

# Jesus Christ, Our Savior King

Hearing, Doing, *and* Retelling  
The Gospel *of* Matthew



WORD-FILLED WOMEN BIBLE STUDY

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH · MEMPHIS, TN · SPRING 2021

**“Crown Him with Many Crowns”**

*Words by Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring*

**Crown him with many crowns,**  
the Lamb upon his throne;  
Hark! how the heav’nly anthem drowns  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.

**Crown him the Lord of love:**  
behold his hands and side;  
rich wounds yet visible above  
in beauty glorified.  
No angel in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends his burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.

**Crown him the Lord of peace,**  
whose power a scepter sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
and all be prayer and praise.  
His reign shall know no end,  
and round his pierced feet  
fair flowers of glory now extend  
their fragrance ever sweet.

**Crown him the Lord of life,**  
who triumphed o’er the grave,  
who rose victorious to the strife  
For those He came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
who died, and rose on high  
who died eternal life to bring,  
And lives that death may die.

**Crown him the Lord of heav’n,**  
One with the Father known,  
one with the Spirit through him giv’n  
from yonder glorious throne.  
To Thee be endless praise  
for Thou for us hast died;  
be thou, O Lord, through endless days  
adored and magnified.

**Crown him the Lord of years,**  
the Potentate of time.  
Creator of the rolling spheres,  
ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For thou hast died for me;  
Thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.

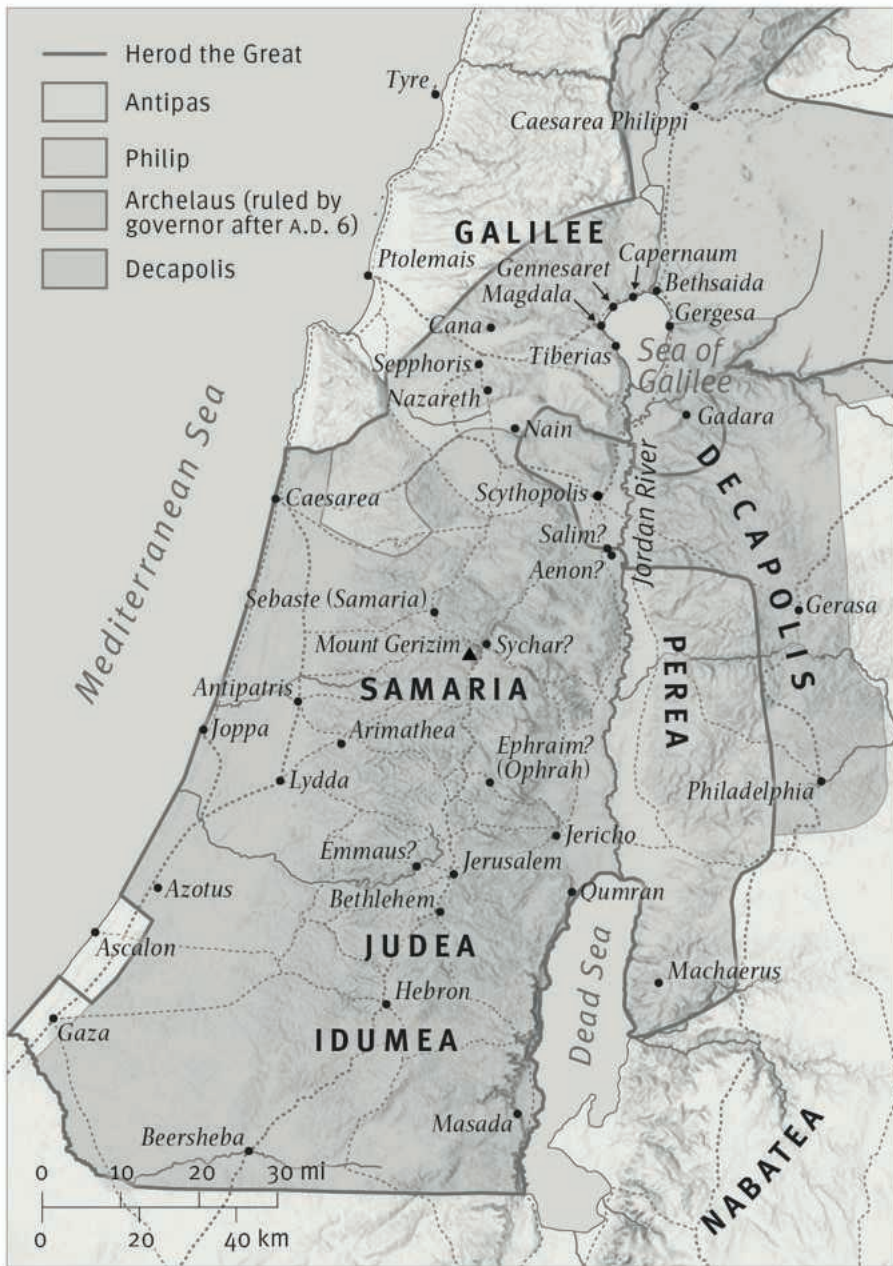
*The cover picture captures a portion of a stained-glass window in the building of one of our sister churches,  
First Presbyterian Church in Baton Rouge, LA.*



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### The Setting of Matthew

The events in the book of Matthew take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe events surrounding Jesus' birth in Judea, where Herod had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip.

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# Jesus Christ, Our Savior King

## Review of Matthew 1–17

**Before we resume our passage-by-passage exposition of Matthew's Gospel,** let's take a moment to recall what we have learned thus far.

**Genre.** New Testament Gospels are theological biographies about Jesus Christ. They declare God's fulfillment of promise in Jesus's Spirit-empowered person and work. Gospel writers ("evangelists") write to persuade readers/hearers to believe in, follow after, and call others to follow after this Jesus.

**Author.** Technically, the Gospel of Matthew is anonymous, since the author never explicitly identifies himself. Nor does he identify the particular audience to whom he writes. Early church tradition and early manuscripts of the Gospel attribute authorship to the apostle Matthew, the tax collector who leaves his tax booth to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9; "Matthew the tax collector" in 10:3).<sup>1</sup> Matthew relies on eyewitness testimony, his own and others', to retell the story of Jesus Christ and explain the significance of Jesus's suffering and exaltation.<sup>2</sup> Matthew possibly composes his Gospel during the AD 60's. He almost certainly composes the Gospel prior to AD 70 when the Jerusalem temple is destroyed, since in passages such as Matt 5:23–24, 17:24–27, and 24:1–2ff, the author makes no editorial comment indicating that the temple's destruction has already happened.

**Original Audience.** Matthew's strong emphasis on Scripture's fulfillment, as well as his characterization of Jerusalem and its establishment, suggest a predominantly Jewish audience for his Gospel. Yet Matthew goes to great lengths to confirm Jesus's purpose to spread his kingdom to all the nations. So, either Matthew's original audience includes Gentiles, or else Matthew simply stresses the inclusion of Gentiles to his Jewish audience so that believing Jews will embrace God's global salvation purposes in Christ. Ultimately, Matthew composes his Gospel for the church, both Jew and Gentile.

**Whole Gospel's Unifying Theme.** In fulfillment of Scripture, God the Father sends his Spirit-empowered Son, Jesus, to suffer, die, and be exalted in order to save his people from their sins, incorporate them into his kingdom, and send them to all nations as his disciple-making church.

**Opening Emphasis.** Matthew begins his Gospel by presenting Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, the Anointed One in whom God fulfills his old-covenant promises. Jesus brings redemptive history to its climax. Matthew's opening genealogy (1:1–17) introduces Jesus as the "Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (v. 1). Matthew includes two titles in the genealogy: "David the king" (v. 6) and "Jesus, the Christ" (vv. 1, 16, 17). Having established Jesus's genealogical "beginning" (1:1), Matthew narrates Jesus's "origin/birth" (1:18) by recounting the angel of the Lord's appearance to Joseph (1:18–25). The angel clarifies that this child, Jesus, will save God's people from their sins (1:21). Matthew further explains the child's significance in terms of his being the promised Immanuel, "God with us" (1:22–23).

**So What?** At the climax of Israel's story, we discover the climax of our story. Israel's tragic predicament of sin and consequent exile from God's presence is also *our* tragic predicament, apart from Christ. Jesus Christ is the Savior King who saves God's people from their sins and secures God's everlasting presence among them. So trust him, embrace his kingdom, and follow him.

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew is also known as "Levi" (Luke 5:27) and "Levi the son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14; "Matthew" in Mark 3:18).

<sup>2</sup>It is reasonable to assume that Matthew's narration of those episodes for which he was not personally present derive from *his firsthand interviews of witnesses* or from *oral history* that developed immediately following Jesus's ascension. For an insightful study of the evidence of eyewitness testimony throughout the Gospels, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

## Thematic Shape of Matthew's Gospel

Matthew largely organizes his Gospel chronologically, though there are several important instances when he organizes material thematically/topically. Matthew also shapes his Gospel with alternating narrative units and discourse units (that is, blocks of Jesus's teaching or speech). Matthew includes five discourse units in which Jesus instructs and exhorts on various matters regarding his kingdom.

In his Gospel, Matthew develops one, unifying theme:

*In fulfillment of Scripture, God the Father sends his Spirit-empowered Son, Jesus, to suffer, die, and be exalted in order to save his people from their sins, incorporate them into his kingdom, and send them to all nations as his disciple-making church.*

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Here's one way to convey Matthew's development of his key theme across the Gospel:

- 1. Introducing the Messiah's IDENTITY and CONFLICT Regarding Him** (Matt 1–2)  
Who Is Jesus, and How Is He Received?
- 2. Clarifying the Messiah's IDENTITY and MISSION** (Matt 3:1–16:20)  
Who Is Jesus, and What Is the Nature of His Kingdom and Belonging to It?
- 3. Explaining the Messiah's SUFFERING** (Matt 16:21–27:66)  
How Does King Jesus Save?
- 4. Issuing the Resurrected Messiah's CALL** (Matt 28)  
So What? How Must People Respond to This Exalted King?



1:1	Genealogy   <b>Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham</b> (exile over?)	<b>Beginnings</b> Jesus Is Born, Worshipped, Delivered, Called out of Egypt as God’s Son	In fulfillment of Scripture, God the Father sends his Spirit- empowered Son, Jesus,
1:18	Angel announces Jesus’s conception and name to Joseph; <b>Immanuel</b>		
2:1	Herod (“the king”) seeks to kill Jesus, whom magi worship as “ <b>king of the Jews</b> ”; Jesus’s family flees to Egypt and returns to Nazareth		
3:1	John baptizes Jesus in Jordan: “ <b>This is my beloved Son</b> ”	<b>Jesus Prepares for Ministry in Wilderness,</b> Where He’s Baptized, Tested	
4:1	Spirit leads Jesus to wilderness to be tempted by devil: “ <i>If you are <b>Son</b> ...</i> ”		
4:12	(Capernaum) Jesus preaches: “Repent, for the kingdom is at hand!”	<b>Jesus Launches Ministry in Galilee:</b> Teaching, Preaching, Healing—Calls Disciples	
4:23	<i>Summary:</i> Jesus’s ministry to teach, preach gospel of kingdom, heal		
5:1	With authority, Jesus teaches disciples about blessings of kingdom, Jesus’s fulfillment of Law, and righteousness (ethics) of kingdom	<b>Jesus’s First Discourse</b> <i>Sermon on the Mount</i>	
8:1	Jesus continues demonstrating his authority as <b>Lord</b> and <b>Son of Man</b>	<b>Jesus Further Demonstrates Authority</b> and Amazes Crowds	
9:35	<i>Summary:</i> Jesus’s ministry in cities & villages to teach, preach, heal		
10:1	Jesus authorizes, instructs, and sends twelve disciples to minister	<b>Jesus’s Second Discourse</b>	
11:2	Jesus to John the B’s disciples: <i>I am <b>the Christ, the Son of Man!</b></i>	<b>Jesus Continues Ministering Amid</b> Intensifying Resistance	
11:20	Jesus denounces unrepentant cities, invites repentant to come to him		
12:1	Pharisees conspire against Jesus, <b>Son of David</b> , including about sabbath		
12:46	<i>Summary:</i> Who is Jesus’s true family?		
13:1	Jesus teaches about the kingdom of heaven in parables	<b>Jesus’s Third Discourse</b>	
13:54	More oppose Jesus, who continues revealing identity as <b>Son of God</b>	<b>Jesus Continues Ministering</b> in Galilee and Beyond, Amid Intensifying Controversy	
15:1	Jesus rejected by Jerusalem elite, embraced by outsiders & vulnerable		
16:13	<i>(Turning Point)</i> Peter: “ <b>You are the Christ, the Son of the living God</b> ”		
16:21	Jesus shows necessity of death/resur; Peter & Jesus rebuke the other	<i>Structural Hinge</i> <b>Jesus Clarifies His (&amp; His Followers’) Identity &amp; Path</b>	
16:24	Jesus articulates cost and path of following him		
17:1	Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, John: “ <b>This is my beloved Son</b> ”		
17:14	Coming off mountain: Jesus casts out demon; predicts Jesus’s suffering	<b>Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem</b>	to suffer, die, and be exalted in order to <u>save</u> his people from their sins, <u>incorporate</u> them into his kingdom, and <u>send</u> them to all nations as his disciple-making church.
18:1	“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”	<b>Jesus’s Fourth Discourse</b>	
19:3	(Judea) Jesus articulates ethics of kingdom of heaven, predicts death & resurrection, and continues revealing identity as <b>Son of David</b>	<b>Jesus Keeps Journeying to Jerusalem</b>	
21:1	<b>Prophet</b> Jesus shows himself as <b>Son of David</b> ; cleanses/heals at temple	<b>Jesus Arrives in Jerusalem</b> Temple Leadership Conspires <i>Passion Narrative Begins</i>	
21:18	(Mostly at temple) Jesus teaches against faithlessness & hypocrisy		
23:37	Jesus laments Jerusalem’s resistance to him and consequent desolation	<b>Jesus’s Fifth Discourse</b> <i>Olivet Discourse</i>	
24:1	(Mount of Olives) Jesus enjoins readiness for coming of <b>Son of Man</b> , to judge and reward on last day		
26:1	Jesus willingly conspired against, betrayed, & arrested in Gethsemane	<b>Jesus Suffers, Dies, and Is Buried</b>	
26:57	Jesus stands trial before Caiaphas and is denied by Peter		
27:1	Jesus, <b>King of the Jews</b> , stands trial before Pilate, delivered to death		
27:27	Jesus crucified, mocked ( <i>If you are <b>Son</b></i> ), killed (followed by signs), & buried		
28:1	Two reports: Marys hear report of Jesus’s resur; Jews hear false report	<b>Resurrected Jesus Commissions His Disciples</b>	
28:16	Jesus is worshipped by disciples and commissions them for all nations		

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. ... they shall call his name Immanuel" (1:21, 23) "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (16:16) "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (28:18–20)

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** What was the highlight of your past month?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. *For those who have studied Matt 1–17:* If you had to choose only four passages in Matt 1–17 that together clarify the main themes of the Gospel, which four would you choose? Why these four?
2. Read Matt 9:35–38. Describe the various characteristics of Jesus’s ministry. Which characteristic stands out the most to you? Why?
3. Read Matt 10:1–8. In what ways does the ministry to which Jesus calls his disciples reflect Jesus’s own ministry (as described in Matt 9:35–36)? How are they similar, and how are they different?
4. What does Matt 9:35–10:8 mainly reveal about Jesus?

### DO THE WORD

5. If you more fully believed what Matt 9:35–10:8 mainly reveals about Jesus and his desire for those who follow him, what’s **one thing that would change** in your life this coming spring? How so? *Be specific.*

### RETELL THE WORD

6. What person you particularly want a God-given, fresh opportunity to share truths about Jesus this spring? What are the specific challenges of sharing truths about Jesus with this person?
7. How would you particularly value prayer from your small group regarding your desire to communicate the gospel with this person? *Be specific.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of your discussion.**



## The Son Teaches the Ethics of His Kingdom: On Humility and Love Among the Church

Matthew 18:1–19:2

**If we want to cultivate right relationships among one another in the church, we must begin by cultivating a right view of our ourselves.** We must humble ourselves and take seriously our utter dependence on God’s mercy. It is those who are “poor in spirit” to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (see Matt 5:3). The more profoundly we understand that we are *children* of our heavenly Father through Christ, the more ready we will be to relate to one another as *siblings* in Christ.

Jesus certainly desires that his twelve disciples humbly love one another—and also that we believers today humbly love one another. In **Jesus’s fourth discourse** (Matt 18:2–19:2), he instructs his disciples regarding how citizens of the kingdom of heaven must relate to one another.

Let’s remember where we are in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew brings his (mostly) eyewitness testimonial to a climactic moment when he recounts Peter’s confession of Jesus’s identity: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (16:13). Following this moment, Matthew smoothly pivots to bring into focus Jesus’s substitutionary atonement. Jesus begins making more explicit his imminent suffering, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem (16:21ff). God the Father then gloriously demonstrates his unique pleasure in his beloved Son, Jesus, and commands Peter, James, and John to listen to Jesus above all others (17:5). Jesus subsequently travels southward with his disciples: from Caesarea Philippi (16:13) to Capernaum (17:24), toward Jerusalem.

But before Jesus moves further south into Judea, which he will do in Matt 19:1ff, he gives his disciples further instruction in Galilee about how they must treat one another. Jesus knows they soon will face fiery tests, personally and corporately. So, Jesus fleshes out key relational implications of belonging to the kingdom of heaven. He shows that any person who genuinely professes to follow “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” will embrace a distinct manner of relating with others who profess to follow him. A true confession of faith in Christ always to a deep commitment to Christ’s community, his church (see Matt 16:18). Always.

As Jesus instructs his disciples, he is sober minded about the near and present danger of sin among them. Similarly, Jesus knows that we redeemed sinners will face temptation in this world, such as selfish ambition, spiritual drifting, resistance to forgive, greed, and self-centeredness. That is why Jesus addresses the reality of lingering sin among the kingdom community and how his followers must confront this sin. **Genuine followers of Jesus are those who lead lives of humble, ongoing repentance.** More specifically, Jesus exhorts his followers to humble themselves (18:1–4), resist tempting others to sin or giving into temptation themselves (18:5–9), pursue wanderers (18:10–14), lovingly confront those who sin against them under the authority of the church (18:15–20), and forgive from the heart as those who have been forgiven from the heart (18:21–35).

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 18:15–20, and respond to questions 3, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17.

### **Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan**

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 18:1–14; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 18:15–20; Questions 3–4
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 18:21–19:2; Questions 5–11
- **Day 4:** Read Matt 18:1–19:2; Questions 12–15
- **Day 5:** Read Matt 18:1–19:2; Questions 16–17

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Arrogance and selfish ambition never produce love. Jesus's disciples ask him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (18:1). Jesus's response must have surprised them. He sets a child in their midst and declares, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (18:3).<sup>3</sup>
  - a. What do you think the disciples mean by "the greatest"? What is "greatness" in their thinking?
  - b. According to Jesus in Matt 18:2–6, what is the essence of greatness?
  - c. What do you think Jesus means by "unless you *turn*" (18:3)?
  - d. In what way does Jesus's response challenge your own worldly assumptions about what makes a person "great"? *Be specific.*
2. Jesus warns his disciples about falling into temptation and about tempting others (18:7–9). He then exhorts his disciples to cultivate the same concern for one another as God has for every sheep in his fold, so that they would even pursue "stray sheep" who wander (18:10–14).
  - a. What stands out to you in Matt 18:10–14 about God the Father's *will*, as Jesus describes it?
  - b. In what season of your life have you experienced the Good Shepherd's pursuit of you when you have wandered?

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<sup>3</sup>Jesus again stresses that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children in Matt 19:13–15, when he tenderly receives the children, lays his hands upon them, and prays for them. He demonstrates his love for little ones and calls those who would follow him to emulate his gentle kindness towards children.

- c. What professing believer in your life right now is straying from the fold? What responsibility toward him or her might you have as a fellow professing believer in Christ? *Be specific.*
3. In Matt 18:15–20, Jesus continues unfolding the way in which citizens of his kingdom must relate to one another, not least in light of the reality of lingering sin among us. Not only must we pursue stray professing believers and rejoice over their returning to God the Father (18:10–14), but we also must confront fellow professing believers who sin against us (18:15–20).
    - a. What are some *unhelpful ways* we are tempted to deal with people who have sinned against us, rather than lovingly confronting them as Jesus instructs? *Give at least four examples.*
    - b. When a professing brother or sister in Christ sins against you, how does Jesus instruct you to deal with this situation? *List the specific elements of his instruction in Matt 18:15.*
    - c. What does Jesus mean by “you have gained your brother” in Matt 18:15?
    - d. If a professing believer whom you have directly confronted refuses to listen to you and repent, how does Jesus instruct you to respond? *List the specific elements of Matt 18:16–17’s instruction.*
    - e. What does Jesus’ presence among the kingdom community (18:18–20) have to do with how we deal with sin among us?
  4. As you aim to understand Jesus’s instruction in Matt 18:15–20, bring to mind some personal experiences you have had with confrontation among professing believers, both positive and negative experiences.
    - a. Think about a time that a professing believer sinned against you, and you chose to confront them. *What made it difficult for you to follow Jesus’s instructions here for confrontation and reconciliation? What was most challenging about it for you, and why? Be specific.*



- b. Think about a time that a professing sibling in Christ lovingly confronted you, along the lines of Jesus's instructions in Matt 18:15–20. How did you respond to that confrontation? How did that confrontation affect your relationship? *Be specific.*
5. In Matt 18:21–35, Jesus continues teaching about right relationships among citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Peter approaches Jesus with a question that, Peter imagines, shows off Peter's generosity: Peter is willing to forgive his brother *seven times* (18:21). But Jesus raises him: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (18:22). Jesus proceeds to tell a parable that exposes the wickedness of any kingdom citizen's refusal to forgive a fellow citizen (18:23–34) and then directly applies this parable to his disciples (18:35).
- a. What stands out to you in this parable (18:23–34) *about sinful human nature*?
  - b. What stands out to you in this parable (18:23–34) and in Jesus's application of it (18:35) *about God and his kingdom*?
  - c. Why is the king's/master's judgment of the unforgiving servant so severe?
  - d. In what specific relationship(s) in your life do the truths of Matt 18:21–35 most challenge you? How so? *Be specific.*
6. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage? *Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of these themes. How is this theme **relevant** to your current circumstances?

7. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer. For help in discerning structure, see "Toolbox: Structure" in the Appendix.*

8. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

**TOOLBOX | Context**

To determine what portion of text constitutes your passage's "immediate literary context," identify the immediately preceding and following **thought unit**.

For example, for Matt 18:2–19:2, some might view the preceding thought unit as **Matt 18:24–27** and highlight the thematic connection of "*rightly living under authority*." Some might view the following thought unit as **Matt 19:3–15** and highlight the thematic connections of "*right living with respect to the family*" (from church family in Matt 18 to marriage/ singleness in Matt 19:3–12) and "*the kingdom of heaven belonging to children*."

Whole-Book Literary Context

**TOOLBOX | Context**

There are a number of key questions to ask in order to discern which other passages in the Gospel to highlight for "whole-book literary context," including: *Does the specific passage under analysis initiate, develop, or bring to a conclusion one of the book's key themes? If so, how does the whole-book development of this theme affect your interpretation of this specific passage and what the author intends to accomplish in this passage?*

Look for a word/phrase/image/idea that recurs throughout the book that also directly or indirectly appears in your passage.

For example: where else does Matthew mainly develop the concept of the "**kingdom of heaven**" (18:1, 3, 4, 23), and how does this chapter contribute to the whole Gospel's development of this theme?

For example: how does Jesus's **fourth discourse** (Matt 18:2–19:2) develop the ethics of the kingdom he has already established in his **first three discourses** and will establish in his **fifth discourse**?

### TOOLBOX | Context

Helpful tools for whole-Bible context include Study-Bible cross-references (often located in the central margin), online concordances (such as biblegateway.com, in which you can search a word or phrase in a particular English version), and commentaries.

For example, the cross-references for Matt 18:10–14 or 18:15 might mention **James 5:19–20**. James also exhorts new-covenant Christians to pursue any professing believers who wander. Likewise, James also stresses the tragic outcome the wanderer will face without being restored and the blessed outcome of restoring him or her.

### Whole-Bible Literary Context

*If the whole Bible is about God's redeeming a people for himself through his Son, for his glory, then how does this passage in Matthew's Gospel fit into the Bible's redemptive storyline and ethic?*

9. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically **the Lord Jesus Christ**? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*

### TOOLBOX | Theme

Discerning a Passage's Main Revelation about God

The Bible is a thoroughly God-centered book. It's theological literature. Scripture mainly focuses on revealing who God is, how he acts (past, present, future), and how human beings can and must relate to him. **Preeminently, the Bible reveals God's character and ways as displayed in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in his Son's gospel.**

Since every biblical author aims to reveal God's person and work, believers who desire to *hear, do, and retell this Word* ought to focus our attention on what every passage of Scripture tells us about God. We aim to make progress in seeing Scripture's God-centeredness so that our hearing, doing, and retelling of Scripture will likewise be God-centered.

10. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**? *Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*

11. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

### TOOLBOX | Author's Aim

To help clarify an author's peculiar purpose in one passage within its whole-book context, ask:

*If this passage were to drop out of the book, what would be missing?*



In *Tramp for the Lord*, Corrie Ten Boom writes, “When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever ... God then places a sign out there that says **No Fishing Allowed.**”

If we must embrace in this way Christ’s forgiveness of our own sin, so too must we embrace Christ’s forgiveness of the sin of our siblings in Christ. And when we do, we will be empowered to love one another in the church, in a way that radically differs from any other sort of community in this world.

Conversely, when we fail to extend mercy to one another in forgiving one another’s sin against us, it is a tell-tale sign that we are failing to recognize the mercy God in Christ has extended to us in forgiving our sin.

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

12. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
13. What professing believer in your life is the Lord bringing to your mind, whom you need to **confront** in love or/and **forgive** from the heart? What practical steps will you take to do this today? *Be specific.*
14. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? How so? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
15. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

Jesus shows his disciples that their humble entry into the kingdom of heaven *like a child*  
ought to reflect their humble perseverance in repentance *like a child*.

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

16. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

### TOOLBOX | Application

For example: God gives mothers daily opportunities to disciple their children regarding the truths of Matt 18. Christian mothers do not disciple from a position of moral perfection—*far from it!*. Rather, Christian mothers effectively disciple their children from a posture of ongoing, daily repentance—daily reliance on and delighting in God's mercy in Christ. For parents, some of the greatest opportunities for clarifying the gospel arise when seeking a child's forgiveness or when assuring a child that he or she has received the parent's forgiveness.

17. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*



## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** While relationships with family and friends are some of God's greatest gifts, they also can be really difficult! What was the (1) best and (2) most challenging part of relating with family and friends over Christmas and the New Year?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. Although the focus passage is Matt 18:15–20, **read Matt 18:10–35** for context. Before discussing Matt 18:15–20 in depth, answer the following: how do the passages surrounding it (i.e., Matt 18:10–14 and 18:21–35) provide helpful context? How do these surrounding passages relate to Matt 18:15–20?
2. Discuss the various aspects of Study-Guide question 3.
3. In your opinion, what is the most “radical” aspect of Jesus’s instruction here, relative to the way people in our culture normally relate to one another?
4. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 9.*

### DO THE WORD

5. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about Jesus, what’s **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide question 14.*
6. What resources does God provide you to follow this instruction, even though it is difficult to do so? *Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide question 15.*

### RETELL THE WORD

7. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus? *Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide questions 16–17.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**

# RESTORATION AND PEACEMAKERS MINISTRY

## WHAT IS THE RESTORATION MINISTRY?

Second Presbyterian Church has a ministry specifically designed to help its members restore broken relationships by following the blueprint given to us in the Bible. Did you know that God cares very much how you handle problems such as family communication, personal or business disputes, or dysfunctional relationships? Before you give up or call a lawyer, contact the Restoration and Peacemakers Ministry. (“RPM”)

Some relationships suffer due to circumstances outside our control; other relationships fail due to our lack of communication or coping skills, physical or emotional issues, or inability to forgive one another. This ministry seeks to heal these strained or broken relationships. Ministry team members work under the authority of the Church Session with the supervision of the RPM Committee and our pastoral staff. We are committed to this way of restoration because believers are commanded by Scripture to be proactive in efforts to restore one another and to “Bear one another’s burdens,” thereby fulfilling the law of Christ set out in Galatians 6:1-2.

## WHAT ARE TYPICAL PROBLEM AREAS?

Although we all face conflict in relationships and struggle in our Christian walk at times, members who need help from other believers might be involved in one or more of the following typical problem areas:

- Unresolved personal or business disputes
- Addictions of various kinds (alcohol/drugs, sex, pornography, gambling)
- Communication breakdowns
- Dysfunctional relationships
- Physical, mental, or emotional abuse
- Marital infidelity
- Parent/child issues
- Unwillingness to submit to the authority of the Church

These types of problems not only affect our relationships with other people but also our fellowship with God. Therefore, the ministry team also desires to restore hope in the forgiving grace of Christ.

## HOW DOES RESTORATION WORK?

The RPM follows the plan given by Christ in Matthew 18. Ideally, the process begins first with the one who has been offended prayerfully going to the one who has caused offense with his or her concern, addressing the matter privately and informally.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” Most relationships can be restored in this way, and nothing more is necessary.

If the offender is unrepentant or resists attempts at restoration, one or two others may be enlisted to attempt restoration as a small, informal group. Matthew 18:16 says, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” The aggrieved party or a concerned friend may contact the RPM through a pastor, Sunday School teacher, or elder. If the committee deems it necessary, a ministry team will be formed to meet with the parties in confidence to determine the facts and the willingness of the parties to repent and be restored.



If the matter is resolved, the team will be disbanded, praising God for His faithfulness. Although the restoration process in a very few cases may lead to formal church discipline, the ministry's approach is gentleness and a non-judgmental spirit. The ministry teams will be able to draw on the full resources of the church, including confidential financial and psychological counseling, mentoring, accountability, and any other means necessary in an attempt to make peace. This is a vital ministry of our church that flows from the core of the Gospel, for it was Jesus who came as the great peace-bringer, restoring us to a right relationship with the Father: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (11 Corinthians 5:18-19)

## What if restoration fails?

If an offending party refuses to repent and be reconciled, the ministry team may decide that the church should become formally involved through action of the Session. Jesus continues to lay out this process in Matthew 18:17a: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." In such cases, the team will recommend a course of action to the RPM Committee, which has several options available. Formal discipline will be considered only after all other less formal means of resolving the offense have been exhausted, and it must usually involve a lack of repentance in the areas of heresy, immorality, or contempt for the established order of the church (set out in the Book of Discipline, EPC Book of Order, 11 1-20).

## What can I expect of restoration teams?

Team members who have a heart for and engage in this ministry approach this work in a careful, gentle, and loving manner, guided by God's revealed will in Scripture: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2)

Team members base their work on God's Word: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," (11 Timothy 3:16)

Team members approach their work prayerfully: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Team members approach their work humbly: "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Team members undergo self-examination: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5)

Team members are ready to forgive: "...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." (Colossians 3:13)

Team members respect confidentiality: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matthew 18:15)

Team members are seeking repentance not perfection from the offending member: "For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:25)

## What about confidentiality?

The Restoration and Peacemakers Ministry keeps the highest standards of confidentiality for those coming for help. Unless the offense precipitating a broken relationship is of such a public nature that it requires formal and/or public discipline, confidentiality must at all times be observed. The ministry team engaged in restoration may not discuss the reported offense, the attempt at reconciliation, or the progress of the restoration with anyone other than the team members themselves, the pastor assigned to the team, or the chairman of the Restoration and Peacemakers Committee. Although permanent records of each case must be kept for statistical and historical purposes, these records are securely stored in the church office.

If you are interested in accessing the resources available through this ministry, contact the Restoration Office at 454-0034, ext. 123 or [peacemakers@2pc.org](mailto:peacemakers@2pc.org)

## Seeking Restoration: Reflections on Matthew 18:15–20

In the case that a professing believer “sins against” one another (note: not “annoys” one another), Christians are to be *deliberate* to “go” and seek understanding (v. 15). We do not stew in our anger, linger for days, or consult with many people. Rather, we take responsibility for reconciliation and refuse to brush any clear offense under the rug. What is our posture when we “go”? We approach one another as siblings and as those mutually dependent on Christ. We do not confront them on our own merits. We confront out of reverence for Christ, who forbids us to wallow in resentment or passively allow sin to destroy a fellow professing believer.

Confronting in love along the lines of Matt 18:15–20 is an act of mercy, which is risky for people-pleasers. Tragically, we often dread our own relational discomfort more than we dread the dangers of sin (in our heart or another’s). In our flesh, we can prioritize maintaining the relational status quo over striving for health and unity.

Furthermore, we are to be *direct* (“tell him his fault,” v. 15) and *discrete* (“between you and him,” v. 15). We must be clear and protective—not vague or passive-aggressive. Moreover, we break the spirit of Matt 18 when we gossip about others, even when we do so under the guise of “seeking counsel” or “asking people to pray.” We also violate Matt 18 when we listen to other people gossip or complain about an offense without urging them to engage this specific process for reconciliation. Jesus’s instruction is clear and concrete.

In these efforts we are to be *determined* to “gain a brother” (v. 15). We do not engage this process to prove ourselves right or justify ourselves, but rather we humbly engage this process to be reconciled with one another for the glory of Christ, who abides among us. Broken fellowship in the church distorts the gospel (see 1 Cor 1:13: “Is Christ divided?”).

Along these lines, we are to be *diligent* “if he does not listen” (vv. 16–17). In the case that a brother or sister refuses to be reconciled, we bring in other Christians to help us be restored to one another. So, we submit to these other believers and are prepared to walk in repentance ourselves when they highlight our areas of brokenness and sin. We appeal! We plead! We humble ourselves! Why? Much is at stake: our witness of the gospel, sibling relationships, and potentially one’s relationship with the Father himself.

What is meant by “the church” in v. 17: is it the elders, the public gathering of the whole congregation, the pastors, or something else? In our presbyterian form of church government, the Session (comprised of elders) is responsible for “the government and the discipline of the church.”

Relatedly, we are *deferential* to submit to church authority. We are willing to relinquish our own reputation and pride in this process so that we will hear of our own need for repentance as well as be satisfied with faithfulness to Christ in this process as our primary objective. So, if someone persists in an offense against us and refuses to reconcile with us, we let that offense go after following Jesus’ commands; we leave it up to him, since he is the ultimate Judge.

If someone refuses to listen to the confrontation of a fellow professing believer, the two or three witnesses, and the whole church, what does Jesus instruct? Jesus says, “Let him be to you (sing.) as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17).

Throughout Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus includes Gentiles and tax collectors in his kingdom. So what does v. 17 mean? The idea here is that the church must assume that this person does not know God as Father and is not part of the kingdom of heaven, since she has chosen to live outside of the bounds of gospel community. Thus, we do not address them as “brother” or “sister.” We operate under no delusion that they are spiritually “safe.” So, we pray diligently for them that they might come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and “turn and become like a child” (18:3–4). We view them as someone who needs reconciliation with God the Father above all else.

Jesus’s statement about two or three agreeing and gathering in his name (v. 20) specifically refers to gathering for judgment and binding/loosing. Jesus is present with his church when it seeks to guard purity and peace. Jesus cares a great deal about unity among his little ones, and he exhorts his followers to pursue any wanderers in order that his church might be united in the gospel.

# The Son Teaches the Ethics of His Kingdom: On Marriage and Divorce

Matthew 19:3–12

**As Matthew tells the story of Jesus’s life and ministry, he tells the truth about the Pharisees’ combativeness toward Jesus.** They are constantly confronting Jesus, not least whenever he draws nearer to Jerusalem (for example, Matt 12:1; 15:1; 16:1). Jesus has made plain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised (16:21; 17:22–23), and he has led his disciples from Galilee into Judea (19:1–2). Like clockwork, the Pharisees then find Jesus and “test” him (19:3).

In particular, the Pharisees try to entrap Jesus by inciting him to misspeak or anger people regarding his interpretation of the Law (19:3). The Pharisees quite deliberately choose a provocative topic: divorce. Just as matters relating to marriage and divorce are controversial in our day, so also they were in Jesus’s day—even if some of the particular issues differ. But Jesus does not shy away from directly responding to the Pharisees’ questions (19:4–9). In fact, he even further instructs his disciples regarding the ethics of community life in the kingdom of heaven (19:10–12). In the process, Jesus clarifies the radically distinct nature of the ethics of his kingdom, relative to the Pharisees’ ethic.

The way Jesus directly, clearly, and wisely responds to the Pharisees (and the disciples) sets a good example for us. Sometimes we wrongly imagine that when matters are delicate or controversial, we should refrain from dealing with them clearly. But wisdom demands that we articulate biblical truth clearly, *not least* when those biblical principles are commonly misunderstood or misapplied. Wisdom also demands that we articulate that biblical truth graciously, humbly, and compassionately, relying on God’s mercy toward broken, weary sinners like us. As Paul urges, “*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*” (Col 4:6).

Jesus’s instruction is not merely revolutionary in his day. It is also revolutionary in ours. Only those who humble themselves before God like a child will receive it (see Matt 18:1–6; 19:13–15). For example, Jesus’s clarity about God’s purpose for marriage (19:4–6, 8–9) stands against our culture’s lackadaisical attitude about so-called no-fault divorce. And Jesus’s clarity about the all-surpassing importance of the kingdom of heaven for some “who have made themselves eunuchs” (19:11–12) stands against our culture’s obsession with romance and marriage as the end-all-be-all. Each of us will be challenged and confronted by Jesus’s words, if we are hearing them rightly.

**We all have experienced pain and frustration** relating to the topics of marriage, divorce, and singleness. Some of us are single and wish we could be married. Some of us are married and wish we could be single or married to someone different. Some of us are widows. Some of us have experienced betrayal and loss that resulted in divorce. All of us have sinned in some way and fallen short of God’s demands relating to sex and marriage. In our small-group discussions this week, let’s be particularly sensitive to one another in this regard. As we allow Jesus’s words to challenge and confront us, it is important that we remember Jesus’s heart. Jesus tells us the truth because he loves us. He desires that we know the joy and freedom of glorifying our heavenly Father through our obedience. Just as none of us is outside the target of his truths, so also none of us is beyond the hope he offers.

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 19:3–12, and respond to questions 1, 2, 8, 13, 16, 17.

## **Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan**

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 19:3–9; Questions 1–3
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 19:3–12; Questions 4–5
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 19:3–12; Questions 6–10
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 19:3–12; Questions 11–14
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 19:3–12; Questions 15–17

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. When Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea, the Pharisees confront him to test him (19:3). They pose to Jesus a series of challenging ethical questions, specifically pertaining to divorce (19:3, 7). They feel threatened by this rabbi's popularity and authority, so they attempt to lead him to say something controversial that would diminish his support base.  
What do the Pharisees' strategy and specific questions reveal about their heart?
2. In Jesus's response to the Pharisees' first question about the lawfulness of divorce "for any cause" (19:3), Jesus appeals to the Law. Specifically, he alludes to Gen 1:27 and cites Gen 2:24. Review Gen 1:26–28 and Gen 2:18–25. (See also Malachi 2:15.) What is Jesus's main point here, in Matt 19:4–6?
3. Following Jesus's initial response, the Pharisees follow up in a further effort to entrap Jesus by appealing to the Law themselves (Deut 24:1–4).
  - a. Review Deut 24:1–4. What is the main intent of this law? What is Moses's (and God's) aim/purpose in giving these instructions in Deuteronomy?
  - b. What is Jesus's main point in his response to the Pharisees' second test, in Matt 19:8–9?
4. Various other biblical passages deal with issues relating to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Review each of the following passages, and note what each *particularly* contributes to the topic.
  - a. Jesus's instruction to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:31–32)
  - b. Paul's instruction to the local church in Ephesus (Eph 5:22–33)

c. Paul's instruction to the local church in Rome (Rom 7:1–3)

d. Paul's instruction to the local church in Corinth (1 Cor 7:10–16, 39)

5. The disciples express astonishment over Jesus's response to the Pharisees (Matt 19:10).

a. In particular, what astonished the disciples (19:10)?

b. What main point does Jesus make in response to his disciples' question (19:11–12)?

On hearing Jesus's response to the Pharisees' question about divorce, the disciples conclude, *in my paraphrase*, "If it's really the case that when a person remarries after divorcing (except in instances when sexual immorality has precipitated the divorce), he or she is committing adultery, then people shouldn't even get married!" (Matt 19:10).

But Jesus qualifies their conclusion. To do so, he uses the analogy of a "eunuch," which is (often) a man who has been castrated, usually in order to serve a specific civil or social function, such as in the service of a queen (see Acts 8:26–40). Jesus explains that only those who are "eunuchs" (literally or metaphorically) should actively refrain from marrying. Jesus mentions three types of "eunuchs":

- (1) born "eunuchs," that is, people born without the capacity for sexual intercourse;
- (2) man-made, career-related eunuchs, that is, men who have been castrated for a particular reason;
- (3) voluntary "eunuchs," that is, those men and women who choose abstinence in order to advance the kingdom of heaven (see, for example, Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 7:32–35).

6. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?

*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?



7. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*
8. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
9. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
10. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

**The gospel of the kingdom enjoins whole-hearted loyalty to the Savior King. May we humbly receive and obey his instruction regarding marriage, as glad citizens of his kingdom.**

In Tim and Kathy Keller's book on marriage, they comment on Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 7:25–40, where Paul shows the implications for marriage and singleness of Jesus's having ushered in the kingdom of God. The Kellers write:

What does this mean for our attitude toward marriage and family? Paul says it means that both being married and not being married are good conditions to be in. We should be neither overly elated by getting married nor overly disappointed by not being so—because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfill us and God's family is the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us. ...

Christianity's founder, Jesus Christ, and leading theologian, St. Paul, were both single their entire lives. Single adults cannot be seen as somehow less fully formed or realized human beings than married persons because Jesus Christ, a single man, was the perfect man (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). Paul's assessment in 1 Corinthians 7 is that singleness is a good condition blessed by God, and in many circumstances, it is actually better than marriage. As a result of this revolutionary attitude, the early church did not pressure people to marry (as we see in Paul's letter) and institutionally supported poor widows so they did not have to remarry. ...

Why did the early church have this attitude? The Christian gospel and hope of the future kingdom de-idolized marriage. There was no more radical act in that day and time than to live a life that did not produce heirs. Having children was the main way to achieve significance for an adult, since children would remember you. They also gave you security, since they would care for you in old age. Christians who remained single, then, were making the statement that our future is not guaranteed by the family but by God.

Tim & Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, 194–96.

More recently, Sam Allberry has written on marriage and singleness. In a summary of his book, he argues:

Both married people and single people need to understand what the Bible says about singleness. If married people don't understand the Bible's teaching on singleness, it probably means they haven't understood the Bible's teaching on marriage. ... Both marriage and singleness testify to the gospel. Marriage shows us the **shape** of the gospel in that it models the covenant promises that God has made to us in Christ. Singleness shows us the **sufficiency** of the gospel because it shows us the reality of what marriage points to—which is our own relationship with Jesus.

(Bolding is mine) <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-both-singleness-and-marriage-testify-to-the-gospel/>

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
  
12. Having studied Matt 19:3–12 and having read the excerpts on pg 26, what is **one way you would like to make progress in developing a more Christ-centered perspective** of your own situation, whether as a married or unmarried woman? What practical steps will you take this week to do so? *Be specific.*
  
13. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
  
14. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

15. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

16. What are some examples of how a believer might **unwisely communicate** the biblical principles of Matt 19:3–12, especially to a non-Christian or to someone who has experienced pain associated with marriage and/or divorce? *Identify at least three pitfalls to avoid when articulating these principles; for example, “When retelling the truths of Matt 19:3–12, take care not to ...”*

17. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction



## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** In your opinion, what's the biggest difference between the way the Bible talks about marriage and the way "Hollywood" often portrays and talks about marriage?

#### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 19:3–12.** Discuss Study-Guide question 1.
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 2.
3. *If there is enough time:* Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
4. Discuss Study-Guide question 5.
5. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *Study-Guide question 8.*

#### DO THE WORD

6. Discuss Study-Guide question 12.
7. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Study-Guide question 13.*

#### RETELL THE WORD

8. Discuss Study-Guide question 16.
9. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus?  
*Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide question 17.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**

# MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

The Session<sup>1</sup> of Second Presbyterian Church expresses our profound concern for the integrity and sanctity of marriage and family in both the Church and our society. We are especially concerned for the families of Second Presbyterian Church. God has spoken to us in His Word, which we believe is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, clearly defining the nature of marriage, how we are to function in our families, and the urgency of obedience; yet we have often gone our own way, to our own undoing. There is great pleasure and much good in the Christian home; there is great pain and much evil in violating God's Word.

## THE CHRISTIAN AND MARRIAGE

We commend to all of God's people the following scriptural guidelines for Christian marriage:

Christian marriage is a union between believers, one man and one woman, each of whom credibly professes faith in Jesus Christ and believes in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Marriage is designed by God to last as long as they both shall live. God instituted marriage for the mutual help and satisfaction of husband and wife; for the safeguarding, undergirding, and developing of their moral and spiritual character; and for the propagation or adoption of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage is a covenant in which both partners solemnly swear their fidelity to one another, picturing the covenant that Jesus Christ has unconditionally made with His bride, the Church. This covenant is made by vow (just as God's covenant with us includes His solemn oath)<sup>3</sup> and is sealed, or consummated, by sexual union, which is reserved only for this covenantal marriage relationship. God's standard is chastity before marriage and fidelity afterwards. The Scriptures teach that Christians should marry only other Christian believers sharing a common faith and a deeply-held commitment to build a Christian home.<sup>4</sup> We recognize, however, that not all Christians experience a common depth of knowledge, understanding, and conviction, and that often one grows in knowledge, understanding, and conviction after marriage.

Due to the solemnity and binding nature of the marriage covenant, persons considering engagement should seek God's will through prayer and the counsel and consent of their families and also their pastors before engaging to be married. After a couple becomes engaged, further pastoral counsel is essential to prepare them for marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Our pastoral counseling includes such topics as the following:

- a discussion of the couple's spiritual backgrounds
- the biblical foundation of marriage and Christian engagement
- implications of each partner's family background
- communication and interpersonal relationships

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<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the considerable help received from the "Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage" by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:27,28; Romans 10:9,10; Ephesians 5:21-33 and Ephesians 6:1-4; Malachi 2:13-16

<sup>3</sup> cf. Hebrews 6:13-20; 7:20-22

<sup>4</sup> Malachi 2:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 11 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Psalm 127:1

<sup>5</sup> When the prospective couple is out of town or otherwise unable to meet regularly with one of our pastors or counselors, our pastors will help the couple locate a suitable, accessible, counselor and will gladly correspond and coordinate with all parties.

- conflict resolution
- relating successfully to future in-laws
- the roles of husband and wife
- financial management
- the sexual relationship
- child-bearing and rearing
- a shared spiritual life in the home and church • the tragic consequences of divorce

Our pastors may refer the couple to Christian psychologists or counselors to explore additional issues. As the wedding date approaches, the pastor and other church staff will help the couple prepare a marriage service that is worshipful and distinctively Christian.

After marriage, the couple should seek the Lord's will and pleasure in every way, through reading the Scriptures and praying together, and by living together in Christian love and forgiveness. The couple should be vitally involved in the life of Christ's Church and regularly take advantage of the ministries offered them. Couples at all stages of marriage should continue to look for and participate in opportunities to build and maintain a strong Christian marriage, such as MidWeek classes, small groups, books, tapes, marriage seminars and retreats. It is important to realize that a successful marriage requires continual and persistent hard work.

When serious conflicts cannot be resolved, a couple, or even one partner if the other is unwilling, should seek pastoral or other counsel within the church immediately. Too often, troubled marriages fail because the couple is too proud to seek help until a crisis has occurred and opportunities for reconciliation are severely limited.

## The Christian and Divorce

We affirm at the outset that any discussion of divorce should be conducted in a spirit of genuine humility. Difficult ethical problems arise in any divorce, and completely innocent parties are seldom to be found. Few experiences in life are more agonizing than the breakdown of a marriage. It is often exceedingly difficult to know and to do what is right, but with prayerful and diligent study of God's Word, we can build a godly foundation for decision-making.

Because human beings are sinful, they may devise a multitude of reasons why marriages should be dissolved. The Scriptures, however, give explicit sanction for divorce only in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or in the case of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion. We recognize that there are marriages which require extended counsel and insight in determining whether a couple should divorce, separate, or live together as a married couple in a strained and difficult relationship. Examples of these cases are drug, alcohol, gambling, or pornography addictions, violent physical abuse, internet affairs, and extra-marital romantic liaisons. While it is not the purpose or intent of this paper to deal with every type of marital conflict, we do emphasize the need for seeking the wisdom of the church and other godly counsel in determining God's will in difficult marital relationships.

In all cases, the couple should not rely on individual judgment alone, but should seek the counsel of pastors and elders who will explore carefully all possibilities for reconciliation and who will also minister to those whose marriages may end in divorce.<sup>6</sup> We emphasize the necessity for actively seeking guidance from the church in these situations due to the magnitude of hurt, anger, and lack of objectivity that often exists when one or both partners in a marriage have committed a serious violation of the marriage covenant.

Divorce inevitably represents a violation of God's standards, but in His infinite mercy and wisdom, God regulates divorce and provides the way for healing and recovery. As we look at the Old and New Testaments, we must be sure to follow His Word on these matters.

## The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, marriage is instituted in Genesis 2 when God brings Eve to Adam to be his helpmate. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."<sup>7</sup> The phrase

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:31,32, 19:1-15; 1 Corinthians 7

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:24

“be united” is a covenantal term that emphasizes the commitment of marriage and is used elsewhere for the Israelites to “hold fast” to the Lord with love and loyalty.<sup>8</sup> God’s plan for the marriage covenant is the same as His covenant with His people.

Divorce, on the other hand, although an allowed practice in Old Testament times, was neither commanded nor encouraged. The Mosaic Law, in general, assumed the practice of divorce and regulated it but did not condone it.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the prophet Malachi affirms that God hates divorce, and because of multiple divorces in Israel, God

“no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

“Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”

“‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith.”<sup>10</sup>

### The New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus comments upon practices in Old Testament times and calls His people to be faithful to the will of God as expressed in the Old Testament.

Jesus said, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way in the beginning.”<sup>11</sup>

“Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that the Creator made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the New Testament explicitly permits divorce in circumstances of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion by one who acts as an unbeliever. (It is important to note that since, under Mosaic law, adultery was punishable by stoning, that case is not discussed in the Old Testament.)

#### 1. Adultery or other gross sexual immorality

In Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9, Jesus cites “marital unfaithfulness” (Greek: *porneia*) as the grounds for divorce. *Porneia* refers to gross sexual immorality, which breaks the one-flesh principle. Matthew uses this broad Greek word rather than the Greek word *moicheia*, which refers to adultery in a narrow sense, i.e. sexual union with someone other than one’s spouse. We thus conclude that Jesus allowed divorce in cases of adultery (in the narrow sense) and gross sexual immorality that breaks the one-flesh principle.

#### 2. Willful, irremediable and prolonged desertion

In I Corinthians 7:12-15, the Scriptures cite the case of a man who becomes a Christian after marriage. His wife, however, remains an unbeliever but is willing to continue living with him. The injunction is that he is not to divorce her. But if she were to leave him she is to be allowed to do so. This case of desertion is the abandonment of the marriage by an unbelieving spouse, with the help of his/her elders, is unable to reconcile. “When deserted, the believing man or woman is not bound,” that is, he or she is free to divorce.<sup>13</sup>

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8 Joshua 22:5

9 Leviticus 21:7,14; 22:13; Numbers 30:9; Deuteronomy 22:19, 29; 24:1-4

10 Malachi 2:13-16

11 Matthew 19:8

12 Matthew 19:4-6

13 Some might wonder how irremediable desertion can be accepted as an allowable ground for divorce when Jesus said that only “marital unfaithfulness” was sufficient cause for divorce. Working in the new Gentile environment, Paul further explicated the meaning of *porneia* when he taught that abandonment, or desertion, was, in effect, a form of marital unfaithfulness – a forsaking of the sexual union in marriage. Paul taught clearly in I Corinthians 7:5 that marriage partners are not to “deprive each other” for extended periods, except by mutual consent for seasons of prayer. Irremediable desertion entails “sexual immorality,” because it forsakes the physical union.

Sometimes, to our great sorrow, there is a severe breakdown of a marriage – so much so that even two believers may be advised to separate for a period of healing and to facilitate reconciliation. In such a circumstance, there should be pastoral and Christian psychological counseling, strategies and attempts to move toward reconciliation as soon as possible, and absolutely no consideration of divorce or romantic relationships with other parties. In the case when two believers separate or even if they disobediently divorce one another, the Apostle Paul said “such persons must remain unmarried (or separated) or be reconciled to one another.”

Scripture’s teaching, then, is that any divorce which takes place on any grounds other than adultery or other gross sexual immorality or willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion represents a breaking of the marriage vow and, therefore, is a breach of personal integrity and has no sanction from God. However, in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable and prolonged desertion, an offended spouse is within his/her rights to divorce without reproach from the Lord and His Church.<sup>14 15</sup>

**The Session of Second Presbyterian Church has adopted the following position:**

“It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, thus allowing for no dissolution except that caused by the death of husband or wife. However, in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion, which cannot be remedied in any way by the church, it is allowable for the offended party to sue for divorce. In considering the possibility of separation or divorce, the persons involved must not rely solely upon their own desires but should seek counsel from the church, because the corrupt nature of humankind is inclined to create and support arguments for the wrong separation of those whom God has joined together in marriage.

The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the church, in keeping with the Word of God, and after proper deliberation concerning each person’s eligibility and suitability for marriage. Clearly, in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion which cannot be remedied in any way by the church, the offended party may divorce and after the divorce may marry someone else, as if the offending party were dead.”<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the Bible never commands believers to divorce, even in the case of adultery. Through the healing power of God’s grace, even the greatest offenses can be overcome and the most troubled relationships restored. But even in cases where marital reconciliation is not advisable or possible, it is always incumbent upon Christians to forgive each other, no matter how grievous the sin, because in Christ we have been completely forgiven all of our sins.<sup>17</sup>

In the case where the parties involved proceed to divorce without biblical grounds, the Session will seek to maintain lines of communication and exhibit love to both husband and wife. The elders may ask other church members to help them reach out to couples and families in special need. In some cases, the elders may seek to help by applying some of the principles and practices of the EPC Book of Discipline, as embraced in our church membership and ordination vows. Our church is determined to use all the means provided by God through His love and grace for the health and restoration of our families.<sup>18</sup>

A divorce does not end our efforts to encourage and strengthen the lives and families of Second Presbyterian Church. The Scriptures, our Evangelical Presbyterian Church Constitution, and the love we have for one another require us as a church to continue to encourage and exhort one another to righteousness, “and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”<sup>19</sup>

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14 1 Corinthians 7:11

15 Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:12,15; Malachi 2:16

16 The Session of Second Presbyterian Church has adopted an amended version of Chapter XXIV of the WCF, which it believes more accurately expresses the biblical teaching and the historic Presbyterian view on this issue, as opposed to the more recent chapter adopted by the PCUS and PCUSA, as well as our own EPC. *See Appendix A.*

17 Matthew 18:21-35 Ephesians 4:32

18 Matthew 18:15-17

19 Hebrews 10:15-25



## The Christian and Remarriage

In God's infinite kindness, He continues to guide us as our Good Shepherd, even when we have failed to carry out His original design for marriage.

In the case of a biblically warranted divorce, we believe the Scriptures teach that one is free to remarry in the Lord, since there are no lingering obligations to remain unmarried.<sup>20</sup>

When separation or divorce occurs without biblical grounds, the individuals involved must remain single or be reconciled to their spouse. Jesus teaches that those who are involved in an improper remarriage commit adultery.<sup>21</sup>

If a former spouse has remarried or unilaterally refuses reconciliation in such a way as to reveal himself or herself to be, in effect, a deserting unbeliever, remarriage to another person becomes a valid option for the offended party.<sup>22</sup> The former marriage relationship and all lingering obligations to remain single have been permanently broken.

Following a divorce and before entering into a romantic relationship with another person, there should always be a very careful process of exploring the past through pastoral counseling and personal reflection to establish one's eligibility for remarriage according to Scripture and to discover helpful lessons for the future. We also encourage all believers to remember the Apostle Paul's special words of encouragement for the single life, a lifestyle badly undervalued in our own day.<sup>23</sup> In all circumstances, we encourage one to seek prayerfully God's will and godly counsel within the Church.

What about those cases in which people have been involved in an unbiblical divorce before becoming believers and have since remarried? We encourage such individuals to seek God's gracious forgiveness with the assurance that He will forgive them and accept their present marriage.<sup>24</sup>

Does this mean that in this case God has changed or lowered His standards? Not at all. It does mean, however, that divorce and remarriage, even under sinful circumstances, serious though they be, are not unforgivable sins and, as with all other transgressions, are covered by the blood of Christ.

## A Call to the Congregation

We are committed to the encouragement of Christian marriages, and we are also deeply committed to the healing and recovery of God's people, regardless of the circumstances.

Anyone who has been involved in the extraordinary trauma of divorce knows that the pain of the spouses and children is far greater than one normally imagines. The extended families are also greatly affected.

We especially sympathize with those who were not aware of what the Bible teaches on these issues, thus unknowingly making grievous mistakes. In addition, we are profoundly thankful for those saints, either single or married, who have obediently persevered or suffered in order to follow Christ's teachings on marriage.

We encourage all those struggling in their marriages not to withdraw from the fellowship of the Church (which is often the tendency), but rather to seek the help, guidance, and encouragement of God's people. This often means dealing with some painful emotional and spiritual realities. It also means building a Christian plan for the future. Christ's Church must always be a place of healing as we minister the truth in love.

In light of Scripture's clear teaching on the sanctity of marriage and God's strong opposition to divorce, Second Presbyterian cannot condone the easy accessibility to divorce in our contemporary society. Increasingly, we must emphasize the lifelong commitment implicit in the marriage covenant and especially in Christian marriage, which

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:15,17; 1 Corinthians 7:39

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:3-9

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:12-17

<sup>23</sup> The Scriptures portray both the married life and the single life as gifts of God. The Apostle Paul, who was single, describes the single life as one of great fulfillment and undistracted service to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:17-35). Among other notable single adults who greatly affected the Kingdom are John the Baptist, Anna (Luke 2:31-40), and Lydia (Acts 16:11-15).

<sup>24</sup> Psalms 32:3-5; Micah 7:18-19; 1 John 1:9

should be a constant witness to God's character, His created order, and to Christ's covenant with his bride, the Church. We, the Session, therefore, lovingly and respectfully call the congregation of Second Presbyterian Church as follows:

- As we love each other, we must continue to exhort and encourage each other toward Christ-likeness.
- We believe it is our sacred obligation to teach our young people about God's design for marriage and His grace, which helps us fulfill this design.
- We also believe that it is the privilege and responsibility of all Christians to seek counsel and help in the Church when there is any consideration of marriage or remarriage or any serious problem in their marriages. They certainly must do so when there is potential for separation or divorce.
- Likewise, every Christian is obligated to encourage his or her friends and fellow believers to follow biblical practices and to seek pastoral counsel when considering marriage or when there is potential for separation or divorce.

In a very real sense, our families and their spiritual strength and well-being belong to us all as the community of Christ.

## Our Resolution

We know that only the Holy Spirit Himself can preserve the integrity of our families, and so we earnestly desire to submit ourselves as officers in His Church to further His Kingdom.

We begin, then, with our own lives as officers.

While all Christians are admonished to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ,<sup>25</sup> we who are elected<sup>26</sup> to positions of leadership in the church have an especially solemn responsibility to behave in an exemplary manner in every area of our lives, including our marriages and families.<sup>27</sup>

As elders, we recommit ourselves to this calling and to the obligation to hold our fellow officers accountable for our behavior and our teachings. We ask the congregation to pray for us, for we are sinful, needy people.

Secondly, we recommit ourselves to prayer and to ministering the Word of God in all of its love and power to our family at Second Presbyterian. We believe to be true what we have published in this call to our congregation, and we know that truth leads to goodness, and goodness leads to health and blessing. We surely shall at times fail through inconsistencies or lack of wisdom, but we trust nonetheless that God, through His grace, will use His Church to bless and protect His people.

We want to pay special attention to our young families and shall continue to provide multiple programs and opportunities for growth, support, and encouragement to couples at all stages of their married life. We also want to provide the same level of care and encouragement to those who are single, whether never married or divorced. We are grateful to God for the many resources He has given us to carry out these ministries at Second Presbyterian Church.

We especially express our gratitude to Almighty God for the exceeding excellence and beauty of His creation, having made us male and female, and having given us the institution of the family. Our desire, above all, is to glorify Him in our families and in all our relationships.

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<sup>25</sup> Philippians 1:27

<sup>26</sup> We believe that a person who is divorced in accord with biblical principles, whether remaining single or having remarried, may serve as a church officer. We must exercise special care, however, in the case of persons considered for church office who have divorced or remarried on unbiblical grounds. In such situations, responsibility for one's failures must be acknowledged and repentance for sin expressed. The persons concerned must have been rehabilitated sufficiently in the confidence and respect of other Christians as to be able to fulfill in an exemplary way the requirements of church office with regard to marital and family relationships. The Session should consider that even when such care is exercised, there may be circumstances in which it would be inadvisable, even though technically permissible, for such divorced or remarried persons to serve as church officers. Community awareness of the situation might also be considered so that even apparent scandal be attached to the church.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4-5,12

## Appendix A

The Second Presbyterian Church Sessional Version of Chapter XXIV of the Westminster Confession of Faith approved on October 18, 1999

### Chap. XXIV – Of Marriage and Divorce

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.
2. Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of their moral and spiritual character; for the propagation or adoption of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
3. All persons who are able with judgment to give their consent may marry, except within the limits of blood relationship forbidden by Scripture, and such marriages are valid before God in the eyes of the Church. But no marriage can be fully and securely Christian in spirit or in purpose unless both partners are committed to a common Christian faith and to a deeply shared intention of building a Christian home. Christians should seek as partners in marriage only those who trust in Christ and believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and who have joined a true Christian Church.
4. Marriage for the Christian has religious as well as civil significance. The distinctive contribution of the church in performing the marriage ceremony is to affirm the divine institution of marriage; to invoke God's blessing upon those who enter into the marital relationship in accordance with His Word; to hear the vows of those who desire to be married; and to assure the married partners of God's grace within their new relationship.
5. It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, thus allowing for no dissolution except that caused by the death of husband or wife. However, in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion which cannot be remedied in any way by the Church, it is allowable for the offended party to sue for divorce. In considering the possibility of separation or divorce, the persons involved must not rely solely upon their own desires but should seek counsel from the Church because the corrupt nature of humankind is inclined to create and support arguments for the wrong separation of those whom God has joined together in marriage.
6. The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the Church, in keeping with the Word of God, and after proper deliberation concerning each person's eligibility and suitability for marriage. Clearly, in the case of adultery or other gross sexual immorality or of willful, irremediable, and prolonged desertion which cannot be remedied in any way by the Church, the offended party may divorce and after the divorce may marry someone else, as if the offending party were dead.

## Appendix B

### EPC version of the Westminster Confession of Faith Chap. XXIV – Of Marriage and Divorce

- I. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.
- II. Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of their moral and spiritual character; for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- III. All persons who are able with judgment to give their consent may marry, except within the limits of blood relationship forbidden by Scripture, and such marriages are valid before God in the eyes of the Church. But no marriage can be fully and securely Christian in spirit or in purpose unless both partners are committed to a common Christian faith and to a deeply shared intention of building a Christian home. Evangelical Christians should seek as partners in marriage only persons who hold in common a sound basis of evangelical faith.
- IV. Marriage for the Christian has religious as well as civil significance. The distinctive contribution of the church in performing the marriage ceremony is to affirm the divine institution of marriage; to invoke God's blessing upon those who enter into the marital relationship in accordance with His Word; to hear the vows of those who desire to be married; and to assure the married partners of God's grace within their new relationship.
- V. It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, thus allowing for no dissolution save that caused by the death of either husband or wife. However, the weaknesses of one or both partners may lead to gross and persistent denial of the marriage vows; yet only in cases of extreme, unrepented of, and irremediable unfaithfulness (physical or spiritual) should separation or divorce be considered. Such separation or divorce is accepted as permissible only because of the failure of one or both of the partners, and does not lessen in any way the divine intention for insoluble union.
- VI. The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the Church, in keeping with the redemptive gospel of Christ, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifested.
- VII. Divorced persons should give prayerful thought to discover if God's vocation for them is to remain unmarried, since one failure in this realm raises serious question as to the rightness and wisdom of undertaking another union.

## The Son Teaches the Ethics of His Kingdom: On Receiving the Reward

Matthew 19:13–20:34

**Jesus continues making his way to Jerusalem**, to suffer, die, and be raised. Matthew repeatedly juxtaposes clear insights into Jesus’s servant-Messianic mindset and clear evidence of his disciples’ total misunderstanding of his Messianic person and mission. What sorrow and loneliness our gentle Savior voluntarily embraced in order to secure our salvation.

Before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, he has various encounters that present fresh opportunities for him to clarify the distinctive ethics of the kingdom of heaven. In the evangelist’s accounts immediately preceding Jesus’s arrival in Jerusalem, Matthew puts at the forefront this matter of “community life” in the kingdom of heaven: from the temple-tax discussion in Capernaum (Matt 17:24–27), to Jesus’s fourth discourse in Galilee (Matt 18:2–19:1) and his instruction regarding divorce and marriage in Judea (Matt 19:3–12), and now to his dialogue with various people on his way to Jerusalem that covers a range of topics relating to the kingdom (Matt 19:13–20:34).

Jesus continues expounding the nature of his kingdom, specifically by clarifying to whom his kingdom belongs. And what Jesus reveals shocks (and even scandalizes) many, including his closest disciples.

To whom does the kingdom of heaven belong? Who will receive the Father’s reward? The kingdom belongs to those who humble themselves and follow the Son of Man, seeking treasure in heaven, not on earth (19:13–30). They are those who obey God the Father and submit to his generosity (20:1–16). They are those who embrace the suffering, glorious Son of Man, including by imitating his example of sacrificial servanthood (20:17–28). They are those who cry out to the Lord for mercy and, on receiving that mercy, immediately follow him (20:29–34).

What Jesus reveals about his kingdom does not merely shock his disciples in that day. It shocks me and you as well (that is, if we are honest and self-aware). It runs against the grain of our sinful, broken, worldly perspective. Jesus’s teaching confronts each of us, exposes our worldly ambitions, and then mercifully beckons us to cry out to him for more mercy still, that he might continue transforming us from the inside out.

**Our gentle and kind Savior extends to us a fresh opportunity to repent and believe**—to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 20:17–34, and respond to questions 3, 4, 8, 12, 13, 15.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 19:13–20:16; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 20:17–34; Questions 3–5
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 19:13–20:34; Questions 6–7
- **Day 4:** Read Matt 19:13–20:34; Questions 8–10
- **Day 5:** Read Matt 19:13–20:34; Questions 11–16

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Jesus confronts the disciples' misunderstanding about to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs—and thus whom the Messiah welcomes. For example, despite his disciples' rebukes, Jesus gladly welcomes little children to come to him and receive his blessing (Matt 19:13–15). Moreover, Jesus exposes the particular obstacles of wealth and power for entering the kingdom of heaven, when a wealthy young man approaches Jesus to ask about which good deeds enable a person to have eternal life (19:16–30).

In Matt 19:13–30, what stands out to you about the actions and words of those whom Jesus surprises by clarifying to whom the kingdom belongs?

- The disciples (prior to Jesus's welcome of the children)
- The wealthy young man (vv. 16, 18, 20, 22)
- The disciples (in response to Jesus's interaction with the wealthy young man; vv. 25, 27)

What stands out to you about Jesus's actions and words?

- In response to the disciples' rebuke of the children (vv. 14–15)
- In response to the wealthy young man's questions (vv. 17–19, 21)
- To his disciples, following his interaction with the wealthy young man (vv. 23–30)



2. Jesus describes the eternal, exponential reward that his followers will receive “in the new world” with the reigning Son (19:23–29). Jesus explains that, contrary to worldly assumptions, “many who are first will be last, and the last first” in the kingdom of heaven (19:30). The upside-down nature of God’s kingdom demonstrates his grace. Jesus then tells a parable (20:1–15) to illustrate this same principle: “So the last will be first, and the first last” (20:16).

The parable begins with the master and laborers agreeing about the precise wages the laborers will receive for their day’s work. Throughout the day, several additional workers come to the vineyard and begin their duties at various points in the day. At the end of the day, the master gives everyone the same wages, regardless of the number of hours each worked. The original workers are indignant, grumble against the master, and complain about harsh working conditions. The master’s generosity to the later comers leads the original laborers to conceive of him as unjust and cruel. They despise him for his grace and “begrudge [his] generosity” (v. 15).

What is Jesus’s main point in telling this parable?

In what ways are you sometimes tempted to “begrudge” God the Father’s generosity toward other people? *Give at least two examples.*

3. For a third time, Jesus speaks with his twelve disciples about his imminent suffering, death, and third-day resurrection (20:18–19; see 16:21 and 17:22–23). In Matthew’s first report, Peter immediately takes Jesus aside and rebukes him for foretelling what he will face in Jerusalem (16:22). In Matthew’s second report, Jesus’s disciples are distressed (17:23b). Here, in Matthew’s third report, Matthew does not record a direct response from the disciples to Jesus’s prediction. Instead, Matthew immediately begins narrating how James’s and John’s mother seeks prestige for her sons in the kingdom (20:20–28).<sup>4</sup>

What is the logical/thematic relationship between Jesus’s predictions in 20:17–19 and his interactions with James, John, and their mother in 20:20–28? That is, how does each passage help show the meaning and significance of the other passage?

What does Jesus mean by asking James and John, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” (v. 22)?

Why might James and John think they are able to “drink the cup” of Jesus?

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<sup>4</sup>The evangelist Mark records the same progression in his Gospel but writes that James and John *themselves* approach Jesus with this question (Mark 10:35ff).

Why might the ten other disciples be indignant when they hear about this interaction (v. 24)?

Sometimes, other people's sin or weakness makes us indignant because their sinful desires threaten our sinful desires. Their way of getting what they want seems to inhibit *our* plan to get what *we* want.

For example, have you ever been self-righteously outraged by "those people" who parade their prosperity ... because deep down you are somehow jealous or threatened? Otherwise, why would their pretension bother you so much?

The sinful things that most aggravate or outrage us in others are often the things that most threaten us. Their sin grates on our sin. Their self-centeredness feels like an obstacle to our self-centeredness.

But the Lord Jesus never competes with sinners in this way. No. He is "the Son of Man [who] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

4. Once again Jesus perseveres in showing mercy, despite the rebukes of others, when he heals two blind men outside of Jericho (Matt 20:29–34; compare 19:13–15). When the crowd rebukes the two blind men who beg Jesus for mercy, Jesus stops to speak with these blind men, has pity on them, and heals them by touching them. Matthew writes, "And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him" (v. 34).

Matthew uses various forms of the word for "in pity" four other times in his Gospel: Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27 (within a parable). After reviewing each of these passages: what sorts of situations lead Jesus to compassion/pity?

How does Jesus's pity/compassion for sufferers comfort you today?

How does Jesus's pity/compassion for sufferers challenge you today?

To whom today will you make a special effort to extend such compassion? How so? *Be specific.*

5. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

6. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

7. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

8. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
9. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
10. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
12. In Matt 19:13–20:34, Jesus openly confronts the arrogance that would inhibit a person's entering the kingdom of heaven. He clarifies that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who humble themselves before God so as to receive his mercy. What is one area in your life in which you especially need to humble yourself before God—perhaps an area in which you have been resisting his gracious will? *Be specific.*
13. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
14. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.

*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*

*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

15. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

16. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction



## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening question:** Think of someone you have known personally who exemplifies “servant leadership.” (a) What is it about this person that makes him or her a good example of a “servant leader”? (b) What was/is it like for you to be led by this person?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 20:17–34.** Imagine yourself as one of Jesus’s disciples during the time of his prediction, narrated in Matt 20:17–19. How might you have felt and reacted to his words? Why?
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
4. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *See Study-Guide question 8.*

### DO THE WORD

5. Discuss Study-Guide Question 12.
6. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what’s **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *See Study-Guide question 13.*

### RETELL THE WORD

7. Discuss Study-Guide questions 15 and 16.

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**



## The Son of David Comes to the Jerusalem Temple to Cleanse and Save

Matthew 21:1–17

**Matthew 21 marks an important turning-point in the Gospel.** Jesus, who has been steadily making his way to Jerusalem with his disciples, has now arrived in the city of David. The first two-thirds of Matthew's Gospel narrate Jesus's thirty-three years of life, primarily focusing on Jesus's public, three-year ministry in Galilee. The Gospel's final third (Matt 21–28) narrates the events of just one week in Jerusalem—the most momentous week in all of human history.

Jesus has repeatedly expressed his resolve to fulfill his Messianic ministry in Jerusalem. Following Peter's open confession of Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt 16:16, 21; compare 17:22–23; 20:17–19). The time has come.

Jesus orchestrates a symbol-laden entrance into Jerusalem (Matt 21:1–12), in fulfillment of Scripture (Zech 9:9; see also Isa 62:11; Zech 14:4). While many consider a donkey a lowly beast, certain ancient Near Eastern evidence indicates that donkeys are sometimes associated with kingship. For example, a victorious king would ride into his city on a donkey to demonstrate *his coming in peace* (2 Sam 19:26, when David rides back into Jerusalem after Absalom's death), as opposed to a conquering king who would ride into a city on a war-horse to demonstrate his coming in battle.

Relatedly, Jacob prophesies about the future dominion of his twelve sons, in particular his fourth son, Judah. About Judah he says, "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes*" (Gen 49:8–12). In other words, the future, victorious king will come through Judah's line. Judah's royal dynasty will begin with David and culminate in David's greater son, Jesus (Matt 1:1). Significantly, one of the symbols of this future king's blessed dominion is a donkey's colt tied to a fruitful vine, symbolizing peace and prosperity for God's people.

Moreover, centuries after Jacob foretold Judah's royal legacy, the prophet Zechariah also prophesied about Israel's coming Messiah. Zechariah anticipated the coming king: "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*" (Zech 9:9). When this king rides into Jerusalem, God will "*cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem ... and he shall speak peace to the nations his rule shall be from sea to sea*" (Zech 9:10). Notice the contrast between the king's colt and Jerusalem's war horses. The Messiah will bring peace to his people and to the nations when he comes to Zion.

Jesus's dramatic entrance into the city of David **sets the stage** for his confrontation with the Jerusalem establishment, which will precipitate his death. All according to the King's sovereign will.

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 21:1–17, and respond to questions 1, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 21:1–11; Question 1
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 21:12–17; Questions 2–5
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 21:1–17; Questions 6–9
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 21:1–17; Questions 10–13
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 21:1–17; Questions 14–15

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. In fulfillment of Zech 9:9, the Lord Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. Jesus comes to his own people in peace, in humility, in gentleness. He and his disciples make pilgrimage to Jerusalem from the north, arriving in Bethpage (about one mile from Jerusalem). The crowd acclaims Jesus as "the Son of David" by citing Psalm 118:26. As John writes, "[Jesus's] disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him" (John 12:16).

The great crowd coming from Jericho to Jerusalem by way of the Mount of Olives most likely consists largely of fellow pilgrims traveling from the north to Jerusalem for Passover—including Galileans who would know a great deal about Jesus from his years of ministering in their region. The crowd also consists of those residents of Bethany who saw and heard testimony of Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead (see John 12:17–18). These men and women throw their cloaks and tree branches before Jesus in glad submissions to the king (compare 2 King 9:13).

The pilgrims' jubilation stirs up "the whole city" of Jerusalem (compare Matt 2:3), such that the Jerusalem citizenry and those pilgrims already in Jerusalem ask, "Who is this?" (21:10). The crowds explain that this man riding on the colt is "the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee" (21:11). What most stands out to you about the way Matthew narrates these events in 21:1–11? Why?

Imagine what it might have been like to be in Jerusalem when this jubilant crowd arrived, citing Scripture to acclaim a man riding on a donkey. *Describe at least three sorts of possible reactions among the crowds in Jerusalem.*

2. On arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus soon goes to the temple. (Jesus first arrives on Sunday of Passover week; the events Matthew records in 21:12–17 take place the next day, on Monday.) Jesus, David's greater son, prioritizes the constitution and reform of right worship at God's dwelling place (compare David's prioritization of right worship in 1 Chronicles 13; 14–16). At the crowded temple complex, Jesus specifically comes to the Court of the Gentiles where worshipers could convert their Greek and Roman currency into temple currency. Appalled by the extortion he sees, Jesus "drives out" those selling and buying and "overturns" the tables of the money changers (Matt 21:12).

Jesus explains his actions by citing Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11. Instead of honoring God's dwelling place as a "house of prayer," the money changers desecrate it and make it a "den of robbers" (Matt 21:23). Their iniquitous greed defiles God's dwelling place and inhibits right worship. Jesus's prophetic action thus pronounces judgment on the so-called temple authorities. In reality, Jesus demonstrates *his* authority at the temple as God's true prophet.

Read Isaiah 56:1–8 and Jeremiah 7:1–15. How does this OT backdrop help explain the significance of Jesus’s actions and speech in Matt 21:12–13?

3. Following his prophetic denouncement of iniquitous temple practices, Jesus heals the blind and the lame in the temple complex (21:14; compare Jesus’s healing of the blind reported elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel: 9:27–31; 11:22; 15:30–31; 20:29–34; see also 11:5; compare John 9). Matthew records two drastically different responses to Jesus’s mercy: the children loudly acclaim Jesus as “the Son of David,” while the temple guard despises him (21:15). The healed blind and the children can see the truth about Jesus, while the religious leaders are blind to his Messianic significance. What tragic irony!

In response to the temple authorities’ fury, Jesus cites Psalm 8:2, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise.” In those moments, after cleansing the Court of the Gentiles, Jesus restores the temple complex as a place of praise for God’s mighty works.

Read Psalm 8. By citing this portion of Psalm 8, what is Jesus indicating to the religious establishment about his true identity and significance?

4. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

5. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage’s shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

6. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

7. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
8. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**? *Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
9. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*



**The very King Jesus who came to Jerusalem at Passover is coming again one day soon.**

The joy, cleansing, and healing that Jesus brought God's people then (Matt 21:1–17) and that which he brings believers now are but a foretaste of the blessings he will bring when he comes again. When he returns, he will not come in humility, but in splendor and power.

As Jesus explains to his disciples, *“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man ... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matt 24:30).

Or as John envisions the second coming of Jesus, *“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is ‘The Word of God’ ... On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords”* (Rev 19:11–13, 15). On the return of our great King Jesus, the heavenly Jerusalem will descend from above like a bride adorned for her husband, and the citizens of this heavenly Jerusalem will be those who have “thrown our cloaks before” Jesus in faith and gladly yielded to his reign.

On our King's return, all our spiritual blindness will be healed. We shall see him face to face. And when we do, we will join with all creation praising the Son of David, the beloved Son of God.

**Come quickly, Lord Jesus!**

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

10. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
11. We must allow Matt 21:1–17 to confront us with the reality of rampant spiritual blindness, not least among those of us who are most religious. Ironically, it is the children at the temple who can see the truth about Jesus, while the religious leaders are blind to his significance. The danger of *being blind to Jesus in his full Messianic authority* is one with which you and I must reckon. Practically speaking, how do we ensure that we are allowing God to open the eyes of our heart to **see Jesus** as he really is and, thus, rightly praise him? What sorts of practices and habits ought we cultivate? *Be specific.*
12. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
13. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

14. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

15. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** What is the most dramatic entrance or opening act you have ever witnessed? What made it so dramatic? *Try to be brief as you share!*

### HEAR THE WORD

1. Read Matt 21:1–17.
2. Read and respond to Study-Guide question 1.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
4. What does Matt 21:1–17 mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 7.*

### DO THE WORD

5. Respond to Study-Guide question 11.
6. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 12.*

### RETELL THE WORD

7. Discuss Study-Guide question 15.

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**





## **The Son Confirms His Authority Over Against the Temple “Authorities”**

Matthew 21:18–23:39

**Having climactically demonstrated his prophetic and Messianic authority at the Jerusalem temple complex when he arrived in Jerusalem** (Matt 21:12–16), Jesus continues unveiling his identity as God’s Son. Over the course of the next few days, Jesus will travel back and forth to Jerusalem from Bethany, where he spends the night. Each day in Jerusalem brings fresh controversy with the temple “authorities,” including the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees. Here again, Matthew makes plain that Jesus causes a crisis: either a person follows Jesus in faith or rejects him in unbelief. There is no middle ground, no third option.

In Matt 21:18–23:39, the evangelist narrates a number of encounters that particularly highlight God’s coming judgment on those who reject Jesus in unbelief, including the temple leadership. Jesus confronts the rank hypocrisy among the Jerusalem leaders in various ways: by signs, in parables, by open denouncement, and by prophetic lament.

For example, as Jesus travels to Jerusalem on Monday morning, he curses a fig tree that has leaves but no fruit, such that the tree soon withers (21:18–24). On Tuesday, he teaches at the temple complex and enrages the temple leadership by responding to their challenges with parables uncovering their hypocrisy (21:23–22:14). The Pharisees and Sadducees seek to trap Jesus by causing him to misspeak (or at least anger the crowds), but to no avail (22:15–46). Jesus refuses to shy away from this conflict. Instead, he openly decries the scribes’ and Pharisees’ hypocrisy to his disciples and the crowd by issuing a series of prophetic “woes” (23:1–36). But Jesus does not denounce their hypocrisy with a calloused heart. Rather, Jesus with deep sorrow laments Jerusalem’s rejection of him, the one who would have gathered and guarded them (23:37–39).

These dramatic actions, which mostly transpire within the larger temple complex, constitute bold and enduring critiques against religious hypocrisy. You and I “religious folks” need the warning that Jesus and Matthew give. As we study the passage this week, let’s humble ourselves before God and plead with him, using the words of our brother, David:

**Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts/cares!  
And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!** (Psalm 139:23)

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 23, and respond to questions 4, 5, 9, 13, 14, 17.

### **Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan**

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 21:18–46; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 22:1–46; Questions 2–3
- **Day 3:** Review Matt 23:1–39; Questions 4–11
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 21:18–23:39; Questions 12–15
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 21:18–23:39; Questions 16–17

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Normally on a fig tree, the leaves and fruit buds appear around the same time. But when Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem with his disciples, he sees a fig tree full of leaves but without the gradually ripening fruit that ought to have accompanied those leaves (Matt 21:18–22). That fruitless fig tree symbolically resembles the hypocrisy of those in Jerusalem who *call* themselves God's people but do not live like it. Here again, Jesus's actions and speech are symbol laden.

It is common for evangelists to narrate the same events with slightly different emphases or from a slightly different perspective. Sometimes skeptics highlight these differences among Gospel writers and claim them as examples of “contradictions.” The account relating to the fig tree provides a good example of this tendency for evangelists to highlight different aspects of the same event.

Read Mark's account of these same events in Mark 11:12–14 and 11:20–26. Mark narrates these events in a more *chronological* fashion: Jesus curses the fig tree on Monday morning, then the disciples see on Tuesday morning that the tree had withered. Jesus's actions at the temple complex (Mark 11:15–19) transpire between Jesus's cursing of the fig tree and the disciples' seeing the withered tree. Mark's decision to highlight that Jesus curses the tree on the way to confront the temple “authorities” helps readers interpret what Jesus means when he curses the fig tree.

Matthew, on the other hand, renders these same events in a more *topical* fashion. Matthew condenses the two events into one, brief, seamless account. Matthew compresses Jesus's cursing the tree and the disciples' seeing that it had withered into one passage, rather than including the detail of the lapse in time.

Having read both Matthew's and Mark's account, why might Matthew have chosen to tell the story this way? What stands out to you as particularly interesting about Matthew's account?

2. Matthew delights to show how Jesus confounds the very ones who seek to confound him. When Jesus reenters the temple, the chief priests and elders approach him to test him (Matt 21:23). They want to tap Jesus into saying something blasphemous or otherwise incendiary. Much to their dismay, Jesus—in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3)—places the burden back on his challengers and publicly exposes their hypocrisy. A series of challenges, parables, and speeches from Jesus ensue (Matt 21:24–23:39).

Jesus tells three parables about the chief priests and Pharisees:

- (1) the parable of the two sons whose father asks them to work in the vineyard (21:28–32);
- (2) the parable of the tenants who reject their master and kill his heir (21:33–44);
- (3) the parable of the wedding feast, for which the king ultimately invites guests from the main road (22:1–14).

What **main point** does Jesus make in the **first parable** (21:28–32)?

What **main point** does Jesus make in the **second parable** (21:33–44)?

What **main point** does Jesus make in the **third parable** (22:1–14)?

What is one way these parables **confront and challenge you** today?

3. Describe the Pharisees', Herodians', and Sadducees tactics to entangle Jesus in Matt 22:15–46.  
*Be specific. Note the verses that correspond with your description.*

These groups are often enemies of the other, but they cooperate due to their mutual hatred of Jesus.

Describe Jesus's tactic in responding to their malice (Matt 22:15–46).  
*Be specific. Note the verses that correspond with your description.*

What do these interactions establish about Jesus's character and authority?

4. Jesus pronounces prophetic woes on the scribes and Pharisees due to their hypocritical law-breaking (Matt 23; compare 11:20–24). Along with teaching the Scriptures (23:2–3a), they burden God's people with extrabiblical rules (23:4a). But they do not even practice what they preach, whether the Scriptures or their extrabiblical regulations (23:3b, 4b). What religious actions they do perform, they do for show and acclaim (23:5–7). They are concerned with the appearance of holiness, but they have no regard for the reality of holiness.

But Jesus is not fooled by their hypocrisy. He calls them “blind guides,” “blind fools,” “blind men,” “hypocrites,” whitewashed tombs,” “serpents,” “a brood of vipers,” and so on.

- a. Where else in Matthew's Gospel has Jesus demonstrated and taught the essence of 23:11–12: "The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"? *Give specific chapter:verse references.*
- b. What does Jesus mean by accusing the scribes and Pharisees of "shutting the kingdom of heaven in people's faces" (23:13)?

What is a contemporary example of shutting the kingdom of heaven in someone's face?

- c. Why might it be significant that, in these oracles, Jesus does not reject the practice of tithing in and of itself, but rather the hypocrisy of distorting the intent of God's law (23:23–24)? In other words, why does it matter that Jesus does not criticize Old-Testament Scripture's command to tithe?
- d. Which specific oracle ("woe to you!") in Matt 23:13–36 most stands out to you, and why?

5. Jesus indicts the scribes and Pharisees as "serpents" who will persecute the righteous. After exposing the murderous hearts of Jerusalem's religious leaders, Jesus lifts up his voice to lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39). Jesus grieved for God's precious people and city, who would face destruction because of their refusal to repent. Jesus's bold denunciations of hypocrisy and clear descriptions of future judgment come from his passionate love for sinners.

What wisdom do you glean from Jesus's example in Matt 23 of dealing with sin, in terms of both his clarity and grief regarding sin's destructive deceitfulness? And regarding which relationship in your life does Jesus's example most challenge you? *Be specific. Ask God to help you confront and grieve sin's destructive deceitfulness—beginning with your own heart.*

6. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

7. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*
8. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

9. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
10. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
11. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

12. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
13. What is one way that **you are often tempted** to be more concerned about *appearing* holy than *being* holy—like the Pharisees do? *Be specific.*
14. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
15. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.

*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*

*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*



## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

16. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

17. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** In your view, has the problem of hypocrisy among religious leaders over the past twenty years gotten better, worse, or stayed the same? How so?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. Why is hypocrisy such a big deal? Why is unrepentant hypocrisy especially problematic when it is rampant among religious leaders?
2. **Read Matt 23.** Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 5.
4. What does Matt 23 mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 9.*

### DO THE WORD

5. Discuss Study-Guide question 13.
6. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 14.*

### RETELL THE WORD

7. Discuss Study-Guide questions 17.

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**



## The Son of Man Foretells His Coming Judgment at the End of the Age

Matthew 24:1–35

**After Jesus excoriates the rampant hypocrisy among Jerusalem’s religious leadership, he departs the temple complex, literally and symbolically.** Matthew writes, “*Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple [complex]*” (Matt 24:1). The very Son of God—the walking temple (see John 1:14; 2:21)!—leaves the Jerusalem temple building in a symbolic act of judgment.

In Ezekiel 10–11, the prophet Ezekiel envisions God’s judgment of his unrepentant people in terms of God’s abandonment of the temple building and even of the city of Jerusalem. In Ezekiel’s vision, the LORD’s glory-cloud (the symbol of his presence) departs the physical temple building and eventually the city of Jerusalem, a departure that symbolizes the LORD’s judgment against his faithless people (Ezek 10:18–19; 11:22–23). Ezekiel envisions the LORD’s glory cloud leaving the Jerusalem temple and city, and then standing “*on the mountain that is on the east side of the city*,” which is the Mount of Olives (11:23).

Matthew knows Ezekiel’s vision full well. When Matthew writes, “*Jesus left the temple and was going away... [and] he sat on the Mount of Olives*” (24:1, 3), Matthew most likely alludes to this vision and indicates Jesus’s fulfillment of it. Matthew’s intention becomes even clearer as he recounts Jesus’s specific instruction of his disciples, who are standing before him on the Mount of Olives. Jesus instructs them about future events that will transpire relating to the “close of the age.” Jesus’s “Olivet Discourse” comprises his **fifth and final discourse** in Matthew’s Gospel. In this discourse, Jesus applies to his followers the reality of his coming kingdom: regarding coming judgment, his return at the end of the age, and the coming restoration of his kingdom.

Just as Jesus’s disciples need instruction regarding how to live in light of the end, so you and I need Jesus’s guidance. We need God’s help to make ourselves ready for Christ’s second coming. Among the fruit that God’s Spirit bears in us as we meditate on the Olivet Discourse, **may he deepen our longing to see Jesus face to face when he returns and strengthen our resolve to wait patiently for him.**

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 24:1–35, and respond to questions 1, 2, 4, 8, 12, 15, 16.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 24:1–14; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 24:15–35; Questions 3–6
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 24:1–35; Questions 7–10
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 24:1–35; Questions 11–13
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 24:1–35; Questions 14–16

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Imagine yourself to be one of Jesus's disciples who point out the temple buildings to Jesus, as narrated in Matt 24:1. You are standing with him on the Mount of Olives and enjoying a stunning view of the temple complex.

How **might you initially react** to Jesus's answer, "*You see all these things, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down*" (24:2)? Why?

2. The disciples seek a private audience with Jesus for further clarity about the coming judgment involving the destruction of Jerusalem's temple (24:3). They want to know how to discern when this world as they know it is drawing to a close. Their question leads Jesus to instruct them regarding the signs of his future coming and of the close of the age (24:4–25:46).

What **main truths** does Jesus point out about the closing of this age in Matt 24:4–14?

What **main instructions** does Jesus give his disciples in Matt 24:4–14, in light of these truths?

Amid raging tribulation and persecution, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" before the present age comes to its conclusion (24:14).

3. Jesus refers to the prophet Daniel as he describes the "abomination of desolation" (Matt 24:15), an allusion to Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11. Jesus instructs his disciples that when they see what Daniel prophesied, "the abomination of desolation ... standing in the holy place" (24:15), all people in Judea should flee and take refuge in the surrounding mountains. Jesus warns them that this future tribulation will come swiftly and with great destruction (24:17–22). He also warns them that those days will feature the rising of many "false christs and false prophets" who will seek to lead people astray (24:23–26). Jesus's followers may take comfort in the fact that, when the Son of Man returns, it will be obvious (24:27–28). Jesus's prophecy of judgment comes to fulfillment in 70 A.D., when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

Why would this context of devastating judgment be one in which false "christs" and prophets would seek to lead people astray, including God's beloved children (24:23–26)? How does tribulation provide a breeding ground for false "messiahs"?

What are some contemporary examples of this phenomenon, namely, of severe tribulation establishing a ripe context for deceitful leaders to gain power and manipulate people who are suffering, weak, and discouraged? *Be specific.*

### **“The Abomination of Desolation” (Matt 24:15) in the Book of Daniel**

The prophet Daniel endures the hardships of exile from Jerusalem. The second half of the book of Daniel (Dan 7–12) mostly consists of visions and prophecies about events that will transpire in the distant future, relative to Daniel. Much in these visions—including “the abomination of desolation”—is difficult to understand and highly debated.

In **Daniel 9**, the prophet turns to the LORD in prayers of confession and petition. Daniel confesses his own sin and the sin of the people of Israel and then pleads with the LORD for mercy, to restore Jerusalem and her people. While Daniel is praying, the angel Gabriel appears (9:21–23). Gabriel announces that, after the LORD’s judgment against his unfaithful people is complete, the LORD will indeed restore the Jerusalem temple. But after a set period of time, Jerusalem and her temple will be destroyed again: *“And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator” (9:27).*

In **Daniel 11**, an angel continues helping Daniel interpret what he sees. In the course of this vision, the angel describes a time when an enemy force will *“profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate” (11:31).*

In **Daniel 12**, the angel continues describing trouble and restoration in the distant future (12:1–4). Then Daniel questions a divine messenger regarding the timing, duration, and outcome of these future events (12:5–13). As the messenger responds to Daniel’s questions, the messenger refers again to the setting up of *“the abomination that makes desolate” (12:11).*

4. Jesus describes his second coming so as to help his disciples distinguish between the rising of false “messiahs” and his coming, the true Messiah. What stands out to you about the way Jesus describes his return (24:27–35)?
5. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?



6. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

7. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

8. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*

9. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
10. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
12. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
13. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.

*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*

*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

14. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

15. Some passages in Scripture are more difficult to interpret. This is certainly the case with respect to a number of passages about the close of the age. How can we make progress in communicating the truths of a text like Matt 24, even when there are portions of it that we must struggle to understand?
16. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** How often do you think about Jesus's second coming and "the close of the age"? When you think about them, what sorts of emotions and feelings do you experience?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 24:1–35.** Discuss Study-Guide question 1.
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 2.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
4. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *See Study-Guide question 8.*

### DO THE WORD

5. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *See Study-Guide question 12.*

### RETELL THE WORD

6. Discuss Study-Guide questions 15 and 16.

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**





## The Son of Man Calls His Servants to Be Ready and Wait for His Coming

Matthew 24:36–25:46

**Jesus departs the Jerusalem temple complex, literally and in a symbolic act of judgment, and informs his disciples of the temple's coming destruction** (Matt 24:1–2). Naturally, the disciples seek more understanding. When Jesus adopts the teaching position—by sitting down—his disciples inquire about the timing and indication/sign of his second coming and the close of the age (24:3). In response, Jesus privately instructs his disciples in what is known as the Olivet Discourse (24:4–25:46), the fifth and final discourse in Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus aims to prepare his disciples (and future generations of believers) for history's unfolding so that they/we will be ready for his return. Although no one except the heavenly Father knows the precise timing of Jesus's return (Matt 24:36–41), Jesus does not want any of his followers to be caught “sleeping” when he returns (24:42–44). That is because everyone must give an account of the service that he or she has rendered the Master, the Lord Jesus (24:45–51). The apparent “delay” between Jesus's ascension and second coming must not fool his followers into slothfulness and spiritual slumber.

Rather, Jesus's followers must wait for him as those prepared to endure until he comes (25:1–13). In fact, his followers should not just prepare themselves to wait patiently for Jesus's return, but they must even advance his agenda as they wait for him (25:14–30). One of the best ways to do this is by sacrificially loving fellow Jesus-followers (25:31–46). The glorious Son of Man so radically identifies with his suffering people that when they are welcomed, fed, clothed, he rewards it as if he himself were welcomed, fed, clothed. As we Jesus's followers learn to serve one another today, in this present age, we are preparing for an everlasting lifetime of serving one another in the age to come.

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus makes plain the everlasting consequences of believing or rejecting him. One day, every person must stand before him and give an account. The critical factor in the outcome of that encounter is whether or not we are united by faith to Jesus Christ, who is seated on his glorious throne.

Followers of Jesus must live **today** in view of these everlasting realities. Our personal life and our local-church life ought to reflect our sober mindedness about Jesus's imminent return. **No matter how long the Son of Man tarries, we must be ready for him at his coming.**

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 25:1–30, and respond to questions 3, 9, 14, 16, 17.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 24:36–51; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 25; Questions 3–7
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 24:36–25:46; Questions 8–11
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 24:36–25:46; Questions 12–15
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 24:36–25:46; Questions 16–18

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. If no one knows the day or the hour of Jesus's return (24:36), **why** do you suspect that so many Christians try to calculate when Jesus will return?
2. What does Jesus mean when he instructs his disciples to "**stay awake**" (24:42) and to "**be ready**" for the coming of Son of Man (24:44)? *Put Jesus's instructions into your own words.*
3. Jesus illustrates the reality that *no one knows the day or hour of his second coming* by telling two parables (25:1–30). These parables describe important features of properly waiting for the King's coming. We believers rightly apply these parables by making ourselves ready for the coming of Jesus, the Son of Man, and waiting patiently for him.

What stands out to you in these parables about the **challenges** believers in Christ Jesus might face as they wait for him?

What stands out to you in these parables about the **manner** in which believers in Christ Jesus must wait for him, until he comes?

James exhorts believers, "*Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door*" (James 5:7–9).

4. Jesus finishes instructing his disciples by dealing with final judgment. The glorified Christ will bring human history to its culmination. On that day, the Son of Man will separate the "sheep" (those who believe in him) from the "goats" (those who do not believe in him). He will bring the sheep into their inheritance, but he will banish and condemn the goats (25:31–46).

What is this "**inherited kingdom**" about which Jesus speaks (25:34)? *List the features of this inheritance that are described in this passage.*

In sharp contrast to the sheep's inherited kingdom, God prepares the "eternal fire" for "the devil and his angels" (25:41). What is this "**eternal fire**" about which Jesus speaks? *List the features of this realm that are described in this passage.*

5. The Judge, the Son of Man, will say to those on his right, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom*" (25:34) and to those on his left, "*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (25:41). The ultimate *basis* for any person's welcome into God's kingdom is her faith in Christ. Christ's merits alone are sufficient for our salvation. After the King either welcomes (v. 34) or banishes (v. 41) a person, the King describes the *evidence* of their belief in Christ (for those welcomed) or rejection of Christ (for those banished).

What **evidence of the sheep's faith** does the King give?

What **evidence of the goat's unbelief** does the King give?

While giving evidence of the sheep's faith, the King refers to "my brothers" (25:40). About whom is the King referring? Who are his "**brothers**"? *For help, read Matt 10:40–42; 12:46–50; 28:10.*

6. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

7. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

8. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

9. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
10. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**? *Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
11. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

**Nothing is more urgent than decisions pertaining to eternal life and eternal punishment.**

Jesus is qualified to offer eternal life to sinners who place our trust in him because he bore the punishment for our sin, on our behalf. This glorious Son of Man is the Suffering Servant. He is the Judge who undertook judgment in his people's place.

What indicates that a woman has truly received Jesus in faith? She makes herself ready for him, eagerly awaiting his return. She lovingly devotes herself to him, such that she shows mercy to those with whom he particularly identifies, his "siblings" who do his Father's will.

**Are you ready for Jesus's return?**

If not, getting ready is simple. Turn to the Lord in prayer. Confess your sin and need for him. Ask him for mercy and faith to believe the good news that Jesus has come to save sinners.

God delights to hear such prayers. He is eager to welcome to his kingdom any who would humble themselves like a child in repentance and faith.

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Christianity Today, "11 Places Where Persecuted Christians Need Our Prayers"

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/november/11-places-where-persecuted-christians-need-our-prayers.html>

1. China
2. Algeria
3. Egypt
4. Eritrea
5. India
6. Iran
7. Iraq
8. North Korea
9. Saudi Arabia
10. Sri Lanka
11. Turkey

\*Perhaps your small group will want to divide up this list of places, do a bit of research on the persecution occurring there, and come prepared to your next meeting to pray in a more informed manner for our brothers and sisters living and ministering in these countries. Pray for their steadfastness in the gospel (1 Thess 1), their boldness to continue proclaiming Christ (Acts 4), that the Lord would direct their hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ (1 Thess 3), and that the Lord would open a door for the word of Christ so they might speak clearly of Christ (Col 4).

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

12. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
13. Jesus so radically identifies with his suffering people that he considers sacrificial love rendered to them as love rendered to him (25:30). Who is a **fellow believer in Christ in particular need** right now, to whom you can extend mercy in the Name of Christ and for his sake? What practical action will you take this week to do this? *Be specific.*
14. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
15. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

16. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

17. Peter urges believers always to be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15). Presupposed in this exhortation is that these believers will lead lives that are *different* from their neighbors, such that their neighbors ask them questions about why they do what they do. More specifically, their neighbors will seek “a reason for the hope that is in you”! (Paul speaks of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” in Col 1.) When believers live in light of their certain reward in Christ, the world notices and inquires.

What is the **visible and/or practical evidence** that non-Christians can notice in your life of “the hope that is in you”—or, to put it in terms of Matt 25, **of your readiness for the Son of Man's coming**? *Name at least two pieces of evidence. These can relate to your conduct, the way you parent, what you post on social media, what you talk about around the neighborhood firepit, etc.*

Take a moment and consider how God might use this evidence to open a door for you to share the gospel message with someone. Then, pray that he would do so. Perhaps this exercise will help stimulate your creativity regarding how you might be more intentional among your non-Christian neighbors, not least to build friendships with them so that they can see the difference Jesus makes in your life.

18. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*



## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** Have you ever looked at the state of affairs and thought that the world was about to end—or, to use Matthew’s language, that this present age was coming to a close? Why or why not?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 25:1–30.**
2. What are the main themes (repeated ideas, words, phrases) in this passage?
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
4. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 9.*

### DO THE WORD

5. Are you ready for Jesus’s return? If so, how do you know? If not, in what sense are you not ready?
6. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what’s **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 14.*

### RETELL THE WORD

7. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus?  
*Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide questions 16–18.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**

## Matthew 24–25

**Jesus will come again in glory** to close this age and to bring a new age. What must we expect regarding Jesus's second coming and the close of the age?

We expect to wait.

We expect to be tested.

We expect to be rewarded.

We expect the Son of Man to reign from the throne.

We expect to appear before the Son of Man.

We expect to receive from the Son of Man either eternal life or eternal punishment, based on whether or not we believe in him and therefore follow him in extending mercy to his adopted brothers and sisters.

## The Son Is Betrayed by His Disciple and Arrested, According to the Scriptures

Matthew 26:1–56

**The Son of Man who discloses his future glory in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25), turns his disciples’ attention to his imminent suffering and crucifixion (Matt 26:1–2).** What a juxtaposition. Our Lord Jesus perseveres in his journey to Calvary. The cross precedes the crown. All according to the Scriptures.

In Matt 26–28, the evangelist’s final two chapters, Matthew narrates the final days of Jesus’s public ministry prior to his ascension. This climactic conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel portrays the climax of redemptive history: Jesus’s substitutionary death and victorious resurrection. Truly, “the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). Nowhere in Matthew’s Gospel is Jesus’s servanthood clearer, or more tested, than in its conclusion.

**Matthew 26:1–56, in particular, mostly covers events transpiring the few days before Jesus’s arrest and up to his arrest.** Here again, Matthew arranges some material topically rather than strictly chronologically. (For example, the woman’s anointing of Jesus most likely takes place *prior* to Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem; see John 12.) Matthew 26:17–56 focuses on what happens Wednesday and Thursday of the week, with the Passover meal taking place on Thursday evening (“Maundy Thursday”) and Jesus’s praying in Gethsemane taking place afterwards, that same evening.

It is impossible to articulate in an adequate manner the poignancy of these events. Matthew skillfully draws his readers into the pathos of these moments. How devastating, for example, to conclude this portion of the passion narrative with the following account: “Then all the disciples left him and fled” (Matt 26:26). What sorrow. What pain. What tragedy.

And yet, “all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled,” according to Jesus (Matt 26:55). Even as Matthew narrates the violent injustice done *to* Jesus, Matthew makes plain that God the Father sovereignly orchestrates every bit of it, to which Jesus voluntarily submits. Humanly speaking, it seems that wicked men are in control. Matthew helps us see what a foolish conclusion that would be; the Lord Jesus reigns, even as he is betrayed, arrested, bound, and abandoned.

**Behold your King, sisters.** He is the glorious Son of Man *and* the Suffering Servant. (Remember Matt 8:14–22, where Matthew first shows that Jesus embodies these Messianic realities?) May God’s Spirit humble us as we meditate afresh on our gentle Savior’s submission to unspeakable betrayal for our sake, in order that he might remain faithful to all God’s promises.

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 26:36–56, and respond to questions 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 16.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 26–28; Question 1
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 26:1–35; Questions 2–4
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 26:36–56; Questions 5–12
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 26:36–56; Questions 13–16
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 26:36–56; Questions 17–19

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Read through Matthew 26–28 in one sitting. Note each instance in which there is either an **explicit reference** to the fulfillment of Scripture and prophecy or a **less-explicit indication** that Jesus is doing or saying something to fulfill Scripture.


2. Matthew records a fourth and final prediction from Jesus to his disciples about his death (26:1–2). Matthew then immediately describes the chief priests' and elders' plotting against Jesus (26:3–5). With the disclosure of Jesus's imminent death and the religious leaders' plots, Matthew heightens the narrative tension.

In a matter of days, almost all of Jesus' close friends and family would forsake him. But a tender moment transpires in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, when a woman anoints Jesus (24:6–13). The disciples indignantly chastise her. Jesus, on the other hand, calls her actions "beautiful" (26:10). Jesus remarks that by lavishly pouring expensive ointment on Jesus's head, she is preparing him for burial (26:12).

What **truth** does Jesus want his disciples (and us) to glean from the events at Simon's house (26:6–13)?

What **truth** does Matthew want his readers to glean from the way he narrates this event?

Imagine yourself as a first-time reader of Matthew's Gospel (and a first-time learner regarding the events of Jesus's suffering and death). What might strike you about **the juxtaposition** of Matt 26:6–13 and Matt 26:14–16? What might you notice or feel about the **contrasts** among the various actions narrated?

3. Matthew sometimes juxtaposes two radically contrasting actions to establish tension. For example, immediately after narrating the woman's costly anointing of Jesus and the disciples' consequent indignation, Matthew recounts Judas' greedy betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (26:14–16).

In Matthew's account, Judas takes initiative to seek money in exchange for handing Jesus over to the leaders. The chief priests welcome Judas' particular scheme, not least because it would help them avoid "an uproar among the people" (see Matt 26:5). And so, "the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

How do you make sense of Judas's betrayal, humanly speaking? That is, how could one of Jesus's disciples deliver him to death, even after following him for years and benefitting from Jesus's ministries of preaching, teaching, and healing? *Don't simply write, "Because Scripture foretold it."*

In what sense does Judas's action, as narrated by Matthew, provide a **warning to professing believers** today? *Be specific.*

Prior to the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost, Peter and the remaining disciples appoint someone to replace Judas as a witness to Jesus's resurrection. Read Peter's statements, as recorded by Luke in **Acts 1:16–26**.

4. Notice how often Matthew mentions the "Passover" in 26:1–56 and its associated festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus deliberately orchestrates his submission to death to correspond with this symbol-laden event in Jerusalem.

Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. As they feast together, Jesus interprets his future saving actions by drawing on the symbols of this ancient festival. The Passover festival commemorated God's mercy to spare his people while they were in Egypt due to their application of a substitute lamb's blood. An essential aspect of this festival is the sacramental consumption of the substitute lamb's flesh--although the animal's blood can never be eaten or drunk. (See Leviticus 17:10–11, for example, regarding the prohibition of consuming the blood of sacrificial animals.)

Bearing in mind this background regarding Passover, **what strikes you about Jesus's words** as he extends the bread and the wine to his disciples (Matt 26:26–29)? Why?

What is Jesus teaching his disciples (and us) about **the significance of the actions** he will take over the next few days, narrated in Matthew 26–28?

5. In Gethsemane, Jesus experiences profound sorrow as he anticipates the agony of his imminent suffering. Matthew portrays the abiding intimacy shared between God the Father and God the Son. Here, that relationship is tested and tried.
  - a. What **three things** narrated in Matt 26:36–46 most strike you? Why?

Jesus submits to his Father's will. The author of Hebrews writes in Heb 5:7–9: *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became a source of eternal salvation to all who obey him . . ."* (Here, "being made perfect" refers to Jesus's being perfected in his role as mediator. The author is not claiming that Jesus was "imperfect" in his character or essence.)

- b. Having read Matt 26:36–46, what do you make of the **author of Hebrews' conclusion** "*and [Jesus] was heard*"—since Jesus ultimately does drink the cup of suffering on behalf of sinners? In what sense was Jesus "heard" by his Father?

How does the fact that Jesus was "heard" challenge the way we often imagine that God only "hears" our prayers when he answers them the way we want?

6. Imagine yourself as a first-time reader or hearer of the events narrated in Matt 26:47–56. What **three things most strike you** about Jesus's arrest and the interactions that transpire? Why do they strike you? *Be specific, and record the chapter:verse references.*

John names Peter specifically as the one who cuts off the ear of Caiaphas's servant, Malchus (see John 18:10–11).

7. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*



8. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

9. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

10. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
11. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
12. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

13. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*

14. In Matt 26:36–56, Matthew portrays Jesus's voluntary submission to his Father. "*Your will be done.*" Scripture elsewhere calls believers in Christ to follow Christ's example of voluntary submission to our Father, not least when that submission is costly (see, for example, 2 Peter 2).

In what **specific area of your life** are you **most resistant** to submitting to God the Father's will? Why? What makes submission to the Father in this area so challenging/costly for you? *Be specific.*

How will you aim to rely on God in prayer this week and **make progress in humbling yourself** in this area, after the pattern of Jesus? *Be specific and practical.*

15. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
16. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust. There might be some overlap here with question 14 ... no worries!*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

17. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

18. What do you notice about the way Matthew narrates these events in order to help his readers grasp his main message about Jesus's person and work? *Make at least three observations.*

How does Matthew's strategy challenge and encourage you, in terms of your strategies for wisely retelling the events of Jesus's suffering and death? *Be specific.*

19. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** What is one of the most difficult decisions you've ever had to make in terms of submitting to God's will, even though it was challenging to do so? What were the results? *Be brief in sharing. Depending on the size of your group, it may be that only a few of you should share (for the sake of time).*

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 26:1–56**, even though you will focus small-group discussion on Matt 26:36–56. This will give you the preceding context for your discussion.
2. To get started: What themes (repeated ideas, words, phrases) do you notice in the full passage, Matt 26:1–56?
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 5.
4. Discuss Study-Guide question 6.
5. What does **Matt 26:36–56** mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 10.*
6. Discuss Study-Guide question 12.

### DO THE WORD

7. Discuss Study-Guide question 14.
8. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 15.*

### RETELL THE WORD

9. Discuss Study-Guide question 18.
10. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus? *Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide questions 17 and 19.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**



## The Son Is Abandoned by His Close Disciple, Condemned, and Delivered to Die

Matthew 26:57–27:26

**The events narrated in Matt 26:57–27:26 probably transpire over the course of only about eight hours, from late Thursday night through Friday morning.** Jesus, who has been abandoned by all his closest disciples, is first taken to the house of Annas (John 18:13) and then to Annas’s son-in-law, Caiaphas, the high priest (Matt 26:57). At Caiaphas’s house, Jesus stands “trial” before Caiaphas and a portion of the Jewish Council of elders, the “Sanhedrin.” Soon Jesus stands before the full Sanhedrin.

The scribes, elders, and the chief priests actively elicit false testimony about Jesus so as to feign legitimacy in murdering him. Jesus remains silent until interrogated by Caiaphas about whether or not Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God” (26:63). After sunrise, the Jewish leaders bind Jesus to bring him to Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea (Matt 27:1–2).

Meanwhile Peter, “following [Jesus] at a distance” outside in Caiaphas’s courtyard (26:58), is repeatedly denying that he even knows Jesus (26:69–75). Jesus has warned Peter just hours prior that Peter will fail him (26:31–35). When the rooster crows, Peter remembers Jesus’s warning. The evangelist Luke adds that while the rooster is crowing, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). Can you imagine? Peter leaves the courtyard and bitterly weeps.

Many of us have heard and read these passages a number of times. We know how the story ends. But we must not move too quickly through these trial narratives. We must linger over every detail, just as Matthew intends. We must contemplate the horror, the wickedness, the scandal of human injustice. We must lament. We lament not only the part in Jesus’s death played by Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and so on. We also lament the part in Jesus’s death that each of us sinners played.

As the apostle Peter later reflects, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*” (1 Pet 2:24–25).

Similarly, contemporary hymnist Stuart Townend reflects, “Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished.” As we meditate on these passages this week, **may God humble us** so that we discern the radically personal nature of Jesus’s sacrifice and our role in his suffering. For those of us believers in Christ Jesus: God’s mercy is not such that he ignores our sins. No, God’s mercy is such that he suffers for our sin, through Jesus’s substitutionary sacrifice in our place, on our behalf.

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 26:57–27:26, and respond to questions 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 13, 15.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 26:57–75; Questions 1–2
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 27:1–26; Questions 3–4
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 26:57–27:26; Questions 5–10
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 26:57–27:26; Questions 11–14
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 26:57–27:26; Questions 15–16

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. The Jewish leaders establish a “kangaroo court” at Caiaphas’s house to try Jesus, probably around midnight on Thursday and into the early hours of Friday morning. These religious leaders have no interest in justice or moral legitimacy. They are aiming to establish the *pretense* of judicial legitimacy, so as to avoid an uproar among the crowds in Jerusalem. The “trial” occurs in the secrecy of night at a residence and gains traction only through false testimonies.

Yet, the Lord Jesus remains silent while he is falsely accused (Matt 26:63; see Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Peter 2:22–23). Eventually, two witnesses come forward who distort Jesus’s statement relating to the Jerusalem temple, which leads Caiaphas to interrogate Jesus about whether or not Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God.” After Jesus responds, Caiaphas charges Jesus with blasphemy. The Sanhedrin conclude that Jesus deserves death and proceed to mock him.

Here at Caiaphas’s house—and soon also before Pilate and Herod Antipas (see Luke 23:7–12)—transpires the most scandalous miscarriage of justice in human history.

Put in your own words **Jesus’s statements to Caiaphas in Matt 26:64**.

Why does Jesus’s statement lead Caiaphas to **charge him with blasphemy**? *Explain.*

Give **an example of a contemporary “court”** or context in which Jesus, the Son of God, would be rejected as a blasphemer (in terms of “blaspheming” the dogma of the day)?

*For example, imagine posting on Twitter certain currently controversial portions of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount without attributing them to Jesus ... cancel culture would roll out in full force!*

2. Peter, the very one who discerned Jesus’s Messianic identity as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16), abandons Jesus in his time of need, humanly speaking. No matter how avidly Peter disagreed with Jesus’s prediction about Peter’s future denial, Peter cowers in fear, even before two servant girls and some insignificant bystanders (26:69–75).

**Why** might Peter be willing to **defend Jesus with the sword in Gethsemane** (26:51; see John 18:10–11), but **unwilling to associate with Jesus** outside Caiaphas’s courtyard?

Notice how Matthew artfully juxtaposes Peter’s cowardice and Jesus’s courage in the scenes at Caiaphas’s house.



3. Matthew records the tragic account of Judas in the most detail, relative to the other evangelists. For example, Matthew records that Jesus discloses to Judas that Jesus knows of Judas's greedy arrangement with the chief priests (Matt 26:25). Imagine what this moment must have been like for Judas, especially when Jesus shows Judas's actions as fulfillment of prophecy (26:24, 56). Judas eventually betrays Jesus with a kiss in the garden of Gethsemane (26:47–49). But after hearing that Jesus was delivered to Pilate, Judas changes his mind (27:3–10). He approaches the chief priests and elders with the blood money they gave him, in an attempt to undo his betrayal. Despite Judas's plea, the chief priests and elders ultimately ignore him. They no longer need to use Judas. In devastation, shame, and terror, Judas throws down the silver pieces, leaves the temple, and hangs himself. What a tragedy.

Among the many character contrasts that the Gospel writers develop in their respective passion narratives is the **contrast of Peter and Judas**. Both disciples commit egregious sin against Jesus. Both disciples profoundly grieve. But, ultimately, they respond to their moral failure differently.

Bearing in mind Matt 27:3–10, read John 21:15–19 (the account of Jesus's restoration of Peter). What is **the difference in Peter's and Judas's response** to their betrayal of Jesus? And how do you account for this difference? *Be specific.*

By portraying the contrast between Peter and Judas in this regard, what do the evangelists want readers to understand about **the nature of true repentance**?

In your own heart and life, how can you discern whether your own disappointment relating to your moral/spiritual failures expresses **unproductive guilt or shame** or **true repentance**? How can you tell the difference?

4. Only the Romans could oversee an execution in those days. So, aiming to convince the Roman governor over Judea to do their bidding, the Jewish leaders bind Jesus to bring him to Pilate (Matt 27:1–2). As Jesus stands before Pilate, the chief priests and elders persist in accusing him. But Jesus again remains silent. As a result, “the governor was greatly amazed” (27:14).
- Why** might Jesus's silence before his accusers **amaze Pilate**?
  - If Jesus's voluntary submission to injustice at the hands of the Jewish and Roman “authorities” is truly God's will, then **why might God allow Pilate's wife to have a dream** that causes her to warn Pilate that Jesus is a “righteous man” (27:19)?

Notice how Matthew also portrays the contrast between Jesus and Barabbas to expose the depth of iniquity among the Jerusalem leaders, Pilate, and the crowds.

- c. The chief priests and elders refuse to accept Judas's blood money (27:4). Pilate performs a public ceremony to demonstrate his innocence regarding Jesus's blood (27:24). Yet these ostensibly "pure" leaders' murderous oppression and abdication of moral responsibility know no bounds. In what other passages in Matthew thus far have we seen such **crass hypocrisy**? *Cite at least three examples, with the chapter:verse reference.*

5. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

6. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

7. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

#### Immediate Literary Context

### Whole-Book Literary Context

### Whole-Bible Literary Context

8. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
  
9. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**? *Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
  
10. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
12. Read 1 Peter 2:13–25, where the apostle Peter exhorts believers to follow the example that Jesus set when Jesus endured injustice before wicked “authorities,” culminating in his death on the cross. In what area of your life are you **particularly experiencing the pain of injustice**, perhaps being unjustly accused, demeaned, or disrespected? How does Jesus's example **equip you** to follow in his footsteps and **challenge you** to do so? *Be specific.*
13. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
14. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

15. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

16. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** In what season of your life did you most come to grips with the reality of your sin and failure? What did God use to humble you in this way, and how did this experience transform your understanding of your need for Jesus? *Due to time constraints, perhaps only a few should share.*

### HEAR THE WORD

1. As you read the passage, pay attention to Matthew's skillful characterization of the various people he portrays. **Read Matt 26:57–27:26.**
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 1.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 2.
4. Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
5. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 8.*

### DO THE WORD

6. Discuss Study-Guide question 12.
7. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about Jesus, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 13.*

### RETELL THE WORD

8. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus? *Be specific. Refer to Study-Guide questions 15–16.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**





## The Son, the “King of the Jews,” Is Mocked, Crucified, Killed, and Buried

Matthew 27:27–66

**Having released the notorious criminal Barabbas, Pilate delivers over Jesus to a brutal whipping and crucifixion** (Matt 27:26). Pilate’s soldiers take Jesus into Pilate’s headquarters where they strip, scorn, and beat him (27:27–30). The Roman soldiers mock Jesus by dressing him in a scarlet robe, crowning him with thorns, and putting a reed in his right hand. A vindictive joke. How ironic their derision: “Hail, King of the Jews!” (27:29).

Notice that Matthew is an equal-opportunity offender. He exposes the hideous iniquity among the Jewish religious leaders, who mock Jesus at Caiaphas’s house: “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” (26:68). And Matthew exposes the hideous iniquity among the Roman leaders, including the soldiers who mock Jesus at Pilate’s headquarters and at the foot of the cross: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (27:37). Jesus, God’s true prophet and Israel’s true King, voluntarily submits to this derision. The glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7 is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. God’s Son dies an insurrectionist’s death. The Author of life is murdered.

Matthew continues vividly portraying Jesus’s suffering. Jesus has become too weakened to carry his own cross, so that Simon of Cyrene must carry it for Jesus part of the way (27:32). Even the criminals crucified on either side of Jesus deride him (27:38–40, 44). In particular, the criminals and the Jewish leaders mock Jesus’s self-understanding as God’s Son. They test Jesus’s Sonship in a manner that resembles the devil’s wilderness testing of Jesus, particularly of his filial loyalty to his Father (see Matt 4:1–11). Before Jesus dies, he cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—citing David’s lament in Psalm 22.

Jesus’s suffering on the cross reveals **the enormity of his love**. He so deeply loves his Father that he will submit to his Father’s will, even drinking the cup of bitter suffering. He so deeply loves his people that he will suffer in their place for their sins. And so, Jesus’s suffering on the cross also reveals **the enormity of our transgression**. Just as the seriousness of a doctor’s prescribed remedy indicates the magnitude of a disease, so the extent of Jesus’s sacrifice to “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21) indicates the utter deadliness of our transgression.

Jesus cries out in agonizing abandonment to the Father in order that we believers can cry out to him, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 27:27–66, and respond to questions 3, 4, 5, 9, 13, 14, 17.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 27:27–56; Questions 1–3
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 27:57–66; Questions 4–6
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 27:27–66; Questions 7–11
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 27:27–66; Questions 12–15
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 27:27–66; Questions 16–18

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Jesus's inauguration of the kingdom of heaven amid this broken and sinful world causes massive conflict, which Matthew first makes explicit in Matt 2. "Herod the king" is troubled to hear about Jesus's birth, as is "all Jerusalem." So Herod attempts to slaughter Jesus. (Matthew introduces Jesus as the king, the rightful son of David, in Matt 1.) In Matt 26–27, Matthew narrates various instances when kingship language is used, especially with respect to those Romans and Jews who mock Jesus as "King of the Jews."

Why might it be significant that Matthew opens and concludes his Gospel with **the theme of Jesus's kingship**? What is Matthew aiming to convey in these specific "bookends"?

Of course, Matthew concludes his whole Gospel with Jesus's post-resurrection affirmation that God has given him "all authority" as the rightful King—not just of Israel, but the whole cosmos!

2. As Jesus is dying, darkness covers the earth. Soon before Jesus dies, he cites a verse from a Davidic psalm of lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). For those Jewish onlookers who know the Scriptures, hearing even one verse from a passage pulls up that whole passage in their minds. Jesus quotes from this psalm to help show the significance of what is unfolding at Golgotha.

Read Psalm 22 in full. What **particularly strikes you** about this psalm, with respect to **Jesus's citing it** before he yields up his spirit? In what ways does this psalm **help interpret the events** unfolding at Golgotha? *Note specific verse references in your response.*

3. List the **various miraculous phenomena** that occur, as narrated by Matthew in Matt 27:45–53, and comment on **each phenomenon's significance**. *Note specific verse references in your response.*

What most strikes you about the **centurion's (and company's) response** to these phenomena (27:54)?

4. Central to Matthew's main message in his Gospel is Jesus Christ's *Sonship*. Here at Golgotha, Matthew continues developing this key theme. The criminals crucified beside Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders mock Jesus for his self-understanding as God's Son (27:38–44). In their estimation, Jesus's crucifixion proves the falseness of Jesus's claim. If Jesus really is God's Son, they calculate, then there is no way Jesus would be subject to such ignominy. Moreover, before Jesus dies, he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46). When the centurion witnesses Jesus's death and the subsequent events, the centurion concludes, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (27:54).

**What does Matthew 27:27–66 contribute to the Gospel's theme of Jesus's Sonship?** If this passage were to drop out of the Gospel, what aspect of this critical theme would be missing?

5. At Golgotha, Matthew rightly portrays Jesus as the victim of horrendous, unjust violence at the hands of wicked human beings. Even so, throughout his Gospel Matthew shows God's sovereign rule expressed through the unfolding of all things, including the horrors of Calvary.

Read the account of Peter's sermon to the Jews gathered near the Jerusalem temple at Pentecost, in **Acts 2:14–41**. In what ways does Peter testify to God's sovereignty with respect to these particular events at Golgotha? *Give specific verse references as you respond.*

What does Peter indicate is **the proper response** to Jesus's death and exaltation?

Even after Jesus dies, the chief priests and Pharisees persist in their neurotic attempts to control and manipulate. They approach Pilate and advise him to secure the tomb of Jesus, "that imposter" (27:63). Pilate instructs these cowards, "Go, make it as secure as you can" (27:65).

If Pilate only knew how his instruction's irony would provoke holy laughter for believers who know how the story ends. Here again, Matthew brilliantly nods to God's utter sovereignty by highlighting wicked humanity's utter folly. As if a tomb secured by a stone and a human guard can bind the risen Messiah ...

6. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

7. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

8. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

9. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
10. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**? *Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
11. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

12. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
13. Matthew vividly portrays a whole cast of onlookers at Golgotha who respond to what they see in drastically different ways. Some behold Jesus dying on the cross and are appalled and ashamed by him. Others behold him and the various other signs of God's action and confess Jesus as God's true Son.

In what ways does the cross of Christ **offend you**, in your sinful flesh? *Be honest. Take time to reflect and confess.*

In what way did your contemplations on the cross of Christ this week **fill you with awe**? *Be specific.*

14. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
15. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.

*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*

*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

16. Who is **someone** to whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

17. The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, “*we [apostles] preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor 1:23–24). Also he claims, “*And I, when I came to you, brothers and sisters, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:1–2).

**What does Paul mean** by saying he “preached Christ crucified”?

Why is this message of Christ crucified **so powerful**—either to offend or to save?

If this message of Christ crucified is so powerful, why do we often think we need the “lofty speech and [worldly] wisdom” that Paul eschews? **What is driving our (misguided) felt need for eloquence and sophistication** in our hearers’ estimation, as we retell God’s Word?

18. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God’s Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God’s Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction



## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** When is a time that you and someone else saw the same event, but interpreted that event's meaning/significance in two totally different ways? *Again, be mindful of the time as you share! Perhaps only a few should share briefly.*

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 27:27–66.** Describe the various characters Matthew portrays in these scenes. What are they like?
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
4. Discuss Study-Guide question 5.
5. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *Refer to Study-Guide question 9.*

### DO THE WORD

6. Discuss Study-Guide question 13.
7. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so? *Refer to Study-Guide question 14.*

### RETELL THE WORD

8. Discuss Study-Guide question 17.

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**



## The Risen Son Appears Bodily to His Disciples, Who Worship Him

Matthew 28

**On the dawn of the first day of the week, another earthquake strikes** (Matt 28:2). The angel of the Lord descends from heaven to roll back the stone and sit on it. The guards tasked with making the tomb as secure as they could—remember that?—fell as though dead. That radiantly shining angel must have been a fearful sight!

When these guards report their eyewitness testimony to the chief priests, the religious leaders persist in their rebellion against God. They continue to conspire, manipulate with money and power, and spread falsehoods. The chief priests and elders bribe the soldiers to lie.

Even though Jesus's twelve disciples all abandoned him during his most intense suffering, many of Jesus's female followers had ministered to him at Golgotha and witness his crucifixion (27:55–56). Two of those women were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph (“the other Mary”). These Mary's also witness the large stone being rolled in front of Jesus's tomb (27:61). These two witnesses of Jesus's death and burial become the first witnesses to his resurrection (28:1, 5–10). When the risen Christ appears to them, the two Mary's take hold of his feet and worship him. Oh how tender and thrilling that moment must have been for these sisters of ours!

Perhaps one of Jesus's most shockingly grace-filled sayings comes in his conversation with these two women. He says, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (28:10). Wait a second, Jesus: “brothers”? You mean those cowards who abandoned you in your agony? That lot?

Yes. That lot.

Jesus subsequently appears to his eleven disciples in Galilee, as he promises. His mercy ... well, it is deeper than we can ever fathom. When Jesus appears in Galilee, there are probably more than the eleven gathered. Although some in that larger group worship Jesus, some doubt him (28:17).

Jesus authoritatively commissions his disciples. He sends them to make disciples among all people groups, throughout all the earth. They must make disciples by baptizing people into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and by teaching them to observe the law of Christ. As Jesus sends them out, he promises his perpetual presence with them (28:19–20).

**Truly, he is Immanuel, “God with us”** (Matt 1:22–23).

**Basic Preparation:** Read Matt 28, and respond to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 13, 17.

### Full Preparation: Five-Day Plan

- **Day 1:** Read Matt 28; Questions 1–3
- **Day 2:** Read Matt 28; Questions 4–7
- **Day 3:** Read Matt 28; Questions 8–10
- **Day 4:** Review Matt 28; Questions 11–14
- **Day 5:** Review Matt 28; Questions 15–18

## HEAR THE WORD

**Pray** that God will open your heart to receive his Word. Pray that by his Word he'll strengthen you in knowing Christ, becoming like Christ, and making Christ known. Then, remaining in that posture of prayerful God-reliance, **read** the full passage (perhaps even aloud). For help in answering these questions, see the appendix, which defines tools for biblical exposition and offers guidance on how to use them.

1. Imagine yourself to be one of the women who witnessed Jesus's crucifixion (Matt 27:55–56) on Friday early afternoon and burial (27:61) on Friday evening. Spend time contemplating what the experience of that Sabbath (Saturday) must have been like. Now consider these women's frame of heart and mind on Sunday morning, when they go to see the tomb (28:1).

What sorts of **thoughts, feelings, concerns** might these women be experiencing as they make their way again to the place of Jesus's burial?

What might the experience have been like for these two women of **seeing the angel** seated on rolled-away stone and hearing the angel's declaration that Jesus has risen?

2. In what sense is **Matthew's portrayal of the chief priests and elders** in Matt 28:11–15 a fitting culmination of his portrayal of them throughout the Gospel?
3. In what sense is Matthew's **portrayal of the disciples' response to Jesus** in Matt 28:17 a fitting culmination of his portrayal of them throughout the Gospel? (Again, this group is probably larger than only the eleven.)
4. Re-read Matt 1. In what sense does the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel (Matt 28) **confirm God's faithfulness to fulfill the specific hopes/expectations** that Matthew raises in his Gospel's introduction (Matt 1)? How does the end "satisfy" the tensions raised in the beginning?  
*Note specific verses in your response.*

5. What are some **themes** (that is, recurring ideas) of this passage?  
*Note specific verses in your answer.*

Pick one of those themes. How is this theme relevant to your current circumstances?

6. What are the distinct parts of this passage, and how do they hold together **structurally**?  
*To show the passage's shape, briefly outline it in whatever form of outline you prefer.*

7. How does this passage **relate to the words surrounding it**: to those passages immediately preceding it and following it (immediately literary context), to the whole Gospel (whole-book literary context), and to the whole Bible (whole-Bible literary context)? And so what?

Immediate Literary Context

Whole-Book Literary Context

Whole-Bible Literary Context

1 Corinthians 15

8. What does this passage **mainly** reveal about the character and ways of **God**, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ? *Articulate your answer in one sentence.*
9. Based on the passage's various themes and structure, what do you think is its **unifying theme**?  
*Articulate the passage's main, unifying theme in one sentence.*
10. Considering all that you have observed about this passage, how would you summarize the author's main **aim/purpose** in writing it? That is, what effect did Matthew intend his words to have in his original audience? *Articulate the author's aim in one sentence.*

## DO THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* of the Word, but *doers* of the Word (see James 1:22). The following questions lead us to consider how God pierces our hearts through this passage and equips us for life and godliness.

11. In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the **author's aim/purpose in your own heart**? *Refer to your summary of the author's aim/purpose in the previous section.*
  
12. Matthew concludes his Gospel by narrating Jesus's commissioning of his disciples to make disciples of all nations (28:18–20). One pastor asks a rather pointed question with respect to this passage. He asks, "Is your life your best answer to the Great Commission?"  
  
In other words, **to what extent** do your habits, lifestyle, relationships, ambitions (and so on) reflect glad and enthusiastic obedience to Jesus's charge?  
  
What is **one area of your life in which you would like to make progress** in proactively obeying Jesus's command to make disciples among people from all nationalities and regions?
  
13. If you more fully believed what this passage reveals about God, what's **one thing that would change** in your life—perhaps a change in attitude, practice, thought life, a relational pattern, or something else? *Refer to your summary of what the passage mainly reveals about God.*
  
14. Practically, how will you rely this week on the **resources God provides you** to trust this truth about him? *Consider how this passage indicates certain divine provision for believers' ongoing and ever-deepening trust.*

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer to him.  
*Allow the words and ideas of this passage to guide your heart's meditation.*  
*Let the passage's revelation of Jesus shape your praise and petitions.*

## RETELL THE WORD

Relying on God's grace, we believers in Christ must not only be *hearers* and *doers* of the Word, but *sharers* of the Word. That is, God grants his redeemed-in-Christ image bearers the privilege of seeking opportunities in our various relationships to **retell God's Word clearly, wisely, and boldly** (see Eph 6:17–20; Col 4:2–6; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 3:15–16).

15. Who is **someone** with whom you want to retell the truths of this passage, especially its main theme and what it mainly reveals about God—perhaps a coworker, friend, family member, or neighbor?

*Specific person/group:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific truth to share:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Possible occasion for sharing this truth:* \_\_\_\_\_

16. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, he reveals that even within the group of Jesus's followers, there are those who do not genuinely believe Jesus. Of course, Judas is the most vivid example. But even when they see with their own eyes the risen Christ, some of Jesus's followers doubt him (Matt 28:17). Similarly, there are many who belong to the "visible church," but who do not actually trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They do not render him worship from the heart.

How does knowing this reality about the "visible" church affect the way you retell the Word **among professing Christians** in your local church (and beyond)? *Be specific.*

17. When you are retelling God's Word in various contexts, what **practical difference** does it make to you that Jesus is with you "all the days, to the end of the age"? How so?
18. How will your retelling and applications of this passage turn your listener(s) to **the person and work of Jesus Christ**, who is at the center of the Scriptures?

**Word-Filled Prayer** | Respond to God's Word by writing out a prayer for this person/ group.

*You may want to use words and ideas from the passage as you pray. Pray that God would open a door in their heart for his Word and enable you to speak his Word clearly, wisely, and boldly.*

*Pray that God's Spirit would help you exalt the Lord Jesus in your retelling.*

## Notes from Video Instruction



## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** During his ministry, Jesus spoke plainly with the disciples about his eventual suffering, death, and resurrection. Why, then, did the disciples not grasp what would unfold? Why are they alarmed and amazed?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 28.**
2. Discuss Study-Guide question 1.
3. Discuss Study-Guide question 2.
4. Discuss Study-Guide question 3.
5. Discuss Study-Guide question 4.
6. What does this passage mainly reveal about Jesus? *See Study-Guide question 8.*

### DO THE WORD

7. Discuss Study-Guide question 12.
8. If you more fully believed this truth about Jesus revealed in this passage, what's one thing that would change in your life? How so? *See Study-Guide question 13.*

### RETELL THE WORD

9. Discuss Study-Guide question 17.
10. What are some opportunities and strategies for sharing this truth about Jesus?  
*Be specific. See Study-Guide question 18.*

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**



## The Risen Son Commissions His Disciples to Make Disciples of All Nations

Recap: Matthew 28:16–20 & Whole-Gospel Summary

**Matthew’s Gospel lands in an implicit call to readers to follow the risen Christ and make disciples of all nations who also follow the risen Christ** (Matt 28:16–20). In Galilee, Jesus issues the “Great Commission” to his disciples—probably consisting of the original eleven as well as a larger group. Jesus’s command extends to all those who would follow him, including to you and me.

Jesus first gives the reason why his disciples should obey him (often called a command’s “grounds”): “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18). Jesus is the authorized Son of God. He has total, all-encompassing dominion. He is Lord. That’s why his followers must obey his command.

What does he command his followers? **“Make disciples of all nations”** (28:19). Notice that Jesus’s universal authority is the grounds for the church’s universal mission. Because Jesus has been given dominion over the whole created order, his followers must spread the good news of his salvation throughout the entire earth, to every people group. Matthew’s repeated emphasis throughout his Gospel on Jesus’s compassion toward the Gentiles culminates here, at the Gospel’s conclusion.

How must we followers of Jesus obey this command?

By **“going”** (28:19). We don’t stay put. We must get after the evangelistic mission of making disciples with intentionality and urgency.

By **“baptizing”** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (28:19). We must seek to incorporate new believers into the fellowship of the new-covenant family, in particular, the local church. No genuine disciple is “second class,” but rather each believer is fully included in the blessings granted by the Triune God.

By **“teaching”** them to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded you” (28:20). In order to teach these commands rightly, we must first know them and live them. Matthew records five of Jesus’s discourses. Matthew also insistently presents Jesus as the fulfillment of all God’s inscripturated promises. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. So also, as you and I teach the Scriptures, we must do so in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Matthew sets an excellent example for us in this regard.

How *can* we followers of Jesus obey this command? Jesus promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). Immanuel, God with us, ensures us that he will abide with believers until this age ends. And this age *will* end when the Son of Man comes.

We follow Jesus because of who he is. And we call others to follow him for the same reason. He is the reigning Savior King who abides with his people until he returns.

It is God’s Word that does God’s work among God’s people, all for God’s glory. May you and I continue making progress in hearing his Word, doing his Word, and retelling his Word—in full reliance on his empowering grace!

## Notes from Video Instruction

## Notes from Small-Group Discussion

### Small-Group Discussion Questions:

**Opening Question:** Throughout your study of Matthew's Gospel, which passage did God use most profoundly in shaping/revitalizing your worship of Jesus? How so?

### HEAR THE WORD

1. **Read Matt 28:16–20.**
2. What are the five main themes of Matthew's Gospel? *Work together as a group. Try to land on just five together.*
3. What does this Gospel mainly reveal about human beings?
4. What does this Gospel mainly reveal about Jesus? *Try to develop as a group a single sentence that summarizes the main truth about Jesus that Matthew expounds.*

### DO THE WORD

5. How have you seen God's transformative grace at work practically in your life this past year, through your study of Matthew's Gospel? What has particularly encouraged you in this regard?
6. If you more fully believed what this Gospel reveals about Jesus, what's **one thing that would change** in your life? How so?

### RETELL THE WORD

7. Share one specific joy and one specific challenge you have experienced this year, in terms of communicating with other people the truths you've gleaned in Matthew.
8. What new or renewed commitment will you make to prioritize "making disciples of all nations," in terms of evangelism among non-Christians and discipleship among Christians? *Be practical and specific. Aim to hold one another accountable for following through on these commitments.*

**Share with one another your plans for continuing to hear, do, and retell the Word over these next few months.**

**Conclude by praying for one another in light of the passage.**





WORD-FILLED  
WOMEN BIBLE STUDY

## **APPENDIX | Five Expositional Tools**

*For Hearing, Doing, and Retelling God's Word*

## DEFINING THE FIVE EXPOSITIONAL TOOLS

### For Hearing, Doing, and Retelling God's Word

How do we dig into a biblical text to understand, apply, and communicate it faithfully?

Genre	In terms of <u>literary form</u> , how does the author say what he is saying?
Structure	In terms of <u>literary shape</u> , how does the author say what he is saying?
Context	In what <u>context</u> does the author say what he is saying?
Unifying Theme	<u>What</u> is the author saying? (That is, what's the <i>main thing</i> he is saying?)
Aim	For what <u>purpose</u> is the author saying what he is saying?
Application	What <u>difference</u> does what the author is saying make in my/your life?

**Genre** | A book's genre is simply the **kind** of literature it is. It's important to notice the specific genre we're reading, because each genre requires that we ask certain distinct questions. Many Old Testament books are historical narrative. The Psalms are poetry. There are many genres and even combinations of genres within books. In studying the book of Matthew, we're working with the genre of "**Gospel**." *Note that when "gospel" is not capitalized, it refers to the message/good news of salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ. When "Gospel" is capitalized, it refers to a literary genre—which, in turn, clarifies the gospel message by retelling the story of Jesus's incarnation, life and ministry, death, and exaltation.*

**Structure** | The structure of a book or passage is its **shape** from beginning to end. When we look for structure, we look to find the distinct parts of a text and how these parts hold together. An **outline** shows structure in a clear, logical form. Discovering structure lets us begin to grasp the whole, unified meaning of a text.

**Context** | The context of a book or passage is the **world** and **words** that surround it. Most of us are aware of the danger of taking words "out of context." It's crucial to understand an author's words in **historical, literary, and theological** context—from the words and worlds immediately surrounding a passage, all the way to those of the whole Bible.

**Unifying Theme** | The unifying theme is the big idea of a book or a passage—what some call the "**main idea**" or "**central thrust**." Every book or passage has themes (that is, recurring ideas) at work in it. The unifying theme is the main message communicated as these themes combine, develop, and pierce our hearts. We'll try to articulate the unifying theme of a book or passage in one concise sentence.

**Aim and Application** | An author's aim is that author's **purpose**—what that author **intends to accomplish** through his or her words. Authors of a New Testament Gospel wrote for a reason. What did they want their audience to understand, and **how did they want them to respond**? Once we begin to grasp the author's aim for his original audience, then we can resonate with that same aim in our own lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister. Application, then, is the process of bringing that aim to bear on the specifics of our lives today: How will this passage **make a difference** in our hearts and actions? Most fundamentally, how will this passage **point us toward** the Lord Jesus Christ?

These five tools help shape our study of Matthew's Gospel. If we had included *six*, the additional principle would be **prayer**, and it would come first. But prayer doesn't seem to work as a separate principle. **Prayer is more like the blanket that covers the whole expositional process from beginning to end.**



## WIELDING THE FIVE EXPOSITIONAL TOOLS

### A Toolbox for Interpreting New Testament Epistles

#### TOOLBOX | Genre (New Testament Gospels)

The Bible incorporates a panoply of literary genres, which together display the depth, beauty, creativity, and clarity of God’s enduring speech. The unity of message amid such literary diversity highlights the manifold wisdom of God. There are psalms, and historical narratives, and law codes, and proverbs, and apocalyptic visions, and so on. Each of them reveals God’s character and ways so that together they manifest Christ in “Technicolor.”

**NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS** are theological biographies about Jesus Christ that declare God’s fulfillment of promise in Jesus’s Spirit-empowered person and work and that are written to persuade readers/hearers to believe in, follow after, and call others to follow after this Jesus.

#### THREE BASIC FEATURES OF NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS

**Primary FORM:** New Testament Gospels are **narratives**—more specifically, **theological biographies**. These theological biographical narratives incorporate many different genres, such as parables, sermons, genealogies, and so on.

About 40% of the Old Testament and about 60% of the New Testament consists of narrative literature. Gospel writers employ many literary devices common in narrative literature, including:

- Development of **characters**, especially through reporting their speech
- **Setting**
- **Plot:** a complete story’s sequence of action from beginning to end; often divided into smaller units, called “scenes” or “episodes”
- Development of **suspense/conflict**

**Primary FOCUS:** New Testament Gospels are about **Jesus Christ**. Specifically, they declare God’s fulfillment of promise in Jesus’s Spirit-empowered person and work.

New Testament Gospels are **fulfillment literature**, in the sense that the authors aim to show how Jesus fulfills God’s inscripturated promises about his coming salvation, spoken to those old-covenant saints who live prior to Jesus’s incarnation. Evangelists often highlight how something Jesus does or says takes place “in order to fulfill” antecedent Scripture.

Even in this focus on *God’s fulfillment of promise in his Son*, all of Scripture’s narratives are radically **God-centered**. They mainly reveal who God is and what God does, even as they also tell us about who we are and about the world we inhabit.

**Primary AIM:** Gospel writers (“evangelists”) aim to **persuade** readers/hearers to believe in, follow after, and call others to follow after this Jesus and participate in/extend his kingdom.

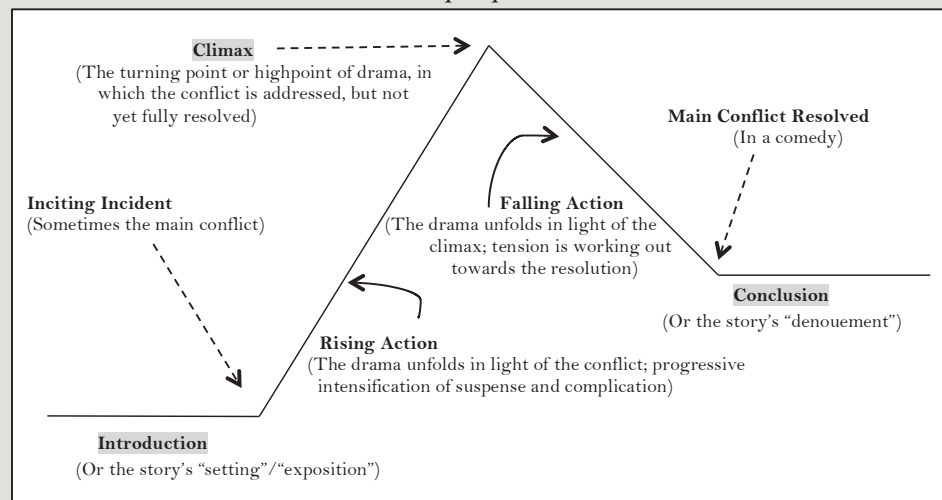
## TOOLBOX | Structure

Although the Gospels form a unique biblical genre, they share much in common with other biblical books that aim to recount historical events.

Below are a few tools that biblical narrators use to shape their stories. Recognizing these literary devices help readers understand how the author/narrator structures a whole book and each of its passages.

- The **plot** is a complete story's sequence of actions/events—the “storyline” from beginning to end. At the simplest level of structure, a plot involves a beginning, middle, and end. Central to plot development is the narrator's use of **tension, conflict, suspense, surprise, and/or irony**. A Gospel's full plot consists of various **scenes/episodes**, representing collected eyewitness testimonies of encounters and speeches. Although some Gospel writers arrange some of their material **topically** rather than chronologically, every Gospel features a plot that to some extent develops **chronologically**: the plot unfolds across Jesus's earthly life and ministry and climaxes in Jesus's **passion** and death.

Here's one way to visualize the structure of a simple plot:



The plot of each individual biblical story contributes to the Bible's “**metanarrative**,” Scripture's one big story of redemption: the **true account** of God's redeeming his people by his Son, Jesus Christ. God's redemptive mission progressively unfolds in the course of human history, from the Garden of Eden to the new heaven and new earth.

- The plot's **introduction** (sometimes referred to as a story's “setting” or “exposition”) establishes the drama's background. The setting usually involves a description of time, place, and/or relevant surrounding circumstances.
- Biblical narrators often indicate a transition from one scene to another by using **linking words**—such as “therefore,” “and now,” “after saying these things,” etc.—and/or noting some kind of **change in the setting**, such as a different location or a different audience.
- Every biblical story expresses a particular **point of view**. That is, the story is told from a particular perspective, usually the narrator's perspective. Often, a narrator's point of view can be discerned by attending to the evaluative and editorial comments he makes in the course of telling a story.

## TOOLBOX | Structure *(continued)*

- Biblical narrators are **highly selective** in terms of which details they include, and they usually narrate at a **rapid pace**. So, when biblical narrators repeat a detail or slow the pace, they are aiming to emphasize something. One common way biblical narrators slow the narrative pace is by incorporating dialogue.
- Biblical narrators **develop a cast of characters** and develop them, through what we call “characterization.” Narrators often develop characters by reporting their speech, including their **thoughts, dialogue** with others, and/or **discourse** (an extended speech, usually addressing a topic).

The Gospels’ central character (“**protagonist**”) is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. The Gospel of Matthew includes within its larger narrative frame five “discourse units” that highlight Jesus’s teaching and preaching.

- Biblical narrators use various literary devices to **emphasize** something and bring into focus their **intended message**. These devices include:
  - Repetition
  - Developing a pattern, such as (a) Jesus performs miracle, (b) group responds in particular way, (c) Jesus remarks on group’s response; then repeat a-b-c pattern
  - Strategically placing important thematic content (for example, at the beginning and end of an episode or at the climax of an episode)
  - Citing or alluding to Old Testament Scripture.

So, here are some pointers to help identify a Gospel passage’s distinct parts:

- Pay attention to **SHIFTS** in setting, characters, topic, theme, genre, or focus.
- Pay attention to **REPETITION** of words, ideas, and phrases. Narrators repeat something in order to establish emphasis and/or narrative progression.
  - Framing. Sometimes narrators develop emphasis by placing a key idea at the edges. That is, the narrator suggests a key theme at the episode’s beginning and then repeats that idea at the episode’s conclusion, thereby “framing” the episode with a key idea that, in turn, helps interpret the events narrated.
  - Layering/Sequencing. Sometimes narrators develop emphasis by narrating a series of actions within an episode that then repeat within several other episodes, thereby establishing a pattern. Such a pattern creates particular expectations in the audience. When there’s a divergence from that pattern/recurrence, thoughtful readers notice it so that divergence creates emphasis (and sometimes tension).
- Pay attention to a **NARRATOR’S EXPLICIT COMMENTARY** on an event. Such comments often explain and/or clarify the significance of what is narrated.
- Pay attention to **CHARACTERIZATION**, that is, the narrator’s development of characters. Narrators often develop characters through reporting their speech.
- Pay attention to **CITATIONS (explicit references) and ALLUSIONS (implicit references) to Scripture** and how the author’s placement of these references helps shape the passage’s central idea.

## TOOLBOX | Literary Context

For help in dealing with a passage's literary context, consult your *Study Bible's cross-references*. Cross-references are often located in the margin of your Bible (often in the center). These references list passages that, according to the Study-Bible editor, are highly relevant to a particular theme, sentence, phrase, or word.

**Immediate Literary Context** | To determine what portion of text constitutes your passage's "immediate literary context," identify the immediately preceding and following **thought unit**. (If your passage opens or concludes the book, then merely refer either to the following or preceding passage, respectively.) Thought units can vary in length, sometimes consisting of multiple paragraphs, and/or sentences and sometimes consisting of just one sentence.

After identifying which passages to examine as the main passage's "immediate literary context," consider: *How does the passage's immediate literary context help establish the passage's meaning and significance? What specific role does the main passage play in its immediate literary context?*

**Whole-Book Literary Context** | Every passage in a Gospel contributes somehow to the author's main message. Conversely, how we interpret a passage is controlled to a certain degree by the book's main message. So we must ask: *What role do this specific passage play in the whole book? And, conversely, what role does the whole book play in how we interpret and apply this specific passage?*

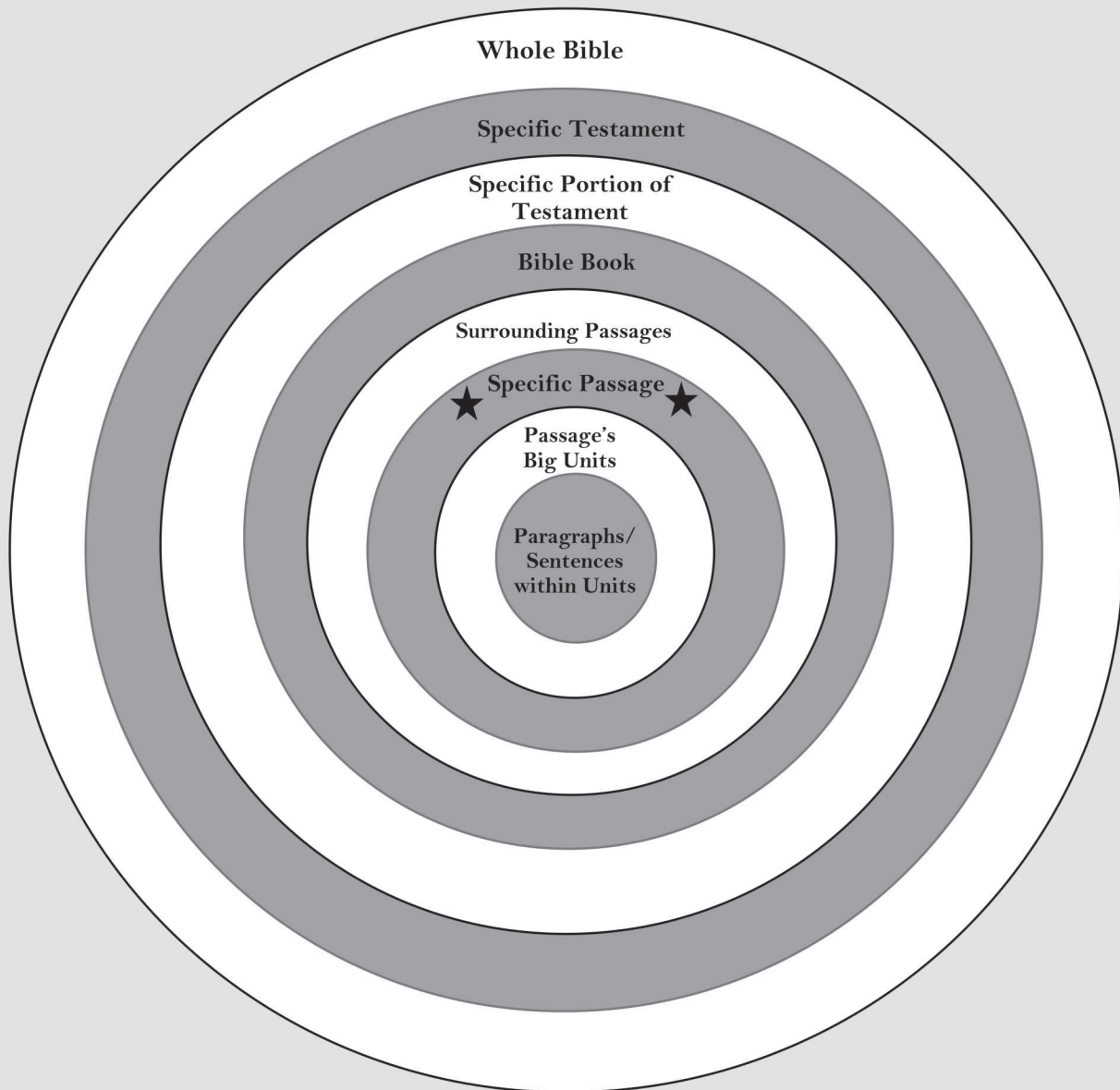
- Does the specific passage under analysis initiate, develop, or bring to a conclusion one of the book's key themes? (Look for a word/phrase/image/idea that recurs throughout the book that also directly or indirectly appears in your passage.) If so, how does the whole-book development of this theme affect your interpretation of this specific passage and what the author intends to accomplish in this passage?
- In its context, does your passage represent a transition to a different aspect of the author's main argument? If so, how does the main argument illuminate this particular aspect of it?

**Whole-Bible Literary Context** | Helpful tools for whole-Bible context include Study-Bible cross-references, online concordances (such as [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), in which you can search a word or phrase in a particular English version), and commentaries.

- Ask, "*At what point in God's big story of redemption does the author write this book?*" This question helps determine the "redemptive-historical" context of the passage.
- Examine any citations (explicit references) and probable allusions (implicit references) to Scripture. Most Study-Bible cross-references will give the source of the citations.
- Consider other Scripture passages by the same author that address aspects of this passage's main themes.
- Consider a few other passages in the Bible that also deal with this passage's main themes.
- Consider whether Jesus ever taught on the topics that the author addresses in this passage.
- Perhaps consider one or two major passages in the opposite testament (Old or New) relative to this passage that deal with one of this passage's major themes.

**After identifying and examining these additional passages for context:** *How do these additional passages help you interpret and apply the specific passage you're analyzing?*

## TOOLBOX | Literary Context *(continued)*



Whole Bible  
Specific Testament: **New Testament**  
Specific Portion of Testament: **Gospels** (first 4 books of NT)  
Bible Book: **Matthew**  
Immediately Surrounding Passages:  
★ Specific Passage:  
Passage's Main Units:

### Some Basic Tools | Context

#### *Literary Context*

The Bible! (daily reading habits)  
Study-Bible Cross References  
Bible Concordance

#### *Historical Context*

Maps/ Atlas

*A good Study Bible is tremendously valuable.  
And a good commentary will attend to the  
most important contextual matters.*



## TOOLBOX | Unifying Theme

The unifying theme is the result of several key themes in a book or passage integrating and coming together to a point. Articulating a passage's central message in a succinct, simple, clear sentence (i.e., a "unifying-theme statement") helps us understand, explain, and apply a passage.

Of course, no single sentence can exhaust a passage's rich meaning! The goal of writing a unifying-theme statement is *not* to be thorough and capture all the details. Rather, the goal is to capture the main idea in a simple theme statement that helps us "cut open" a text and explain how the various elements of a passage develop and relate to that main message.

### What's the process of developing a UNIFYING-THEME SENTENCE of any passage?

#### 1. Read! (and re-read!)

Ideally, read through the whole book in one sitting. Perhaps mix up how you "hear" the whole book by marking it up as you read it, reading it aloud, and/or listening to a recording of it.

#### 2. Notice repeated words, phrases, and ideas.

Authors of Scripture didn't have colored highlighters. So how did they create emphasis in their writing? Repetition! When an author repeats a word, phrase, or idea, he's emphasizing it. Another way to describe an author's "unifying theme" in a passage is "thematic emphasis" or "main message."

#### 3. Work out the passage's structure.

Structure is another mechanism an author uses to create emphasis. Understanding a book's/passage's structure is hard work! Usually our initial thoughts about a passage's structure change as we spend more time in the passage. After reading through a book or passage in full, take a stab at an initial, simple outline. Be open to tweaking that outline a few more times throughout the process of "hearing the Word."

#### 4. List key themes and their relationship to one another.

After reading the passage thoroughly, attending to repetitions, and making an initial outline ... make a list of what strike you as the passage's key themes. Once you've listed all the key themes, consider how these themes *relate to one another* and *integrate into one main idea*, or "unifying theme." For a book's unifying-theme statement, it's helpful to review again and again those passages that seem to play a dominant role in clarifying the book's main idea.

#### 5. Identify author's aim/purpose in composing this passage. (*See the next "tool"!*)

#### 6. Articulate the passage's unifying theme in a resonant (with the text and your audience), simple, and clear sentence that has explanatory power for the whole text.

- Using actual words from the passage will strengthen your statement's resonance with the text. Some people make a "non-negotiable lists" in which they identify the two or three key words or themes they think are vital to include in their unifying-theme statement.
- Articulate the passage's unifying theme simply, but not simplistically.
- Regarding a unifying-theme statement's explanatory power for the whole text: if there's an element of the text that your statement doesn't help explain (in terms of why the author included that element in the passage), then your unifying-theme sentence might not be sufficiently *unifying*. That is, you might have articulated a key theme of the passage, but not its main theme.

## TOOLBOX | Author's Aim

Here are a few tips for discerning an author's aim/purpose in composing a particular passage:

1. **Start with the whole book.** What is the author's purpose in writing the whole book?
2. **Examine the specific passage.** What evidence is there of the author's purpose in composing this particular passage? To help clarify an author's peculiar purpose in a specific passage, ask: *If this passage were to drop out of the book, what would be missing?*
3. **Relate the author's aim in this passage with his aim in the book.**  
*How does the author's purpose in writing this specific passage contribute to his overarching purpose in writing the whole book?* This question helps us discern the logical relationship between a specific passage and the Gospel as a whole.

## TOOLBOX | Application

Putting God's Word into practice (including by sharing that Word to others) requires careful listening. Faithfully "doing" and "retelling" the Word depends on humbly "hearing" that Word.

God's Spirit is the chief Teacher and Applier of God's Word. He is the *only* One who can change hearts by his Word. We servants of the Word don't "make the Bible relevant"—we simply aim to make God's Word plain in order to show its intrinsic relevance. We must ask the Chief Author of these inspired words to pierce our hearts with them.

Preparing to retell a passage of Scripture in this manner requires that we first **yield our own heart** to let God's Word do its work in us. Only then ought we consider how that Word applies to others and seek opportunities to speak that Word to others' heart.

Here are a few tips for developing a helpful MAIN APPLICATION of a biblical passage:

1. **Prioritize the author's unifying theme in this passage.**  
Usually one passage can legitimately inspire a number of helpful application points. But rather than noting all the many ways these ancient words apply to a contemporary audience, it's best to focus on the author's principal message, so that the passage's THEMATIC emphasis gives rise to your APPLICATION emphasis.
2. **Adopt the *author's original* aim in writing the passage as *your* aim in applying it.**  
This principle underlies the first question we're asked in the "Doing the Word" section: *In what ways do you find this passage accomplishing the author's aim in your own heart?*
3. **Call for a specific response.** Ask: *What does God require from me in response to the truths revealed in this passage? And in what specific area of my life does he require this of me?*

Let the passage's unifying theme guide you and focus your application. Getting *specific* and *concrete* in applying a passage helps us put that Word into practice.

All Scripture calls us to respond to God in faith and obedience. We discern the particulars of a passage's call by closely examining it. Sometimes the main thing God requires from us in a passage is that we *believe* a particular truth. Sometimes it's that we *change our attitude* about something. Sometimes it's that we *say "no"* to something—or *repent* of a sin pattern. Sometimes it's that we *open our heart and humble ourselves* to experience the beauty and power of God's love. Sometimes it's that we *more actively trust Jesus Christ* and the promise of his return. Usually it's a combination of several of these!

## TOOLBOX | Application (continued)

Sometimes biblical narrators use characterization to indicate the appropriate response to the passage's main truths. That is, sometimes a story's character(s) will illustrate the sort of behavior that the reader ought either to reject or emulate. In the Gospels, for example, often the evangelists portray the **folly of unbelief** by describing the Pharisees' murderous rejection of Jesus and the destructiveness of *that* path. Conversely, evangelists often portray the **wisdom of belief** by recounting a person's humble reliance on Jesus for healing and the blessedness of *that* path. So, in biblical narrative, we must ask: do the characters in this narrative unit exemplify a specific response to Jesus that a wise person ought either to reject or emulate? Often, asking that question will help illuminate what God requires from us in response to the truths revealed in the narrative.

4. **Avoid moralism.** Ask: *Why must I do what God requires of me in this passage?*

"Moralism" falsely teaches that Christianity is mainly about being a good, moral person. Moralism emphasizes human performance rather than God's performance. But we must never apply a passage in a manner that unhinges it from its gospel context. We must explicitly root a passage's "call to action" in *God's prior action on our behalf*. (See discussion under "Structure" for the distinction between a passage's "indicatives" and "imperatives" and the gospel sequence of the two.) God's performance is primary. Scripture application that matures people in the long run is application rooted in the gospel and empowered by the Spirit. It doesn't merely aim for behavior modification.

5. **Don't be superficial.** Ask: *Why is it difficult for me to do what God requires?*

This question helps us apply the Word to broken, fallen, sinners with sober-mindedness, compassion, and urgency. It helps us attend to the tension we sinner-saints experience in our daily struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Yes, Christ has decisively defeated our enemy on the cross. But the battle rages on until that day when the Lord Jesus returns and consummately exercises his victory.

6. **Don't leave listeners hanging.** Ask: *How can I do what God requires of me?*

The message of Christianity is decidedly NOT "God helps those who help themselves." It is NOT "God does the first part, now you do the rest." No, the Christian life is grace upon grace—including with respect to God's enabling of us to follow Jesus day by day. God equips those he calls. He supplies sinner-saints the needed grace to "do the Word."

Here again, we must closely examine the passage and its unifying theme. The passage itself usually indicates, either explicitly or implicitly, how God empowers his people to obey him. **Just as God motivates his people by his grace, so he empowers us to obey him by his grace.** So, in giving the passage's call to action, highlight God's provisions of grace to enable sinners to respond to his Word in faith and repentance.

In sum, faithful application of God's Word to others involves **asking** God for wisdom and humility, **submitting your own heart** to God's word, **prioritizing** an author's unifying theme and aim/purpose, **developing** a specific call to action, and **rooting in the gospel** this call to action, which is a response to God's grace and undertaken by God's gracious empowerment.

Some of the application questions listed in 3–6 above come from Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 214–22.



