned a slight profit)
- x. This slave's perspective has been compared to "a religion concerned only with not doing anything wrong." Schweizer - interesting to note is the realization that to some degree such service (discipleship) requires risk (not misdirected or impulsive, but that of following the instructions of the Master even when it may **seem** risky (potentially costly))
- y. The Master orders that the one talent be taken and given to the one who had 10 - the point being, that it will be invested one way or another and will not be wasted - the one with 10 already had proven his willingness to be responsible, and since the work/investment is so important, it must continue - faithfulness and not **fairness** is the emphasis here
- z. The judgment and its reason are succinct (brief and clear) - The one who has much (because of faithfulness) will continue to gain more (in this case, investment opportunities), and the one who has none (because of unfaithfulness) will lose all else he has - those that profess to be His and yet are not faithful will lose all (or as in Luke 8:18, even what he thinks he has will be lost)
- aa. The punishment is severe - the slave is removed from the household and sent out into "darkness" (into the night with no shelter, no home) and will forever be "weeping and gnashing teeth" - such is the end of religious hypocrites, making themselves out to be slaves of the Lord, but **shirking** their responsibilities (their purpose)
- bb. "And why? Not for great ill doing, sacrilege, crime, offence against the common laws of God and man; but for neglect, idleness, omission of duty. This is a very fearful thought. Men endeavour to screen themselves from blame by minimizing their talents, ability, opportunities; this parable unveils the flimsiness of this pretence, shows that all have responsibilities, and are answerable for the use they make of the graces and faculties, be they never so small, which they possess. Spiritual indolence is as serious a sin as active wickedness, and meets with similar punishment" Pulpit Commentary

3. The last judgement - vs. 31-46

- a. "But when the Son of Man comes..." - vs. 31 - all, beginning with the end of chapter 23 through this point, have been aiming at this final point, the time when all nations will be before the "Son of Man" and He will judge them
- b. He will come in His GLORY and will be sitting on His GLORIOUS throne - no longer are parables being used; the Lord now describes His final coming in judgement and ALL coming before Him to be judged - His judgement is the only one that **counts** !
- c. It is such a picture of **what will be**, that should motivate us now - such a spectacular scene this will be with the Lord, in His unveiled glory with His angels! - Nothing here could compare!
- d. Using sheep and goats as a simile, Jesus describes what will take place when all nations are gathered before Him - the countless millions will not be the point of intimidation here! Imagine such a scene where the Lord is seated above all people!
- e. The picture of dividing the sheep from the goats is pointing back to other illustrations He used to demonstrate that in this life, those that are His will be intermixed with those that are not (wheat and tares and the dragnet of all kinds of fish in Mat. 13) - such a realization is needed now so those that are His people will not **expect** that they should be like those around them (we see now why there is a difference in life purpose and priorities amongst peoples)
- f. Those who are separated to His right side (the sheep), He will invite to Himself ("Come"), and He identifies them as "blessed of My Father" - the word for "blessed" is εὐλογημένοι, describing those who are well-spoken of, versus that of just being fortunate
- g. "Come... inherit the kingdom..." - this is in the imperative! What a command to have to follow! - the inheritance being the "kingdom" (taken as plainly as possible, the word for "kingdom" is βασιλείαν, indicating "kingship" and "rule" (privileged responsibility))

It does us well to focus on such a time (that is coming) to help us stay focused in the “now”

There is no in-between (Purgatory) - eternity will be spent with those we are “like” (like the Father in Christ, or like the Devil, left to ourselves in sin)

“Good works” are the result not the means - this makes sense since, only by the “good works” of Christ can we be “born again” (New creation), and now such good works become characteristic of the newly received nature

Charitable organizations are setup by Christians to meet such needs, but sometimes to the neglect of the “brothers” Christ references here - charities with the purpose to use it to give the Gospel are very good, but many focus so much on the charity of the practical, they lose sight of the eternal

This demonstrates more a motive of character than of accountability - they did it because it was their priority

With such a revelation of what is coming, should this not turn our life's focus toward individuals and not crowds and institutions?

These are not judged for their actively immoral deeds, but for their neglect or refusal of ministering, aiding, encouraging the “little ones” associated with Christ and His work

“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”
Prov. 20:6

For what true living could there be in separation from our Creator? Everlasting joy will be the result of reconciliation with God

Matthew

- h. Imagine the thrill of the ultimate Judge saying “come” - it could be imagined that each of those hearing such a welcome will sense their everlasting debt of love and gratitude as they begin the eternal experience of a glory, beyond their comprehension, that was purchased and given to them
- i. The inheritance to be received was planned at the beginning of creation (**it was part of the purpose and design of the creation**) - the opposite (the inheritance of the “goats”) is the “eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels” making an interesting distinction - those “blessed by the Father” had the glorious inheritance of/for the Father “prepared for you from the foundation of the world”, while the “cursed” inherit what was created for the Devil
- j. The Lord, as Judge, explains the evidence of those that inherit His kingdom - He identifies their actions, these being indicative of being a part of the “sheep” - some look on this as being the means to being “on the right hand” while, in harmony with the rest of Scripture, these are evidential of who they are (as in “these are what actual Christians do”)
- k. What makes this text unique from what many would (and have) assumed, is those to whom such gracious deeds were done - it is common to take these acts as being to all mankind (treating all as the Lord’s “brothers”) though the context indicates something more specific - it describes meeting the essential needs of those that are Christ’s “brothers” and that are “the least of these” (the lowliest) - who did Christ reference earlier in this Gospel as His “brothers”?
- l. In Mt. 12:46-50, Jesus indicates that His “mother and brothers” are those that do “the will of my Father in heaven” - such will suffer loss of some sort in this world, and the Lord illustrated in basic needs (hunger and thirst, clothing), social needs (“a stranger and you took me in”, being visited when sick) and even courage to be identified with one socially deemed a criminal (because of Christ) in “I was in prison, and you came to me”
- m. These “righteous” (as the Lord identifies them in verse 37) are also characterized as not having tracked their “good works,” nor that they were doing it as to the Lord - The Lord makes it clear that as they were gracious and faithful to even these “least,” they were faithful to Him - to take care of those He loves and gave Himself for, is to take care of His work (doing it to Him, caring for what He cares for and loves)
- n. Notice the simplicity of these works “showcased” in the final judgement as the “public evidence” (of the private faith) - none of these are what many over the centuries have showcased as “the great Christian works” - instead, these are simple, practical, and works **focused on individuals** and not crowds! - if works are focused on “numbers,” then there will be no time for the individual (“After all, many are worth more than one”, one may reason)
- o. To those on His left (the “wicked”) He commands them to “Depart” - they did not want to be associated with Him in life, so they are bid depart in eternity: so in contrast to the “Come” invitation, these must separate; instead of being “blessed of my Father,” these are cursed (of their own doing), and rather than a place prepared at the founding of creation prepared for them, these inherit what was designed for the Devil and his angels
- p. The evidence used against these is similar for the righteous - as these were faced with opportunities to assist “the least of these my brethren” they didn’t (either because they consciously chose not to or were too busy/distracted with other priorities) - these also ask as to when such opportunities were, and possibly figure they would have assisted had they known it was actually ministering to Him - yet it is the innate hatred of the actual God/Christ that would have made this impossible
- q. Why only use (in this description) the absence of good works? Is there a judgement for active sinners? Of course, but this group, being addressed and illustrated, are **those who profess to be a part of His kingdom/church and are not**
- r. These will depart “εις κόλασιν αιώνιον” (into punishment unending), clearly indicating the utmost seriousness of the end result - this is not even remotely an indicator of annihilation (which would provide an escape from God’s judgment, and is an amiable option the wicked would comfort themselves with, to console their worries as they continue in their sin and opposition to the Lord’s work/purposes and people)
- s. The righteous “εις ζωήν αιώνιον” (into life unending) - the contrast is between life and punishment (one, fullness of life/living, the other fullness of pain (of all sorts))

There is no natural affection we would have for the concept of eternal agony, but it is not ours to mete out, just to warn regarding

- t. There have been and are still debates as to whether or not the punishment is eternal (never-ending) - the use of the word “αἰώνιον” (unending) is used for both the “life” of the righteous and of the rest “punishment” - if the eternal life is without end, then the punishment must be also - either way, who would risk such a thing!?

XXXVIII. The Last Days Before The Crucifixion - 26:1-46

A. The pre-ordained plot to kill Christ - vs. 1-5

1. These verses demonstrate a contrast between the “plans of man” and their dependency upon the foreordination of God

see also Pr. 19:21, 21:30, Isa. 46:8-13

It wasn't only planned (by God) that Christ would be crucified, but the process (the details) of how would happen were also - God is not over just the “general happenings” (the “highlights”), but the particulars

- a. Proverbs 16:9 - “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” - what happens does not rest solely on the plans we make, but upon the will/decreed of God - such is the case here, where we see both demonstrated
- b. Such a truth is essential for us to understand and trust, if we are to rightly discern and respond to the difficulties we will face, or see others face
- c. This is also a good demonstration of how God overrules even the worst of sins to serve His righteous purposes - we, not being God, could never do this (and would be wrong to think we could)

2. As soon as Jesus had finished all that He had been teaching/answering regarding the end of the age, He not only tells of His upcoming betrayal and crucifixion, **He ties it to the Passover** - vs. 1-2

It is interesting to consider how often the principles that the enemies of God subscribe to and live by, are compromised when they do not fit an immediate agenda (they are flexible)

Jesus, being the Christ, would be the ultimate Lamb of God (the “antitype”) - the timing of all this was of the highest significance

- a. At the point verse 2 was stated, it was two days before the Passover observance - this would have been something the disciples would have already know, so why state this now?
- b. The Lord indirectly connects the Passover with His crucifixion by then revealing that at the same time, He would be **betrayed**/given-up to be crucified (which is interesting to consider in that not only did Judas betray Him to the religious leaders, but the religious leaders betrayed Him by handing Him over to the Romans to be crucified (which was not a Jewish form of execution))
- c. The tradition of the Passover feast had objects used to represent something more than was originally known - it was more than a remembrance of their coming out of Egypt, but more in association with the lamb that was slain, the blood posted, all that the judging Angel of God would pass over them and they would be protected from God's judgement

3. The “high priest” conspires with the other religious leaders to seize Jesus - vs. 3-5

Neither fear was legitimate, but their fear and hatred of Christ was proven to outweigh all others (demonstrating the core of their character where they hated Him, not because of their knowledge of the Truth, but because He disrupted their lives and traditions (which many today still hate Him for))

As many that have come since, these likely felt they were doing the right thing (morally) in their schemes - feeling does not dictate fact

- a. It is intriguing to realize that the High Priest is directly involved with the other “chief priests” in plotting-out a way to kill Jesus - we have the Passover celebration about to begin, where sacrifices will be given; and here we have priests of Israel securing the actual sacrifice
- b. They were planning to do this “by stealth” (deceitfully, “under the radar” as we may put it), because they knew He was popular (things were getting so desperate they were going to have to risk the crowd for what they collectively considered to be the greater good)
- c. Ultimately the crowds would have to know, but by then, they would have concocted false testimony against Him and “worked the crowd” to shift enough opinion against Him
- d. It must also be noted that Jesus had precisely revealed when this would begin (in two days) yet these were plotting to wait till after the “festival” to avoid being seen seizing Him - even the “evil participants” could not realize how God would use them for His eternal purpose!

B. Jesus is anointed for burial long before the process begins - vs. 6-13

1. This account is found in the other Gospels, though John 12 reveals more detail - it took place 6 days before Passover - Lazarus, Mary and Martha were there also

John also reveals in his account that the Chief Priests also desired to kill Lazarus, realizing how many came to see him as well

- a. There is no contradiction since Matthew sometimes describes events out of order, though he clearly associates this with the coming death of Christ and its significance
- b. Matthew tells us that the feast was held at a house of a man called “Simon the Leper” (likely because of being healed by Jesus if his leprosy)

2. A woman (Mary as John records it, though it is possible that John's account was another time)

There are, no doubt, works done truly for Christ but are looked upon as a waste because they are viewed only with the focus on the temporal and values system of the age

- a. She brought very expensive perfume in an alabaster container and poured its contents on the head of Jesus (John records she did so on his feet and wiped it with her hair)
- b. The reaction by the disciples (apparently stirred on by Judas) was indignant because of the perceived waste - Jesus makes it clear that it was done with a higher purpose than even she knew, for it was done in preparation for His burial (since He would soon be having a violent, undignified death)

No doubt some gifts can actually be a waste, but we ought to be very careful when criticizing a gift given by another, to another, realizing we do not necessarily know all that it involves

Notice also that the Lord states the fact of the poor always being with us - it will be a lifelong expectation that we will have (and should take) opportunities to help the poor

If this is the case, her act was one of great faith in at least two ways; the cost and she would have trusted Him completely!

As seen in the description of the Last Judgement, the Lord places a high value on "works" that might normally seem insignificant and little

He also mentions that the Gospel will be proclaimed in the whole world

- c. The reason put forward by the disciples (of their disagreement with the deed) was that the perfume could have been sold and given to the poor, yet they seemed to have forgotten to Whom this was done - if something is truly done to the Lord, it is His to "judge" - whether she knew the significance of what He declared this act was for, it is the receiver of such a gift to consider its worth
- d. Jesus asks why they are troubling her - would not He chide her if the gift was extravagant (for He did not stop her) - this demonstrates that there are roundabout ways to criticize the Lord (indirectly) - it would have been best if they had waited for the Lord's response - to give to the poor is a good thing, but it is not the only good thing, and this situation was better because of its timing (and soon to pass opportunity)
- e. "For you always have the poor with you..." - vs. 11 - this was not to degrade caring for the poor, but we (as they) still should realize our service to the Lord exclusively, and in so doing will serve others (such as the poor)
- f. They would shortly not have Jesus with them in person as they had Him now - so the Lord reveals the anointing was for His "burial" (and this is reiterated in the other Gospels - it is possible (if we take this as plainly as it is stated) that she did know it was for this purpose (and that she believed Him when He spoke of His soon-coming crucifixion))
- g. Two things stand out in the Lord's response to the criticism of this woman and what she did: first, the Lord states that this would be spoken of from that time on (because it would be mentioned since it was included in the precursor to the greatest event of all time) - this is a demonstration of a seemingly small deed having a place of significance with the Lord
- h. Second, the Lord references the account in that it will be shared with "τὸ εὐαγγέλιον" (the Gospel), **making it evident ahead of time that even though He revealed His upcoming crucifixion and burial, the result will be "Good News"!**

C. The betrayal begins - vs. 14-16

1. There is endless speculation as to why Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord, and we are not told his direct motive; but based off what we have just studied (and the accounts in the other Gospels), it is possible that he was motivated negatively by hearing the Lord speak of His crucifixion and His burial
 - a. Many that seek to follow the Lord and become acquainted with His graces, still turn on Him because they are seeking out a more immediate solution or objective
 - b. There are those that follow after Christ but leave Him when it becomes apparent they will not see and obtain what they would hope to have in this life - it might be related to his frustration of seeing what he perceived to be a waste with the perfume - regardless, he was no longer impressed with Jesus and was now looking to "get something out of it" for his time/effort
2. Judas went to the chief priests (they did not seek him out) - this was truest betrayal!

This is a prime example of one who comes to know the Lord closely, hear His teachings and learn His ways and yet still be "after" something else

Some would forsake the Lord now for much less - many sell themselves out for so "cheap" an offer

This is illustrative of sin in general - once yielded to internally, the opportunity is sought - sin in action is always looking to betray Christ and His work once the inner struggle has been surrendered to

- a. Many dispute that the amount given to Judas was too little an amount for him to be persuaded to go through with the betrayal, but to a greedy, disenchanted man, it was more than enough
- b. These religious leaders pay him "thirty pieces of silver," which most agree was not a very significant amount - he was paid ahead of time and went back to the group with his betrayal money in his possession - all of this is a reminder that the seemingly most faithful, religious companion may be motivated in a totally different way than ourselves - thus our faith never rests upon the consistency of others, no matter how solid we deemed their reputation
- c. From that time on, he was looking for a convenient opportunity to hand Him over (and the way it is worded, he was offering to do it himself) - the opportunity would come the next evening

D. Preparation for the Passover meal (in the case, "The Last Supper") - vs. 17-19

1. Matthew references this time as the first day of "Unleavened Bread" (which feast actually follows the Passover, but, as is the case with many holy days, the terms were used interchangeably)
2. Jesus had apparently made arrangements so He had some disciples (Peter and John as Luke indicates)
 - a. Jesus has them go to "a certain man in the city" and let him know that the "teacher" needs it for "My time is at hand" - this was more than just any meal as it would serve as the foundation for the practice we still observe today, recognizing its significance
 - b. It may have been that He was being secretive so that even Judas would not know where they would meet, so as not to have the meal interrupted

Traditions/practices like the "Lord's Supper" are more (as will be discussed later) than just something to do - in this case, it will not only serve as a reminder of what Christ did, but how it is tied to the Old Testament

E. One among them will betray Him - vs. 20-25

1. No doubt, when the word “betray” is used, many will think of Judas Iscariot

Christ is figuratively handed over by false-friends all the time who come to Him for selfish reasons, and when He does not comply with their wishes, they seek to profit or gain the “good graces” of His enemies by offering Him up and standing against Him openly

- a. If we consider the actions and motive in betraying Him, we can see similarities to what leads many, to this day, to also betray Him
- b. To “betray” is to “hand one over” into the control or for the desires of another, when the one being handed over will be hurt (**and the one handing them over is perceived to be a friend**)
- c. Judas wanted money (regardless of it being a low amount), he still wanted some profit for doing what he would do - he was also upset on some occasions where resources were used in a way that he thought wasteful
- d. As it was with the rest of the disciples, the concept makes one “very sorrowful” and would be deemed (rightfully so) as one of the worst things that could be done

2. Jesus reveals that one of the 12 will betray Him - vs. 20-21

To know something is God’s will gives it purpose, but does not take away the pain - purpose provides resolve to push-through the pain!

Betraying Christ is an absurd thought to one of Christ’s, but one often considered by a non-believers, putting on a “front”

Pride is at the source of thoughts that trust self to be faithful and not the grace of God

- a. In John’s account in John 13:21, Jesus was said to be “troubled in His spirit” - even though the Lord knew all this must happen and that all of it was in God’s will, it did not make it painless
- b. The pronoun “ὁμοῦν “ is possessive, as in saying, one of **your** number - fortunately, Judas was alone in his thinking and motives and the rest were faithful (to the death... later) - all would run away when Jesus would be taken in the garden, but none of these would **betray** Him (the difference being **one runs toward the trouble (betrayal) while the other runs from it**) - Judas was proactive in his rebellion (he thought through it and acted on it)
- c. The disciples were grieved (exceedingly) that one of them, who had seen what they had seen and experienced what they had experienced, would participate in its end (how could one of them turn on the Lord? - such is a question a true believer would ponder)
- d. As hard as this was to accept, they seemed to know better than to question Jesus, which prompted each to ask if it was them (and such lack of self-confidence is a good indicator - confidence is not in self but in the Lord to keep us faithful)
- e. “The guilty would, if possible, always conceal their crimes. The innocent are ready to suspect that they may have done wrong. Their feelings are tender, and they inquire with solicitude whether there may not be something in their bosoms, unknown to themselves, that may be a departure from right feeling.” Barnes

3. “The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him...” - vs. 23-25

In John’s account of this (John 13:23-30) he describes Jesus saying that whoever he gives the bread to (that had been dipped in the bowl) was the one

see Acts 2:22-23

To attempt to somehow justify sin (to any degree) by acknowledging that it will somehow fit into God’s perfect plan grossly discounts the personal consequences on the one doing the wrong - yes, God’s will is not thwarted, but to the Godless, this will do them no good!

No doubt Judas had learned much under the teaching of Jesus, but he had not been converted (which is internal, affecting more than mind and emotions, but to the heart... the will)

- a. It may have been that after the 11 had asked if it was them that they thought maybe it was not actually one of them - Jesus states further that it is one who has “dipped his hand in the dish with me”
- b. But such a betrayal was fitting in God’s plan, for the “Son of Man” is not taken by surprise, against His will, but He “goes” in accordance with what had been written of Him long before
- c. Jesus had been focused on doing the will of the Father throughout His life, and this was the pinnacle act of obedience, not just providing a significant point in the purchase price of our redemption, but an example of how life is to be lived - we “go” willingly in His will
- d. Yet, the Lord also makes clear, that even though this was perfectly in the design of God, the one that does this betrayal, it would have been better for that man to had not been born - notice it is not that it had been good that that man had not been born, but better FOR THAT MAN - it was good that he had been born, but his actions (of his own desires and internal motivations) would be so bad for him, non-existence would be preferable
- e. It is not uncommon for some to learn of the truths of God’s absolute sovereignty over all things, to work out a string of logical steps to seek to use such truths to defend themselves from absolute and permanent punishment - something may be a channel of “blessing” and still not receive the blessing itself
- f. It’s at this point that Judas now asks if it is him - how astonishing it is to see such brazenness before the Lord! Judas knew what he was planning and should have known the Lord knew, yet he “plays along,” possibly hoping that Jesus somehow did not actually know
- g. It should be noticed that the other disciples referred to Jesus as “Lord” in their questioning, yet here Judas calls Him “Rabbi” (teacher (one from whom he learned much) but not “Lord” (one to whom he had surrendered) - countless, over the centuries, have followed Jesus the teacher (and many do to this day) yet do not follow Jesus as Lord

F. "The Lord's Supper" - vs. 26-30

1. The institution/ordinance of the "Lord's Supper" is profound in its meaning, but has been overshadowed by mishandlings and a mystifying of the elements

It needs to be understood that the actual consumption of the actual body of Christ would not "save" anyone - this was not its purpose, and Jesus was clearly speaking metaphorical in John 6, which we know (not by John 6) but by texts as we have here in Matthew 26 (the Lord now demonstrating the metaphor)

Such a memorial is intended to keep us sober from the alluring intoxications of life that vie to become our purpose for living

- a. If too much is "read into" what the Lord was doing, it directs attention away from its purpose and actual meaning; yet if not enough is considered, it becomes a meaningless **ritual** to its participants, becoming more rote practice than the life-focusing memorial it was meant to be
- b. If the "elements" used in the Lord's Supper are touted as the actual body and blood of Christ, the elements themselves become a point of focus and not what they represent - overemphasizing the "parts" over the purpose contradicts and adulterates its usage
- c. Some do not see the elements as the actual body/blood of Christ, but still see it as producing a special presence of Christ (thus the term "communion") - this takes away from the promise of the Lord to be with us always (so how/why would He be even closer during this time?) - It is to be more a challenging **memorial** than an experience!
- d. Yet, just making this a time/practice that is formalized habit, robs it of its usefulness (which is irresponsible and irreverent, and why Paul stresses its significance in I Cor. 11:27-28) - the entire handling of the concept of the Lord's table in I Corinthians 11, and that Paul "received it from the Lord", demonstrates this was more than just an historical happening, but an institution to be followed (something which the Corinthian church was abusing)

2. Jesus establishes the symbol of the bread - vs. 26

Seeing the Lord blessed this event and symbol, it must be treated reverently (versus "unworthily" which Paul warns against in I Cor. 11:27) - to participate in its practice and yet live as though it is irrelevant, is to treat it with contempt (not in word as much as in deed)

"True" flesh and "true" drink indicating it fulfills the ultimate purpose regular food and drink cannot (for He provides eternal life in what He did, not in the actual consumption of His body and blood)

*We are not told more details of what was done or said because they were not the point - the simple yet powerful **memorial institution** was established simply*

*This ordinance has become to many **THE means to grace**, making it a work for/to salvation (which was absolutely never its purpose!)*

- a. While they were eating (the Passover meal), toward the end of it, He took some bread (highly likely it was unleavened), and "blessed it" (εὐλογῆσας - to say good things about, to praise or even to set aside as special) - there is debate as to whether He was "blessing" the bread itself or was offering thanks for it, or was stating a blessing over this aspect of the meal (not just the bread), further distinguishing the **significance** of what He was doing
- b. "Take and eat, this is My body" - as stated previously, some take this as non-metaphorical not considering His metaphorical language elsewhere ("I am the door", "I am the way", "I am the good shepherd", "I am the bread of life", "I am the light of the world", "I am the true vine")
- c. The act of eating (consuming) is to nourish one's self to live as well as to become (the food) part of one's self - Jesus describes this vividly in John 6 where He states, "the food that endures to eternal life" (vs. 27) which He would give, and He also said, "... For my flesh is **true** food, and my blood is **true** drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me." (vs. 55-57)
- d. Jesus broke the bread, but too much has been "read into" this - He broke it with the purpose to distribute it, not to demonstrate His body being broken - many also are so focused on the parallels to the Passover meal that they see more symbolism than was intended, and attempt to predict what Jesus said in His blessing - note: I Cor. 11:24 in the KJV includes the word "broken" in describing Christ's body being given is not correct since it does not harmonize with any of the other accounts and as JFB state, "The oldest manuscripts omit "broken," leaving it to be supplied from "brake."" (if it is to be used)
- e. We eat to live and to obtain true life, Christ is the **means** - this is the succinct idea in this, and to those not understanding or believing, they will (as the naysayers in John 6) reject it and simply react to the picture, while missing the point - even to this day, those seeking to actually consume the body of Christ become enamored with the physical (adoring the bread/wafer) and totally missing the atonement and remission
- f. Jesus, in what He is detailing in the describing the "body" and next, the "blood" as separate entities, is picturing a sacrifice (the one He was about to make) - His actual sacrifice (leading up to and on the cross) would be **the fulfillment**, and **all subsequent observances would be memorials (and not a sacrifice of Christ all over again)** - see Heb. 10:1-12

3. Jesus establishes the symbol of the blood - vs. 27-28

"γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου" simply references the "offspring" of the vine, not disqualifying grape juice as some have attempted to make a case

- a. Jesus then took a cup with the "fruit of the vine" in it (see verse 29), He gave thanks (and in this case it seems appropriate to assume His thanks was more than for the wine, but for what it would represent)
- b. Jesus instructs them "Drink of it, all of you" (none were to be left out or refuse it)

“Jesus here uses the solemn words of Exo_24:8 “the blood of the covenant” at Sinai. “My blood of the covenant” is in contrast with that. This is the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31; Heb_8:1-13.” RWP

It was the establishing of God’s covenant that He would keep, because of His faithfulness - yet, as seen in Jeremiah 31, the results would be life altering because the heart would be changed - this is no mediocre change, but one more to be characterized as radical!

The magnitude of His sacrifice was more than just its conquering, covering power over our countless sins, but for countless people, and that, once for all!

*We are, by this, **freed from** sin and **freed to** serve as we ought our Lord - this has no hint of being freed from consequences and feed to continue in sin without a sense of consequence*

And such is the handling of it by pseudo-religious, and morally philosophical people - to them it is an event to be admired but not one to be “trusted in”

As mentioned in Luke 22:19, this is done “in remembrance of me”, and not just to think back on, but to live in light of

This time will come and may be at what is commonly referenced as the “Marriage Supper of the Lamb” and/or at what is referenced in Mat. 8:11 which looks to be inclusive of Gentiles

Which is a good test for us - do we dread the “end of the world” or anticipate it because of what follows? Attachment with this age will cause us to dread any of its loss, which is detrimental to maintaining an “eternal perspective”

The first part of the “great Hallel” (as in “Hallelujah”) was Psalm 113-114

Matthew

- c. “This is My blood of the covenant” - this is one of the most profound statements in all of Scripture! - it is clearly in harmony with Exodus 24:8, where in establishing the “Mosaic covenant” with Israel where Moses, “took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” - blood was applied to the people in the ratifying of the covenant
- d. this was in direct reference to the Old Covenant (Old Testament) being replaced with the new - see Jer. 31:31-34 and Ex. 24:3-8 (blood sprinkled on the people); Heb. 9:15-28; I Pet. 1:2-9
- e. This would not only be a covenant distinct from the Mosaic covenant, but it would be the fulfillment of all that the **sacrificial** system was “pointing to”
- f. Leon Morris, in his commentary on Matthew wrote of this the practice of applying sacrificial blood to people, that it was “...a most uncommon procedure... it seems that the action signifies cleansing from earlier defilements and consecration to a new life of service to God... Jesus was saying that his death would be central to the relationship between God and the people of God. It would be the means of cleansing from past sins and consecrating to a new life of service to God. It would be the establishing of the covenant that was based not on people’s keeping it (Ex. 24:3,7), but on God’s **forgiveness** (Jer. 31:34).” - read also Isa. 53:1-10
- g. His blood would be “poured out” (again, a sacrificial term and hear in the present tense as in “is being poured out (shed)”) for “the many” (τὸ περὶ πολλῶν, as in “concerning/in regards to the many”) stressing that this particular sacrifice would not be one that would benefit the one giving it, but would be for many (as in “the mass of all mankind” not just, as the previous sacrifices had focused upon, the Jews) - note also that the present tense demonstrates the “giving” of His blood was already “in play” as He was submitted to do the will of the Father - as our obedience will also start within the will **surrendered**, then the acting upon it
- h. And the ultimate of purpose statements, “for the forgiveness of sins” (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, in sending away of sins (faults of coming short (deliberately or ignorantly) of the “mark” (perfection/true holiness)) and in the “sending them away”, we are freed from them and their rightful judgement/condemnation before God - with such freedom, purchased at such a price, there is a realization of responsibility - all “freedoms” must be associated with responsibility or they digress into emboldened self-service
- i. To the causal observer, it would be important to understand these symbols and the significance of the covenant (and its being **applied** to people) to understand the events to follow, else they just become a “nice man” being put to death by “mean people”, and then miraculously brought back to life to show that “good” wins-out over “evil” (as in a moral tale)
- j. Sins (upon which the blood of Christ is applied) are “sent away” not just from us, but from the presence of God - they are, in the truest sense, truly gone! - this is all pulled together (in its results) in Romans 8:1-5; sin is dealt with so there is no condemnation because Christ, by His perfect life and by His vicarious death, “...that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us...” which is characterized from there on out as not “walking according to the flesh”

4. Looking forward to “My Father’s kingdom” - vs. 29-30

- a. We find that so many of our hardships are faced and endured because we keep our focus on what lies on the other side of it - here, Jesus is so focused
- b. Jesus apparently already drank with the disciples, but would not do so again until He was with them “in my Father’s kingdom” (which looks to be the final “stage” of the order listed in I Cor. 15:20-26) - here, Jesus sets a point to look forward to, with (partly) the purpose for all that are His, to “get through” all they **must** face
- c. “that day” is a specific time without reference to how far off it is - it is not to be our focus as to how long we wait, just that we continue on, with anticipation of such a personal fellowship with the Lord as these disciples were able to experience
- d. It will be a “new wine” as in the idea it will be fresh in a “fresh” (new) era - Christ was looking forward to the “end of the world” (age)! (the “old” done away with)
- e. What the Lord was to face was truly for the best - there will be for us also, things ahead that we do not desire to face, but it will be (as God has designed) for the best
- f. This entire event was followed by singing a hymn which likely consisted of Psalm 115-118 (the second part of a set of Psalms sung/recited during the Passover meal)

G. Jesus foretells the disciples' forsaking Him - vs. 31-35

1. Just as they ended the supper, Jesus reveals that all of the disciples were soon to **leave and flee**

a. The placement of this is interesting seeing He had just revealed that one would betray Him, and now He reveals they all will **abandon** Him that very night

Matthew Henry

b. "... let not the rest be secure; though there will be but one traitor, they will be all deserters."

c. The word the Lord uses is σκανδαλισθήσεσθε (as in you will be scandalized because of me) - it pictured a falling/stumbling, yet the Lord adds that He will be raised, and will then go before them into Galilee, providing **hope** in Him even in light of their own (sure to come) failings

d. These were to become the foundations of the early Church, and would serve as examples of God's grace from the start, **that it would be built on His grace and not their fortitude**

2. This event (of their being scattered) would fulfill Zechariah 13:7 - vs. 31

a. It would seem odd to consider that their abandoning the Lord would be something foretold in Scripture as God's design, and that it would still turn out for their good

b. Where it reads "I will strike the shepherd" it is actually God who is doing this by means of His "sword" (as in the Zechariah text), which God commands to strike "the shepherd" (who also happens to be called by God "the man, My Associate" (someone being on the same level) - this fits perfectly what is described in Isaiah 53:10-11 (it pleased the Lord to crush Him)

The prophecy also goes on to describe that two thirds will be essentially destroyed (lost) but a third will be preserved (which looks to be a prophecy yet to be fulfilled)

c. "the sheep of the flock will be scattered" - this, in the context here, is His disciples - it is interesting to note that in the Zechariah text, it goes on to say that the "little ones" God will turn His hand upon (carrying either the idea of judgement or special **protection**)

Trials and even failures (ours) are all in keeping with God's work in and for us, as He brings us along in His sanctifying work (begun in our rebirth)

d. Yet, they were assured they would be recovered, for after He is raised from the dead, He will "go before you into Galilee," which is where they were taught so much, and it would be there they would get their final send-off into the work given them - the Lord was not only focused on the other side of His suffering, but that also of the disciples (and that it would not be the **end** of either of them) - see Mt. 28:7 for this fulfilled

e. The "scattering of the sheep" was also illustrative of other "calamities" that God would use to bring about His will, not with the purpose to destroy His sheep, but to ultimately guide them

3. Jesus corrects Peter's self-confident response - vs. 33-35

Self-confidence and self-determination are often touted as virtues - there may be some situations where this might be true (somewhat), but not when it comes to our abilities to do the will of God (this, we must always see ourselves as in constant need of His grace)

a. Peter was wrong in at least three ways in his response to the Lord: (1). He contradicted (challenged) what Jesus said (2). He placed himself above the other disciples and (3). He trusted himself too much

b. Peter was most likely confident because he was **sincere** - in that moment, he could not imagine any scenario that would cause him to abandon the Lord (especially that very night, while experiencing such a "spiritual high")

The Lord is not looking for our personal fortitude as much as He is our conscious dependence on Him

c. Peter was not only brash (self-assertive), he assumed he would not fail even though all the others would (this was not needed, and lent nothing but pride to his defense) - unrelenting dedication to the Lord is very good, but not at the cost of making it a point of our dedications being better than others

d. Peter's point was simply that even though all others would stumble, he NEVER would - as is to be seen, he did "stumble" and by human accounts, should have been permanently disqualified from the Lord's service - but our consistency is not the focus of our lives as much as it is to be a focus upon His consistency (faithfulness) to us, through all things

e. He is countered by the Lord stressing "Truly" that that night he would deny the Lord three times (not just once, but three times!) - the word for "deny" is ἀπαρνῆση, which is used of someone **disowning** and therefore disregarding someone - Peter would deny that he even knew the Lord, and would do so three times before the morning (rooster crows)

It is not unusual for our self-righteousness to become a declaration of the wrongness of God (making a point that God's revelation of our weaknesses is incorrect)

f. Still defiant of the Lord (though he likely thought he was being reverent), Peter continued to deny that he would deny the Lord (and the other disciples following the same and agreeing that they would not either)

H. Jesus in Gethsemane (the submission to the will of God) - vs. 36-46

1. There is a great deal of focus at this point on the humanity of Christ - what a contrast He is to his over-confident disciples as He, in His being grieved and "distressed," goes to pray to the Father - vs. 36-38

As God often does not allow us comfort from friends, but uses such stress to bring us to Him

a. He went with His disciples to a garden area near Jerusalem and the Mt. of Olives to pray - even surrounded by friends, He would not gain comfort from them

This is the beginning of the fullest moments of His being "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows acquainted with grief" - Isa. 53:3

It is key to note that the Lord Himself desired to have His friends with Him at this time of greatest grief - it will certainly be the same (whether or not we are able to have friends with us) in our griefs

As the writer of Hebrews reveals "He was heard because of His piety" - so He was "rescued" through it, not from it!

The Lord demonstrates the ultimate example of a grieved posture/stance before God, as well as the stance of the will! (humble, not bitter)

He was fully righteous, and as such, rightfully dreaded taking on Himself sin and the judgment it deserved - and then with such dread, He submits fully to do this as the Father's will in dealing with sin!

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

As weak as the Lord could ever be portrayed, this was it! Yet, even here, His purpose and resolve was set - personal weakness will never serve as an "excuse" from responsibility (the Father's will... life purpose)

It appears as though they did not sense the urgency, though they had seen the distress of the Lord - neglect often occurs when we fail to see the importance in the moment because we succumb to natural fatigue

One of the core aspects of prayer is admitted/acknowledged dependence upon God

- b. He had most of His disciples (friends) sit while He went a little further to pray, and took with Him Peter James and John (James and John being the "sons of Zebedee")
- c. He is described by Matthew as "began to be grieved and distressed" (λυπεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδημονεῖν, being deeply grieved (intense pain/suffering) and troubled as one out of place (the extreme opposite of not being "at home" (and so to feel intense loneliness)) - only He would know such immense loneliness (the like we will never face, no matter how lonely we feel, **realizing the one who can empathize the most, will never leave or forsake us!**)
- d. He reveals as much when He tells them (as He is headed off to pray) "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death..." - Περιλυτός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου "surrounded by/ encompassed by grief He was, in His soul" - He was not only surrounded by grief, but it was to His core (picturing it being all around outward and inward) - it was overwhelming!
- e. He instructs these three disciples to remain close and "watch with Me" (stay alert and guarded with Me) for He knew the intense trouble coming
- f. Jesus explained the sorrow as being "unto death" - it could be taken as saying it is "heavy enough to kill me" or better yet, that it was a heaviness that would now be with Him until His death

2. His prayer of submission - vs. 39

- a. The Lord's struggle here is also referenced in Hebrews 5:7-9 - "In the days of His flesh..." describes His human will submitting to that of the Father - there is no conflict in recognizing a "side" of the Lord desiring not to face what was ahead, yet such a will expressed, was in complete submission to the will of the Father - the expression of a personal will is not wrong if it is always couched in submission
- b. Going a little further off from the three disciples, He fell prostrate (He "fell on His face") - this was the most humble posture that could be taken during prayer; it was one of great humility and reverence before the Father
- c. His will regarding the situation is voiced openly before the Father, "... if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." - this was not a revulsion of death (or the fear of death), for many that came after Him faced their deaths bravely, expressing no hesitation - this "cup" was far more than death by crucifixion; it was the "cup" of God's wrath and this, upon the One who knew no sin, and yet would die the death of a wretched sinner and the rightful judgment and shame it deserved, along with separation from the Father (being totally abandoned/ forsaken in the moment) - note also, that if it had been possible to perform the redemptive plan and fulfill justice in the universe without such suffering, it would have been removed - seeing the Lord had to face it is proof **it had to be done** (faced)
- d. As He had so perfectly demonstrated throughout His life, He was here to do the will of the Father, even to this degree ("obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" Php. 2:8)
- e. Such a powerful few words! πλὴν οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω, "however, not of what I wish" - it is not, nor would it ever be about "Me", but always about "You" (Father) - the Lord is the supreme example of the overriding focus and posture our lives must take; it is never my will, but His! (and not just at my "strongest" moments, but always, especially, at my "weakest")
- f. "In conformity to this example of Christ, we must drink of the bitter cup which God puts into our hands, be it ever so bitter; though nature struggle, grace must submit. We then are disposed as Christ was, when our wills are in every thing melted into the will of God, though ever so displeasing to flesh and blood; The will of the Lord be done, Act_21:14." Matthew Henry

3. Confronting the three disciples (through Peter) for not "watching" - vs. 40-41

- a. Jesus, in His grief and internal suffering, returned to find the disciples asleep (the same ones who insisted they would be completely faithful, just a little while before - true faithfulness is not just "standing with and for" the Lord when I see the opportunity, but is to be seen as a life calling)
- b. The Lord directs His question to Peter (being the one so boldly declaring his faithfulness to the Lord) - "Could you not watch (be vigilant, cautiously watching) with me for an hour?"
- c. Their tiredness (reasonable or not) contributed to them not looking further into the agony the Lord was facing internally (of which He told them) - the physical should not be trusted to set the priorities we are to have throughout life!
- d. He again instructs them to "watch" (be on guard) and now, adds that they should also pray so as not to be overcome by the "temptation" that was coming

A lazy focus on possible threats is a vulnerability since threats like these temptations are not taken seriously

A lack of prayer is often a sign we are too confident in "the flesh"

Ellicott

- e. The Lord instructed them to "watch" (be on the lookout and be "vigilant") so as not to "enter into temptation", which pictures more than just facing temptation (which was already coming), but that they not yield to it altogether - the prayer is not to avoid it as much as it is to not be overcome by it (**stay focused** to be prepared for what is coming!)
- f. These disciples meant well (their spirit was willing) but their "weak flesh" overcame their sincerity (which is why they needed to stay alert and mentally, verbally and submissively come before God seeking strength, which they would never have otherwise)
- g. "But the spirit and the flesh were contrary the one to the other (Galatians 5:17); and therefore they could not do the things that they would, without a higher strength than their own."
- h. Jesus was gracious in His dealing with them, identifying the point of the struggle (the flesh) - True friendship does this - looks to reveal the cause so as to best deal with the problem

4. Returning to prayer (continuing in prayer) - vs. 42-46

Notice also the extreme agony in such a submissive response in Luke 22:44

Here the Lord's prayer was of yielding - such we should expect so much of our prayers to be; not forceful persistence to see "escape", but open surrender to God's will though it looks difficult

Support of friends is welcomed and encouraged, but must not be looked upon as a necessity to do what God has given (face what He has given us to face)

The ESV translators handled this by interpreting this as, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand..."

We are able to rest in spite of all our trials and difficulties, knowing that the ultimate conflicts (between God and ourselves) has been resolved/reconciled

It is not uncommon to see throughout Church history (up till now) the "religious" and the apparent followers of Christ handing Him (as it were) over to sinners, being used to "turn on Him"

- a. Matthew reveals His prayer now is one of resolution (as in since/if this must be so, if "I must drink it", then Your will be done) - this was in keeping with the example prayer He had given them in Mt. 6:10, "Thy will be done..." (a regular part of our praying)
- b. This was a major part of what is referenced in Heb. 5:7-10, with "loud crying and tears... He learned obedience from the things which He suffered", and this because "He was heard because of His piety" (not that He would avoid it, but as mentioned earlier, He would go through it)
- c. We see the Lord resolute from here on out - now that it was made clear that this must be faced, because it was the will of the Father, there was no more resistance, but resolve and quiet submission to all that it would entail
- d. Even though, when He returned again to find His disciples sleeping, He still continued in this prayer of submissive resolve (reiterating that since He knows this to be the way it must be, He will do it) - faithful obedience does not depend on the support of our friends, but on the clarity of what God's will is (fully trusting His perfect and righteous perspective)
- e. The Lord finds them still sleeping after His third time returning to prayer, and says something that is difficult to understand as to why He said it - He said, "Sleep on now and take your rest", some take this as irony (as if sarcastically saying, "Go ahead and sleep now because things are about to start") yet the original wording is "λοιπὸν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθε" stating "from now on be taking your rest" (present indicative middle)
- f. Why say it this way? If we realize what was taking place, what was about to result in the "Son of Man being betrayed", then we know there is to be a resting in His work- for even though they were yet to face many agonies and discouragements, there would be a rest in the finished work of Christ (the final High Priest) - this is a **possible** reason
- g. Having indicated that His "hour had not yet come" many times before, **His "hour" had now come** (see also John 12:23-35) - He now faced it with resolve, and the first step was now "in play" as He was being handed over to "sinners" by His betrayer - these "sinners" included the self-righteous Chief Priests and Pharisees who found assistance from one of Jesus' own followers, and the Romans, to work out their agenda - we must stay focused though, on the incredible fact that **He was handed over to sinners who would be used to work our His victory over sin and sinners!**

XXXIX. The Crucifixion Of The Christ - 26:47-27:56

A. Jesus is arrested - 26:47-56

1. Jesus had apparently prayed up to the very last minute, for we see as soon as He is finishing this short statement to His disciples, "...behold, Judas..." - vs. 47-49

It is likely many of these thought they were doing the right thing (having mutually talked themselves into the "rightness" of their thoughts and the necessity to act)

- a. Judas came (knowing this was a place Jesus frequented for time alone) leading a "crowd"
- b. This "crowd" came with swords and clubs, expecting some resistance (not necessarily from Jesus, but because the crowds had been so enthusiastic)
- c. Secrecy is often sought by those who know their cause is not just and that are afraid to be seen for who/what they actually are
- d. Judas set up a sign so those with him, who would not have recognized which one was Jesus, would know which one to arrest - the symbol (a kiss) would be one of friendship and closeness
- e. Judas is addressed specifically as "he who was betraying Him"

Still shocking to see his behavior in light of what he was doing

f. And, once identified “seize Him”, possibly not wanting another instance of when Jesus, when surrounded by hostiles, worked His way through them without being caught or hurt (as in John 10:39) - they would have been unsure of His power!

g. The next verse begins with “καὶ εὐθέως” in the Greek and is translated “and immediately” (wasting no time he acted (he had given it thought already and was now committed to it))

There does seem to be some indication that Judas may have thought he was doing the Lord a favor (not realizing what would actually happen to Jesus)

—h. His greeting of Jesus is remarkable, saying “Hail, Rabbi” which was affectionate (even bright-spirited) and somewhat respectful (still recognizing Him as “Teacher”) - the word for “Hail” is Χαῖρε as in saying “be glad” or “rejoice”, acting as though this was not as dreadful a thing he was doing - as many who become comfortable in their sin try to divert the seriousness away from it - it may also be that he was bitter against Christ and was now being sarcastic (as in condescending to Him) - betrayal is often stirred on by a sense of confidence that is uninformed and incorrect (in this case, grossly so!)

Almost as though “Really, with a kiss!?”

i. Judas performs his arrangement and greets the Lord with a kiss, and Luke (in Luke 22:48) reveals that Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” - such is the result of one in whom Satan had entered (Luke 22:3)

2. Jesus still commands the situation (He is no victim of circumstances or conspiracies; He is no victim!)- vs. 50-54

Jesus, here and throughout His life, is the supreme example of living in light of the reality of God at work in all things at all times

a. Jesus, unaffected by Judas’ “show”, tells Him to get to what he has come to do (“Literally it is, that for which thou art here...” Vincent’s Word Studies)

—b. Jesus sees past the act in front of Him, to the acting out of God’s purposes in it - plus, He demonstrates He is not intimidated by these and their numbers

c. This is seen also in John’s account in John 18:4-9, when Jesus identifies Himself as “I am He” and the crowd “fell backward” (***even in His humility, He was a powerful presence***)

Most of the greatest enemies to Christianity have been those who once professed to be “Christian” and have turned on “the faith”

—d. Jesus also calls Judas “friend”, though this is a common term used (not just of close friends) of acquaintances - Judas should have been a friend having been with Jesus so long, but ***his true self was unconverted*** and so was used as the ultimate of betrayers

Bold action does not necessary equate to bravery - some bold actions cover-up greater fears (“act now so as not to face what I truly fear later”)

e. With Jesus now seized (which had never happened before), Peter drew his sword and struck the slave of the High Priest (we see this in John 18:10 that it was Peter) - Peter appeared to now be “delivering on his promise” to stand with the Lord to the death - Peter did not anticipate, first of all, the Lord’s rejection to the defense and, second, the Lord’s surrender to the harshness/humbling to come

God graciously allows us to find ourselves to be clumsy in taking on the methods of influence that the world relies on

f. Peter’s action looks to prove he was far from proficient in violence - we’re not told what he was aiming at, but it would seem odd that it would be an ear, or that Peter would have been so proficient (if he was aiming for the ear)

John records in John 18:11, “The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?” - if it is accordance with the purpose of God, should He not surrender to it?

g. Jesus immediately has Peter put the sword back “in its place” and reveals that all those who “take up the sword will perish by the sword” - those whose course of action (to get done what they see needs to get done) is to use “the sword”, are going to die by it - this is especially true in the cause of Christ; it was NEVER intended to be fought for with weapons and the physical conquering of others (as characterized some who went to war in the name and for the cause of Christ) - compare this to Ex. 14:13-14

God’s causes will never depend upon our “fighting skills” - we look, as His servants, to utilize as much faith in His defense as possible

h. Peter was acting too hastily for a couple reasons: first of all, nothing wrong had yet been done and Peter was only anticipating what would come (he prejudged the situation incorrectly (which ought to be the “fear” that anyone who uses such a weapon has before they decide to act))

—i. Second, Peter did not know what Jesus had “at His call” to defend Him - as John’s account indicated the mob falling backward with Jesus response as to who He was, this may have given Peter the wrong idea and misdirected courage - too many of us, inspired by displays and the knowledge of God’s power, want to utilize it as we see fit and in conjunction with our pride

The sovereign hand of God needs to remain in our conscious thought always, else we see situations (especially the ones that would cause panic) as needing weaponry

j. Jesus immediately refocuses Peter’s attention to reality by asking a rhetorical question; “Don’t you think I could ask my father and He would send more than 12 legions of angels?” - a legion usually consisted of 5,000-6,000 soldiers - this was an enormous amount, and could have easily defeated this mob with far less - it is also profound to realize that Jesus knew this at every point of His trial, beatings and crucifixion - This was truly a voluntary sacrifice/offering of Himself!

The enemies of the Lord will not be defeated by guns - they will be defeated by Him!

k. This is not a forbidding of “the sword”, but is a statement and truth that should keep our “faith” and “trust” off of our weapons - our primary weapon is the Sword of the Spirit!

Good intentions do not equate to confirmation that our actions are right

Some things are not possible, not because of a lack of power, but because it goes against character (who/what one really is, as it is not possible for God to lie)

The Scriptures not only revealed that it must happen, but that it must happen "this way"

Lasting comfort in the midst of trials is found, not in its release or escape, but in knowing its overriding purpose

He could have had them all annihilated and their weapons would have been of no use against Him

Self-righteous "moral" mobs, mutually endorsing their cause without accountability to Law are a dangerous group indeed!

It is normal for any of us to not look beyond the seeming random happenings in life to see and realize God is at work - and such is at the core of why so little is seen as "holy" in our lives, because we see nothing "set apart" by God for His purposes in our lives

l. Such defense was unnecessary in light of the Father's will - Jesus did not need the aid of Peter nor the others - as much as the gesture would seem to be welcomed, its forcefulness was in opposition to the revealed will of God, which the disciples kept missing (He and Peter saw it differently - Jesus correctly, Peter wrongly)

m. Jesus was demonstrating that He was doing this willingly, and that at any moment He could have stopped it - yet, as He explains to Peter, He could not stop it, not because of inability, but because what was about to take place was the will of the Father - Imagine the focus required to disregard such an "escape" because of the purpose!

n. "How else could the Scriptures be fulfilled?" - This was predetermined, so how else would Peter see God's predetermined plan happening? - understanding/accepting God's absolute sovereignty does not (should not) ever motivate inactivity - instead, it anticipates personal involvement in the outworking of His decrees - see Heb. 2:10

o. "The words indicate what one may reverently speak of as the source of the peace and calmness which had come to our Lord's human soul out of the depths of its agony. All that was sharpest and most bitter was part of a pre-ordained discipline." Ellicott

3. Jesus challenges the method of their arrest - vs. 55-56

a. Jesus addresses the arresting group with a basic question, which reveals their lack of moral authority and a "just case" against Him - they were setup so as to bring into custody a robber or marauder needing "swords and clubs" as if He would mount an offensive against them

b. Jesus points out their illegitimacy when He points out that He "every day" would sit in the Temple teaching, and yet, because of the people (we assume), they would not take Him then - now that those they feared were not around, they created their own self-supporting "moral" band of justice seekers

c. He had not been in hiding, nor had He been building an army to revolt and make Him king - these religious hypocrites would find a way to form a case against Christ, not seeking truth but an agenda (**and so often the two are at odds!**)

d. Yet, now to even this group, Jesus makes it clear that all of this in keeping with the "Scriptures of the prophets" being fulfilled - this likely made no sense to them (and therefore no impact on them) for it would have seemed absurd that such an event would have been predicted in the sacred Scriptures - Mk. 14:49 it reads that Jesus said "let the Scriptures be fulfilled"

e. Seeing the Lord non-resistant to the mob, the disciples (all of them) fled - fear now gripped them, no longer trusting what Jesus had said as much as they were their own assessments of the "danger" of the situation to them - Zech. 13:7 was now "in action"

B. Jesus is brought to "trial" by the "self-righteous moralists" - vs. 57-68

1. Jesus will be brought before a few "judgments", this one being more the religious side where the truth will be put aside to fulfill an agenda to protect the religious system as it stood - the governmental judge would be motivated to "keep the peace" (a political motive founded in fear, not justice)

a. We need to watch for profound concepts as we study what takes place - for instance, God foreordained to use the injustice of sinners to justify sinners, by inflicting His righteous justice on our sins, upon Christ - what a process to justification!!

b. Rather than be confused by God's allowance of such actions, we should marvel at His perfectly precise usage of them for His purpose - this is needful so we never look upon the allowance or the apparent victory of "evil" as an effective thwarting of God's purposes

2. Jesus, having been "seized", was taken before Caiaphas, the High Priest

a. Matthew just records Jesus being before and questioned by Caiaphas, yet it first took place at Annas' house (he being the father-in-law of Caiaphas - John 18:13) - **it is interesting to note Jesus was brought before the High Priest when He Himself was the true High Priest (about to perform all aspects to completion of the High Priestly work!)**

b. The Scribes (who were recognized as scholars of the Scriptures and Law) and the "Elders" (the leaders of the people) were gathered to hear the "trial" (the questioning) - Per John's account in John 18, Jesus was questioned while at Annas' house first before moving to Caiaphas' house for the formal "hearing")

3. The pursuit of a case against Christ that would try to look legitimate - vs. 58-61

a. As Jesus was led into the initial questioning, Peter followed along "at a distance"

The practical outworking of II Cor. 5:21

These were the religious leaders (the High Priest being the top), so it would be expected that their judgment would be right and would have moral authority

- b. We learn in John 18:15-17 that another disciple also followed with Peter and, knowing someone in the High Priest's house (he was known to the High Priest) was able to get Peter into the courtyard to better see and hear what was happening
- c. We do not know what was going on inside Peter's mind, but he clearly circled back (probably because he realized he was not being pursued), and likely because he had been sincere in his statements to Jesus (that he would stand with Him) and was working his way back... only with great caution, to first see what was happening and how it would "end"
- d. It may have also been that Peter was curious to see what the Lord would do - there may have been some notion in his thinking that Christ would once again confound His enemies - regardless, Peter desired to know what was actually happening
- e. This initial grouping of the council were in the process of finding "false testimony" against Jesus - note that they already had a verdict in mind and were looking to find support in order to make it - many commentators remark on the absurdity of seeking out "false witnesses" yet it is plainly identified as such by Matthew (ψευδομαρτυρίαν, false witness)
- f. They had been able to "put-up with" Jesus for a short time, but His teaching, influence on the people, and their inability to trap Him with their best reasoned arguments, made Him a threat to their way of life, so they were emboldened to seek His death - "urgency" ruled the moment
- g. They were able to have many "false witnesses" come forward, offering their assistance to the cause, though when it states "they found none", the idea is that they could not find any that would stand the scrutiny of a court setting - until, at least, they had their "two" who agreed on a testimony that could at least be used
- h. It was about this point that Jesus was asked (according to John's account in John 18:19-24) regarding His disciples and His teaching - the response was one of openness, and that He never taught in secret, therefore they should be able to find some who had heard Him teach - this was likely what these chief priests and elders were now trying to do
- i. The two witnesses referenced what they said was His stated ability to destroy the Temple and then to rebuild it in three days - this was in reference to John 2:19 (though Jesus was not speaking of destroying "the Temple" and He was referencing His body, not the actual building)
- j. These witnesses agreed, but their agreement was inconsistent with the actual statement - there was a common belief that the Messiah would rebuild the Temple, which in context, makes sense the upcoming question by the High Priest regarding whether or not He was the Messiah

4. A verdict of blasphemy is reached - vs. 62-68

- a. As Mark points out in Mark 14:59 that even in this testimony, the witnesses "did not agree"
- b. Since such high value was placed upon the Temple, the High Priest likely expected some type of response, and became frustrated that Jesus kept silent
- c. The High Priests stands, essentially demanding an answer - he was seeking that Jesus treat this "court" with respect, yet this particular accusation/testimony deserved no answer, plus, Jesus was resigned to His destiny, offering no defense - see also Isa. 53:7
- d. Looking to force the issue (in light of Jesus' silence), the High Priest places Jesus under oath ("I adjure you by the Living God") to answer if He was actually "the Christ, the Son of God" - this apparently had not come up yet with the witnesses, but was core to the issue these religious leaders had against Him
- e. This question of Caiaphas was of greater significance than even he knew - here Jesus would most certainly need to deny such a statement if He was truly not these things - there may have been some opposition if He claimed just to be the Messiah, or even not much opposition if He claimed to be a son of God, but to have both together was perfect!
- f. The Lord's answer to him is interesting since Caiaphas' understanding of these titles together was likely misinformed, yet it was all true, and as such needed an answer
- g. Jesus replies, "You said it" (as in, it is as you said, or it may also include the idea, "you phrased it this way, not I" and therefore the point is being "forced") - there are questions "the opposition" will ask and do not really want the answer, and so will react to it
- h. In using two phrases which would be clearly understood in His answer, Jesus declares that not only what was stated true, but as a result of all that was taking place, He would thereafter be "sitting at the right hand of the Power" He would be their judge (roles reversed)

Peter is illustrative of how many who desire to follow-after and be associated with Christ, approach the situation - They want to wait and see, but not be too risky

As with so many who desire to keep some form of "religious" or spiritual appearance while accomplishing an unrighteous objective

Those in opposition to Christ, in our day, still do the same - they desire an approach that looks like one of integrity, but the verdict is already made and they only seek out "witnesses" that agree with their objective

That which is in opposition to Christ is always seeking out "witnesses" against Him - there is an innate fear of the Truth!

As with any that are looking to argue against the Lord, there will be frustration when things are not working out as they would wish - many of those in opposition to God and His Word try to control a scenario, so as to make sure the actual truth is not seen in a credible light

Jesus would answer in the affirmative and add even more clarity to it in His answer (validating the truth of it)

For if the answer is a certain way, it will be condemning to the questioners - this is at the heart of so many religious organizations avoiding "condemning" aspects of the Truth

It is very normal to live in the moment and base decisions off the apparent urgency (of that moment) with no real thought of the ultimate judgment - it would seem that the bulk of most decisions in this life are guilty of this!

There may have been relief on the part of the council, since not having credible witnesses and having a "sham" court, they now had something to work with - but a formal, authoritative verdict against God does not make it truth!

It is not unusual to realize that many to this day have their own defiant methods to prove (in varying degrees) that there is no God, or that Christ was no who He said He was

Such is likely of the heart of many who curse Jesus still and who sense the urgency to oppose Him and His truth with vicious mockery and violent behavior

- i. "One expects 'hereafter' rather than 'henceforth,' but the latter seems to mean that their condemnation led to His glory; there was not merely sequence, but consequence. He who now stands before their judgement-seat will then be seated on the clouds, invested with divine power, and ready to judge them." Plummer
- j. Christ here makes it clear that all this was as if an inauguration to such a position of power and ultimate judgement - He will "come in the clouds" (Mt. 24:30) and these that were at that moment in time condemning Him, would come before Him later, He condemning them
- k. He declares without reservation (in contrast to all the times previous He was wanting the truth of who He was concealed) that He is the Messiah and will be "**seated**" (His equality with the Father and His work being **completed**)
- l. Lest anyone think Christ was not declaring His divinity, notice the response of the High Priest - he likely knew the reference Jesus was making to Daniel 7:13-14, and why he then pronounced "blasphemy" on the part of Jesus - since they had their own, concocted idea of what the Messiah would be like, they were not remotely tempted to truly explore His claims - so it still is today; most have an idea of who and what God is supposed to be, and find it then **irrelevant** to search out and understand the Scriptures to what he declares of Himself
- m. The verdict "He **deserves** death" (since they did not have the authority to actually carry out a sentence of death, being under Roman authority) - in truth, **He was the only one that ever lived that did not deserve death**
- n. Immediately those holding Him and around Him began to spit in His face - this is one of the most detestable acts they could do! It demonstrates the utmost contempt - it may be that they justified themselves by doing these things (each particular action), to prove He was not the Christ (using their own methods of proof, for surely if He was who He said He was, none of these things would be **allowed**)
- o. The spitting in the face was to shame Him, and to demonstrate their spite for Him; the hitting Him with their fists, to show their power over Him, and the slapping Him (or possibly this was hitting Him with sticks) and that while He was blindfolded (Luke 22:63-65) to demonstrate that He could not foretell what was coming, and was not divine - it is still possible to spit and hit Him (figuratively) by how we **live**, think, and act in opposition to Him
- p. Note also that they charged Him with blasphemy for claiming to be the Christ, yet knowing the truth of the matter now, we know **they** actually were the blasphemers, being the ones to deny the actual Messiah - such blasphemy continues

C. Peter fulfills the prophecy of Christ, in his denial of association with the Lord - vs. 69-75

1. This text is often focused upon to just point out the failures of Peter, yet it is utilized further to show the gracious response of the Lord when Peter is set right again, even after such a display of unfaithfulness - Peter was not just forgiven, he was assigned **responsibility** (as all forgiveness should be expected to include with it)

*Even if we could imagine being able to change the account, we would not, for to do so would be to portray Christ in error - **He could prophesy**, but when it was the right time*

- a. This is the same one who was used to pen I Peter 1:5 - "who by God's power are guarded..."
- b. We ultimately learn by such an account, that it is the Lord's faithfulness that usurps our unfaithfulness, **making us faithful because of it**
- c. "It was his loyalty to Jesus, not his temporary repudiation of his leader, that showed the real Peter." Leon Morris

2. The first denial of Jesus - Diversion ("I do not know") - vs. 69-70

Denial does not have to be an outright, spoken lie; it can be avoiding something/someone - it can be an internally justified approach to avoid something we don't desire to face

- a. While sitting in the courtyard (warming himself, as in Mark 14:66-67)
- b. It was a servant girl, not an intimidating man, not a person of particular significance - this likely would not have been a scenario one would have expected a temptation to deny Christ
- c. Yet, Peter was motivated to lie and try to divert the conversation (avoiding the topic of his association with Jesus - he figured this was not a good place to do so (while Jesus was being tried, mocked and beaten by the crowd within))
- d. When spotted by this girl and confronted by her that he was "with Jesus the Galilean" he replied that he did not **understand** what she was saying (or getting at) - he was essentially "playing dumb" - in attempting this "dodge", it is speculated by some that he used different wording to add to the idea that he did not understand what was being said/asked
- e. Nevertheless, it was a lie (with motive to escape)

Feigning ignorance is a technique still used much when avoiding topics of discomfort - this is at the core of why so many don't want to actually learn much of the truth

3. The second denial - Defiance - "I do not know the man!" - vs. 71-72

- a. Once again Peter is confronted by a servant girl who now, rather than address Peter, speaks for everyone nearby to hear, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth"
- b. For the second time, the "accusation" was indicating (merely) his association with Jesus, not that he was a close follower - here is also an indicator of what the "fear of man" will motivate (one does not desire to be recognized as even peripherally associated with the Lord)
- c. He tries to lend his lie credence by including an "oath" (contradicting what Jesus had taught, in that if you are genuinely speaking the truth, do not make an oath)
- d. His usage of "the man" is a further attempt to distance himself (not even using His name) - oaths were typically made by invoking God as a witness - many lies utilize some association with "religion" trying to make it more believable

Oaths are seen as needed mainly because of the inclination to lie - endless oaths though - do not turn a lie into truth!

Think of the absurdity of calling upon God to support a lie - yet it is done by so many putting themselves forward as if at the height of godliness

4. The third denial - Damnation - "he began to curse and swear" - vs. 73-74

- a. Many take this as Peter using "bad" words, and it may have been close to that, but the core idea is that of pronouncing curses/condemnation on one's self if what is being said is untrue
- b. This is the origin of what we know as "cursing and swearing" today - it is associated with "bad" people, because there is no moral and righteous usage of such phrases and ideas - Peter tries to use it to further add a tone of "moral assurance" to what he said, while others, today, just use it to add a sense of weight or seriousness to their sentences
- c. "Lying led to swearing, and swearing to cursing; no one but the Lord knows how much further Peter would have fallen if he had not been divinely arrested in his sinful career. Many men heard the cock crow that morning; but to Peter it carried a solemn reminder of his Lord's prophetic warning." Spurgeon
- d. "Immediately, the rooster crowed" - his failure was complete and now the time had come for genuine repentance (not for forsaking, but for restoring - such is always God's purpose for those of His children when they falter)

The Lord had prayed for Peter, not that he would not fail, but then WHEN he failed, his faith would not fail, but that when he had "turned again" he would "strengthen your brothers" - failure will be a part of our lives, not for defeat, but for further growth (as a result of repentance)

5. Peter remembers and grieves - vs. 75

- a. The use of the word "remembered" makes it evident what happens during times of betrayal - forgetfulness (focus is diverted) changes priorities in a moment (which in this case lingered for a little while) - see II Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1
- b. He remembered what Jesus had said - that he would deny (disown/disregard) Jesus three times - Luke points out that this came back to him when Jesus looked at him (Lu. 22:61) - when we forget the gaze of the Lord upon us (never making "eye-contact" with Him), we are most likely to live in denial of Him
- c. Peter left where he was (likely hurriedly) and "wept bitterly" (ἔκλαυσεν - expressing uncontainable, audible grief, to sob) - such is a typical sign of the first step to repentance - we know it was not just regret, because it was accompanied by restoration (returning to where he had left off)

Dwell upon the details of the memories that are now more painful remembering how they contrast past commitment

See II Cor. 7:8-11 for an example of what "Godly sorrow looks like and its results

D. Jesus is brought before Pilate - 27:1-2

1. The religious and civil leaders of the people "took counsel" to put Him to death - vs. 1

- a. Having reached their judgment/conclusion in the night, these leaders of the people deliberated, yet not to see if they had a fair assessment of the facts, but for the purpose to have Him executed - they desired all the appearance of justice (seeing their verdict as right)
- b. Much is written about their evil intent, but it is highly likely they thought themselves just in what they were doing (even in their fear of the people) because they were fulfilling their take on the Law, and putting a "blasphemer" to death
- c. They had to strategize so as to come up with a verdict that could convince the Roman leadership that Jesus was guilty of a crime worthy of death

There are no doubts that there are many instances to this day where those standing against what is true and right see themselves courageous and justified in their actions - but personal morals do not define absolute righteousness - such is why our "convictions" need to be measured against God's Word

2. Jesus is "delivered" to Pilate - vs. 2

- a. He was "bound" as a criminal would be (not necessarily because He was a legitimate threat, for He offered no resistance) - it was likely the "visual" they desired as He came before Pilate
- b. Pilate was a "prefect" and history has it that he had been a military man placed in his position to keep order - as we will see, he was manipulatable, but could also be vicious (Luke 13:1)
- c. Part of their consultation against Jesus would have included the charge to bring before Pilate - we see if in Luke 23:1-5 - He was accused of "misleading the nation", "forbidding to pay taxes" and declaring Himself a King

d. This was the fulfillment of Mat. 20:19 - "... and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified..."

E. The end of Judas "the betrayer" - vs. 3-10

1. Judas has a change of mind, but not a true change of heart/character - vs. 3

Many will sorrow over their sin, but not after a "Godly sort" - II Cor. 7:9-10 - one leads to life, the other to death/self destruction

Judas regretted that things did not work out like he hoped/planned, while Peter regretted what he had become, and pursued a life of change

"Feeling sorry" is not enough; everyone feels sorry at some point in their life - it's what is done because of the sorrow, and with the sorrow that distinguishes the two

- a. When he realizes that Jesus has been condemned, he regrets what he has done (seeming to indicate he had not intended Him to be condemned and put to death)
- b. There is a key distinction between the "repentance" of Peter and that Judas - Peter regretted, grieved, and changed, while Judas regretted, grieved and killed himself (sorrow leading to despair versus sorrow leading to life alteration)
- c. Matthew still titles him "the betrayer" because it was still who he was - Peter was not called the "denier" because **it was not who/what he truly was** - the consistency of one's life over a long period of time, is more telling of true character than moments of poor judgment or disobedience - hypocrites find one of their greatest enemies to be time!
- d. Having "changed his mind," Judas sought to undo what he had done, versus seeking out forgiveness - there was nothing essentially wrong in what he did returning the money, but his despair over not being able to "take back" his action, proved his focus was one of selfishness and not selflessness
- e. So in an attempt to relieve his conscience, he returned the money he had been given

2. Judas confesses to the wrong people - vs. 4-5

There will be an endless amount of people encouraging us to sin, but when consequences occur and a change in life direction is sought, they will prove themselves for what they really are; deceivers

But when "religious" morals become subject to agendas rather than Truth, corruptions of all sorts are unleashed!

Such was the end of one in whom Satan had entered, who betrayed Christ, and grieved to despair and not true repentance

- a. Judas' confession could be literally worded "I sinned having handed over blood that was guiltless", now offering further testimony (from one who had been with Jesus for 3 years)
- b. To the Chief Priests and Elders (who now had time to get back to the Temple area) this was of no concern (as they essentially worded it) to them - their response "What is that to us?" was like saying, "What does that have to do with us?" (why should we be concerned?) saying "See to it yourself" ("It's your problem not ours") - many still fail to see their responsibility
- c. "So all wicked men who make use of the agency of others for the accomplishment of crime or the gratification of passion care little for the effect on the instrument." Barnes
- d. These are supposed to be the spiritual leaders, yet they blatantly disregard Judas' attempts at righting a wrong - it should have been "something" to them, for not only Judas' conscience sake, but for the possibility of condemning an innocent man
- e. Not desiring to keep the money (his guilt usurped his covetousness), he threw the coins and left the Temple area (and John Gill notes, "and went; out of the temple; not to God, nor to the throne of his grace, nor to his master, to ask pardon of him, but to some secret solitary place, to cherish his grief and black despair")
- f. This surrender to despair led him to hang himself - the account is referenced with further detail in Acts 1:18 (with the graphic details of him falling headlong and his "bowels gushed out") - it is commonly accepted that he hung himself over a cliff side, and that his method of hanging failed and he fell

3. The "moral dilemma" of the Chief Priests and Elders - vs. 6-10

They hypocrisy is on full display here! They maintain (before each other) their "high and holy standards", a method often employed by those looking to counter a potentially pricked conscience

In Acts 1:18 it indicates that Judas purchased it, though that is likely because the money would have been used in his name, since it would still be considered his money

- a. This is an astounding account to consider! These same men, who had just dismissed Judas' confession that Jesus was innocent, who had paid with money (likely from the treasury) for Judas to betray Jesus, now are concerned that the money is morally "tainted" and cannot be put back into the treasury (which is supposed to be used only for "holy" purposes)
- b. They scheme to an apparent "righteous" end - they use the money to purchase a field for the purpose to bury strangers - surely this would make-up for some of the evil they had done, and how this money had been used (they may have figured)
- c. We are not sure why it was called the "Potter's field", though it is guessed that it is likely a field that a potter had used and had no more use for it - as Matthew points out, up to the time he had written this account, it had a popular name of "Field of Blood" because its origin was known, and the hypocrisy of these leaders was also known
- d. Such attempts to use righteous acts to cover or distract from immoral motives, only heightens the disdain of onlookers, and legitimizes in their minds the untrustworthiness of "religious systems"
- e. Interestingly, Matthew points out that this also was a part of the prophecies regarding the Messiah, though this one would not have likely been seen as such

The "magnificent price" is an exaggeration, mocking how little value was ascribed to the shepherd (to get rid of Him)

As prophesied in Zechariah, so it was all done "as the Lord directed me" - there to demonstrate what would ultimately come, here what happened (as God willed it)

f. The text Matthew references is Zechariah 11:12-13, where an analogy/illustration is being worked out, and it reaches a point where the shepherd of flocks (that are set for the slaughter) is seeking wages from sheep traders, he receives 30 pieces of silver - this, the shepherd is told, to throw it to "the potter" - "Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.""

g. "In Zechariah the payment of thirty pieces of silver was made in order to get rid of Israel's shepherd. That same price was paid to get rid of Jesus who is Israel's shepherd. At such a miserable price the Jews valued Jesus and gladly paid to get rid of Him." Lenski

h. There is an apparent discrepancy in that Matthew names Jeremiah as the source for the prophecy, yet it clearly came from Zechariah - there are many explanations for this, two of which are (1). The Scriptures at that time were broken into major sections, and one had the name of Jeremiah and it included Zechariah's writings; thus the usage of "Jeremiah" (2). that Matthew's original manuscript simply said "the prophet" and did not actually name him (and so it was a copist error) - I lean toward the first

F. The intimidation of Pilate (the Governor) and the manipulated mob - vs. 11-26

1. The background for Pilate's question to Jesus "Are you the King of the Jews?" can be found in John's account in John 18:28-37 and Luke 23:2 - vs. 11-14

Just as so many agnostics strive to direct conversations away from absolutes and back into the realms of speculation (where they are most comfortable)

a. Jesus basically answers in the affirmative "as you say," but He describes what type of King He actually is, which posed no threat to Rome at that time

b. A key part of that dialog was in John 18:37, where Jesus ends His statement with "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" to which Pilate exclaims, "what is truth?" as if introducing and concluding with something that cannot be answered

c. So to Pilate He answer "you say" (it is as you say)

d. All the while He was being accused by the Chief Priests and Elders, yet He "made no answer"

e. This looks to have perplexed Pilate, and he is surprised that Jesus offers no defense - He in no way ever strikes a defensive posture before these "courts" - Jesus is the supreme example of leaving "Himself to Him who judges righteously" - see I Peter 2:23

f. As seen in John's account, Pilate found no fault in Jesus and publicly declared it - yet this would not stop the mob that was forming - **when self-righteousness becomes the dominating force, the truth of the matter is of little significance**

g. Jesus would again appear before Pilate (John 19:1-15) after being handed over to be beaten and scourged, but when again publicly declaring Jesus' innocence, the mob became more determined to have Him crucified - they wanted Him dead!

Jesus is innocent of all these accusations and (humanly speaking) it was to be the responsibility of these courts to work toward the truth

Evil needs power found in numbers for its force, while truth can stand alone... and still be standing - this was all supposed to happen, but this did not lessen the guilt of those who were used to bring it about

2. The choice of Jesus the Christ or Barabbas - vs. 15-26

Mankind seeks to be the universal standard of right and wrong, and prefers to have those "beneath" them so their self-righteousness is not threatened

a. This account demonstrates humanity's response to the actual Jesus when given a choice between Him and someone who is genuinely guilty of sin - even though this fact seems unreasonable, there is actually more to identify with in the "sinners" of this world than there is with the spotless Creator - His presence heightens **our** sense of guilt!

b. Pilate appears to be looking for a way to release Jesus, by playing off a custom that had been started where a prisoner is released on a feast day (of which this was the time of Passover)- he was likely looking to play-off of Jesus' popularity with the people, and pit it against the will of the Chief Priests and Elders

c. "... it shows the wisdom of the overruling providence of God, that he was condemned by a man who was satisfied of his innocence, and who proclaimed before his accusers his "full belief" that there was no fault in him." Barnes

d. Pilate makes the offer, Jesus or Barabbas, knowing the Jesus had been brought to him out of "envy" on the part of these religious leaders and elders - yet Pilate underestimated who he was up against with these men - they were determined, and clearly skilled at persuading the people to opt for crucifixion of Jesus and the release of one who actually was worthy of execution

e. This "envy" is also seen in our day when some resent and oppose Christ in the lives of others, when His influence over them is greater than theirs - Jesus is accepted in many circles as long as those among them don't get too serious about Him and what He taught

f. The wife of a heathen governor pleads for the release of Jesus - there is much tradition that records that she later became a Christian - her attempts are disregarded

Pilate offers up Barabbas as a contrasting offer- Barabbas being a notorious criminal also apparently guilty of murder- it would seem like an easy choice to free Jesus in contrast to such an evil man

Christ may be given a seat in churches but is often denied a throne

This was also further evidence that this was the working out of God's plan against what would seem to be basic sense and reason - Jesus was looked upon as innocent by all except these religious and civil Jewish leaders - God would use injustice to fulfill His work of Justification!

Many try to make the case that this was a different crowd altogether than the one that had celebrated His arrival days before - yet such speculation is unnecessary, realizing these had been "persuaded" (ἔπεισαν), convinced not only by these leaders, but by "popular demand" - such it is with even the best of humanity - we need not defend them

Fake "holiness" detests true holiness - such competition with Truth produces all sorts of violent responses when Truth will not back-down and won't go into hiding (and be submissive)

This was the Roman method of execution of its worst criminals

The crowd could offer no answer to Pilate's questions as what wrong Jesus had done

Blame shifting does not equate to justice.. ever

The first (with Judas) was leaving someone with a pricked conscience to themselves, while here it is leaving a decision with those without a conscience (or one grossly misinformed)

It was the Father that ultimately brought this about, and He was pleased with it (Isa. 53:10) because of its purpose

Barabbas was a known murderer as well (Luke 23:25)

- g. "...his was an honourable testimony to our Lord Jesus, witnessing for him that he was a just man, even then when he was persecuted as the worst of malefactors: when his friends were afraid to appear in defence of him, God made even those that were strangers and enemies, to speak in his favour; when Peter denied him, Judas confessed him; when the chief priests pronounced him guilty of death, Pilate declared he found no fault in him; when the women that loved him stood afar off, Pilate's wife, who knew little of him, showed a concern for him. Note, God will not leave himself without witnesses to the truth and equity of his cause, even when it seems to be most spitefully run down by its enemies, and most shamefully deserted by its friends." Matthew Henry
- h. Pilate's wife's use of "righteous man" (just one) reaffirms His innocence - all of this is key, not to demonstrate the evil of this trial, but to demonstrate Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God!
- i. While Pilate was being persuaded for Christ's release, the Chief Priests were "working the crowd" to persuade them to choose Barabbas instead of Jesus - we do not know what method or argument they used in influencing the growing crowd, but they did - they were being persuaded for a known criminal, and against one who had healed, comforted and taught countless people in their country
- j. Rather than act shocked at such a response (as though we all are "above" such a thing), we must remember our sins (willingly committed and often sought out with determination) demand His death - our **voluntary** actions are on par with this crowd!
- k. Not only were they persuaded to choose Barabbas, but to have Jesus "destroyed" (ἀπολέσωσιν - utterly done away with; destroyed completely)
- l. So, when Pilate "calls for a vote", the decision was the sinner over a Savior (though they did not realize the magnitude of the situation they were facing; such is still the normal response of mankind - spare the sin, destroy the Savior!)
- m. Pilate, it seems, was still looking to release Jesus and asks what is to be done with Him (calling Him "the Christ" (possibly looking to lend to His appeal)) - now, he clearly is crumbling under the pressure in leaving the sentencing to the "programmed" mob - this is another vivid reminder that numbers do not equate to "rightness"
- n. Matthew points out "they all said" (it was a unanimous crowd) to have Him crucified (Σταυρωθήτω (aorist imperative passive) to affix with driven spikes on a wooden cross)
- o. Likely surprised, Pilate asks "Why, what evil has He done?" - not dealing with "facts and truth", the crowd just shouts him down, demanding again that He be crucified - there appeared to be a bloodlust in the crowd, caught-up in the moment, desiring to see the man executed - the depravity of mankind was on full display, providing a stark contrast with the purity and innocence of the Lord
- p. Pilate washes his hands in front of the crowd, to disassociate himself from what they planned to do with Jesus (he found no fault in Him) - he was still just as guilty, since he had the power to free Him, but **he feared more the riot that was building rather than injustice** - in Luke 23:22 we learn that Pilate asked three times as to "why" and then offered to beat Him and let Him go
- q. It's interesting to see that Pilate uses the same words that the Chief Priests and Elders used with Judas, "See to it yourselves" (as in "you deal with it") - he was handing Him (knowingly) over to their will, and they acknowledged it as such, taking full responsibility - shifting responsibility does not defer guilt
- r. It is important to remember, though, as we review all aspects of the crucifixion, that it was for our guilt He endured this, so we cannot allow ourselves to shift blame to these participants, nor to develop a hatred of such (as some became anti-Semitic, using some of these texts to justify hatred of, and kill Jews)
- s. In an apparent attempt to make the final decision of Pilate easier, they openly accept the responsibility (the mob) by accepting guilt upon themselves and their children (such an act was intending punishment upon themselves if Jesus was truly innocent) - not long after this, all of Jerusalem fell in some of the most horrific ways recorded in history (multitudes of which were also crucified)
- t. Pilate released to them Barabbas (an exchange of an innocent man for a known criminal) - such is **the heart of man before God; evil is more to be tolerated than true holiness**

It is noted that many died as a result of the flogging, before going to the crucifixion - it is commonly believed that Pilate did this to try to appeal to some sympathy in the people, and that they would settle for it

It is the ultimate in futility to fight against God! There can be NO victory against Him, even in the slightest! In their apparent victory, they were setting Him up for the greatest victory of all time

- u. Jesus was “scourged” (flogged with a whip unique to the Romans, characterized by multiple leather strands and likely had metallic balls near the ends of the strands, and sharp objects imbedded in them also) - the design was to tear through the flesh (even to the bone), to inflict incredible pain and damage - Matthew simplifies this to just one word (the attention is not to be focused upon the physical agony, realizing the true agony was the bearing of our sin and receiving the wrath of God upon Himself)
- v. John describes more of what went on during this time in John 19:1-16 - much of this involved mockery and the apparent demonstration that He was no threat - being severely beaten and publicly humbled was not enough for the leaders of the people - so the enemies of Christ desired what they saw to be the ultimate end (death), not realizing He would conquer even that - read also Isaiah 53:3-10
- w. Jesus was handed over to be crucified - and so the final part of the sacrifice begins

G. Jesus is crucified - vs. 27-56

1. Jesus is mercilessly mocked - vs. 27-31

They were going to mock Him (after the scourging), playing off the idea of Him being the King of the Jews (which He actually was, and more) - mocking the Truth does not negate it

And such mockery continues, where the godless setup their own scenarios of proof that they are smarter and more powerful than God

And such humility we all deserve and more, yet even this (which sin deserves) was willingly borne for us!

It is profound to remember at this pint that these were those included in Jesus request for forgiveness (Luke 23:34)- most would be filled with endless hate and the pursuit of revenge

- a. As had been prophesied, Jesus was handed over to the Gentiles (Mt. 20:19) to be flogged and mocked and crucified (yet with the purpose “to be raised the third day”)
- b. Jesus is taken into the “palace” or judgment hall where He is surrounded by the “whole Roman cohort” (which could have been up to hundreds), where they stripped Him and placed a scarlet robe on Him (and he also had a reed placed in His right hand); to finish their mocking stage, they weaved a crown out of thorns and put it on His head
- c. The objective was to shame Him as much as they could, making Him look ridiculous in front of them and anyone else that might see Him - such, as it did with the Sanhedrin mockers, lend to their “proof” that He could not be who He said He was, for who would take such mocking and beatings?
- d. They played through their “fun” by kneeling before Him, calling out “Hail, King of the Jews!” (again, not knowing that their words were correct) - as naysayers to this day will often declare the Truth, but do so in mocking terms (as though that nullifies it)
- e. Here they staged a naked man with a faux royal robe, a thorny crown, a reed for a scepter and “subjects” made-up of antagonists
- f. As they mock, their cruelty intensifies and they begin to spit on Him (demonstrating their utter disgust for Him and their superiority to Him); they take the reed (stick) from His hand and beat Him over the head with it (taunting Him and driving in the thorns deeper into His head and scalp) - the vicious treatment was immense!
- g. Having finished their mocking, they took the robe off and put His clothes on Him again so they could lead Him off to be crucified - there is no mention that they removed the crown of thorns

2. Jesus is crucified, having been led out of the city to a place called Golgotha - vs. 32-44

It is likely that Jesus was unable to bear it, a result of the overwhelming fatigue and the beatings

This would have been a place of horror to onlookers (as it was meant to be a graphic visual that would deter crime)

To the observer in their time, this would have been a grotesque scene, yet to we who know its purpose and what was accomplished, it is very precious

Those crucified were usually naked, so all that they had left was even taken

- a. As they began the final journey to the place of execution, it was common for the criminal to bear his own cross to the end (and John points out that this is how it started (John 19:17)), but a man called Simon (from an area known as Cyrene) was forced to carry the cross for Jesus (or possibly to have borne it with Him) - Mark 15:21 mentions Simon’s sons (the second “Rufus” could possibly be the one Paul references in Romans 16:13)
- b. They arrive at “the place of the skull”, which would have been a common place for crucifixions, and likely had the remnants of other executions, and was a dreadful place to see and smell
- c. This was “outside the city”, a concept the writer of Hebrews uses and challenges all that are associated with Him to also join Him - Heb. 13:11-15
- d. When they arrived, Jesus is offered a wine mixture which is believed to have been for the purpose to deaden the senses, to make the agony a little less worse - Jesus refuses it, not seeking any relief at all from what is coming - **He would take ALL OF IT!** (the suffering)
- e. Again Matthew simplifies the terms and just speaks of Him being “crucified” (which entailed being tied and nailed to a cross, and raised up for public display to slowly die)
- f. “But now in the same place where criminals were sacrificed to the justice of the government, was our Lord Jesus sacrificed to the justice of God.” MH
- g. As was customary, the executioners divided His clothing among themselves, and as John (19:23-24) points out, they “cast lots” for His “tunic” (outer garment) because it was seamless

"He is pronounced the true Messiah, even by those who reject him." Geneva Bible Notes

The underlying word for "despised" clearly indicates a looking down upon something, in comparison to something much greater

see also Gal. 3:13

This is illustrative of all sinners, in that they participate in the derision of others, sensing themselves superior

Compare this to 1 Peter 2:22-24

One way to be like Satan is to put the Lord to tests of our own making, based upon speculation of His authenticity - He can and is proven, but on His terms (being more convincing than anything our imagination could dream-up)

"...acting like silly children who love to guy one another. These grave and reverend seniors had already given vent to their glee at the condemnation of Jesus by themselves." RWP

It is interesting to discover that we actually do not know what it would take us to actually "believe" - yet how often or "proofs" leave us with doubt

It is risky (to say the least) to declare what God desires and doesn't desire without God actually declaring it

Man deals with their innate knowledge of God by making one (a "god") to serve them

see Luke's account where one of the thieves later repents - Luke 23:39-43

All types of people, morals and social standings were united against the Lord

- h. The KJV includes the statement that this was the fulfillment of a statement in Psalm 22:18, which is a true statement, but there is very little manuscript evidence that this was in Matthew's original Gospel (it is clearly stated though in John 19:24)
- i. The inscription (of what He was accused), "This is Jesus, King of the Jews" - once more an indirect validation of who/what He was, "... Pilate, instead of accusing Christ as a Criminal, proclaimed him a King, and that three times, in three inscriptions. Thus God makes men to serve his purposes, quite beyond their own." MH
- j. Before continuing, it is key to point out an interesting phrase the writer of Hebrews used of Christ as He faced the whole process of the crucifixion: in Heb. 12:2 we read that Jesus "...endured the cross, despising the shame..." and this because of the "joy set before Him" - to "despise the shame" is a phrase that pictures someone so "above" something else, they "despise" (belittle, think little of) it
- k. Jesus was crucified between two thieves as foreshadowed in Isaiah 53:12 being "numbered with transgressors" "framed" as such by his enemies - little did they know that His position was accurate before God **since He was bearing our sins**, and so the guilt and punishment of it
- l. Three "groups" deride/mock Jesus in His agony - those who "passed by" (casual observers), the religious leaders and then even the two criminals crucified with Him - these have been called "ignorant sinners, religious sinners and condemned sinners" - all three groups are still sinners no matter how they divide and define themselves, they were united against the Lord
- m. Those "passing by" derided Him based upon what they had apparently just heard (offering commentary which proved to be an expounding upon their own ignorance) - they "wagged their heads" as some gesture of disdain (as seen in Psalm 22:7) - the sorry state before them they figured deserved their visual contempt
- n. Just repeating what they heard others say, they mock Him as if He had said He would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, and yet (they note), He cannot save Himself - having also heard of His claim to be "the Son of God" they put Him to the same test that Satan did in Mat. 4 "If you are the Son of God then..." - their "test" of authenticity was for Him to come down from the cross
- o. The religious leaders, not subscribing in any way to His claim to be "the Son of God", point out what He had actually done (saved others), yet is unable (by their discernment) to save Himself - yet they had already witnessed profound miracles (even resurrections) and would not believe - this shows the nature of the self-righteous, in that they will envision scenarios that would impress them (yet actually would not, because they do not "fit-in" with their self-promoting agendas) - they develop requirements that will never be met to comfort them in their stance
- p. "...their outlook was wrong. They said they would have believed He was the Son of God had He come down from the cross. We believe He was the Son of God because He stayed up." Morris
- q. They go blasphemously further when they invoke God in their mocking - they rightfully point out His trust in God (which He exemplified) only to belittle the concept by pointing out that God was not delivering Him (as though their take on what God should do was definitive proof that His trust was useless - they conclude God does not "take pleasure" (desire) Him - after all (they say), He said He was the Son of God (being clueless to what the Son came to do for the Father)
- r. The majority of religions create a God of their own making, keeping such a "god" subject to their emotional and philosophical whims/variations
- s. Then even the thieves mocked him - even condemned sinners are proud and stubborn to some degree - it may be that they (even facing death) were crowd followers to the end, or that they were bitter that He would not do what many thought He could/should do - they would be saved from their crosses but not from their sin! (as sinners typically desire freedom from consequences but not from their "freedom" to do as they like)
- t. These were throwing the "same insults" at Him - What a scene! A crucified man, suffering agony (which would normally provoke some pity or at least ease), yet only stirs their bitter hatred of Him to astronomical heights - they "make fun" of Him even when their apparently victory is being realized
- u. The scene now grows quiet as His death approaches, for now the worst of it all was about to come upon Him as He would endure God's wrath (which infinitely surpassed all that had occurred)

3. Jesus is forsaken, facing the wrath of God, facing the utmost of "deaths"- vs. 45-50

Darkness is often associated with judgement, though we ought not assume this to be judgment on those crucifying Jesus

There had to be a separation of some sort in the dealing with sin, and this, being the most unimaginable!

All attempts to explain how this could have happened in the triune Godhead would be futile - we know that somehow it happened and that it was dreaded beforehand in Gethsemane (the "cup"), and now excruciating when faced

This was not His divinity leaving Him, for this would be to take God out of part of the redemptive work and would be to cause it to come short of it's full, eternal completeness

The relief Jesus' enemies had at His death was short lived if they had any at all - we know they were worried of His claims to resurrection and the possibility of His body being stolen - here they may have still had a touch of doubt that Elijah just might show-up - the wicked can never escape all doubt!

This one Greek word in this context is the height of profundity! The completeness of our salvation comes down to this one word!

The agonizing moments of separation were now complete- what had to be paid for our sin was done, a price no other could even begin to truly consider they could pay it!

Compare to Hebrews 10:19-25 (Jesus now being the "curtain" by which we now enter the "holy places")

see also Eph. 2:11-22 He "... has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, and God and man by "...abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances..." (ESV)

- a. Matthew's focus now leads us to a change in the scenery - darkness comes "over all the land" for a three hour period - some attempt to make a case for an eclipse or some other natural phenomena, but it is best to leave this as supernatural, and some evidence of judgment looming
- b. We can be confident that this is God's judgement being expressed/pictured because of the following verse - it might seem normal to assume this was a sign of God's wrath with those crucifying Jesus, but it is Jesus Himself that expresses what was taking place
- c. We come upon one of the most difficult passages to comprehend (not because it is unclear, but because of what is clearly communicated) - we need not be able to explain how Jesus was forsaken, but we know He was, and at a key point
- d. If we were going to try to place a point as to precisely when "He who knew no sin became sin for us" (from II Cor. 5:21), this would be the place - up to this point, throughout the life of Jesus, He addressed God as "Father" and now (as expressed in Psalm 22:1) He refers to Him as "My God" and reveals Himself as "forsaken"
- e. The word for forsaken (σαβαχθάνι/ἐγκατέλιπες) clearly communicates an abandoning, leaving alone - having our sins upon Himself, He had to be truly forsaken, separated from God (separation being the core idea of what death actually is) for this was what righteous/holy judgement demanded, and we do not want to take anything away from it trying to better fit our ideas of how it should have been done or that it would be somehow "extreme"
- f. No one could ever experience this full sense of lonely abandonment! The pains of the eternal Lake of Fire will be those of despair, but a despair rightly earned and just - here was the eternal Godhead facing a departure of sorts (one person from another) which had never happened before, **and will never happen again**
- g. We will at times in life be abandoned and sense loneliness, but being "in Christ", we will never truly be alone and cannot be forsaken! (see Heb. 13:5; Mt. 28:20)
- h. Some of the bystanders thought that He was calling out for Elijah - Elijah was looked upon by many as one who would at some time come to help Israel, so some either mockingly or sincerely waited to see if Elijah would come to His aid
- i. Harmonizing this with John's account, it was also around this time that He said "I thirst" (John 19:28) - Matthew records that someone at this point ran to get Him a drink using a sponge - this looks to have been an act of some type of mercy while others (likely the religious rulers (who were more likely to know Elijah than the Romans)) waited for His death
- j. It is at this point that Jesus "yielded up His spirit" - we read in John's and Luke's accounts that Jesus declared just before this "It is finished"(John 19:30, the word being "Τετέλεστα" (perfect indicative middle, the tense of something done in the present with lasting results (never to need to be finished again!))
- k. When consulting Luke's account of this moment (Luke 23:46), we once again see Jesus addressing God as His father - **His physical death now being fully welcomed and embraced** - we can only imagine the fullness of joy at this very moment, embracing now the handing off of His spirit into the hands of His loving Father - here He "breathed His last" (Mk. 15:39)
- l. Looks at His accomplishment! - Heb. 10:1-14, Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 2:14-16; Rom. 5:1-10

4. Signs of Christ's great victory - vs. 51-54

- a. These successive signs/miracles demonstrate the start of a new era (from that moment on)
- b. The "curtain of the Temple" was torn into two parts, from the top to the bottom - this is in reference to the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the "Holy of Holies" which was entered only once a year by the High Priest - at that very moment access to the Father was no longer tied to the Temple or the High Priest, but was through Christ alone - see Heb. 9:6-12
- c. We see the resurrection of many "saints who had fallen asleep" rising as the earthquake came (the earth being shaken and rocks being split) - these would have been still considered to be "Old Testament saints" by us, demonstrating that Christ's death/sacrifice was their salvation and resurrection to new life as well as it is ours
- d. This was a resurrection (evidence of victory over death) and was witnessed by many who saw them in the "Holy City" - we are not told who these were nor what happened later to them, but it is interesting to speculate they might have been some who had testified of Jesus (e.g. John the Baptist, or maybe even Old Testament prophets who had been killed)

It is probable that he and his soldiers heard what Jesus had been accused of, and seem to have reached a conclusion that He was of great significance - if it was obvious to him, by what he observed, think of the degree of resistance to reality on the part of the religious leaders!

There are also a likely majority who are characterized by what is described in Rom. 1:18 as those who "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" - they can see the truth, but because of their self-will, hold it down

It is not likely that they were far away because of fear, but more likely because they were not allowed to come forward, or that their modesty kept them back from such a graphic scene

There are no "small" services for the Lord, as this helps demonstrate!

- e. The centurion and those with him (under his command, and who were (highly likely) part of the "cohort" that mocked Jesus), is "exceedingly afraid," having witnessed what he had, and concludes openly that he was sure that this was "a son of God" (or "God's son", since there is no Greek article before "God" or "Son").
- f. "Petronius is the name given this centurion by tradition. If he was won now to trust in Christ, he came as a pagan and, like the robber who believed, was saved as Jesus hung upon the Cross. All who are ever saved in truth are saved because of the death of Jesus on the Cross. So the Cross began to do its work at once." RWP
- g. Based on the way Matthew puts it, it looks to be that they all agreed with this conclusion and may be the reason others (like Luke) declare answers such as "truly, this was a righteous man"
- h. Many saw the same things these did, yet did not come to Christ (spiritually), demonstrating again that one is not saved by means of seeing miracles - the message is what is utilized by the Holy Spirit (miracles and the meeting of practical needs by Jesus were used to get a hearing)

5. Faithful friends to the end - vs. 55-56

- a. Matthew ends this section with the reference to the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee (quite a distance) and had witnessed all these things from "afar" - these were the ones who had taken on the task of meeting His basic/practical needs (διακονοῦσαι, "to wait tables", "serving", literally one who "kicks up the dust" as they go to meet a need)
- b. One of the women was Mary Magdalene, who had begun following Jesus after having seven demons cast out of her (Luke 8:2) - such were as faithful as they could be - in a sense, they were some of those who stood with Him last and were first to the tomb the morning of the resurrection (still with the purpose to minister to Him as much as they could) - such attention to seemingly "small" things placed them in a position of one of the highest privileges one could ever have... being first to know of His resurrection

XXXX. The Resurrection and "Great Commission" - 27:57-28:1-20

A. The unique aspects of Christ's burial - vs. 57-66

1. As evening approached (after 3:00 PM), we are told of a "rich man" who came for Jesus' body - vs. 57-58

His wealth did not distract his focus as it so often does (as the Lord mentioned in Mt. 19:24) - his preference was for what was coming and not for the "now"

Even to the fearful followers, God provides opportunity to grow out of it

It was common for crucified people to last for much longer than this, even days

See John 19:31-37 for another confirmation of Jesus's death and prophecies fulfilled

- a. Joseph of Arimathea is described in Luke 23:50 as "... was a member of the council, a good and righteous man..." and that he had not consented with the rest of the council to have Jesus crucified/condemned - he is also described in Mark 15:43 as one who was waiting for the kingdom of God - he was characterized as one who lived his life in light of the coming kingdom (which would lend to his being a "righteous man")
- b. He was also identified as a "disciple of Jesus" (one who looked to Him for learning), though it is likely he had been a secret follower "for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38) - such fear was apparently weakening, since he now was acting in defiance to the will of the council
- c. He approaches Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus (as it was likely, because of the circumstances and the swiftness of it all, no plans had been made) - when he asks, Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead (Mk. 15:44-45 - Pilate asked "the Centurion" if it was true (possibly the same one that had been at the cross))

2. Joseph (and Nicodemus (Jn. 19:39) who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes) took the body of Jesus off the cross (Luke 23:53) and wrapped it in new linen - imagine what it was like for these who removed Jesus lifeless body from the cross and quickly prepared it for burial - vs. 59-61

The fact that Joseph was "rich" and had a new tomb is in perfect harmony with Isaiah 53:9, in that He was as if wicked, and to die and be buried as such, yet was somehow going to be "with the rich" in His death

Matthew is making it clear the evidences of His resurrection

- a. They would still not have known the magnitude of the significance of what had happened
- b. Here were (in contrast to His "open" disciples), two "disciples in hiding" now taking on such a responsibility - also, "We must remember that this act of Joseph and his friends was not only a bold proceeding, but an act of great self-denial. Contact with a corpse caused ceremonial defilement of seven days' duration, and thus they would be debarred from taking their part in the great Paschal solemnity, with its solemn and joyful observances." - Pulpit Commentary
- c. Joseph and Nicodemus laid the body of Jesus in Joseph's new tomb that had been "hewn out of the rock" - there would have been no other entrances into the tomb other than the front one (adding to the impossibility of Christ's body being stolen through another way)
- d. After the wrapped body had been laid in the tomb along with the spices (about 75 lbs. according to John 19:39), a large stone was rolled into place to close the tomb

Mary, Jesus' mother had likely been taken home with John (per some of the last words of Jesus on the cross - John 19:26-27)

- e. Matthew points out that amongst this, two "Mary's" sat opposite the tomb watching what was taking place - so at the burial of the Son of God, we see four present, and that without ceremony and other formalities, as the process had to be rushed

3. Securing and setting a guard over the tomb - vs. 62-66

These did not necessarily fear His actual resurrection (at this time), but feared that the impression could still be made that Jesus had risen - the ungodly are full of uneasiness, and typically do not fear what they should, and not as much as they should!

Unbelievers usually know that believers should actually believe! They often place stock in the doubts of those who claim to follow Christ

The reality (and thus the message of it) proved to be an unstoppable message

Read I Cor. 15:1-8 for others Paul lists that the Resurrected Christ appeared to

And such illustrates the futility of working to hold back the work/Word of God (no matter the seeming advantage one has against it, or the "quality" of those joining in the "cause" against God's will)

"... they overreached themselves and provided additional witness to the fact of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus." Plummer

- a. The "next day" would now be into the time of the Sabbath day, if Jesus was crucified on Friday before 6:00 PM (since the Jewish next day would have begun at 6:00 in the evening)- it was during this time of what was to be rest (and a day set aside to honor God), the Chief Priests and Pharisees gathered (it was a formal gathering of sorts with a group of them), coming to appeal to Pilate again
- b. These actual deceivers (having been working on their own conspiracy) begin by addressing Pilate as "Sir" (though had proven already they did not truly respect him), and share their recollection of the "deceiver" (imposter), and that He claimed (while still alive) that He would rise again - the enemies of Christ remembered this while His followers had lost track - it is not uncommon for the ungodly to know that there should be lofty expectations of Christ, while His followers are often sadly tempted to lower their expectations
- c. This also demonstrates one of the key tactics of deceivers... call those who are of the Truth "deceivers" - liars love to call others liars to supposedly lend to their credibility
- d. These religious leaders knew that if the idea of a resurrection of Jesus became credible, they would have an even bigger challenge to deal with (than that of Jesus being considered to be the Messiah)
- e. More than just the account and evidence of the resurrection lent to this - the disciples (who were still (after the fact) accused of stealing the body away), still went to their own executions for this truth, and countless others who saw Jesus after He was resurrected, and others who believed without seeing
- f. Pilate grants them their wish for a Roman guard, and instructs them to "make it as secure as they can" (or as much as they know to do) - they left Pilate and with the guards, made the grave "secure" and sealed it together with them (which likely involved a method to demonstrate whether or not the grave opening had been tampered with)
- g. "Everywhere deceit recoils upon itself, and against its will supports the truth. It was necessary for it to be believed that he died, and that he rose again, and that he was buried, and all these things are brought to pass by his enemies .. The proof of his resurrection has become incontrovertible by what ye [his enemies] have put forward. For because it was sealed, there was no unfair dealing. But if there was no unfair dealing, and the sepulchre was found empty, it is manifest that he is risen, plainly and incontrovertibly. Seest thou how even against their will they contend for the proof of the truth?" Chrysostom
- h. The enemies of Christ had now provided more "credible witnesses" to the coming resurrection of Christ in their attempts to put an end to the work of Jesus

B. The resurrection of Jesus, the Lord Christ (conqueror of sin and so also, death) - 28:1-10

1. Two women, an earthquake, an angel, a stone removed, and an empty tomb - vs. 1-6

We get to three days by realizing the first day was the last part of Friday (3 PM to 6 PM), then Saturday (which was 6 PM on what we call Friday night till 6 PM Saturday night), and then Sunday, which is from 6 PM on Saturday night until Sunday morning at sunrise

"God can, by one and the same means, comfort his servants, and terrify his enemies. The resurrection of Christ is a subject of terror to the servants of sin, and a subject of consolation to the sons of God; because it is a proof of the resurrection of both, the one to shame and everlasting contempt - the other to eternal glory and joy." Clarke

- a. "After the Sabbath" and "dawn of the first day of the week" clearly places the timing of this event at Sunday morning
- b. The scene begins with the same "two Marys" mentioned in 27:61 who now returned with spices (as we read in the other Gospels) to anoint the body of Jesus (with no apparent expectation of His resurrection) - In Mark's account (read Mk. 16:1-4) they were concerned about the large stone they had seen be used to close-up the tomb entrance
- c. Either before they arrived, or as they were arriving, an earthquake occurred, caused by an angel of the Lord coming and rolling back the large stone that had been used to seal the tomb - after it was moved aside, the angel used it as a seat - Luke and John point out that there were a total of two (Luke describing them like men and John as angels)
- d. The stone was not removed to let the Lord out of the tomb, but more to allow the women (and others) to see and go in to see the absence of a body
- e. The appearance of the angel is described as being "like lightning" and his clothing as white as snow - he was without doubt extremely bright in his appearance
- f. For the Roman guards, this was a terrifying event - "for fear of him the guards became like dead men", or in other words, they were paralyzed by their fear, so afraid they could not move

In Luke's account, the angels ask "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" This is followed by their announcing His resurrection and a reminder of how Jesus had told them of this (Luke 24:1-12)

see also the account in John 20:1-10 - in John 20:2, Mary Magdalene told the disciples that the Lord had been taken - either she was still trying to collect her thoughts, or possibly she had not heard the entire message (maybe in fear?)

He would appear to them in Jerusalem, but He was going to meet with them at length (and many more (1 Cor. 15:6)) in Galilee (as He had told them before His death (Mt. 26:32))

As our knowledge of Him grows (and so our relationship with Him), so our anticipation of seeing Him also grows! - see also 1 John 3:1-3

Read also John 16:16-22 ("... but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.")

Fear and joy describe well the "feelings" we should have with our responsibilities - joy for the opportunity and fear/reverence in carrying it out

Jesus does not stop their worship (fully accepting it before then sending them on to share the news)

Jesus could have just delivered the message Himself - but clearly, it was and is God's "method" to use us - this is an honor more than an obligation!

In John 20:17, we see Jesus also instructing Mary Magdalene to say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." - not only was God God to them, but He was truly Father also

- g. The women were addressed by the angel - the angel is described as having "rolled back the stone" and then he sat on it - it must have been that the angel then directed them into the tomb as in Mark's account (Mark 16), where the angel is seen by the women inside the tomb and encouraged to look to see that Jesus' body was no longer there
- h. There is a calmness in the process of these angels - there is a sitting on a stone that had just been toppled (likely very large and that had been sealing the tomb) - then they must have ushered the women at some point into the tomb to inspect it
- i. We should note that it was these women that had followed Christ through His ministry, were at His crucifixion, and then were at His burial - now, having still faithfully returned to minister to Him (His body), they are the first to learn of His resurrection, and have angels sent for them to deliver the message - they were faithful, and it was rewarded with one of the greatest privileges one could imagine; the honor to be the ones who got to share the Good News first!
- j. We also see in John's account that the disciples did not believe it at first, so John and Peter ran to go see for themselves
- k. The angel told the women simply that "He has risen, as He said" - they were invited to see where His body had been laid - **He was not to be looked for among the dead any more!**

2. A message assigned and a message confirmed! - vs. 7-10

- a. This was a remarkable turn of events for these women - they came to mourn again their Lord and friend, only to discover He had risen - they are instructed to quickly go and tell the disciples He was risen - plus, it was more than just the good news, it was also instruction of "His going before you into Galilee" (He was going to meet them there - celebration with responsibility)
- b. The profound words "There you will see Him" must have been overwhelming to realize! This would not just be hearsay, they would experience it - so it is in many ways with us; we do not just learn of Christ, His history and teaching as we learn of Him; instead we come to know Him and witness for ourselves the source of Truth He actually is!
- c. "ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν" (see/look, told you have been) - there is partly an idea of "pay attention to what you have been told!" - this was not to be just an experience; there was to be focus, remembering, and **faithful** communication of the message
- d. Their response is one of mixed feelings - they are afraid and joyful at the same time - "If we find it difficult to assess the emotions of these humble Galilean women, we must remember that faith in the resurrection of the body of the incarnate Son of God Who had promised so much in His life and who had now appeared to them as totally capable of delivering on every promise that He made, is the only source of the delight which now filled their souls and lent speed to their heels." Yeager
- e. It is an interesting combination of words; "fear and great joy" - they were awe struck, afraid, and full of joy - their "fear" could have been based on just the experience with the angel and all that had happened so quickly, or it could have been the seriousness of the instruction they were given - the reality of the situation produced excessive gladness
- f. On their way Jesus, met these women - Matthew begins this sentence with "καὶ ἰδοὺ" ("And look!)", there was Jesus! - Knowing their fear, He greets them with a greeting that is more than "Hello", but has more the idea of "Good cheer!", followed by their falling down and grasping His feet and worshipping Him
- g. To fall prostrate before someone was not uncommon, but this was no formality! - This was a sincere falling down before Him - we likely cannot think of a person we would do such before, but **surely we can anticipate such a posture before our Lord!**
- h. His command to them was not to be afraid - this is the second time in a short period they were told not to fear - they sensed the significance of the Lord and what had happened, but such reverence is never to be overwhelming or even defeating to us in our "lowly state" - it is to be humbling and inspirational that we GET to participate in any way possible!
- i. He also utters the precious words, "Go tell my brothers" - there was no rejection of those that had rejected Him - He was revealing their true status because of His work... they were brothers!
- j. They were to go to Galilee "... and there they will see me." - the time coming would be likely the most precious times they would have this side of eternity - from there they would begin to live out all that Jesus had described to them beginning in John 14

And this brotherhood was made possible through Adoption which was made doable through the work of Christ on our behalf - we have relationships closer to Him than any that could ever be had naturally on Earth

- k. Martin Luther, writing of the reality of being a “brother” of Christ wrote, “If, now, Christ is our brother, I should like to know what we still lack? Brethren in the flesh have common possessions, have together one father, one inheritance, otherwise they would not be brethren; so we have common possessions with Christ and have together one Father and one inheritance which does not grow less when divided, but whoever has one part of the spiritual inheritance has it all.” - compare the relationship to the Father also in Psa. 103:8-13

C. The attempt to “cover-up” the resurrection - vs. 11-15

1. Notice the stark contrasts; as His followers rush to spread the word of His resurrection, the enemies of God rush to conceal it and discount it with boldface lies - vs. 11-14

Notice true belief/faith/trust in Christ is not founded upon “proofs” and having enough “evidence” - even with these credible witnesses, these Chief Priests and Elders did all they could to suppress the truth (for their own self-serving purposes) just as we still see today

- a. At the same time the women were heading to tell the disciples, the Roman guard was heading into the city to tell the Chief Priests what had happened
b. These had witnessed what had actually happened and conveyed it - the women truly believed (trusted) while these were still unconvinced (seeing they could be bribed away from the truth)
c. The religious leaders and civil leaders of the Jewish people had set up the guard themselves, which would have been the most credible witnesses of all! Yet they do not yield to the facts brought before them - they are committed to their opposition to Jesus and all He taught and stood for - blatant facts (reality) would not deter them from their goal to stop this “movement”
d. The statement they were to give had several issues, but it was the best these “learned men” could come up with in the moment - if the entire Roman guard was asleep (which was far from normal belief), how were they to know what had happened, being asleep?

And when absurdity becomes the accepted norm, truth is looked on as what is “absurd”

- e. Yet, we learn that when the truth is unacceptable, even absurd answers/conclusions will be mutually accepted and agreed upon by the opposition

To the “natural man” money/profit/temporal security and comfort will always overpower the Truth

- f. To protect the lie there had to be a guarantee of protection to the liars - these leaders promise that if the news of this reaches Pilate’s ears, they would relieve them of worry (keep them out of any trouble) - lies always have costs to maintain
g. So the guard is paid a “large sum of money” - even overwhelming experiences with the Truth can be redirected with enough money (for money, the perceived power of what it can do and the independence/freedom it could bring, **becomes more useful than Truth**)

2. The lie becomes the common, acceptable answer “among the Jews” - vs. 15

Even false accounts and lies can become traditions, past on to generations - the truth of the matter must be sought by each, individually

- a. Having now the incentive of money and security from the failure of their duty, these Roman guards go and do just as they were instructed to do - yet even though it received widespread support (or at least widespread propagation), we see in Acts 2:42, shortly after all this, “about 3,000 souls” were convinced and became followers of Christ
b. Matthew notes that the story of the guards (as given them by the Chief Priests and Elders) was “widely spread among Jews” and was still so to the time this Gospel was written

D. Now “go and make disciples of all nations” - vs. 16-20

1. The eleven disciples did as they were directed and went to meet Jesus in Galilee - vs. 16-17

As discussed earlier in this study, God does not necessarily make the seeing and learning of the Truth “easy” or convenient - those that desired to hear John the Baptist had to go into the wilderness

- a. This would have been a journey for them, but it would be here they (and many more - I Cor. 15:6) would see and meet with Jesus
b. When see Jesus there were two responses - the first was to worship Him (to prostrate one’s self before Him in honor and obedience, as an outward acknowledgment of His deity), while the other response was one of hesitation (the word being “ἐδίστασαν” which pictures a wavering between two thoughts/conclusions) - these were not as certain at first (as so often is the case with those that come to Christ; they waver/doubt but become more convinced over time - this is not faithlessness; it is quite often the process of conversion)
c. It is always important to remember that faith isn’t necessarily the absence of all doubt; it is the trust to get past the immense (initial) doubt, and move on ahead anyway
d. It is also likely that some of the “hesitation” was associated with not knowing what would come next - they had not expected His death, nor His resurrection, so their doubt was likely associated also with their lack of trust in their perception/discernment/understanding

Submission and obedience are quite often precursors to strong faith - even “seeing” is not enough (as seen here) for some

2. All authority in all the creation has been given to Christ - vs. 18

- a. Jesus is said to “approach” them (possibly because He was a ways-off from them, and they being hesitant, He approaches them closer to “commission” them)
b. The first words are “πᾶσα ἐξουσία” meaning “all authority/sovereignty”

- c. See I Cor. 15:20-28 where all things are made subject to Christ so that "... then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all." - It all is leading to this moment!
- d. All other competing "authorities" are not to be allowed to usurp that of Christ's in our own estimation (for they will never actually be above Him in any way) - confidence will be the result of a steady focus on Christ (and His constant presence with this) - He's the boss of everything!
- e. See also Heb. 2:5-10 as another description of this process and God's use of suffering in it
- f. Knowing this is how things will be from here on out, Jesus instructs them on their life purpose from here on out - they will follow in His footsteps, doing what He did
- g. "This authority is exercised also over the evil spirit world, whose prince is conquered and despoiled, and whose hosts lie in abject submission beneath Jesus' feet. All the powers of heaven are in his hand to do without question or pause. This the disciples are to realize as Jesus sends them forth. Never did a human army have such resources behind it." Lenski

Read Php. 2:8-10

This is the ultimate contrast to what Satan offered in Mt. 4 - Jesus demonstrated the right way, in submission to God, rather than looking to accomplish God's will based upon personal authority

3. "Go therefore and make disciples..." - vs. 19-20

Their "going" was going to happen (often by persecution and other means), so this is what they were to be doing when this happened

And what a work has been done since the beginning of such a small, unlikely group!

There were other baptisms (of dedication and commitment) and Jesus instituted one different from them all and above them all

It is the "πάντα" (the whole of what Christ commanded)

compare with Heb. 13:5

- a. The first word in verse 19 is "πορευθέντες" is aorist passive (so could also have been translated "having gone") - the imperative isn't on the "go", it's on the "making disciples" (also aorist, so "having made disciples") "baptizing them" (present tense)
- b. These, having a risen Lord and Savior, Who has all authority and power over all things, are to do as He did and make disciples (train/teach to readiness) people of all nations (τὰ ἔθνη, the peoples (ethnicities)) - this would have seemed like an unimaginable order to follow, had not the Lord prefaced this with His acknowledgment of His overriding authority
- c. As part of the discipleship, they were to be "baptizing" them, which was the ultimate outward sign of complete commitment - it was not the baptism of John, but one of "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" identifying with the Godhead, and complete submission to it - note also that the word for "name" (ὄνομα) is singular (it's not in the "names" of these, it is in their name (they are three in one))
- d. Such a responsibility was more than just "evangelistic endeavors" but instead it carried with it a sense of responsibility to pursue a maturity in them (growing in "the knowledge of Christ" as Paul often stressed) - these were to teach them to "observe **all** that I commanded you"
- e. The word for "observe" is "τηρεῖν" which has more the picture of guarding and protecting something - not only were the future disciples to be taught, to learn, but to then guard and practice **ALL** that Christ had commanded and taught (not just aspects and parts of it)
- f. "καὶ ἰδοὺ" and "look" (notice, realize) that "I am with you always to the end of the age" - He will be the constant companion through all our lifetime as we are in His service - this is more than just a comforting truth that He is with us in our personal hard times, but is more speaking of His presence with us in the carrying out of this command
- g. All of which then we are to be doing, we as the practical results of multiple generations carrying out this command of the Lord!