

Follow Me
Matthew—Part Two

Matthew 14–28

by

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New edition, 2008

Northwestern Publishing House
1250 N. 113th St., Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284
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Lesson One—Matthew 14 and 15

Follow Me—And Be Separate from the World

Introduction

In our study we have been emphasizing the kingdom of God. Jesus is teaching his disciples about their work in the kingdom. He is teaching them important truths about the kingdom, which include the following:

The kingdom of God is one of authority. Before it the kingdoms of the world cannot stand, and at the Last Day this truth will become clear to all.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of grace and pardon for sin. God's compassion overflows into every area of our lives.

The kingdom of God is radically different from the kingdoms of this world—secular and religious. Those who enter Christ's kingdom must leave the other kingdoms behind.

Watch for these themes in chapters 14 and 15.

14:1-13 The death of John the Baptist

How does this account illustrate the great gulf between God's kingdom and the kingdoms of the world?

Verse 13 Note Jesus' response to the news that John had been killed. What lesson is there in this for us? (Hint: Contrast Jesus' reaction to John's death with the way a ruler of this world would have reacted to the murder of one of his champions at the hands of a rival kingdom.)

14:14-21 Jesus feeds the five thousand

Look at each of the following phrases and note the lesson Jesus' disciples learn about work in the kingdom.

- “he had compassion on them”
- “They do not need to go away”
- “Bring [the five loaves of bread and two fish] to me”

- “he gave them to the disciples”

14:22-36 Jesus strengthens the disciples’ faith

Jesus invited Peter to walk on the water and come out to where he was. Jesus’ invitation strengthened Peter’s faith and Peter did what Jesus told him to do. But what happened next?

What lesson did Peter and the other disciples learn from this?

How do you think Peter and the others put this into practice later on in their ministries?

15:1-20 Jesus teaches what cleanness and uncleanness really mean—in contrast to the teaching of the Pharisees

Verses 1-8 How did Jesus point out the Pharisees’ hypocrisy?

Verses 10,16-20 How did the Pharisees define uncleanness?

How did Jesus define uncleanness?

Verses 12-14 The disciples were somewhat concerned about the Pharisees’ reaction to Jesus’ words. What does Jesus tell the disciples to do? What lesson is there for us in this?

15:21-28 A further example of Jesus’ understanding of cleanness

Verse 22 What was so unusual about this woman?

Verse 26 How did this woman display her great faith?

Verse 27 When Jesus thinks of cleanness or uncleanness, what matters most—the external things or the internal? Explain.

15:29-39 Jesus feeds the four thousand

How is this account a fulfillment of Matthew 6:33?

In this account how does Jesus display his compassion? his authority?

What did the disciples learn about their ministry as they watched Jesus feed the people?

Note the progression of these two chapters: Jesus teaches his disciples to avoid the teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus teaches the disciples the full scope of his compassion—on Gentiles as well as on the people of Israel. Jesus displays his authority over all the forces and results of evil.

How do these accounts help you when

- you experience the Christian church undergoing persecution?
- you feel overwhelmed and rather angry with all the false teachings and teachers in the world?
- you feel powerless in comparison with the powers of this world?
- you feel your faith wavering?

Summary

Jesus continues to teach his disciples about their future work in his kingdom. He does not retaliate when Herod kills John, but continues his ministry of compassion. He teaches his disciples how to spot and avoid false teachings. He displays marvelous acts of power to strengthen the faith of his disciples.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 16 several times.

Lesson Two—Matthew 16

Follow Me—By Taking up Your Cross

Introduction

In this chapter we hear how Jesus continues to separate his disciples from the narrow, legalistic righteousness and unbelief of the Pharisees.

Being separated *from* man-made religions and set apart *for* the Lord was a glorious privilege. But it was also a frightening prospect for the still immature disciples.

It is frightening for us as well, but the joy of being part of God's kingdom outweighs anything we might be called on to give up for our Lord.

16:1-4 The sign of the prophet Jonah: a fitting sign for those who refuse to believe

Verse 1 Recall the judge Gideon, who asked the Lord for a sign before he went into battle with the Midianites. How was Gideon's request for a sign different from the Pharisees' request?

Verses 2,3 What were the signs of the times that the Pharisees refused to interpret correctly?

Verse 4 Review the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Recall Matthew 12:39,40.) Why was this an appropriate sign for the Pharisees?

16:5-12 The yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Verse 5 Why is yeast an appropriate picture of false teaching?

The *Pharisees* were the religious conservatives of the day. In the face of liberal influences of the Greek and the Roman world, they had held the line for Moses' Law. Their good intentions, however, had degenerated. What was the yeast they produced that Jesus warned his disciples to avoid? What similar yeast is around today?

The *Sadducees* were the religious liberals of the day. They were go-along-to-get-along people. They didn't want to rock the boat in the face of challenges to the Jewish faith. What do you think their yeast was? What similar yeast is around today?

16:13-20 The rock on which Christ's church is built

Verses 13,14 What were some common notions about who Jesus was?

Verse 15 One person said that the question in this verse is the most important question a person could ever answer. What did he mean by that?

Verses 16,17 Why did Jesus say that Peter was blessed?

Compare what Jesus says here with what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 and 2:1-5. Why can we say that we are blessed along with Peter?

Verses 18,19 What is the rock on which Jesus will build his church?

Why will the gates of Hades not be able to overcome Jesus' church?

What is the key that unlocks the kingdom? To whom should the disciples open the gates of the kingdom? To whom should they keep them closed?

Verse 20 Review why Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

16:21-28 *Being part of the kingdom means carrying a cross*

Verses 21,22 Why do you think Peter said "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you"?

What insight does this give us as to why many religious people today don't focus much on the cross?

Verse 23 Why was Jesus so harsh with Peter? Remember, Peter had just made a wonderful confession!

Verses 24-28 How does Jesus' answer help us interpret the intent of Peter's statement in verse 22?

Name some of the crosses the Lord has put in your life. Note: Suffering in general is not a cross. Only what we suffer because we are Christians can be termed a cross.

Why does Jesus talk about our deeds in this section? Why does he speak about God giving us a reward for those deeds?

Summary

Jesus separates his disciples from the doubt and self-righteousness of the Pharisees. Peter makes a bold confession, a confession that will be the foundation on which Jesus builds his church. However, Peter does not yet understand how the Christ he has just confessed will establish his kingdom. Nor does he yet realize what Jesus' cross will mean for his own life.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 17 several times.

Lesson Three—Matthew 17

Follow Me—And Share in My Glory

Introduction

Jesus' death was fast approaching. Yet he continued to prepare his disciples for their future work.

God the Father revealed Jesus' glory. This both strengthened Jesus for the days ahead, and it gave the disciples a clear view of the Lord to whom they would bear witness.

But their faith remained weak. Jesus teaches them the meaning of faith.

They needed to be taught about their relationship to the Old Testament law. In a unique way, Jesus teaches them about their freedom from laws concerning the Old Testament temple and their duty to show love to fellow worshipers by not causing them to stumble in their faith.

17:1-9 Jesus' transfiguration

Verses 1-3 Examine the details of what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration.

How would this event have strengthened Jesus for his sufferings and death?

Verse 4 Peter and the other disciples always wanted Jesus' glory to continue in an earthly kingdom. They didn't want Jesus to gain glory through the cross. In this verse how did Peter express his mistaken opinions about the kingdom?

Verse 5 How did the Father's words, "Listen to him!" reinforce Jesus' work of trying to separate the disciples from the religion of the Pharisees?

Verses 6-8 How do these verses teach the law? How do they teach the gospel?

Verse 9 We have already heard Jesus tell his disciples not to tell who he was (Matthew 16:20). This verse helps us understand why Jesus did this. What significance is there in the phrase “until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”?

17:10-13 Elijah has already come

Verse 10 From the disciples’ question, how did the Pharisees (and Jesus’ disciples also) imagine it would be when Elijah appeared?

Verses 11-13 How do Jesus’ words further help the disciples understand the real nature of the kingdom of God?

In a world that is looking for a Christ who will solve its social problems, how do these words help us understand our ministry as servants of God?

17:14-22 What it means to have faith

Verse 17 Why did Jesus express his frustration with the disciples’ slow spiritual growth? Weren’t his words a bit too strong, especially considering that he is talking about his disciples?

Verse 19-21 Why couldn’t the disciples heal the boy?

In the context of what Jesus said in verse 17 and what he says next in verse 20, what did Jesus mean when he said the disciples had “little faith”?

Why is a faith as small as a mustard seed all we need to have as Christians?

Verses 22,23 We can perhaps understand why the disciples were filled with grief when they heard about Jesus’ coming death. But what else did Jesus tell them? How should they have taken that news?

17:24-27 Jesus separates his disciples from the temple

Verse 24 Why was this question a tricky one for the disciples?

Verses 25-27 What was the new relationship the disciples had with the temple because they were followers of Jesus?

Martin Luther said that a Christian is a free lord of all, subject to none, and that a Christian is a servant of all, subject to all. How do Jesus' words and actions show that he taught this as well?

Why do you think Jesus got the money for the temple tax from a fish instead of from the disciples' own treasury?

Summary

Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God, yet before his disciples proclaim this fact, Jesus must suffer and die. Only then would his followers truly understand the nature of his kingdom and glory. Faith is great not because of what it is but because of whom it believes in. Christians will rejoice in their freedom in Christ, yet live so as not to harm the faith of others. All these are lessons about the kingdom.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 18 several times.

Lesson Four—Matthew 18

Follow Me—Forgive as I Have Forgiven You

Introduction

The kingdoms of the world differ from the kingdom of God in many ways.

One way is their definition of greatness. A mighty general, a skilled politician, a tactful diplomat, and a great scientist are all highly valued by their governments and are considered the great people of society. This is not true in the kingdom of God. He who is great is humble. He who is great treats fellow sinners with the same love God has for them.

18:1-9 Greatness in the kingdom of heaven

Verse 1 What were the disciples thinking when they asked Jesus about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Verses 2-4 What is it about a child who believes in Jesus that makes such a child a model of greatness?

Evaluate: In God's kingdom a person is not great because he does something great, but because he receives something great.

Verse 6 How do people today (including some who count themselves members of the Christian church) cause Christian children to fall into sin and unbelief?

Verse 7 It is inevitable that one person leads another to sin. A sinful world cannot act differently. But what does Jesus say about those who are agents of leading others into sin?

Verses 8,9 We heard Jesus say these same words in the Sermon on the Mount (5:27-30) when he warned people against falling into the sin of adultery. What do these words warn us against doing?

18:10-14 Heaven is filled with joy when a little child comes to faith

Verse 10 What fact should lead us to treat Christian children with high regard?

Verses 12-14 What also should lead us to treat Christian children with high regard?

18:15-20 The process of showing patience toward those who sin against us

Here Jesus does not describe some sort of constitutional process for dealing with sinners. Rather, he teaches the church to deal with sinners in patient love—just as he would deal with them if he were with them in person.

Verse 15 Why does love demand that the Christian first attempt to deal with the sinner on a one-to-one basis?

Verse 16 Why does love dictate that a second person become involved if the one-on-one approach does not work?

Verse 17 Why does love finally lead the Christian to take the matter before the church?

Verse 20 Often we use this passage in a general way, sometimes to take comfort in Christ's presence when only two or three Christians are present. What is the specific context of these comforting words?

Using the keys of the kingdom is the greatest responsibility of a church. How does this verse encourage the church and give it confidence to use the keys?

18:21-35 The forgiveness of our King: the heart and core of life in the kingdom

Verse 21 Peter understood that Jesus was teaching him about patience. What did Peter consider a reasonable limit to patience?

Verse 22 What does Jesus consider a reasonable limit?

Verses 23-34 This entire parable explains why Jesus' limit and not Peter's is the way it should be—yes, must be—in the kingdom of heaven. (Note how Jesus puts it: “The kingdom of heaven is like.”) What is the point of the parable?

Verse 35 Why will God judge those who refuse to forgive from the heart?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Greatness in the kingdom of heaven is not measured by how much we do for God, but by how we receive his pardon and grace. Little children who humbly trust in Jesus are good examples for all who want to follow him.

Receiving Christ's forgiveness and having that forgiveness permeate our lives is central to living in God's kingdom. To practice patience with the erring is to display the patience we have received from God. To forgive a brother or sister is to display the fact that we have found life in God's forgiveness to us.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 19 several times.

Lesson Five—Matthew 19

Follow Me—In How You Think about Marriage, Children, and Possessions

Introduction

In this chapter Jesus continues to instruct his disciples about the kingdom of God.

Here again, Jesus works to separate his disciples and us from the world's thinking. In this chapter Jesus focuses on three main components of our life in this world: marriage, children, and possessions.

When we understand the pardon and the grace of God that belong to us, we can view these three areas of life as God intends.

19:1-12 How to view marriage

Verses 1-3 Jesus wanted nothing more than to separate his disciples from the leaven of the Pharisees. Note how Jesus displayed his mercy and power. What was the Pharisees' response to the wonders they were witnessing?

Note: Why was the Pharisees' question a test? They were trying to pin Jesus between the rock of his own teaching on divorce (see Matthew 5:31,32) and the hard place of Moses' Law, which seemed to permit divorce. Many Israelites were hiding behind that law as they divorced and remarried.

Verses 4-6 How does Jesus express the meaning of marriage?

Who joins two people in marriage?

If two people have married for less than honorable reasons and now are having difficulty in their marriage because of that, can it really be said that God has joined them together?

Verse 7 See Deuteronomy 24:1-4 for Moses' law regarding divorce.

Verses 8,9 How does Jesus establish God's law, vindicate Moses, and expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees all at the same time?

Christian legislators are sometimes faced with making laws they know will permit people to sin. How might they take comfort in these verses?

Verse 10 Based on the disciples' reply, what was their attitude at this time toward divorce?

Verses 11,12 What do we think about remaining single in order to avoid the difficulties associated with marriage?

19:13-15 How to view children

Once again, the disciples consider it beneath the great teacher and ruler of God's kingdom to spend time with children. Why does Jesus value the opportunity to be with the children and bless them?

How do Jesus' actions shape how we view our Christian children?

19:16-30 How to view possessions

Verses 16,17 What did the young man have in mind when he asked Jesus about "good things"?

Why did Jesus rebuff his questions and shift the conversation to the only one who is good—God himself—and his commandments?

Was Jesus right when he said that it is possible to inherit eternal life if you obey the commandments?

Verse 21 Jesus had purposely omitted one commandment from his list. He now adds that commandment. Which is it?

Verses 23,24 What commentary does Jesus offer on mankind's ability to love God more than money?

Verse 26 Christians repent of their sin and consider God's kingdom a greater treasure than their earthly possessions. To whom do they owe their ability to do that?

Verse 27 Peter knew God had led him to choose Christ over his possessions. What question did Peter ask Jesus? Was it wrong for him to have asked that question? Why or why not?

Verses 28,29 What reward will there be for us in heaven? in this life?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

(**Verse 30** serves as the introduction to chapter 20.)

Summary

Because we are members of God's kingdom, we can trust that God will bless our marriages. We do not have to resort to divorce as the world does. We treasure children because of their ability to trust God implicitly. We consider God more valuable than our possessions and trust that he will give us back far more than we have given up for him.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 20:1–21:11 several times.

Lesson Six—Matthew 20:1–21:11

Follow Me—Up to Jerusalem

Introduction

We have left everything to follow you. What, then, will there be for us? That was Peter's question.

Jesus began answering him in chapter 19. He continues his answer in the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

In this chapter the pace quickens. The time is coming for Jesus to sacrifice himself for our sins.

The suffering servant, the Son of David, the King over God's kingdom, the true meaning of discipleship—these themes are all in high relief in our study today.

20:1-16 Do not think you should be first and as a result end up last

Who were “the first” in the parable?

Why did they end up last?

Who were “the last”?

Why did they end up first?

Review the first part of Jesus' answer to Peter's question in 19:27-29. How does this parable complete that answer?

Apply this to yourself. Do you ever feel you deserve more than other Christians because you have worked hard for your church?

20:17-19 Up to Jerusalem

These words form the introduction to Matthew's final chapters.

20:20-28 The disciples still don't understand the nature of the kingdom of God

Verse 21 Considering what Jesus had just said in 20:17-19, why is this mother's question such a great example of a total misunderstanding of the kingdom of God?

Verse 22 Why didn't James and John's mother know what she was asking?

What does Jesus mean by the cup he was going to drink?

Did James and John understand what drinking that cup meant for them? If not, when would they?

Verse 23 What does Jesus' answer tell us about his attitude toward his Father and his Father's will?

Verse 24 What did the rest of the disciples do that tells us they were no less guilty of sinful ambition?

Verses 25-28 Evaluate: To understand and apply these verses is the most important (and difficult) lesson in being a disciple of Christ.

20:29-34 Two blind men receive their sight

Compare this miracle with a similar miracle in 9:27-30.

What are some similarities?

What are some differences?

Can you explain why Jesus handled the second situation differently than he handled the first? (Hint: Consider the time element.)

21:1-11 Jesus enters Jerusalem

Verses 1-7 This account illustrates Jesus' complete power and complete humility at the same time.

How does it show Jesus' power?

How does it show Jesus' humility?

Verses 8,9 Why did the way Jesus entered Jerusalem form such a sharp contrast to how he had treated public recognition before?

If you had been a disciple, how would you have reconciled Jesus' humility with the fact that he was accepting the praises of those who were extolling him as the Son of David?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Jesus is ready to go into death for us. The disciples still did not understand the nature of his kingdom, yet soon would.

Jesus accepts the praise of the people, for that praise will write his death sentence with the Jewish leaders.

The one time Jesus accepts the full and public praise of the people is also the moment of his greatest humility. He puts himself in his Father's hands and resolutely sets out to follow his Father's will, even to death.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 21:12-46 several times.

Lesson Seven—Matthew 21:12-46

Follow Me—And Bear Witness against Unbelief

Introduction

This section records the events of Palm Sunday afternoon and the following day.

During the last week before he was crucified, Jesus spent a good deal of time in the temple, where he taught the people.

But now his teaching was different—different from the Sermon on the Mount, from his final words to his disciples at the Last Supper, and from his patient teaching about the spread of the kingdom of God.

As you listen to Jesus speak, remember the hundreds of years of God's patience and blessings on his people. Recall their repeated unfaithfulness.

Chapters 21–25 present the last words of Jesus and God the Father to the chosen people Israel—a final call to repentance and warnings of what would happen to them whose hearts would not change.

21:12-17 *Children will praise Jesus even if the religious leaders will not*

Verses 12,13 For what purpose had Solomon's temple been built? For what purpose was it now being used?

Verses 14-17 The children saw Jesus' grace and compassion, and they praised God for it. What, however, was the reaction of the religious leaders?

Jesus quotes from Psalm 8:2. Read the whole verse from the psalm. Do you think the religious leaders knew the second half of the verse? If so, what do you think was the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus' use of this verse?

21:18-22 *A visual aid to help the disciples understand what would happen to Israel*

What lesson was Jesus teaching by causing the fig tree to wither?

Jesus promised that the Christian church would be able to do the same thing in its ministry. In this context, what sort of request is Jesus saying God will honor? (Hint: Look at Matthew 16:18.)

21:23-27 *Even what the Jewish leaders had would be taken away from them*

Verse 23 Why did the religious leaders need to ask Jesus where he received his authority?

Verses 24-27 How does Jesus make them reveal their unbelief?

Verse 27 How does Jesus take away from them even the little truth they had?

21:28-32 *The Jewish leaders are forced to admit their guilt*

Verses 28,29 How did the Gentiles and “sinners” show themselves to be like the first son?

Verses 30,31 How did the Jewish people show themselves to be like the second son?

Verses 31,32 How did the Pharisees condemn themselves?

21:33-44 *The Jewish leaders are again forced to admit their guilt*

Verse 40 Review the parable. There are no difficulties involved in interpreting its basic points. How did Jesus set up the Jewish leaders to condemn themselves?

Verse 41 Reflect on the answer the Jewish leaders gave to Jesus. What must have been going through their minds when they answered Jesus’ question as forcefully and accurately as they did?

Verse 42 Identify each of the subjects of the verse Jesus quoted. How does this verse summarize what was happening that week in Jerusalem?

- “the stone”

- “the builders”

- those who consider what God has done as “marvelous”

Who does Jesus say is behind his ministry? What impact do you think this had on the Pharisees?

Verse 44 Jesus is talking about two levels of punishment. Those who reject him will suffer for their rejection. They will never find peace of conscience or spiritual happiness.

But there will come a day when the stone will fall on those who reject it. What will happen to them on that day?

21:45,46 *The Jewish leaders’ hearts remain hard*

Verse 45 How did the Pharisees reveal both their understanding and their lack of understanding of Jesus’ parables at the same time?

Verse 46 This verse serves as an introduction to the events on Thursday evening and Friday morning. How?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus’ ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Two thousand years of Jewish history are at an end. God has sent his Son and God’s people have rejected him. Jesus issued God’s final call to repentance, but Jesus’ words of warning only served to stir up more animosity against him.

For next time

Use The People’s Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 22 several times.

Lesson Eight—Matthew 22

Follow Me—With a Pure Heart

Introduction

God had chosen the Israelites as his children. At Mount Sinai they had promised to do everything God had commanded them. But they did not follow his commands (Matthew 21:28-32).

God had given Israel the privilege of serving him. Their leaders were to care for his vineyard. But they took the vineyard for their own (Matthew 21:33-44).

A family; a privileged place of employment—in this chapter Jesus expands on these pictures with a third; a wedding feast. The Jewish people refused this privilege and joy also.

These three *pictures* of Jewish rejection are followed by three *examples* of rejection. They demonstrate the hardness of the people's hearts.

22:1-14 *The Jews refuse God's invitation to come to his wedding feast*

Verses 1-10 Compare this parable with the two Jesus told in the previous chapter.

How are you a part of the fulfillment of verses 8-10? How can you help bring about the fulfillment of these verses?

Verses 11-14 What warning is there in these verses for the Gentiles who will be invited to the wedding feast? (See Romans 11:17,18,22.)

22:15-22 *Jesus reveals how the Pharisees are confused about the nature of the kingdom*

This is the first of three confrontations between the religious leaders and Jesus. The first people to confront him were the Pharisees, accompanied by the Herodians. The Herodians, as their name implies, were sympathetic to Herod's rule and would have been offended if Jesus had said they should not pay taxes to Caesar.

Verse 16 How do Jesus' opponents "set up" their question?

Verse 17 Analyze the question the Pharisees ask. Why does it betray a faulty understanding of God's kingdom?

Verses 18-21 How does Jesus reveal the Pharisees' confusion and at the same time lead us to understand the kingdom better?

Your neighbor thinks Christian denominations should try to force legislators to enact laws that will improve our country's morality. Another neighbor thinks it is wrong to send taxes to the federal government because these taxes are used for some immoral purposes. How would you counsel these people on the basis of these verses?

22:23-33 *Jesus shows the shallowness of religious liberalism*

Verses 23-28 How do the Sadducees mock Jesus with their question?

Verses 29-33 Jesus says that the Sadducees are in error on which two counts?

Use Jesus' method to rebuke the liberal church member today who rejects creation.

22:34-40 *Jesus reveals the legalism of the expert in the law*

Verses 34-36 Why do you think the expert in the law considered his questions to be such a great test of Jesus' understanding?

Verses 37-40 What was Jesus' answer? Why could the expert in the law never have come to this conclusion on his own?

Martin Franzmann says this about Jesus' answers to all three questions: "Jesus triumphs over His interrogators, not because He is cleverer or more adroit than they, but because He is purer than they."

Often Christians are afraid that they will not have the right answer for those who challenge their faith, and that they will need much study before they are capable of giving a good witness. Why is a pure heart in a better position to bear witness to and defend our faith than much learning?

22:41-46 *Jesus shows the shallow nature of his opponents' understanding of the Messiah's role*

When the Pharisees answered Jesus by saying that the Messiah was the son of David, they were again showing their desire to have the Messiah fulfill an earthly function—granting the Jews freedom from their enemies as David had done. Like father, like son.

Verse 45 The Messiah is David's son *and* David's Lord. What grander vision of the role of the Messiah does this give us?

Verse 46 Why did Jesus' questions and statements about David's understanding of the Messiah put an end to all opposition?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Jesus exposed how wickedly the Jews had treated God's gracious invitation to his wedding banquet.

Jesus also silenced the broad range of religious opposition that his people were throwing at him. He rebuked the false understandings of the kingdom of God, the religious liberalism, and the legalism that were all prominent in his day.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew chapter 23 several times.

Lesson Nine—Matthew 23

Follow Me—And Find Refuge under My Wings

Introduction

An ancient church father once said, “The heart is hard which will not be softened by benefits, nor terrified by threats, nor moved by promises.”

That well describes Israel, especially its rulers. Discussion between Jesus and the Jewish leadership had ceased with the end of chapter 22. Now comes one of the most scathing rebukes found anywhere in Scripture.

Every religious impulse of the Pharisees was at odds with God’s will and with his Son’s will. The only word suitable for such rebellion against God is “Woe,” which Jesus utters seven times.

But mixed with the obvious anger expressed in that word is profound grief, as we will see at the end of the chapter.

23:1-4 The Pharisees lay heavy loads on the shoulders of their hearers

Why should the disciples obey the teachers of the law and the Pharisees?

Does the life of an immoral religious leader negate the effect of the truth he preaches from God’s Word?

23:5-12 They love to be seen in places of honor

Why did the Pharisees and teachers of the law want to be called Rabbi?

Many religions have “masters,” “fathers,” and “teachers.” They are special people who gather disciples around them who hold their teaching in high regard and sit at their feet.

Contrast this with the posture and attitude the disciples were to have when they became the “teachers” of the church.

23:13-15 They keep people from entering the kingdom of God

On the basis of what we have learned about “the leaven of the Pharisees,” why were they keeping people out of God’s kingdom and making their converts “sons of hell”?

23:16-22 They make subtle but ridiculous distinctions about oaths

Recall Jesus' discussions about oaths in the Sermon on the Mount. Why do you think the Pharisees made distinctions between binding and non-binding oaths?

23:23,24 They focus on the least important things and neglect the most important

In the days ahead, how would the Pharisees prove the truth of Jesus' words about how they neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness?

23:25-28 They were dirty cups and whitewashed tombs

Jesus was able to look into the Pharisees' hearts. What did he find there?

All of us are sinners, but what made the attitude of the Pharisees so evil?

23:29-36 They would kill God's Son just as their fathers had killed the prophets

Verses 29-32 The sins of Israel were like water filling up a cup. When would the cup finally be filled to the brim?

Verses 35,36 Why would God hold the Pharisees guilty for the blood of Abel?

What is the significance of the second of the two names Jesus mentions—Zechariah, son of Berechiah? (Hint: Ask your teacher where 2 Chronicles is located in the Hebrew Bible.)

23:37-39 They will be destroyed because they were not willing to be saved

Verse 37 How do Jesus' words in this verse help us understand his motives in everything he did during the last three years?

Verse 38 To be desolate means to be empty and barren. How does that apply at this time to the house of Israel?

Verse 39 Someday the true believers among the Jews would see Jesus coming in his glory and say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." But until then, Israel would not see Christ anymore.

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

This chapter contains Jesus' last words to his enemies. They are strong words, a final rebuke of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had turned God's Old Testament religion of repentance and grace into a system of laws and regulations.

He rebukes these religious leaders for their hypocrisy and tells them to fill up the cup of wickedness that was now almost filled to the brim.

Yet even at the end, Jesus still has compassion for his people, whom he had longed to gather under the wings of his grace.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 24:1-35 several times.

Lesson Ten—Matthew 24:1-35

Follow Me—And Be Always Watching

for My Return

Introduction

Jesus had labeled the Jewish house as desolate—empty of any spiritual life and ripe for destruction.

Now Jesus turns his attention to his disciples. He does not want their house to become desolate. He wants them to hold on to their faith and be watching for his return.

As you read this chapter, keep in mind some important truths. This chapter is:

NOT about trying to figure out in which verses Jesus is talking about God’s judgment on Jerusalem and *when* he is talking about his judgment on the world,

BUT about learning to see the judgment on Jerusalem as an example of what God will do on the Last Day to all who reject him.

NOT about trying to figure out *when* Jesus will come again,

BUT about learning to keep *watching* for him at all times.

NOT about satisfying our curiosity for details about the end of the world,

BUT about learning to see in all of history evidence that this world will someday come to an end.

24:1-3 The nature of the disciples’ question

What event had Jesus referred to at the end of the last chapter?

Verse 2 What event does he refer to here?

Verse 3 From the nature of the disciples’ question, how do they understand the time relation between these two events?

24:4-14 Signs of God’s judgment on unbelief

Verse 4 Why doesn't Jesus separate the two events that the disciples had in mind when they asked their question (verse 3)?

Verses 4-14 Focus on each of the events leading up to the Last Day. Are these events taking place now?

- false Christs
- wars/rumors of wars
- famines/earthquakes
- persecution of the church
- Christians falling away from the faith
- deceptive prophets
- increase in wickedness/decrease of love
- the gospel preached in all the world

How do the following statements help us understand what Jesus wants us to do with this information?

- “watch out that no one deceives you”
- “see to it that you are not alarmed”

- “such things must happen”
- “beginning of birth pains”
- “he who stands firm to the end will be saved”
- “as a testimony to all nations”

In what sense are all these signs a testimony to the world regarding its final end?

24:15-25 *The distress of the last days*

Verses 15-20 The conquest of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 was terrible for the city and its inhabitants. Jesus uses this act of God’s judgment to picture God’s final judgment on the world. As time allows, discuss the details presented in these verses.

Verses 21-22 Jesus now returns to the last days of the world and describes how hard it will be on Christians in those days. What comfort does he give his elect?

Verses 23-25 Jesus describes the terrible deception of those days. What comfort does God give his elect?

Why is the truth of election so comforting in view of the nature of the last days?

24:26-31 *Jesus will appear in such a way that all will see him*

Verse 26 Where do the false Christs appear?

Verses 27,28 Where will the true Christ appear?

Verse 29 What signs will immediately precede Christ's second coming?

Verse 30 The nations rejoice as they attempt to destroy the faith of God's people. But what will they do when Jesus returns?

Verse 31 The Christians mourned as they suffered at the hands of the unbelievers. But what can they look forward to when Jesus returns?

24:32-35 *We can be certain that everything will happen just as Jesus said it will*

Verse 33 Why did Jesus describe the events leading up to his return?

Verse 35 Why can we be certain that everything will take place just as Jesus describes it?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus' ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Jesus warns his disciples to keep watching until he returns. They should not be frightened by what will take place as the end approaches. All these things must happen. God will guard his elect. Jesus will return and bring us safely into heaven.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 24:36–25:46 several times.

Lesson Eleven—Matthew 24:36–25:46

Follow Me: Until I Return

Introduction

Religious radio and TV stations often feature preachers who are experts on the last days. They attempt to use clues from Scripture to analyze current world events and predict what will happen in the future.

Take a quick look at chapters 24 and 25. Compare how much material is dedicated to giving details about the end times, and how much is dedicated to encouraging God's people to be ready for them.

After you have done that, state what you think is the purpose of these two chapters.

Today we will see what kind of people we should be as we await Jesus' return.

24:36-44 *No one knows the day or hour of Jesus' second coming*

Verse 36 What do these verses say about those who claim to know when Jesus will come again?

Verses 37-39 What will it be like in the world immediately before Jesus comes again? Why does this fact increase the importance of our constantly watching for Jesus' return?

Verses 40,41 These verses show us the unexpected nature of Jesus' return. Many denominations teach that Jesus will return and establish a thousand-year reign on earth before the eternity of heaven begins. Many teach that seven years before Jesus comes he will "rapture," or snatch up, all the believers to spare them from the tribulation of the end times. These two verses are claimed to be proof texts for that teaching. Show from this chapter that such an interpretation of these verses is unscriptural.

Verses 42-44 Jesus teaches that he will come like a thief in the night. In what sense does Jesus' second coming fit that description?

24:45-51 *What it means to keep watch*

Verses 45-47 Jesus said that we should keep watch. He also tells us that he will come at a time when we do not expect him. That seems to be a contradiction. These verses, however, explain what Jesus means by watching. How do we watch for Jesus?

Verses 48-51 Name some things in our world that make watching difficult.

How does the theory of evolution lead people to reason like the wicked servant did in verse 48?

25:1-13 *Be ready!*

Verses 1,2 True or false: The foolish virgins had never come to faith. Explain your answer.

Note: Marriage customs of the day explain what is happening in this parable. In those days the man and woman were actually married before they came together as husband and wife. Various conditions had to be met by the man before he could claim his wife. When those conditions had been fulfilled, the bridegroom went to the bride's home, got his bride, and celebrated the marriage banquet. The virgins were waiting for the bridegroom to return from getting his bride so they could take part in the marriage banquet.

Verse 6 What is the significance of midnight?

Verse 12 Why did the bridegroom say he did not know the five virgins who arrived late?

25:14-30 *Be faithful!*

Verse 15 What was an ancient "talent"?

What is the significance of the phrase "each according to his ability"?

What are the talents the Lord has entrusted to you?

Verses 20-23 What did the first two servants do? What was their reward?

Verses 24-28 What reason did the wicked servant give for not investing his master's talent? What does this show about his heart?

Verse 29 We heard Jesus use this statement when speaking about those who refused to accept God’s Word (Matthew 13:12). To whom are these words applied in this verse?

25:31-46 The final judgment

Some in the church claim that deeds, not creeds, is the important thing. We correctly answer that creeds are more important, for without knowing what Christ did for us, we will not know how to be saved. However, how might the devil get us to misuse that truth? To what does Jesus refer in this section, deeds or creeds?

With the above question in mind, what is the significance of the phrase “the least of these brothers of mine”? How does this help us understand the wicked nature of the unbelievers’ actions, which Jesus condemns?

How does this chapter help us understand Jesus’ ministry? How does it help us understand the nature of the kingdom in which we are serving?

Summary

Jesus tells us to watch. We should be watchful and faithful, always serving our fellow Christians by giving them physical help and spiritual encouragement.

For next time

Use The People’s Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 26:1-46 several times.

Lesson Twelve—Matthew 26:1-46

Follow Me—I Will Go Ahead of You to Galilee

Introduction

For three years the disciples had seen Jesus' deeds and heard his words.

They knew Jesus as the Messiah; they understood repentance and faith. They had been taught to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees. They had learned many things about the kingdom of God and what they could expect when they began their ministry.

But there was one thing they did not yet know as they ought. They had not experienced their own personal spiritual failure and could not fully contrast it with the grace that God had given them in Christ. This was one virtue they needed in greater measure before they could work with God's people. They needed a deep humility that would foster understanding and patience toward the people among whom they would work.

As Matthew tells us the story of Jesus' sufferings and death, he points out the disciples' failure (his own too) and shows us how Jesus went on alone to win salvation for the world.

26:1-5 The contrast between Jesus and the religious leaders

Matthew begins the passion history with the ultimate contrast between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Express this contrast in your own words.

26:6-13 The disciples begin going down the road to failure

Verses 6-9 An unnamed woman anointed Jesus' head with very expensive perfume. What was the disciples' reaction to this act?

Verses 10-13 Why had the woman anointed Jesus? Compare the understanding of this woman, who probably knew a small fraction of what the disciples knew, with the understanding of the disciples.

Whenever the disciples remembered this woman's remarkable act, what do you think they would also remember? How would that help them in their future work?

26:14-16 Judas agrees to betray Jesus

Note the way Matthew records Judas' betrayal. One person said that the very way Matthew recorded Judas' betrayal is a fruit of Matthew's faith. What do you think he meant by that? (Hint: Note the way we often talk about people around us who commit sins.)

26:17-25 The Passover meal and Judas is exposed

Verses 22,25 Contrast what was going on in the hearts of the 11 disciples when they said, "Surely not I, Lord" with what was going on in Judas' heart when he said the same words.

Verses 23,24 What was Jesus trying to do for Judas with this warning?

26:26-30 The Lord's Supper

Against the backdrop of the greatest betrayal of all time comes the greatest act of giving of all time.

Look at the following phrases and words. What do they tell you about the Lord's Supper?

- "take eat/drink, fruit of the vine"

- "all of you"

- "my body/blood"

- "the covenant"

- "poured out"

- "forgiveness of sins"

26:31-35 Jesus predicts Peter's denial

Verse 31 What does Jesus foretell that his disciples would do that night?

Verse 32 How does Jesus say he would treat these men who would so sinfully desert him?

Verses 33-35 How do Peter and the rest of the disciples show that they had much to learn about themselves?

26:36-46 Jesus' success versus the disciples' failure in Gethsemane

How do the following phrases and words help us understand what Jesus was doing in Gethsemane?

- “pray”
- “my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow/point of death”
- “this cup”
- “taken from me”
- “not as I will/as you will”
- to his disciples: “keep watch/pray”

How did the disciples fail Jesus in Gethsemane? How would their failure help them in the future?

Summary

Jesus begins to fulfill the last part of his work of suffering and dying for the sins of the world. Through it all he gave of himself for us—giving us his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

To make his disciples humble, appreciative of his grace, and patient with the weak, Jesus lovingly lets his disciples fall. He must travel the road to the cross alone.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 26:47–27:10 several times.

Lesson Thirteen—Matthew 26:47–27:10

Follow Me—I Must Go to the Cross Alone

Introduction

No one could follow Jesus to the cross. No one could stand before the high priest and make the good confession for Jesus. He had to make it for himself. Jesus alone won our salvation, and when the disciples looked back at that event, there was no doubt in their minds on that score.

They betrayed him, misunderstood him, fled from him, and disowned him. One writer said that Matthew's account of the crucifixion was Matthew's confession of the sinful way he acted during the hours of Jesus' passion. Certainly Matthew speaks for all of us. Today we witness our Savior suffering and dying for our sins, even our sins of denial.

26:47-56 Jesus is arrested

What a vision of the sinfulness of the human race!

Verses 48-50 What was going on in Judas' mind when he approached Jesus in the garden?

Verses 50-54 What was going on in the mind of the disciple who took out his sword and tried to defend Jesus?

Verses 47,55 What was going on in the minds of those who arrested Jesus? Consider the time of the arrest, the size of the crowd, and their weaponry.

Verses 52,53,55 What place did the sword and other forms of violence or force have in Jesus' plan?

Verses 54,56 What was going on in Jesus' mind as he faced the crowd? (Compare this with Jesus' attitude as he prayed in Gethsemane.)

Verse 56 What was the disciples' response to Jesus' three years of love, compassion, teaching, miracles, and unswerving dedication to preparing them to be his witnesses?

26:57-68 Jesus confesses the truth before the Sanhedrin

Justice was perverted at this trial. What was the response to the many who told lies at the trial? What happened to the only one who told the truth?

Read Daniel 7:13,14. What confession did Jesus make before the Sanhedrin?

What was the religious leaders' response to Jesus' confession?

26:69-75 Peter disowns his Lord

Why do you think Matthew puts this account in his book?

Sometimes apostles like Peter and Paul are called heroes of faith. Do you think they would have wanted to be referred to like that?

27:1-10 Judas hangs himself

Compare Judas' reaction to his sin with Peter's reaction to his own sin. How did the remorse that each felt differ? What was the result of each kind of remorse?

Testimonies that Jesus is the true Messiah

The disciples did not give any testimonies to their Savior, nor did they try to defend him and explain who he was. Yet the Lord himself saw to it that there were ample testimonies to Jesus' person and work.

Jesus fulfilled prophecy. What prophecies did Jesus fulfill?

In the next lesson we will see Jesus' enemies and even creation bear witness to what was happening in the last hours of Jesus' life.

How does Jesus' work during these hours help us understand the nature of the kingdom?

Summary

Jesus continues on the road to the cross. It is a road he must travel alone. Only the Son of God can go to

battle with Satan and take away his power. Only by suffering for our sins could Jesus win the victory over Satan and establish the kingdom of God.

The disciples deserted Jesus. This caused them shame in later years. Yet it gave them all the more reason to rejoice in God's grace for them, and it made them humble and patient as they worked with fellow sinners.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 27:11-56 several times.

Lesson Fourteen—Matthew 27:11-56

Follow Me—Our King Goes into Battle

Introduction

Jesus is now in the middle of the hours of his suffering.

His disciples have rejected him. The leaders of God's people have rejected him. Now he stands before the secular powers of the world. Would they reject him too? Yes.

At a time when Jesus appears to be anything but a great king, he is establishing the greatest kingdom of all time—the kingdom of God.

Only he can carry on this battle. The swords of the disciples could not help. The only weapon that could conquer Satan was the innocent life of the Son of God.

27:11-26 Behold, the king of the Jews

Verse 11 Why did Jesus answer this question of Pilate, yet remain silent when Pilate asked him about the charges brought against him by the Jews? (Hint: Compare what Jesus did here with how he answered the high priest earlier.)

Verse 19 How did God dramatically testify to his Son's innocence?

Verses 18,23,24 What tells us that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent?

Was Pilate really able to wash his hands of the matter? Why or why not?

Verse 25 This was the final word in Israel's rebellion against the Lord. What would be in store for Israel as a nation from this time on? Compare Matthew 23:35,36.

Verse 26 What shows us that Pilate harbored malice toward Jesus? (Note also what happens in the next account.)

27:27-31 The king of the Jews

This is the only time Jesus ever wore royal robes. Why was it fitting that he wear them now?

27:32-44 *The crucifixion*

Verse 34 Why do you think Jesus refused to drink the wine mixed with gall that the soldiers offered him?

Verse 37 Why is it appropriate that Jesus have this superscription over his head at this time in his life?

Verses 34-44 Matthew doesn't always quote from the Old Testament. Yet it is clear that he chooses to record the events that fulfill prophecy. Look at the following Old Testament passages and note how they were fulfilled.

- Psalm 69:21

- Psalm 22:18

- Isaiah 53:12

- Psalm 22:7,8 (Note also Psalm 22:1 that is quoted in the next section.)

27:45-56 *The death of Jesus*

Verses 45,46 How do the two events—the three hours of darkness and Jesus' cry from the cross about his Father forsaking him—explain each other?

Verse 50 It is clear from all that happened that Jesus went into death willingly. Nothing makes that truth more clear than the way Jesus died. How does this verse teach that truth?

Verses 51-53 Every event bore witness to what was happening. Prophecy fulfilled, unwilling (and unwitting) statements of Jesus' enemies, the testimony of Gentiles who really had no stake in Jesus' death—all explained what was happening.

In these verses we have some special witnesses to the significance of Jesus' death. How did the following explain what was happening?

- the temple
- the earth
- the tombs of believers and their inhabitants

Verse 54 What witness do the Roman soldiers give?

Verses 55,56 Why do you think Matthew included this reference in his account?

How do these accounts help us understand Jesus' ministry? Why are they central to our ministry?

Summary

Jesus walked the path to his death alone. Yet all along the way were road signs, giving witness to what was happening.

Jesus' enemies, some Gentiles, the temple, creation, and even the dead gave witness that Jesus was the Son of God who had died for the sin of the world, had defeated Satan, and had established God's kingdom.

For next time

Use The People's Bible commentary on Matthew to review this section. Read through Matthew 27:57–28:20 several times.

Lesson Fifteen—Matthew 27:57–28:20

Follow Me—Lead Others to Follow Me, the Risen Lord

Introduction

Matthew's resurrection account is short. But it doesn't need to be any longer than it is. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead tells us that everything he said and did has God's stamp of approval on it.

Because he fully paid the punishment for our sins, death could not hold him in the grave. Because he overcame sin, the devil lost his deathgrip on us and we are no longer consigned to be members of Satan's kingdom.

Although Matthew's actual account of the resurrection is short, he shows us how God watched over Jesus' body from his death to his resurrection. In our lesson, watch how Matthew shows this.

27:57-61 Jesus is buried with the rich

Verse 57 Clearly, Matthew wants us to realize that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Read Isaiah 53:9. How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Verses 58-60 It is also clear that Matthew wants us to know exactly what happened to the body of Jesus. In this regard, what is the significance of the order Pilate gave? What is the significance of the big stone?

Verse 61 Matthew had already mentioned that the women watched Jesus' crucifixion. Now he notes that they were there at the burial. When Jesus rose, he notes that they were the first to the tomb and that Jesus appeared to them first. Why do you think Matthew focuses on the loyalty of the women?

27:62-66 The guard at the tomb

Verses 62-64 From hindsight, what would have made the Pharisees' position more firm: if a guard had been posted or if the tomb had been left unattended?

Verses 65,66 How does Pilate's seal make the resurrection account more certain?

28:1-10 The resurrection

Verses 1-3 Why did the angel roll away the stone from the opening to the tomb?

Verses 5-7 What good news did the angel give the women with the following words:

- “He is not here; he has risen”

- “He is going ahead of you into Galilee”

Verses 8-10 What good news did Jesus give the disciples when he spoke of them as his brothers?

28:11-15 The guards’ report

A person might say about Matthew’s version of the story: “That’s only your version; we prefer to believe what the guards said about disciples stealing the body away.” Why should Matthew’s account have been more credible even to unbelievers of that day than the soldiers’ account?

How do the Pharisees’ actions complete the story of their rejection of Christ?

28:16-20 The Great Commission

Why did Jesus preface his commission by telling the disciples that he had “all authority in heaven and on earth”?

How were the disciples to “make disciples”?

Why is “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” such a wonderful ministry?

Sometimes people think that “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” refers only to Jesus’ moral precepts. Give a complete picture of the things Jesus commanded us to do.

Why was it so comforting for the disciples to know that Jesus was still with them?

Why is it so comforting for us to know that Jesus will be with us to the end of the age?

Summary

There can be no doubt about what happened to Jesus' body. Pilate ordered it put into a tomb and ordered soldiers to watch it. Nothing short of the sight of an angel could frighten Roman soldiers away.

Jesus truly rose. His work is finished. He has all authority in heaven and on earth and wants us to tell this truth to others. Christ has arisen, and his kingdom of grace and forgiveness is theirs!
