

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

BEHOLD, YOUR KING

Reflections on the Gospel of Matthew

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Behold, Your King: Reflections on the Gospel of Matthew

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The Introduction and the Part One, Two, and Three introductions draw on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

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Drawn from a decade of shared Quiet Time reflections at dailyqt.org, and from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It follows the same daily rhythm as every volume in this series: one reading, one reflection, one day at a time. Each chapter corresponds to a portion of Scripture from the Bible Reading Plan included as an appendix, so that this book can be read alongside your own Bible in the same unhurried pace in which it was first written — as a daily discipline of Quiet Time, not a book to be consumed in a weekend.

Each chapter grew out of years of daily reflections shared by fellow readers working through the same passage on the same day, together with notes drawn from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas. What you are holding, then, is not a technical commentary but a companion for your own reading — written by fellow travelers, not experts, who have simply tried to sit with the text long enough to let it speak.

We encourage you to read the day's passage first, in your own Bible, before turning to the corresponding chapter here. Let Scripture have the first word. Then let this book help you listen more closely to what God has already said.

Whether you are reading on your own or working through this book with a group, we would suggest the following simple rhythm for each day, or for each session if you are meeting weekly as a group:

1. Begin and end in prayer. Ask God, before you open either Bible or book, to teach you something true about Himself that day, and thank Him, when you close both, for whatever He has shown you.

2. Read the assigned Scripture. Using the reading plan in the appendix, read the day's chapters directly from your own Bible before turning to our reflections on them. There is no substitute for reading the text itself first and letting it raise its own questions before we offer our own.

3. Read the corresponding chapter in this book. Each chapter walks through that day's reading in the order Scripture presents it, drawing out its major movements and, where it seemed useful, the background behind them. Treat it as a conversation about the text you just read, not a replacement for it.

4. Answer the discussion questions. Every chapter closes with four questions suitable for a group discussion or for slower, personal journaling. Some ask you to notice something in the text; most ask you to notice something in yourself.

Matthew is not a book to be hurried through. It is the bridge from the Old Testament to the New, and its twenty-eight chapters reward slow, attentive, patient reading. Take your time.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the four Gospels, Matthew stands first — and the early church placed it there deliberately. Its writer, a Jewish tax collector named Matthew, also called Levi, was one of the Twelve whom Jesus called away from his tax booth in Capernaum to follow Him. Tax collectors of that era were trained record-keepers, fluent in the practical business of ledgers and receipts, and it shows: no Gospel mentions money, and different kinds of money, as often as this one does. The same meticulous hand that once tracked a Roman census now tracks something far weightier — the case that Jesus of Nazareth is Israel’s long-promised Messianic King.

Matthew wrote primarily for a Jewish audience, and every page bears the marks of it. He opens not with a birth announcement but with a genealogy, because a Jewish reader’s first question about any claimant to David’s throne would be: can he prove his line? Matthew answers before he does anything else. He refers to the Old Testament, and especially to Isaiah, more than any other evangelist, tracing a straight line from ancient promise to present fulfillment at every turn. He uses “kingdom of heaven” — a reverent Jewish way of avoiding God’s name — where the other Gospels simply say “kingdom of God.” And he takes pains, more than any other writer, to show that in Jesus, the Law and the Prophets have not been discarded but fulfilled.

That single word — kingdom — is the key that unlocks the whole book. It occurs some fifty times in Matthew’s Gospel, and the message Jesus and His forerunner John the Baptist preached throughout it can be reduced to a single sentence: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Every Jew who heard that

sentence understood exactly what was being promised: the long-awaited day when God's own reign, through His anointed King, would be established over Israel and over all the earth. What no one expected — not the crowds, not the disciples, not even John the Baptist from his prison cell — was that the King would come first not to conquer but to suffer; not to sit on David's throne but to die on a Roman cross. Matthew's Gospel is the record of that great, world-altering surprise, and of a kingdom that came to Israel in two stages rather than one: first in humility, to bear the sins of many, and only later, at His return, in the visible glory Israel had always expected.

Matthew organizes his material with a Jewish teacher's love of pattern and repetition — bundling Jesus' miracles and parables into groups, and marking the end of each of Jesus' five great blocks of teaching with the same refrain: "when Jesus had finished." Around those five discourses, and building on the sturdy frame of a genealogy at the start and a great commission at the close, Matthew builds his case in three movements, which this volume follows in turn: the King is presented to Israel and demonstrates His authority; the King's own people increasingly oppose Him even as His identity becomes unmistakable; and the King is crucified, risen, and sends His disciples out to make disciples of every nation.

One small but lovely detail ties the whole Gospel together like bookends. In its very first chapter, Matthew tells us that Jesus would be called Immanuel, "God with us" (1:23). In its very last verse, the risen Jesus makes His disciples a promise: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:20). Everything in between — every healing, every parable, every hard word to the proud and gentle word to the weary — is the record of exactly how

near God drew to us in the person of His Son, and how near He has promised to remain.

This is a King worth beholding slowly. May these pages help you do just that.

PART ONE

The King Is Presented

Matthew 1–14

Every claimant to a throne must first answer a basic question: what is your right to it? Matthew opens his Gospel answering exactly that question, and then spends fourteen chapters answering a second, harder one: what kind of King has actually come?

These first fourteen chapters present Jesus' credentials one domain at a time. His genealogy establishes His legal right to David's throne. His baptism and wilderness temptation establish His moral authority, as heaven itself testifies to Him and He alone, of all the sons of Adam, meets every trial with unbroken faithfulness. His Sermon on the Mount establishes His teaching authority — He does not cite the rabbis, as every other teacher did; He simply says, "But I tell you." And a long, deliberate sequence of miracles establishes His authority over the created order itself: over disease, over demons, over nature, over death. By the time His own disciples are caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, there is only one adequate response left to them, and it is the same response Matthew wants from every reader: "Truly you are the Son of God."

Opposition begins to gather even within this first movement — in Nazareth, in Capernaum, among the Pharisees who first merely watch and then begin to plot. But for now the dominant note is revelation, not conflict. The King has come. Every sphere of His authority, one after another, is being laid before us. The only question these chapters leave unanswered is the one every

reader must eventually answer alone: having seen this much, what will we do with Him?

CHAPTER ONE

Jesus the King: Genealogy, Birth, and Temptation

Matthew 1–4

Matthew begins where no other Gospel begins: with a list of names. To a modern reader it can feel like the driest possible opening to the greatest story ever told. To Matthew's original Jewish audience, it was the opposite — it was the whole case for the defense laid out before a single miracle had occurred. Before anyone could believe Jesus was the Messiah, they needed to know He actually descended from David and from Abraham, the two men to whom God had made covenant promises that a King and a blessing to the nations would come. Matthew supplies the proof first, then tells the story.

He arranges the genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations — Abraham to David, David to the exile, the exile to Jesus — a structure that traces the whole arc of Israel's history: her rise under David, her fall into exile, and her long wait for restoration. And he includes, deliberately, four women whose stories were anything but respectable: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “the wife of Uriah,” Bathsheba. A genealogy built to impress would have omitted them. Matthew includes them because they make his real point better than a spotless pedigree ever could: God has always been in the business of writing a righteous story through unlikely, even scandalous, material. If God could bring the line of David through a Canaanite prostitute and a woman caught in adultery, no reader needs to wonder whether their own history

disqualifies them from His purposes. If we cannot trace God's hand through the details of our lives, we can still trust His heart.

That same pattern holds in the birth narrative that follows. Mary was found pregnant during Israel's one-year betrothal period, a season when the couple was legally married but not yet living together — the very circumstance under which the law allowed for public disgrace, even stoning. Joseph, described as a righteous man, had every legal ground to expose her. Instead, not yet understanding what God had done, he planned to divorce her quietly, sparing her the shame the law technically permitted him to inflict. It took an angel's visit to reveal what was actually happening: this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and He would be called Immanuel — God with us. Joseph's righteousness turns out to have been inseparable from his compassion. The two were never in tension; a right relationship with God's law always leaves room for mercy, because the law itself was never meant to be wielded as a weapon against the vulnerable.

Herod's slaughter of Bethlehem's children, the flight to Egypt, and the eventual return to obscure, looked-down-upon Nazareth all unfold under the same sovereign hand. Matthew notes repeatedly that each turn "fulfilled" what the prophets had spoken — not always in ways an ancient reader could have predicted looking forward, but unmistakably in ways we can recognize looking back. The pattern itself is the lesson: the God who ordained the exact city, the exact escape, and the exact obscurity of the Messiah's upbringing is the same God ordaining the specific, sometimes unglamorous, circumstances of our own lives. We did not choose our parents, our bodies, or our particular set of gifts and limitations, any more than the infant Jesus chose Bethlehem or Egypt or Nazareth. He is still the one authoring the story.

By the time John the Baptist appears, preaching repentance in the wilderness in the very spirit of Elijah, the stage is set for heaven's first open testimony to who Jesus is. When Jesus insists on being baptized — not because He had any sin to wash away, but to identify fully with the sinners He came to save — the Spirit descends like a dove and the Father speaks aloud: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." It is the first of only two times in this Gospel that heaven speaks this way; the second will come on a mountain of transfiguration, further along in the story.

Immediately afterward, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness, tired and famished after forty days, to be tempted by Satan at the exact moment of His deepest weakness. Every temptation targets a different form of need — physical hunger, spiritual presumption, worldly power — and every time, Jesus answers not with clever argument but with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy three times in a row. He had treasured God's word in His heart long before He ever needed it in the desert. That is the real lesson of the temptation account: the time to arm ourselves with Scripture is not in the crisis itself but in the ordinary days that precede it. We cannot quote what we have not first hidden in our hearts.

Discussion Questions

1. Matthew includes four women of scandalous reputation in Jesus' genealogy. Where in your own history have you assumed some part of your story disqualifies you from God's purposes?
2. Joseph's righteousness and his compassion for Mary worked together rather than against each other. Where might you be

tempted to choose strict justice over mercy in how you treat someone who has wronged you?

3. Jesus met every temptation with Scripture He had already treasured in His heart. What would it look like for you to “arm” yourself with specific verses before your next season of testing, rather than during it?
4. God ordained the specific, sometimes obscure circumstances of Jesus’ upbringing — Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth. What circumstance of your own life have you struggled to see as part of God’s authorship rather than as an obstacle to it?

CHAPTER TWO

Seek First His Kingdom

Matthew 5–6

Having demonstrated His authority, Jesus now begins to teach with it — and the Sermon on the Mount is where He does it most fully. In chapter 5 He turns inward, addressing the origin of our righteousness in the heart rather than in outward compliance. In chapter 6 He turns upward, addressing the goal of that righteousness: not the approval of the people watching us, but the approval of the Father who sees in secret.

Much of chapter 5 corrects the same error from different angles: the assumption that God’s law can be satisfied by managing behavior while leaving the heart untouched. Israel’s teachers had reduced “you shall not murder” to the literal act and “you shall not commit adultery” to the literal act, leaving unexamined the anger and lust that produce them. Jesus relocates the battlefield to the heart itself, where every sin actually begins. The same principle reframes His hard teaching on divorce. Jesus permits an exception only for sexual immorality during Israel’s betrothal period — the very circumstance Joseph himself faced with Mary in chapter 1 — while otherwise closing the door His contemporaries had opened wide through creative legal reasoning. His teaching against oaths works the same way: rather than build an elaborate system of which oaths bind and which do not, as the rabbis had done, He tells His followers simply to let their yes be yes and their no be no, so that their character, not their vocabulary, becomes the guarantee of their word.

Chapter 6 takes this same inward focus and points it toward heaven. Jesus draws a sharp distinction between doing good so that others understand it reflects God’s work in us, which He commends, and doing good merely to be admired for it, which He condemns — the difference lies entirely in whose approval we are actually seeking. Applied to giving, praying, and fasting, the principle is the same each time: do it before an audience of one. The Lord’s Prayer that follows models what a rightly ordered heart actually asks for — God’s name hallowed, God’s kingdom come, God’s will done, before any request for our own daily bread or forgiveness or deliverance ever appears.

The chapter’s most quoted line — “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” — is often heard as a formula for financial blessing, but Jesus is after something both simpler and more searching. He is not forbidding work, planning, or providing for one’s family; His own half-brother James and the apostle Paul both assumed ordinary responsibility was a Christian duty. He is forbidding anxiety — the low-grade, constant worry about tomorrow’s food and clothing that quietly displaces God as the object of our trust. No amount of wealth, comfort, or control extends a single hour to anyone’s life. What can be redirected is where our hearts settle their hope: on money, which cannot serve as a foundation and a master at once, or on the Father, who already knows what we need before we ask Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus relocates the battlefield of sin from outward action to the heart — anger before murder, lust before adultery. Where is

your own heart, rather than your behavior, the place that most needs Christ's transforming work right now?

2. "Let your yes be yes and your no be no" describes a person whose character, not their oath, is their guarantee. Does your own word carry that kind of weight with the people who know you best?
3. Jesus contrasts doing good so people understand it reflects God's work in us with doing good merely to be admired. Which audience are you actually performing for in your most visible acts of faith?
4. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" is a command against anxiety, not against planning or work. What specific worry about tomorrow is currently competing with your trust in God today?

CHAPTER THREE

Authority in Word and Deed

Matthew 7–8

The crowds' verdict on the Sermon on the Mount was immediate: Jesus "taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:29). Chapter 8 answers the obvious follow-up question — does His authority extend beyond words? — with a rapid sequence of miracles that leaves no doubt.

But first, chapter 7 closes the sermon with a handful of teachings that are among the most quoted, and most misquoted, in all of Scripture. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" is regularly deployed to silence any correction whatsoever, but the context tells a different story. Jesus is not forbidding discernment — He immediately calls His hearers to recognize "wolves in sheep's clothing" and to evaluate teachers "by their fruit," which requires judgment of exactly the kind the opening verse seems to forbid. What He is forbidding is hypocritical judgment, in which we hold others to a standard we exempt ourselves from, and condemning judgment, which seeks someone's destruction rather than their restoration. The goal of every biblical correction, elsewhere spelled out in careful, escalating steps, is always to win a brother back, never to win an argument.

The same chapter's promise to "ask, and it will be given to you" has likewise been stretched by some into a guarantee of health and wealth for anyone with sufficient faith. But Jesus' own illustration corrects the distortion before it can take root: even an imperfect earthly father does not hand his hungry child a stone or a snake merely because a request was made; he gives good gifts. Our

confidence is not that every specific request will be granted exactly as asked, but that our Father, who knows infinitely better than any earthly parent what is actually good for us, will always give what is good. Believers who have prayed for healing that never came, and found instead a deeper, harder-won dependence on Christ through the trial itself, understand this distinction in a way theory alone cannot teach.

Then, without transition, Jesus descends the mountain and begins to heal — a leper who approaches with humble uncertainty (“if you are willing”), a Gentile centurion whose faith in Jesus’ mere word amazes even Jesus Himself, Peter’s fevered mother-in-law, and, by evening, “all who were demon-possessed,” healed with nothing but a word. Matthew is careful to note that this healing ministry fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah would bear our infirmities — not because Jesus personally experienced each disease He cured, but because every sickness in this world traces back to sin, and Jesus was on His way to bear sin itself, once for all, on the cross. The miracles were previews of a healing far larger than the merely physical one they displayed.

Before the chapter ends, Jesus calms a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee with nothing but a rebuke, prompting His disciples’ question: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” It is the same authority the crowds recognized in His teaching, now displayed over creation itself — a King whose word governs the human heart, the human body, and the natural world alike, with equal and total command.

Discussion Questions

1. “Judge not” is often used to silence any correction. What is the difference between the hypocritical, condemning judgment Jesus forbids and the loving, restorative correction He elsewhere commands?
2. Have you ever prayed earnestly for something good and received, instead, something you did not ask for but later recognized as the better gift? What did that teach you about trusting God’s judgment over your own requests?
3. The leper approached Jesus uncertain whether He would heal him, only certain that He could. How does that distinction between “can” and “will” shape the way you currently bring a specific need to God?
4. Jesus’ authority extended from teaching, to healing, to command over nature itself. Which of these three domains do you find hardest to actually trust Him with in your own life right now?

CHAPTER FOUR

The Harvest Is Plentiful

Matthew 9–10

Matthew continues cataloguing Jesus' authority in chapter 9, and this time he includes his own story among the evidence. A paralyzed man is lowered to Jesus, who first forgives his sins and only then, to prove He has the authority to do both, heals his body — a claim so audacious that the religious leaders correctly recognize it as a claim to divine authority, and correctly reject it, since only God can forgive sin. A synagogue leader's daughter is raised from death. A woman who had suffered bleeding for twelve years is healed by a single touch of Jesus' cloak. Two blind men receive their sight. A demon-possessed mute man speaks.

And then, almost in passing, Matthew includes his own calling: "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth... 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him" (9:9). The man writing this Gospel was, by profession, one of the most despised figures in Jewish society — a collaborator who collected Rome's taxes from his own people, often skimming a personal profit along the way. When the Pharisees objected to Jesus eating with "tax collectors and sinners," Jesus answered that it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick — and He had come to call sinners, not the self-righteously well. Matthew's own presence at the table, and his own authorship of this Gospel, is itself a living argument for that claim.

Asked why His disciples did not fast like John's disciples did, Jesus answered with two homely pictures: no one patches an old

garment with unshrunk cloth, and no one pours new wine into old wineskins, or the skins will burst. Jesus was not merely reforming Judaism; He was inaugurating something categorically new, a New Covenant that the old forms could not simply be stretched to contain.

Seeing the crowds — “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” — Jesus did not respond with pity alone but with a strategic call to prayer: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (9:38). The very next verse answers that prayer with action: Jesus commissions His twelve disciples, gives them His own authority to heal and to cast out demons, and sends them, for now, exclusively “to the lost sheep of Israel” — not to the Gentiles, not even to the Samaritans. The mission would only later expand, after Israel’s own leaders had rejected the message, to encompass the whole world; even then, the pattern would remain “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”

What is most striking about Jesus’ commissioning speech in chapter 10 is what He does not promise. He promises persecution, family division, and hatred “because of my name.” He does not promise earthly safety, family harmony, or worldly success. What He does promise is more durable than any of those: the Father’s intimate knowledge and care for each of them, down to the sparrows and the hairs of their head, and His own defense of them before the Father on the day of judgment. The single question that mattered, then as now, was never whether following Jesus would be comfortable. It was whether they would remain faithful to Him regardless.

Discussion Questions

1. Matthew includes his own calling from a despised profession alongside Jesus' healing miracles, as if his own transformation belonged in the same category. What “unlikely” detail of your own story might belong there too?
2. Jesus responds to the crowd's need not merely with compassion but with a call to pray for more laborers. When did you last pray specifically for God to send workers into a harvest you have noticed but felt unable to reach yourself?
3. Jesus promised His disciples persecution and family division rather than comfort and success. How does that reshape what you expect faithfulness to actually cost you?
4. The mission went “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” — meaning you and I are, in a real sense, latecomers to this story of grace. How does that reality shape your posture toward those who have not yet believed?

CHAPTER FIVE

Come to Me, All Who Are Weary

Matthew 11–12

John the Baptist, the very man who had baptized Jesus and heard the Father’s own voice confirm Him, now sits in Herod’s prison with a troubling question: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (11:3). It is a startling question from the man who once pointed his own disciples toward Jesus. But John, like nearly every faithful Jew of his generation, expected the Messiah to arrive as a conquering King who would immediately overthrow Rome and free the captives — and here was John, still captive, with no deliverance in sight.

What John could not yet see was that the Messiah was coming not once but twice: first as a suffering servant to atone for sin, and only later, at His return, as the conquering King who would set every captive free and judge the nations. Jesus’ answer to John gently affirms both His identity and the reordering of expectations: the blind see, the lame walk, the good news is preached to the poor — every mark of Isaiah’s prophecy except the one about liberating prisoners, which would have to wait. “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me,” Jesus says (11:6) — a blessing extended to every believer since, who must likewise learn to trust God’s timing over our own assumptions about how deliverance ought to look.

To the crowds who had seen mighty miracles and still refused to repent, Jesus pronounces a sobering woe: the pagan cities of Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom would have repented long ago had they witnessed what Galilee refused to believe. And yet the

chapter's harshest words give way immediately to its gentlest: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (11:28, 30). The image is of two oxen yoked together, an experienced one absorbing the bulk of the weight so the inexperienced one can simply walk alongside. Jesus is not offering an easier set of rules; He is offering to carry, Himself, what we were never strong enough to carry alone.

Chapter 12 shows exactly what that easy yoke looks like in practice, and exactly what the Pharisees' heavy one had become. When Jesus' hungry disciples pick grain on the Sabbath, and when Jesus heals a man's shriveled hand in the synagogue, the Pharisees accuse Him of breaking the law — using a definition of "work" invented by centuries of oral tradition, not by Moses. Jesus answers from their own Scriptures: David ate consecrated bread reserved for priests when he was in need, and the priests themselves "work" in the temple every Sabbath without guilt, because mercy and worship were never meant to be enemies of one another. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," God had said through Hosea, and Jesus, "Lord of the Sabbath," was its true fulfillment, not its violator.

The Pharisees' hearts had hardened past the point of persuasion. When they could no longer deny Jesus' miracles, they recharacterized them as the work of Satan — a charge Jesus calls the one truly unpardonable sin, not because God is unwilling to forgive, but because a person who calls the Spirit's clear witness a lie has closed the only door through which forgiveness could ever reach them. It is a sober warning, not a trap for the tender conscience: the sin in view is a settled, final rejection of unmistakable truth, not the ordinary doubts and struggles that trouble any honest believer.

The chapter closes with Jesus' own family trying to pull Him away from His ministry, apparently believing He had lost His senses. His response reframes the whole idea of family around obedience rather than blood: "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (12:50). The same invitation extended to the weary in the chapter before is, in the end, an invitation into a new family — one built not on lineage but on trust.

Discussion Questions

1. John the Baptist expected the Messiah to bring immediate deliverance and struggled when it did not come. Where in your own life have you struggled to trust God's timing rather than your own expectations of how He should act?
2. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" pictures Jesus carrying the greater share of the weight beside us. What burden are you currently trying to carry alone that He has actually offered to share?
3. The Pharisees prioritized a rigid definition of religious rule-keeping over mercy. Where might you be tempted to do the same — enforcing a standard on others (or yourself) that misses what God actually desires?
4. Jesus redefines family around obedience to the Father rather than blood relation. What would it look like for you to treat your spiritual family with the same devotion you give your biological one?

CHAPTER SIX

Truly You Are the Son of God

Matthew 13–14

Rejected by Israel's leaders and increasingly by the crowds, Jesus changes His method of teaching in chapter 13. From this point He speaks to the public almost entirely in parables — stories that reveal truth to those with ears to hear and conceal it from those who have already hardened their hearts against it. The Parable of the Sower sets the pattern: the same seed, the message of the kingdom, falls on a hardened path, on shallow rocky soil, among choking thorns, and finally on good soil that produces a lasting crop. The seed never changes. What changes, every time, is the condition of the heart that receives it — a sobering question to bring to our own reading of Scripture each day: which soil are we today?

The parables that follow all approach the same subject from different angles. The kingdom is like a mustard seed, small beyond notice yet destined to become the largest of garden plants — an unlikely beginning, in a ragtag band of fishermen and a tax collector, growing into something that would touch the whole world. It is like treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of surpassing value, worth selling everything else to obtain. It is like a net that gathers every kind of fish, good and bad together, until the day of sorting finally comes. Each image insists that the kingdom's present, hidden, unimpressive form is not its final one — patience, not despair, is the appropriate response to a kingdom still growing quietly beneath the surface of ordinary life.

When Jesus returns to His own hometown, the people are amazed by His wisdom and His miracles, yet their amazement curdles into offense rather than faith, because they know Him only as “the carpenter’s son.” “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home,” Jesus observes (13:57) — a reminder that familiarity, left unchecked, breeds a kind of blindness to the very things that ought to provoke our deepest gratitude: a new day, a working body, an open Bible, freedom to worship without fear.

Chapter 14 opens with the darkest scene in the Gospel thus far: Herod’s execution of John the Baptist, extracted from a rash oath made at a birthday banquet to please a dancing girl and a vindictive wife. It is a picture of earthly power at its most corrupt — self-indulgent, easily manipulated, and murderous when crossed. Jesus, hearing the news, withdraws — not from fear, but because there was still work to do, and a wise man does not needlessly court the danger that ended John’s life before his own appointed hour.

That work continues immediately: a crowd of thousands follows Jesus into a remote place, and rather than send them away hungry, Jesus takes five loaves and two fish, gives thanks, and feeds more than five thousand people until they are satisfied, with twelve baskets of food left over. That same night, walking on the surface of a storm-tossed sea, Jesus calms His disciples’ terror with a single sentence — “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” — and when Peter, invited to walk toward Him, begins to sink under the weight of his own fear, Jesus reaches out and catches him without hesitation.

By the time Jesus climbs into the boat and the wind dies down, the disciples' response is no longer confusion or mere amazement. It is worship: "Truly you are the Son of God" (14:33). Two rulers appear side by side in this chapter — one who used his power for self-gratification and left only death behind him, and one who used His power to feed the hungry and rescue the drowning. Every reader is left with the same quiet question the disciples answered that night on the water: which King will we actually follow?

Discussion Questions

1. The Parable of the Sower asks which soil currently describes your own heart toward God's word. Which of the four — hardened, shallow, choked, or fruitful — feels most honest for this season of your life?
2. The kingdom's parables all describe something small, hidden, or unimpressive that becomes something vast. Where do you need patience to trust that God is still growing something you cannot yet see?
3. Jesus' own neighbors dismissed Him because familiarity had bred contempt rather than wonder. What ordinary gift in your life — health, provision, freedom, relationship — have you stopped being amazed by?
4. Peter began to sink the moment he took his eyes off Jesus and noticed the wind. What "wind" is currently distracting you from keeping your eyes fixed on Christ?

PART TWO

The King Is Opposed

Matthew 15–25

If Part One presented the King, Part Two watches Israel's leaders formally and finally reject Him — even as His own identity becomes, chapter by chapter, impossible to mistake. These eleven chapters trace two lines moving in opposite directions at once. The opposition of the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and eventually the Herodians hardens from suspicion into outright conspiracy to kill Him. And at the very same time, the truth of who Jesus actually is becomes unmistakably clear: confessed by Peter at Caesarea Philippi, confirmed by the Father's own voice on the mount of Transfiguration, acted out publicly in a King's entrance into Jerusalem, and defended by Jesus Himself against every trap His enemies can devise.

The center of this section is a hinge point as important as any in the entire Bible: Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16), immediately followed by Jesus' first plain prediction of His own coming death and resurrection. From that moment forward, the journey of this Gospel turns decisively toward Jerusalem, and the shadow of the cross falls over everything that follows — the parables, the arguments in the temple courts, and finally the long, sobering discourse on the Mount of Olives about the judgment and glory still to come. Israel's leaders, offered every possible sign, choose rejection. Israel's true King, having offered every possible proof, sets His face toward the suffering that rejection was always going to cost Him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Who Do You Say I Am?

Matthew 15–17

When the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of eating with unwashed hands, they are enforcing a rule found nowhere in Moses' law, only in generations of rabbinic tradition. Jesus turns the accusation back on them: their own traditions had let people avoid caring for aging parents simply by declaring their money "devoted to God" instead — technically pious, actually a betrayal of the fifth commandment. True defilement, Jesus explains, was never a matter of unwashed hands or forbidden foods; it flows from the heart, the source of every evil thought that eventually becomes murder, adultery, theft, or slander. In one stroke, Jesus exposed centuries of misplaced religious energy and relocated the entire question of holiness back where it had always actually belonged.

The contrast could not be sharper with the Canaanite woman who approaches Jesus soon afterward, begging healing for her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus initially seems to rebuff her — He was sent, He says, only to the lost sheep of Israel — but she persists with a humility as striking as her faith: "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Where the Pharisees, insiders by birth and training, could not see their own need, this Gentile outsider saw hers with perfect clarity, and Jesus commends her "great faith" and heals her daughter at once. Soon after, a crowd of largely Gentile onlookers, fed miraculously as the five thousand had been fed before them, do what no Pharisee in the narrative has yet done: they praise the God of Israel.

All of this sets up the pivotal moment of the whole Gospel. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks His disciples who people say He is, and then, more pointedly, who they say He is. Peter answers for all of them: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16). It is the confession the entire book has been building toward since its opening genealogy, and Jesus tells Peter that only the Father in heaven could have revealed it to him. On this rock — the truth Peter has just confessed, not Peter’s own person — Jesus will build His church, giving Peter the “keys of the kingdom”: not a private authority to determine anyone’s eternal destiny, but the privilege of being the one through whom God would formally open the door of the gospel to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles alike, as the book of Acts would soon show.

The very same Peter who had just spoken by the Father’s own revelation immediately shows how far understanding still had to travel. When Jesus predicts His coming death in Jerusalem, Peter rebukes Him, and Jesus rebukes Peter in turn — “Get behind me, Satan!” — for thinking merely human thoughts about a plan only God could have authored. Jesus then makes the cost of following Him explicit for every disciple in every generation: “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (16:25). Peter’s faith, genuine but still unsteady, would falter badly before the story was finished — and would be restored just as surely, because it was never ultimately Peter’s own grip on Christ that mattered, but Christ’s grip on him.

Six days later, that same identity is confirmed from heaven a second time. On a high mountain, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John, His face shining like the sun; Moses and Elijah appear beside Him, and the Father’s voice again declares, “This is my Son, whom I love... Listen to him.” Descending the

mountain, the disciples are unable to heal a demon-possessed boy — not for lack of power, Jesus explains, but for lack of faith — and a temple tax collector’s simple question to Peter becomes, in Jesus’ hands, one more quiet demonstration that the One who is Lord over the fish in the sea has no debt at all to the very system built to honor Him.

Discussion Questions

1. The Pharisees enforced a religious rule that let them avoid caring for their own parents. Where might a rule or tradition you hold be quietly excusing you from something God actually requires?
2. The Canaanite woman, an outsider by birth, saw her spiritual need more clearly than Israel’s religious insiders saw theirs. Where might familiarity with “insider” faith be dulling your own sense of need for Christ?
3. Peter confessed Christ rightly and stumbled badly in the very same conversation. How does his imperfect but genuine faith encourage you in your own uneven walk with God?
4. “Whoever loses their life for me will find it.” What would it look like, concretely, for you to lose something this week for the sake of following Christ more fully?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Like Little Children

Matthew 18–19

The disciples open chapter 18 arguing about who among them will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven — an argument that, ironically, is itself the very reason Lucifer was cast out of heaven in the first place. Jesus answers by calling a child to stand among them: “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (18:3). Greatness in God’s kingdom has nothing to do with status, reputation, or self-sufficiency, and everything to do with a child’s simple, unselfconscious dependence. Whoever welcomes such a person in Jesus’ name welcomes Jesus Himself.

From there Jesus turns to what happens when a brother or sister sins — first privately, then with one or two witnesses, then before the whole church, always aimed at restoration, never at humiliation. Peter, still thinking in terms of limits and thresholds rather than childlike trust, asks how many times he must forgive: seven times? Jesus answers “seventy-seven times” — not a new, higher ceiling, but a refusal of the counting framework altogether. The parable that follows makes the stakes plain: a servant forgiven an enormous, unpayable debt refuses to forgive a fellow servant a trivial one, and the king who had shown him mercy withdraws it entirely. The one who had received the king’s forgiveness as a bare transaction, without letting it transform him, is exposed as never having truly received it at all. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (18:35) — a hard word, but a consistent one: the

forgiveness we have been given is meant to remake how we forgive others, not simply to relieve our own debt while we go on collecting everyone else's.

Chapter 19 opens with the Pharisees testing Jesus on divorce, and Jesus reaffirms the seriousness of the marriage covenant, permitting only the narrowest exception and reminding His questioners that “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” When His own disciples object that this standard seems impossibly demanding, Jesus does not soften it; He simply acknowledges that not everyone can accept it, and that some choose lifelong singleness for the sake of the kingdom — itself a calling, not a lesser one.

Then, in a small scene easy to read past, people bring their children to Jesus for a blessing, and the disciples — the same men who had just argued about greatness — try to send them away as an unwelcome distraction. Jesus rebukes them: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (19:14). The lesson of chapter 18's opening scene returns in miniature: those the world considers least significant are precisely the ones the kingdom is built around.

A rich young man then asks Jesus the most important question anyone can ask: “What good thing must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus points him to the commandments, and the young man insists he has kept them all — the same instinct that led a teacher of the law, on another occasion, to ask “who is my neighbor” only to justify himself. Jesus exposes the young man's real god with a single test: “sell your possessions and give to the poor... then come, follow me.” The young man walks away sad, because he was not willing to let go of the one thing his own righteousness could

not do without. His question and his sorrow both reveal the same misunderstanding shared by nearly every person who has ever asked what they must do to earn eternal life: it cannot be earned, and every attempt to establish our own righteousness is, at bottom, a refusal to receive God's.

When the stunned disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus gives the answer that settles the matter for every generation since: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (19:26). Salvation was never a mountain any of us was strong enough to climb. It is, and always has been, a gift only God is able to give — received the way a little child receives anything: with empty, open, dependent hands.

Discussion Questions

1. The unmerciful servant received forgiveness as a transaction without letting it change him. Is there someone you have technically "forgiven" without truly releasing them from your heart?
2. The disciples tried to keep children away from Jesus as an unwelcome distraction. Who in your life might you be overlooking or dismissing who actually belongs at the very center of God's attention?
3. The rich young ruler wanted eternal life but was unwilling to release the one thing that competed with God for his trust. What is the "one thing" Jesus might be asking you to release right now?

4. “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Where in your life do you need to stop trying to earn what only God can give as a gift?

CHAPTER NINE

The First Will Be Last

Matthew 20–21

Jesus tells a parable that unsettles our natural sense of fairness: a landowner hires workers throughout the day — some at dawn, some at the eleventh hour, an hour before quitting time — and pays every one of them the same denarius. Those hired first grumble, but the landowner has broken no agreement; he simply chooses to be as generous with the last as he was fair with the first. “Are you envious because I am generous?” he asks (20:15). The parable is not really about wages. The first workers negotiated a set wage; the later ones simply trusted the landowner’s character. That is the shape of grace itself: those who come to God on the basis of what they think they have earned receive justice, while those who come with empty, trusting hands receive far more than they had any right to expect. “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (20:16) is not a threat but a promise about how differently the kingdom measures worth than we do.

That same lesson is lost, immediately, on two of Jesus’ own inner circle. James and John — or rather, their mother on their behalf — ask for the two seats of highest honor beside Jesus in His coming kingdom. Jesus asks whether they can drink the cup He is about to drink; they answer yes, not yet understanding what they are agreeing to. When the other ten disciples hear about the request, they are indignant — not because the ambition was wrong, but because each of them wanted that same honor for himself. Jesus uses the moment to redefine greatness one more time: “whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant...

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:26-28). Immediately afterward, two blind beggars call out for mercy and receive their sight — a deliberate contrast Matthew leaves for the reader to notice. The disciples wanted something that would elevate their own status. The blind men wanted only to see, and it was their request, not the disciples’, that Jesus granted without hesitation.

From there Jesus enters Jerusalem the way a King should — deliberately fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy of a King who comes “gentle and riding on a donkey” rather than a warhorse — and the crowds greet Him with genuine, if short-lived, enthusiasm. He goes directly to the temple and drives out the money changers, declaring that His Father’s house, meant to be “a house of prayer,” had been turned into “a den of robbers.” The next morning, hungry, He approaches a fig tree in full leaf — leaves that should have signaled early fruit already present on the branches — and finds none. “May you never bear fruit again,” Jesus says, and the tree withers immediately. The lesson is not really about horticulture. A fig tree covered in leaves but bare of fruit is exactly what Israel’s religious establishment had become: outwardly flourishing, inwardly barren, all appearance and no substance.

Jesus presses the same point with a simple parable of two sons: one refuses his father’s request but later changes his mind and obeys; the other agrees readily and never follows through. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” Jesus asks the religious leaders, and they cannot avoid the obvious answer. Tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus tells them, who had once flatly rejected God’s ways, were entering the kingdom ahead of leaders who had always spoken the right words but never actually obeyed. Initial enthusiasm, impressive vocabulary, and religious performance

count for nothing next to simple obedience. It is a theme that runs the length of this whole Gospel: what God has always wanted is not our promises but our obedience, not our performance but our fruit.

Discussion Questions

1. The workers hired last received the same wage as those hired first, purely by the landowner's generosity. Where do you find yourself resenting God's grace toward someone else rather than simply receiving your own?
2. James and John sought status; the blind men sought sight. Which request more honestly describes what you tend to ask God for?
3. The fig tree looked fruitful from a distance but had nothing to show up close. Where might your own faith be more leaves than fruit right now?
4. The son who said "no" and later obeyed pleased his father more than the son who said "yes" and did nothing. Where in your own life is your obedience lagging behind your good intentions?

CHAPTER TEN

No One Dared Ask Him Any More Questions

Matthew 22–23

Jesus tells one more parable of rejection and inclusion before His enemies begin their final assault of questions. A king prepares a wedding banquet for his son; those first invited refuse, even killing the messengers sent to summon them, so the king destroys them and fills the hall instead with anyone his servants can find, “both good and bad.” One guest, however, arrives without wedding clothes and is thrown out. The garments in view were traditionally supplied by the host himself, not brought by the guest — a detail that turns the parable’s ending from harsh to merciful: what is required is not the moral perfection of the guests, but their willingness to wear the righteousness that has been freely given them. The invitation to God’s kingdom is wide and generous. What it will not tolerate is an attempt to attend on our own terms, dressed in our own righteousness instead of the one He offers.

What follows is a gauntlet of trap questions, each one designed to catch Jesus in something He might say. The Pharisees and Herodians, an unlikely alliance, ask whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar — a question with no safe answer, since agreeing sounds like betraying Israel and refusing sounds like sedition against Rome. Jesus asks for a coin, points to Caesar’s image on it, and answers, “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (22:21) — a response so complete it leaves no room for further attack. The Sadducees, who deny any resurrection, try next with an absurd hypothetical about a woman widowed by seven brothers in succession; Jesus answers that they understand neither

the Scriptures nor the power of God, since the resurrected do not marry, and since God described Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the present tense — He is the God of the living, not the dead. An expert in the law then asks which commandment is greatest, and Jesus answers with two, inseparably joined: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (22:40).

Then Jesus turns the tables and asks a question of His own: “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They answer, correctly, “the son of David.” Jesus presses further: if the Messiah is merely David’s descendant, why does David himself, under the Spirit’s inspiration, call him “Lord” in Psalm 110 — “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand”? No father calls his own son “Lord.” The only adequate answer is one their tradition had never fully reckoned with: the Messiah must be more than David’s human descendant. He must also be David’s divine Lord. Matthew records the result plainly: “no one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions” (22:46). It is one of the quieter but more remarkable moments in the Gospel — a single question, from the very man they were trying to trap, that silenced every remaining trap they had.

With His opponents finally silenced, Jesus turns to the crowds and His disciples and delivers the most severe public denunciation of His entire ministry. Israel’s teachers, He says, “do not practice what they preach” (23:3) — their words and their lives have become entirely disconnected. They load people down with religious burdens they themselves never lift a finger to carry. Everything they do — wide phylacteries, long tassels, the best

seats, the most honored greetings — is performed for an audience of human observers rather than for God. In place of that culture of status, Jesus offers His disciples a strikingly flat vision of Christian community: one Teacher, one Father, one Instructor, and no title among believers meant to elevate one over another, because “the greatest among you will be your servant” (23:11). The woes that follow, seven of them, spell out in detail exactly how far religious performance can drift from the God it claims to honor — until finally, and unexpectedly, Jesus’ fury gives way to lament: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (23:37). Even His sharpest words toward His enemies never lose the ache of a Shepherd who genuinely wanted to gather them in.

Discussion Questions

1. The wedding garments in the parable were provided by the host, not earned by the guest. Are you currently trying to approach God dressed in your own righteousness rather than the righteousness He offers freely?
2. Jesus’ question about Psalm 110 exposed a category of Messiah His questioners’ tradition had never developed — one who was both David’s son and David’s Lord. Where might your own assumptions about God need to be stretched by what Scripture actually says, rather than what you expected it to say?
3. Jesus condemned religious leaders whose public performance and private life had become disconnected. Where is there a gap between what you profess and how you actually live when no one is watching?

4. Even in His most severe denunciation, Jesus' anger gave way to genuine lament over Jerusalem. How does that combination — truthful confrontation and real love — challenge how you address people you are frustrated with?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant

Matthew 24–25

Leaving the temple, Jesus predicts its total destruction — “not one stone here will be left on another” (24:2) — and His disciples, shaken, ask what seems to them a single question: when will this happen, and what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age? In their minds, all three were the same event. They could not imagine Jerusalem lying in ruins while history simply continued on. Jesus’ answer gently separates what they had collapsed together, describing a longer horizon than they had imagined, with real gaps of time between events they assumed would happen all at once.

He begins with wars, famines, and earthquakes — not signs that the end has arrived, but “the beginning of birth pangs” (24:8). The metaphor carries real weight in both directions. The pain is genuine; Jesus does not minimize it. But birth pangs are also purposeful, intensifying toward something, not away from it — they signal that new life is coming, not that death has won. The single condition Jesus attaches to the end is not another catastrophe but a completion: “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (24:14). The mission of the church, carried out amid real and painful history, is not a sideshow to the drama of the last days. It is the very thing the age is structured around.

Jesus goes on to describe a period of unprecedented distress — “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of by the prophet Daniel, followed by “great distress, unequaled from the

beginning of the world until now” (24:15, 21) — concluding with His own visible, unmistakable return: “they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (24:30). Everything to this point has been observable, sign-attended, building toward a climax anyone watching could track.

Then, at verse 36, the discourse changes character entirely: “about that day or hour no one knows... but only the Father.” No signs precede this moment; it comes “as it was in the days of Noah” — ordinary life proceeding right up until it does not. Two men will be in a field, two women grinding grain, and one will be taken and the other left, without warning. This shift — from an observable, sign-led coming to an unannounced, signless one — is the same kind of telescoping found throughout Old Testament prophecy, where two distant events are described together without marking the years, sometimes generations, that separate them. The church, living now in the long interval this discourse describes, is not given a timetable. It is given a command: “keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (24:42).

The parables that follow all press the same point from different angles. Ten virgins wait for a bridegroom; five bring enough oil for the wait, five do not, and when the bridegroom finally comes at midnight, the unprepared find the door already shut. A master entrusts his servants with talents before a long journey; two invest what they were given and are commended equally — “well done, good and faithful servant” (25:21) — regardless of how much they started with, while the third, paralyzed by fear and a distorted view of his master’s character, buries his talent and is condemned not for failure but for refusing to try at all. Faithful waiting, in every one of these pictures, is active, not passive. The question is never

whether the wait feels long. It is what we are doing with what has been placed in our hands while we wait.

The discourse closes with the sheep and the goats, gathered before the Son of Man in His glory and separated by a single, searching criterion: how they treated “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” — the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the imprisoned. Neither group realized, in the moment, what their small acts of welcome or neglect actually meant. The sheep simply received the ones who came to them; the goats simply overlooked them. But because Jesus had already taught that “whoever welcomes you welcomes me” (10:40), the accumulated weight of a thousand small choices toward His messengers turns out to be nothing less than a verdict on one’s posture toward the King Himself.

Discussion Questions

1. The disciples collapsed three distinct questions into one, unable to imagine history simply continuing past the destruction they feared. Where do you tend to assume God’s timeline must match your own expectations of how quickly things should resolve?
2. “Birth pangs” are painful but purposeful — pointing toward new life rather than away from it. What present difficulty in your life or in the world might you be able to hold with that same dual honesty: genuinely hard, and not without direction?
3. The servant who buried his talent acted out of fear and a distorted view of his master’s character. Where might a wrong

picture of God be causing you to play it safe rather than invest what has been entrusted to you?

4. The sheep and goats were surprised by the verdict, because neither group realized the weight of their small, ordinary choices toward “the least of these.” Who has God placed in your path this week whom you might be tempted to overlook?

PART THREE

The King Is Crucified and Risen

Matthew 26–28

Everything in this Gospel has been building toward these final three chapters. The King whose authority was demonstrated over disease, demons, and nature; whose identity was confessed by Peter and confirmed by the Father’s own voice; whose opposition from Israel’s leaders finally hardened into a settled plan to kill Him — that same King now walks, with open eyes and unforced steps, into the very suffering He had already predicted three times. Every character in these chapters is placed under extreme pressure, and every one of them is revealed by it: a woman who gives everything without calculating the cost, a disciple who sells his Lord for the price of a slave, a Father who does not remove the cup even as His Son asks Him to, and a King who submits to arrest, trial, and execution with the same quiet authority He showed calming a storm.

And then, three days later, an empty tomb. The resurrection is not an epilogue tacked onto the Gospel’s real story; it is the vindication of everything that came before it — proof that the suffering Servant and the promised King were, all along, the very same person. The book that opened with a genealogy proving Jesus’ right to David’s throne closes with the risen King commissioning His followers to make disciples of every nation, promising to be with them “to the very end of the age” (28:20) — the same Immanuel, God with us, that His name announced in its very first chapter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Not as I Will, but as You Will

Matthew 26

Matthew's twenty-sixth chapter is his longest and most concentrated, covering barely more than a day, yet it reads like a study in contrasts — every character placed under the same extreme pressure, and every one of them exposed by it.

It opens with a woman — almost certainly Mary of Bethany — breaking open a jar of perfume worth a year's wages and pouring it over Jesus' head. The disciples call it wasteful; Jesus calls it beautiful, and declares that wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, her act will be told in memory of her. What made it beautiful was its complete lack of calculation. She was not performing for an audience or managing a budget of appropriate devotion. She simply gave what she had, extravagantly, because Jesus was worth it. Against that uncalculated generosity, the very next scene lands with devastating weight: Judas goes to the chief priests and asks what they will give him to betray Jesus. They agree on thirty pieces of silver — the price of a slave under the Mosaic law. The woman gave a year's wages out of love. Judas sold the Son of God for the price of a slave. The relationship was transactional from the start.

At the Passover table, Jesus takes the bread and the cup and reorients the entire meal around Himself: "This is my body... this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:26, 28). The disciples eat and drink without fully grasping what they are participating in — the ancient rehearsal of Israel's rescue from Egypt is being remade, that very night,

around a far greater rescue still to come. When Jesus announces that one of them will betray Him, each disciple, remarkably, asks the same anxious question: “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?” It is worth noticing that not one of them points a finger at Judas. Years spent in Jesus’ presence had made every one of them, Judas included, honestly uncertain of his own heart’s capacity for failure — a self-suspicion healthier than the confident innocence we more often bring to our own self-examination.

In Gethsemane, Jesus takes His three closest disciples deeper into the garden and tells them plainly, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” He falls on His face and prays, not once but three times: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (26:39). This is not a failure of faith; it is faith at its most honest and most costly — the full weight of what was coming, brought without editing to the Father who already knew it, and surrendered anyway. Each time Jesus returns, He finds the disciples asleep, and each time He responds not with condemnation but with compassion: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” They had not abandoned Him out of hostility. They simply could not stay present to a suffering this large.

When Judas arrives with an armed crowd and identifies Jesus with a kiss, Jesus still calls him “friend” — not a formality, but a final, genuine offer of relationship that Judas had already refused. Jesus submits to arrest without resistance, and “then all the disciples deserted him and fled” (26:56) — the very men who had promised, hours earlier, that they never would. Peter alone follows at a distance, only to deny even knowing Jesus three times before a rooster crows, at which point he remembers Jesus’ prediction and “went outside and wept bitterly” (26:75).

Both Peter and Judas failed catastrophically that night, and both knew it immediately — Judas’s later remorse was real enough that he threw the silver back at the priests who had paid him. What separated them was not the depth of their regret but the direction they ran with it. Judas ran away, into despair and ultimately death. Peter ran back — toward the very Lord he had denied, into a restoration Jesus Himself would seek out after the resurrection. Remorse alone leads nowhere good. Remorse that turns and runs back to Christ is the beginning, not the end, of the story.

Discussion Questions

1. The woman at Bethany gave without calculating cost or audience; Judas calculated everything. Which posture more honestly describes your own giving and devotion right now?
2. Each disciple, hearing of a coming betrayal, asked “Surely not I, Lord?” rather than pointing at someone else. When you consider your own capacity for failure, do you tend toward that same honest self-suspicion, or toward a confident assumption that you would never do such a thing?
3. Jesus brought the full, unedited weight of His sorrow to the Father in Gethsemane rather than managing or minimizing it. Is there something you have been editing out of your own prayers because it feels too raw or too honest to bring to God?
4. Peter and Judas both failed and both felt genuine remorse, but only one of them ran back toward Christ. Is there a failure in your own history you are still running from rather than bringing back to the Father?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I Am with You Always

Matthew 27–28

Handed over to Pilate, Jesus is offered a choice the crowd makes for Him: release Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist, or release Jesus, against whom Pilate himself can find no real charge. The crowd, stirred by their leaders, chooses Barabbas, and Pilate washes his hands of the outcome without washing away his responsibility for it. Jesus is mocked, flogged, and led to Golgotha, where He is crucified between two criminals — the very picture of the two ways Israel’s own zealots imagined the kingdom might come: by violence and self-assertion, or by the Suffering Servant’s costly, peaceful submission to His Father’s will. He had already told His disciples which path was His own: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28).

Matthew records that at the moment Jesus breathed His last, the curtain of the temple — the barrier separating the Holy of Holies from every ordinary worshiper — was torn in two, from top to bottom. No human hand tears a curtain that size from the top. God Himself was declaring that the way into His presence, once guarded by ritual and priestly mediation, had been opened once for all by His Son’s own body, broken for exactly this purpose. It was a Roman centurion, of all people, standing at the foot of the cross and watching the manner of Jesus’ death, who spoke the confession the religious leaders never could: “Surely he was the Son of God!” (27:54). Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man and a secret follower, asks for the body and lays it in his own new

tomb, sealed and guarded at the chief priests' own insistence — an ironic precaution, since it would only make what happened next impossible to explain away.

On the third day, the tomb is empty. An angel tells the women who came to anoint the body, “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said” (28:6), and Jesus Himself meets them on the way, His first word to them the same reassurance He gave His frightened disciples on the storm-tossed sea: “Do not be afraid.” The chief priests, informed of the empty tomb by the terrified guards, do not deny what happened; they simply pay the soldiers to lie about it, inventing a story that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept — a story so transparently self-serving that it required its architects to admit, in the same breath, that they had been asleep on duty and yet somehow knew what had happened while they slept. Peter would later preach that these same religious and political leaders had handed Jesus over “by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge... but God raised him from the dead” (Acts 2:23-24). Every scheme devised against Him, every bribe paid to suppress the truth, only served in the end to display more clearly what no human plan could prevent: “there is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord” (Proverbs 21:30).

The Gospel’s final scene brings its risen King to a mountain in Galilee, where He gives His disciples both a declaration and a command: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (28:18-20). Notice the logic: the command to make disciples flows directly from Jesus’ own authority, not from the disciples’ own

competence or courage. “Go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” all describe how disciples are made; the one great, standing command is simply to make them — to bring people into a real, ongoing relationship with Christ Himself, not merely into charitable service or bare intellectual agreement.

And then, one final promise, addressed to those first disciples and, by the very words Jesus chooses, to every disciple who has followed since: “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (28:20). It is the last line of the book, and it answers, at last, the promise made in its very first chapter — that this child would be called Immanuel, God with us. The King who was presented, who was opposed, and who was crucified and raised, closes His own Gospel exactly where it began: near. Still near. Promised to remain near until the very end of the age.

Discussion Questions

1. The torn curtain declared that access to God’s presence no longer depended on ritual or priestly mediation. Is there some remaining part of your life where you still relate to God as though you needed to earn your way into His presence?
2. The chief priests’ cover-up story required them to admit they were asleep while somehow knowing what happened. Where have you seen human schemes against the truth ultimately expose themselves, in Scripture or in your own experience?
3. The Great Commission’s central command is to “make disciples” — a real, ongoing relationship with Christ — not simply charitable service or bare agreement with His teaching.

Which of those lesser substitutes might you be tempted to settle for in your own walk or in how you disciple others?

4. The Gospel opens with “Immanuel, God with us” and closes with “I am with you always.” How does that promised nearness change the way you face whatever this next season holds for you?

CONCLUSION

Matthew set out, from his very first verse, to prove a single claim: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messianic King promised throughout the Old Testament, the true Son of David and true Son of Abraham, in whom every covenant promise finds its fulfillment. Twenty-eight chapters later, the case has been made in every way a case can be made — through genealogy, through fulfilled prophecy, through authoritative teaching, through miracles no one else could perform, through a death no innocent man deserved, and through a resurrection no tomb could contain.

We titled this volume *Behold, Your King* because that is the single sustained argument of the whole book, and because it is the same command every reader is left to obey. It is not enough to admire Jesus as a moral teacher, or to be moved by His compassion for the outcast, or even to marvel at His miracles, the way the crowds in Galilee so often did without ever repenting. Matthew's Gospel exists to bring every reader, in every generation, to the same point Peter reached at Caesarea Philippi: a genuine confession that this is the Messiah, the Son of the living God — followed, as it was for Peter, by a whole lifetime of learning what it actually costs, and what it actually means, to follow Him.

The message Jesus and John the Baptist preached throughout these pages was simple: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." That kingdom did not arrive the way Israel expected, with armies and thrones, and it will not fully arrive until Jesus returns to finish what His first coming began. But its King has already come, has already died for the sins of the world, has already risen in vindicating triumph, and has already promised never to leave those who follow Him. Every chapter in this book, whether

it dwelt on a parable, a miracle, a confrontation, or a cross, has really been circling the same two questions Jesus put to His first disciples and puts to us still: who do you say that I am, and what will you do about it?

Matthew opened his Gospel with a promise — Immanuel, God with us — and closed it with the same promise renewed: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Between those two bookends lies the whole of this King’s authority, this King’s love, and this King’s claim on every life He calls. May we, having beheld Him in these pages, spend the rest of our days following Him.

APPENDIX

Daily Bible Reading Plan

A one-year plan through the whole Bible, following the same daily rhythm used throughout this series. Rows marked with an asterisk () correspond to chapters in this volume.*

January

1/10	Genesis 1-3	1/11	Genesis 4-7
1/12	Genesis 8-11	1/13	Genesis 12-15
1/14	Genesis 16-18	1/15	Genesis 19-21
1/16	Genesis 22-24	1/17	Genesis 25-26
1/18	Genesis 27-29	1/19	Genesis 30-31
1/20	Genesis 32-34	1/21	Genesis 35-37
1/22	Genesis 38-40	1/23	Genesis 41-42
1/24	Genesis 43-45	1/25	Genesis 46-47
1/26	Genesis 48-50	1/27	Exodus 1-3
1/28	Exodus 4-6	1/29	Exodus 7-9
1/30	Exodus 10-12	1/31	Exodus 13-15
1/1	2 Peter 1-3	1/2	1 John 1-5
1/3	2 John 1, 3 John 1, Jude 1	1/4	Revelation 1-3
1/5	Revelation 4-8	1/6	Revelation 9-12
1/7	Revelation 13-16	1/8	Revelation 17-19
1/9	Revelation 20-22		

February

2/1	Exodus 16-18	2/2	Exodus 19-21
2/3	Exodus 22-24	2/4	Exodus 25-27
2/5	Exodus 28-29	2/6	Exodus 30-32
2/7	Exodus 33-35	2/8	Exodus 36-38
2/9	Exodus 39-40	2/10	Leviticus 1-4
2/11	Leviticus 5-7	2/12	Leviticus 8-10
2/13	Leviticus 11-13	2/14	Leviticus 14-15
2/15	Leviticus 16-18	2/16	Leviticus 19-21

2/17	Leviticus 22-23	2/18	Leviticus 24-25
2/19	Leviticus 26-27	2/20	Numbers 1-2
2/21	Numbers 3-4	2/22	Numbers 5-6
2/23	Numbers 7	2/24	Numbers 8-10
2/25	Numbers 11-13	2/26	Numbers 14-15
2/27	Numbers 16-17	2/28	Numbers 18-20

March

3/1	Numbers 21-22	3/2	Numbers 23-25
3/3	Numbers 26-27	3/4	Numbers 28-30
3/5	Numbers 31-32	3/6	Numbers 33-34
3/7	Numbers 35-36	3/8	Deuteronomy 1-2
3/9	Deuteronomy 3-4	3/10	Deuteronomy 5-7
3/11	Deuteronomy 8-10	3/12	Deuteronomy 11-13
3/13	Deuteronomy 14-16	3/14	Deuteronomy 17-20
3/15	Deuteronomy 21-23	3/16	Deuteronomy 24-27
3/17	Deuteronomy 28-29	3/18	Deuteronomy 30-31
3/19	Deuteronomy 32-34	3/20	Joshua 1-4
3/21	Joshua 5-8	3/22	Joshua 9-11
3/23	Joshua 12-15	3/24	Joshua 16-18
3/25	Joshua 19-21	3/26	Joshua 22-24
3/27	Judges 1-2	3/28	Judges 3-5
3/29	Judges 6-7	3/30	Judges 8-9
3/31	Judges 10-12		

April

4/1	Judges 13-15	4/2	Judges 16-18
4/3	Judges 19-21	4/4	Ruth 1-4
4/5	1 Samuel 1-3	4/6	1 Samuel 4-8
4/7	1 Samuel 9-12	4/8	1 Samuel 13-14
4/9	1 Samuel 15-17	4/10	1 Samuel 18-20
4/11	1 Samuel 21-24	4/12	1 Samuel 25-27
4/13	1 Samuel 28-31	4/14	2 Samuel 1-3
4/15	2 Samuel 4-7	4/16	2 Samuel 8-12

4/17	2 Samuel 13-15	4/18	2 Samuel 16-18
4/19	2 Samuel 19-21	4/20	2 Samuel 22-24
4/21	1 Kings 1-2	4/22	1 Kings 3-5
4/23	1 Kings 6-7	4/24	1 Kings 8-9
4/25	1 Kings 10-11	4/26	1 Kings 12-14
4/27	1 Kings 15-17	4/28	1 Kings 18-20
4/29	1 Kings 21-22	4/30	2 Kings 1-3

May

5/1	2 Kings 4-5	5/2	2 Kings 6-8
5/3	2 Kings 9-11	5/4	2 Kings 12-14
5/5	2 Kings 15-17	5/6	2 Kings 18-19
5/7	2 Kings 20-22	5/8	2 Kings 23-25
5/9	1 Chronicles 1-2	5/10	1 Chronicles 3-5
5/11	1 Chronicles 6	5/12	1 Chronicles 7-8
5/13	1 Chronicles 9-11	5/14	1 Chronicles 12-14
5/15	1 Chronicles 15-17	5/16	1 Chronicles 18-21
5/17	1 Chronicles 22-24	5/18	1 Chronicles 25-27
5/19	1 Chronicles 28-2 Chronicles 1	5/20	2 Chronicles 2-5
5/21	2 Chronicles 6-8	5/22	2 Chronicles 9-12
5/23	2 Chronicles 13-17	5/24	2 Chronicles 18-20
5/25	2 Chronicles 21-24	5/26	2 Chronicles 25-27
5/27	2 Chronicles 28-31	5/28	2 Chronicles 32-34
5/29	2 Chronicles 35-36	5/30	Ezra 1-3
5/31	Ezra 4-7		

June

6/1	Ezra 8-10	6/2	Nehemiah 1-3
6/3	Nehemiah 4-6	6/4	Nehemiah 7
6/5	Nehemiah 8-9	6/6	Nehemiah 10-11
6/7	Nehemiah 12-13	6/8	Esther 1-5
6/9	Esther 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10

6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23
6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Psalms 1-8	6/24	Psalms 9-16
6/25	Psalms 17-20	6/26	Psalms 21-25
6/27	Psalms 26-31	6/28	Psalms 32-35
6/29	Psalms 36-39	6/30	Psalms 40-45

July

7/1	Psalms 46-50	7/2	Psalms 51-57
7/3	Psalms 58-65	7/4	Psalms 66-69
7/5	Psalms 70-73	7/6	Psalms 74-77
7/7	Psalms 78-79	7/8	Psalms 80-85
7/9	Psalms 86-89	7/10	Psalms 90-95
7/11	Psalms 96-102	7/12	Psalms 103-105
7/13	Psalms 106-107	7/14	Psalms 108-114
7/15	Psalms 115-118	7/16	Psalms 119:1-88
7/17	Psalms 119:89-176	7/18	Psalms 120-132
7/19	Psalms 133-139	7/20	Psalms 140-145
7/21	Psalms 146-150	7/22	Proverbs 1-3
7/23	Proverbs 4-6	7/24	Proverbs 7-9
7/25	Proverbs 10-12	7/26	Proverbs 13-15
7/27	Proverbs 16-18	7/28	Proverbs 19-21
7/29	Proverbs 22-23	7/30	Proverbs 24-26
7/31	Proverbs 27-29		

August

8/1	Proverbs 30-31	8/2	Ecclesiastes 1-4
8/3	Ecclesiastes 5-8	8/4	Ecclesiastes 9-12
8/5	Song of Songs 1-8	8/6	Isaiah 1-4
8/7	Isaiah 5-8	8/8	Isaiah 9-12
8/9	Isaiah 13-17	8/10	Isaiah 18-22

8/11	Isaiah 23-27	8/12	Isaiah 28-30
8/13	Isaiah 31-35	8/14	Isaiah 36-41
8/15	Isaiah 42-44	8/16	Isaiah 45-48
8/17	Isaiah 49-53	8/18	Isaiah 54-58
8/19	Isaiah 59-63	8/20	Isaiah 64-66
8/21	Jeremiah 1-3	8/22	Jeremiah 4-6
8/23	Jeremiah 7-9	8/24	Jeremiah 10-13
8/25	Jeremiah 14-17	8/26	Jeremiah 18-22
8/27	Jeremiah 23-25	8/28	Jeremiah 26-29
8/29	Jeremiah 30-31	8/30	Jeremiah 32-34
8/31	Jeremiah 35-37		

September

9/1	Jeremiah 38-41	9/2	Jeremiah 42-45
9/3	Jeremiah 46-48	9/4	Jeremiah 49-50
9/5	Jeremiah 51-52	9/6	Lamentations 1:1-3:36
9/7	Lamentations 3:37-5:22	9/8	Ezekiel 1-4
9/9	Ezekiel 5-8	9/10	Ezekiel 9-12
9/11	Ezekiel 13-15	9/12	Ezekiel 16-17
9/13	Ezekiel 18-20	9/14	Ezekiel 21-22
9/15	Ezekiel 23-24	9/16	Ezekiel 25-27
9/17	Ezekiel 28-30	9/18	Ezekiel 31-33
9/19	Ezekiel 34-36	9/20	Ezekiel 37-39
9/21	Ezekiel 40-42	9/22	Ezekiel 43-45
9/23	Ezekiel 46-48	9/24	Daniel 1-3
9/25	Daniel 4-6	9/26	Daniel 7-9
9/27	Daniel 10-12	9/28	Hosea 1-7
9/29	Hosea 8-14	9/30	Joel 1-3

October

10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Obadiah 1, Jonah 1-4	10/4	Micah 1-7
10/5	Nahum 1-3	10/6	Habakkuk 1-3, Zephaniah 1-3

10/7	Haggai 1-2	10/8	Zechariah 1-7
10/9	Zechariah 8-14	10/10	Malachi 1-4
10/11*	Matthew 1-4	10/12*	Matthew 5-6
10/13*	Matthew 7-8	10/14*	Matthew 9-10
10/15*	Matthew 11-12	10/16*	Matthew 13-14
10/17*	Matthew 15-17	10/18*	Matthew 18-19
10/19*	Matthew 20-21	10/20*	Matthew 22-23
10/21*	Matthew 24-25	10/22*	Matthew 26
10/23*	Matthew 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16		

November

11/1	Luke 1	11/2	Luke 2-3
11/3	Luke 4-5	11/4	Luke 6-7
11/5	Luke 8-9	11/6	Luke 10-11
11/7	Luke 12-13	11/8	Luke 14-16
11/9	Luke 17-18	11/10	Luke 19-20
11/11	Luke 21-22	11/12	Luke 23-24
11/13	John 1-2	11/14	John 3-4
11/15	John 5-6	11/16	John 7-8
11/17	John 9-10	11/18	John 11-12
11/19	John 13-15	11/20	John 16-18
11/21	John 19-21	11/22	Acts 1-3
11/23	Acts 4-6	11/24	Acts 7-8
11/25	Acts 9-10	11/26	Acts 11-13
11/27	Acts 14-15	11/28	Acts 16-17
11/29	Acts 18-20	11/30	Acts 21-23

December

12/1	Acts 24-26	12/2	Acts 27-28
12/3	Romans 1-3	12/4	Romans 4-7

12/5	Romans 8-10	12/6	Romans 11-13
12/7	Romans 14-16	12/8	1 Corinthians 1-4
12/9	1 Corinthians 5-8	12/10	1 Corinthians 9-11
12/11	1 Corinthians 12-14	12/12	1 Corinthians 15-16
12/13	2 Corinthians 1-4	12/14	2 Corinthians 5-9
12/15	2 Corinthians 10-13	12/16	Galatians 1-3
12/17	Galatians 4-6	12/18	Ephesians 1-3
12/19	Ephesians 4-6	12/20	Philippians 1-4
12/21	Colossians 1-4	12/22	1 Thessalonians 1-5
12/23	2 Thessalonians 1-3	12/24	1 Timothy 1-6
12/25	2 Timothy 1-4	12/26	Titus 1-3, Philemon 1
12/27	Hebrews 1-6	12/28	Hebrews 7-10
12/29	Hebrews 11-13	12/30	James 1-5
12/31	1 Peter 1-5		