

JESUS

pure & simple



A Hope Chapel Commentary & Study Companion to:
Meeting Jesus, a 13-session LifeGuide Bible Study
by Leighton Ford, InterVarsity Press

Introduction

SUPPLEMENTAL LEADER & STUDY RESOURCE

Jesus: Pure and Simple is written as a study companion to **Meeting Jesus, 13 Studies for Individuals or Groups** by Leighton Ford, published by InterVarsity Press. Each of the studies uses a portion of one of the four Gospels as a lens to help us get to know the real Jesus. Throughout this series, as we consider what He taught and did, we will grow in our understanding of who He is. And as we grow in our understanding of who He is, we will grow more and more in love with Him.

The booklet *Meeting Jesus* provides Scripture readings and thoughtful questions for either personal reflection or group discussion. This supplemental resource, that we call *Jesus Pure & Simple*, is designed to provide a little more biblical background and context for each week's passage.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS RESOURCE

Each of the 13 lessons here corresponds with a chapter in *Meeting Jesus* and is made up of:



Background Tidbits – Brief historical, cultural, or biblical insights that help set the scene for the passage.



Commentary & Notes – Short explanations of verses, words, ideas, or difficult sections that may benefit from some added content.

- **Additional Scripture** – We may also point you to other Scripture passages that help provide a fuller picture for that week's lesson.

These notes are **not intended to be an answer key or a comprehensive commentary**. You will find some excellent notes in the main study guide, *Meeting Jesus*, starting on page 53. This supplemental Hope Chapel resource offers additional help — something to give group leaders even more confidence as they prepare for group discussion and to help anyone using these resources to better understand the Scriptures they are reading.

If you are leading a group, please don't feel the need to bring everything from these notes into your group discussion. Rather, consider these comments like a buffet where you can pick and choose what seems helpful for your group. These notes are here to help you prepare, to provide context when it is helpful, and to give you a place to start when you encounter a passage or idea that may be unfamiliar to you or hard to understand.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON SUNDAYS

During the Fall of 2026, our Sunday messages at Hope Chapel will follow the same general themes we are exploring through these two study guides. The sermons might not follow the 13 lessons precisely nor address every question found in a particular chapter. Instead, our Sunday messages will seek to bring greater depth to each topic and help us see more clearly what Scripture reveals about Jesus.

The Sunday sermon, your personal study, and group discussions will complement one another and build on each other without simply repeating the same material. Together, they will give us multiple opportunities throughout the week to open God's Word, talk about what we are learning, and consider how knowing Jesus continues to impact our lives.

Our goal isn't merely to complete a study or learn more information. Our goal is to **know Jesus more clearly, follow Him more faithfully, and allow what we learn about Him to transform how we live.**

Hope Chapel, 2026

Hope Chapel, 35 Chocksett Road, Sterling, MA 01564
hopechapelsterling.org

1. The Real Jesus: Mark 1:9-45



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

The author, Mark, is likely the same individual who fled the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52) and who abandoned the very first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13). But here we see Mark later used by God as one of His chosen and gifted instruments to provide His authoritative Word for us. The Real Jesus changes people.

Note that the Gospel of Mark does not include any of the birth narratives found in Matthew or Luke. Mark opens his Gospel at the start of Jesus' ministry, providing authoritative evidence that affirms He is the true Son of God. In some ways, Mark just lets the Real Jesus speak for Himself as He demonstrates and proclaims that He is the Only Savior, the Son of God.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 9-11 – The Baptism of Jesus

(other accounts of this are in Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-23)

- In the days of Jesus, Jews practiced baptism as a form of ritual cleansing. They understood it to wash away any “contamination” experienced by encountering unclean things. It was also like an acted-out prayer — requesting forgiveness and righteousness.
- Jesus' baptism mirrors what He came to provide to all who believed in Him.
- The Jordan River connects the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. It is the same river the Israelites crossed on dry ground as they entered the Promised Land under Joshua.

vs. 12-13 – The Temptation of Jesus

(other accounts of the temptation of Jesus can be found in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13)

- In the temptation, Satan confronted Jesus with the choice to achieve supremacy over Creation God's way or the world's way.
- Notice that Jesus' temptation lasted 40 days. That mirrors Moses' forty days on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law, the Ten Commandments. It also carries the connotation of completion or fulfillment as it took 40 years of wandering in the wilderness following the Israelites' disobedience before entering the Promised Land.

vs. 14-15 – The Announcement of the Kingdom

- Galilee is in Israel's north, encompassing much of the region near the Sea of Galilee.
- Notice the core of our response to God's Kingdom — repent and believe. Repentance refers to a genuine change of heart, not just a feeling of conviction. The words in the original languages of

the Old and New Testament refer to a complete change of direction, a return to God by turning away from sin, based on a deep, conscious, and specific decision. Belief is a life-altering trust, not just an acceptance of fact.

vs. 16-20 – The Call of the First Disciples

- Fishing was a respectable and needed profession in the days of Jesus. The Sea of Galilee provided a good supply of food for the region. The main point of noting their profession is to highlight that God uses ordinary people, not just a priestly line. One is qualified not by pedigree or training, but because he or she has been with Jesus.
- Note the calling of the followers of Christ: to “fish” for others. This stands in sharp contrast to the way the purpose of our faith is understood today. Many approach faith in Jesus as some form of personal enrichment and seek mainly what it can do for them. The response of Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John are guides for us: immediate and obedient following Jesus.

vs. 21-38 – The Healing Ministry of Jesus

- The miracles are intended to affirm that Jesus truly is the Son of God. The miracles are not His mission but evidence that He is qualified and has authority to fulfill His mission as the Savior of the World.
- His authority extends beyond the physical realm because He also has authority over the spiritual world of unclean spirits. He not only casts them out of people, but commands them not to reveal who He is.
- v. 35 – Jesus’ power flowed from His relationship with His Father. In this passage you can see Him cultivating that relationship.
- v. 38 – This verse highlights that Jesus’ mission was primarily preaching the Good News, not just healing.

vs. 39-45 – Healing the Leper

- This miracle symbolizes the overarching mission of Jesus: to make people clean.
- Leprosy was a scary disease in the first century. It referred to a wide range of skin diseases that made people “unclean.” Lepers were forced to live in isolation from family/friends, wear torn robes and yell “unclean, unclean” when others approached. In extreme forms, the disease could make extremities fall off.
- To be declared “clean” and thus able to re-engage with family, an individual needed to be declared clean by a priest. Hence Jesus’ instruction to the healed leper.
- It seems probable that Jesus was not ready for, or desired, His ministry of healing to be in the “limelight” as He still had much teaching to do with His disciples and wanted to define His redemptive ministry Himself.

2. The Surprising Jesus: Luke 5:17-32



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

In Luke's Gospel, the events in chapter 5 took place very early in Jesus' public ministry. They occurred in the region of Galilee as Jesus was calling His first disciples.

Most homes were very modest. They were made of mud bricks with flat roofs which were often used as a gathering place to enjoy a cool breeze. These were often accessed by an outside set of stairs. The roofs were made of beams, straw, mud, and sticks which could be ripped apart using one's hands.

Jesus' emerging notoriety had already drawn the attention of the religious authorities. They had come to gauge His orthodoxy. Jewish leaders managed to get front-row seats and were listening for "mistakes" in His teaching.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 17-24 – Healing the Paralyzed Man

- The Pharisees were dedicated students of the Law. They were committed to making sure the people of God would never again be punished by God for failing to fulfill the Law. Therefore, they were highly motivated to examine any new teacher who was attracting the spiritual attention of the nation. Note that they had come from as far away as Jerusalem.
- The attracting power of miracles is evident in the passage. Large numbers packed the tiny space making it impossible for someone in need to reach Him. The miraculous can always draw a crowd, but witnessing miracles does not actually transform a person. Transformation takes obedient faith.
- We could all wish to have friends like this paralyzed man had. We see clearly how their faith and persistence paid off.
- The surprising Jesus in this passage is seen in His forgiving sins. It's true that only God can forgive sins. The religious leaders present saw his bestowing of forgiveness as heretical overreach. Jesus was flesh and blood sitting right in front of them. He was not God, in their minds.
- It is easy to say someone's sins are forgiven. No one can disprove it nor prove it for that matter. Healing a person who is undisputably paralyzed is far more empirical. As evidence of the truthfulness of His words of forgiveness, Jesus heals the paralyzed man.
- Note the role of faith. Who exercised their faith and what was the outcome?

- Note that being impressed by God is not the same as being a faithful follower. The Pharisees had seen incredible things and must have been impressed. Time will prove they were not inclined to follow Jesus.

vs. 27-32 – The Call of Levi

- There are two surprising elements in this section:
 - 1) That Jesus would call a tax collector: Tax collectors were seen as unclean sinners because their profits were often generated by onerous charges. They were also seen as traitors as they were serving the Roman occupiers.
 - 2) That Jesus would eat with a “sinner:” Eating a meal with someone was an intimate experience. To do so with someone perceived to be a “sinner” meant becoming spiritually contaminated. It was therefore extremely surprising, indeed downright shocking, that a religious teacher would associate with “sinners.” Surprising indeed!
- v. 29 – Levi, more commonly known as Matthew, created an opportunity for people he knew to experience the same acceptance he had just experienced. This is a great picture of our role to shine our light, our faith in Christ, using our circle of influence to introduce people to Jesus.
- Verses 31-32 indicate where the heart of Jesus’ people should be. Clearly, we should care for one another. With that said, we also need to have a healthy burden for those who are gripped by spiritual lostness.

3. Jesus the Storytelling Teacher: Mark 4:1-25



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

In the days before amplification, vocal communication with large crowds was a challenge. In the Gospels there are several occasions when you see Jesus using the acoustical features of water and hillsides to teach large crowds at one time.

Storytelling and the use of parables was and still is an effective teaching method used to communicate spiritual truth via a graspable example or story. It was especially so in the days before widespread literacy. Jesus frequently used common, everyday situations, such as a farmer planting a field, to communicate spiritual truth.

Parables naturally lend themselves to many observations. However, there is usually a main point to each. The main point here is that the condition of a person's heart affects his or her response to the life-giving Word of God.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 1-9 – The Parable of the Sower

- v. 1 – “Again” indicates that Jesus frequently taught whether it be in the synagogue, the marketplace, or the hillside.
- v. 3 – “Listen!” This word is used to highlight the importance of what is about to be taught — a call to pay close attention. It relates well to the statement Jesus makes to the disciples in verses 10-12.
- vs. 3-9 – Many have suggested that a nearby farmer actually sowing his field may have been visible in the distance, providing an acted-out parable right before the eyes of the hearers. Even if not, it would have been a familiar scene to Jesus’ listeners.
- The soil types presented in the parable were typical. The most common form of transportation was walking. Therefore, there were many walking paths, even through the fields. Those paths often became as hard as concrete. The soil could also be thin, with a layer of ledge not too far below. And like most of our yards, the soil could be full of weeds ready to come to life. The good soil was very rich, yielding profitable harvests for farmers.

vs. 10-12 – Why Jesus Used Parables

- These verses can be troubling since they could be interpreted to say God does not want some to repent and be saved. That understanding is inconsistent with other statements in the New Testament such as John 3:16.

- The quote in v. 12 is from Isaiah 6:9-10. Without going into much detail, Isaiah's prophecy was intended to indicate that due to his listeners' hardness of heart, God's Word would not prove profitable for them. Here, Jesus is communicating to His disciples that the same spiritual reality is present. A heart resistant to God will lead to a rejection of God's saving truth. Conversely, faith leads to a heart receptive to God's truth, bearing much fruit.
- The verses also highlight that as Christ's followers, we have special access to understanding truth. Later in the New Testament, we learn that the Holy Spirit will guide us into profitable understanding. The point here is the need to be good stewards of that access by listening wisely. Mark 4:21-22 highlights this truth.

vs. 13-19 – Four Responses to the Seed

1. No reception at all. The seed falls on hard soil and quickly the life-giving opportunity ends.
2. Others respond quickly, motivated by the possibility of grace and forgiveness, which seems like something too good to pass up. But they are not willing to pay the cost of discipleship and soon fall away into former patterns of life.
3. The thorny soil is indicative of those who are not willing to choose which master they will serve, God or something else. Inevitably, the wrong master will prevail in directing their life direction.
4. The fruitful soil describes those who receive the Word, prioritize and respond to it. This is who we should strive to be.

vs. 21-25 – Use Your Light

- The theme of this teaching is that the benefit we get from the teaching we receive depends on our response to it. As we embrace, recognize its value, and prioritize it, we will get more out of it. If not, the value we have already received will be diminished.

4. Jesus the Master Over Fear: Luke 8:22-39



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

The Sea of Galilee is approximately 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. The terrain around the lake created an environment where storms and winds could intensify quickly on the surface of the water.

The typical fishing boat on the lake in the days of Jesus was roughly 27 feet in length and 8 feet wide. This is a far cry from the size of the fishing boats working the seas off the New England coast. With Jesus and the 12 disciples in the boat, it was at near capacity, which made it more susceptible to capsizing as it sat lower in the water.

Many of the disciples had firsthand knowledge of the lake. Therefore, they would have had an accurate assessment of how much danger they were in.

The region of the Gerasenes was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. It was a part of the area known as the Decapolis, a network of 10 cities created by the Romans after their conquest of the region about 65 years before the birth of Jesus. The presence of pigs indicates it was not a region considered to be “Jewish.”

Demon possession can raise a lot of questions for us. Clearly in the New Testament the position is that demon possession happened. The fact that demons were able to recognize the Deity in the man Jesus shows their spirit-world nature. These occasions also reveal Jesus’ power over the spirit world.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 22-25 – Jesus’ Authority Over Wind and Waves

- v. 23 – That Jesus was sleeping highlights that Jesus is fully one of us — a physical, human being that needs to sleep.
- v. 24 – “Master” is a term of respect, indicating the disciples embrace Jesus as their teacher and leader. Also note their fear was real: “We are going to die!” Jesus speaks and the storm is stilled, displaying His authority as God’s Son over creation.
- v. 25 – “Where is your faith?” This is a penetrating question for them and for us. Do we put our faith in the “man” Jesus, the One who needs sleep, someone just like us who can only offer guidance and wisdom? Or do we put our faith in the Master Jesus, the One who commands the winds and the waves, so that our actions might not be based on our circumstances, but on the One who is the Truth, who reigns over circumstances?

vs. 26-39 – Jesus’ Authority Over Demons

- v. 27 – The demon possession had taken the man out of God’s design for humanity of living in community and in relationship with Him. The spiritual deadness of his situation is reflected in his living among the tombs.
- v. 28 – The recognition by the demons of who Jesus is, God’s Son, should not be lost on us.
- v. 29 – The demon possessed man’s life was out of control. All efforts to protect him from himself failed as seen in the broken chains and shackles.
- v. 31 – The abyss was understood to be a place of imprisonment for evil spirits, a place where they could not exercise any influence, a place which they dreaded.
- v. 33 – The east side of the Sea of Galilee has areas where the drop-off into the lake is like a cliff. The pigs would not be able to swim ashore after running into the lake as they ran aimlessly in fear and plunged to their death.
- v. 34 – Good and remarkable news needs to be shared.
- v. 37 – Why would they ask the Miracle Worker to leave? Perhaps it is because they feared what they did not understand, could not control, and/or what might change their perspective on life and eternity.
- vs. 38-39 – A person with a changed life witnessing to the power of Jesus in their own hometown is a powerful thing. Sometimes the hardest but most profitable thing to do is to stay where God has planted you and tell others about what God has done in and for you. There is relentless power in that.

5. Jesus the Challenging Savior: Mark 8:22-38



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

It is helpful to keep the entire context of Mark 8 in mind as you approach this passage. Immediately preceding the two-stage miracle of restoring sight to the blind man, the disciples had been rebuked for worrying about having enough to eat. They were in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee but only had one small loaf of bread with them. While they were concerned about not having bread, they were blind to the reality that Jesus, the one who had just fed four thousand people with just a few loaves, was right there in the boat with them. They “saw” Jesus there but could not “see” who He was.

Bethsaida was a fishing village located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Its name meant “house of fishing.” John notes that it was the hometown of Peter, Andrew and Philip. (John 1:44) Jesus taught in and near the village and performed some miracles in its vicinity. Despite this, Jesus would later rebuke the town for its lack of repentance and faith. (Matthew 11:21)



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 22-26 – Healing the Blind Man

- v. 23 – Note that Jesus led him by the hand out of the village. The man was truly blind and needed help. Most likely, Jesus led him out of the village so that this healing did not become a spectacle. After the man was healed, Jesus told him not to go back into town. (v. 26)
- v. 23 – Also in this verse, note that saliva in those days was understood to have healing properties, especially for eye problems. (Pliny the Elder, a Roman author, mentions the practice). Perhaps Jesus used this method because it was expected by the blind man, although Scripture does not say.
- vs. 23-26 – Why was the healing incomplete at first? Was the man’s faith insufficient? Was Jesus demonstrating that worldly methods are insufficient? Or could it be that the two-stage miracle was a message to the disciples? Their sight was partial as well, and they needed a second touch to see Jesus clearly for who He is: the Son of God.

vs. 27-29 – Peter Confesses that Jesus is the Messiah

- v. 27 – Caesarea Philippi lay north of the Sea of Galilee near the base of Mt. Hermon. It was a predominantly Gentile area dominated by Greek and Roman pagan worship in contrast to other regions which were more strongly Jewish. This seems a strange place for Peter’s confession of faith to take place.
- On the road, Jesus questioned His disciples regarding His identity. First, he asked about what they were hearing. John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah as seen earlier. At this point he had already been executed. Elijah is one of the prophets of the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 2 he

was taken into heaven without experiencing physical death. Malachi foretold that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. (Malachi 4:5-6) Jesus later clarified that John the Baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, thus fulfilling the prophecy. (Matthew 11:9-14)

- v. 29 – “Who do you say that I am?” This is the most important question any person will ever answer. Peter’s response is a faith breakthrough. The teaching that follows reveals that Peter and the other disciples still had a long way to go in truly understanding Jesus. In the next few verses of Mark’s Gospel, the disciples began to gain that spiritual sight.

vs. 31-38 – Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

- v. 31 – All that Jesus foretold about his suffering, death, and resurrection came to pass. However, for the disciples, this was a very different pathway to spiritual victory for the Messiah than anyone expected, which is reflected in Peter’s reaction.
- v. 32 – Peter interpreted what he heard to be a prediction of failure. Certainly, he reasoned, the Messiah would not fail and be executed. He would be victorious. Peter challenged Jesus to reject this defeatist attitude.
- v. 33 – The *Amplified Bible* translates and expands Jesus’ rebuke of Peter with these words: “Get behind Me, Satan; for your mind is not set on God’s will or His values and purposes, but on what pleases man.” Jesus was familiar with the struggle. In Jesus’ temptations at the start of his ministry, Satan offered Jesus a worldly pathway to authority and power which Jesus recognized and refused. Now Peter was echoing Satan’s option once again and Jesus just as vehemently refused to take the bait.

vs. 34-39 – The Cost of Discipleship

- v. 34 – There is no explanation given as to where the crowd came from. “Taking up a cross” would have been a stark and jolting imagery for Jesus’ listeners. They knew about Roman crosses, but they did not know Jesus would soon sacrifice his life on one, nor did it occur to them that they needed to take up a cross themselves. The pathway to Kingdom victory would follow a counterintuitive path: that of self-denial, the rejection of self-perseveration, and the embracing of costly obedience, perhaps even to the point of death.
- vs. 36-38 – The call here is to live for what will always matter. It is more than just holding on to live another day. It is to live for eternity, which is to live for Christ. A sinful and adulterous world will never encourage this level of personal sacrifice. But Jesus will.

6. Jesus the Source of Power: Mark 9:2-32



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

The event we call “The Transfiguration” can also be found in Matthew 17 and Luke 9. Peter, James, and John are invited by Jesus to join Him to climb a mountain where they experience a tiny glimpse of the glory and majesty of the Son of God and where they hear the Father’s voice proclaim aloud that Jesus is His Son.

As soon as they get off the mountain, they come upon a large and noisy crowd, stirred up by Jewish leaders in a heated dispute with the rest of the disciples. Jesus’ authority and power are now put on display as He delivers a boy from demon possession, but not before issues of authority, belief, and doubt come to the surface as the faith of the boy’s father is questioned, and the disciples question their own abilities. Ultimately, everyone present learns that power and deliverance can only come from Jesus, the Son of God.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 2-3 – The Transfiguration

- v. 2 – The phrase “...to be alone” points to the rhythm of solitude that Jesus kept throughout His time on earth. He often needed time alone with the Father after teaching hundreds and thousands, which shows us both His perfect humanity as well as His dependence on the Father. Here Jesus invites three of His disciples into His “alone time” with God.
- v. 3 – Jesus’ change in appearance directly points to His true identity, the perfect Son of God. His “extremely white” clothing reminds us how He is without blemish and without sin.
- vs. 4-7 – It was not lost on the disciples that Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets. Jesus Himself at one point said he had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17) Only Luke, in his version, gives us a clue as to what Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking about. Luke writes, “They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:31)
- v. 5. – Peter strangely offered to build three shelters or tabernacles for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Mark states what is already obvious to us: “he did not know what to say, since they were terrified.” Matthew adds that while Peter was still speaking, God speaks from the cloud and sets the record straight as to who Jesus is. There is no more mention of three tabernacles after that!
- vs. 9-10 – Jesus revealed everything to His disciples in His own perfect timing according to the sovereign plan of his mission. Here, Jesus commands them to not speak of what they’ve seen until “the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” They obeyed but wondered what he meant.

- vs. 11-13 – When the disciples asked why the scribes said that Elijah must come first, they were referring to a prophecy in the book of Malachi that says that God will send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the Messiah. Jesus confirms this and makes the connection that John the Baptist had come to fulfill this prophecy. He was not Elijah, but he carried Elijah’s mission.

vs. 14-18 – The Failure of the Disciples

- What we are not told are the specifics of how the disciples attempted to drive out the demon. We only learn from the boy’s father that their efforts failed. Earlier, in Mark 6, Jesus had given the disciples authority to drive out evil spirits and they had success in doing so. (Mark 6:12,13) But now, something was different.

vs. 19-24 – Jesus Exposes and Extinguishes Unbelief

- v. 19 – Jesus was clearly exasperated with the disciples’ unbelief after all they had seen Him do and had done themselves, and even after Jesus had given them authority over spirits. Their lack of belief stood in the way of setting the boy free.
- v. 24 – The desperate father did not dare to hope too much after having been disappointed before, probably from other attempts at deliverance in the past and now from Jesus’ own disciples. But now, facing Jesus, he also faces the truth about his own heart and sees he is carrying both belief and unbelief together. Being with Jesus exposes our hearts to the Truth. Recognizing his dilemma, the father asks Jesus to help him move from doubt to faith. The honesty of this man is refreshing as we, like him, are often in two places at once, but find it hard to admit it. Our prayer can also be, “I do believe; help my unbelief!”

vs 25-28 – A Boy Set Free

- v. 20 – When Jesus addressed the spirit, it threw the boy into convulsions because it knew that the Son of God was approaching. This reminds us of James 2:19, which says, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder.”
- Delivering the boy of the evil spirit was not hard for Jesus. When the disciples asked Him why it was impossible for them, Jesus points to prayer as the answer. Some later manuscripts add: “and fasting” although this was not in the original text. When Jesus says, “This kind,” it may indicate there are levels of demonic spirits, and some are more powerful and thus more resistant to the authority of Jesus. Yet at the command of Jesus, this spirit, whatever “kind” it was, had no choice but to come out and stay out.

vs. 30-32 – Another Prediction of His Death

- Jesus openly and directly tells His disciples that he will be killed and will rise again three days later. Nevertheless, the disciples could not understand what he was saying. It may be that their preconceived ideas about the Messiah continued to cloud their understanding so they could not even imagine the greater and better plan that God was putting into place, as dying had no room in their plan and “rising from the dead” was a mystery.

7. Jesus & A Rich Man: Luke 18:15-30



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

Luke records this encounter between Jesus and a young man whose name we never learn, but who we always remember as “the rich, young ruler.” The story is also found in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. When Christians wonder about our relationship with wealth and what Jesus has to say about it, we often reflect on this passage.

From this story we also get Jesus’ illustration of a camel entering through the eye of a needle. This seems to be a hyperbole of impossibility that Jesus used to get people’s attention. He chose the largest mammal common to Israel and the smallest opening someone would think of to make his point. A legend grew up in the 1800s that there once was a small gate into Jerusalem known as “the eye of the needle” and a camel would need to be unloaded to get through, suggesting that for us to move through life, we need to unload our burdens. There is no historical evidence that this was true.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 15-16 – Jesus Blesses Children

- Just before Luke introduces the story of the rich, young ruler, he includes a short episode revealing Jesus’ attitude toward children, another story we often turn to and learn from. The disciples were trying to keep parents from bringing their children to Jesus, assuming he was too busy or too important to bother with them. Jesus rebukes His disciples and instead welcomes the children and holds them up as an example for older people to follow. First, there is an open invitation to anyone who seeks to know Jesus (see Isaiah 55:1 “Come, everyone who is thirsty...”). Second, we all need the faith of a child to enter the Kingdom of God.

vs. 18-23 – A Challenge for the Rich Young Ruler

- v. 19 – When Jesus asks the young ruler, “Why do you call me good?” He seems to sidestep the man’s question about eternal life but really directs his thinking to the heart of the issue. It may be this young man had two issues to deal with: striving for goodness and keeping his wealth in proper perspective. Psalm 14:3 says, “there is no one who does good, not even one.” With that in mind, Jesus asks him the question, letting the young ruler connect the idea that Jesus really is the only one that is “good.”
- vs. 20-22 – The rich young ruler knows the commandments and has attempted to follow them. Yet after all that hard work, he comes up short. “You still lack one thing,” Jesus says. And then Jesus challenges him beyond his human willingness and ability. “Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor.”

- v. 23 – Following Jesus is not just checking boxes on your doing-good list, but following Jesus becomes the entirety of the list itself. If you commit your whole life to God, your whole life turns upside down. Just a few chapters before this, Jesus teaches on this same point, how one cannot serve two masters. (Luke 16:13) For this young ruler, treasure was one master he was not willing to abandon.

vs. 24-27 – Jesus’ Response to Connecting Wealth with the Eternal Kingdom

- v. 24 – This story is not teaching that anyone who has wealth or has done well financially is disqualified from eternal life or, conversely, is thus entitled to it. Jesus contradicted conventional wisdom that a rich person was blessed by God and was therefore in a right connection with Him. This word to the rich young ruler to give it all away is not to be understood to apply to all of Jesus’ disciples. Some who were following Jesus at that time were wealthy and used their wealth in love and submission to Jesus and for his glory. But certainly, there is a heart issue here from which we can all learn.
- v. 25 – The illustration that Jesus gives of the camel and the eye of the needle is a hyperbole used to show that it truly is impossible for people to earn or buy their way into heaven. It is grace alone that saves us, not our works or status.
- v. 26 – The strong response to the camel illustration may have more to do with the common mindset that rich people are the blessed ones than just the difficulty facing the camel.
- v. 27 – God makes the impossible possible.

vs. 28-30 – Peter’s Boast

- v. 28 – We get a glimpse of Peter’s personality — so eager and quick to be in step with Jesus, his Master. His enthusiastic and “quick to speak” personality is evident throughout the Gospels. Here, Peter has grasped what Jesus is saying and proclaims his surrender and devotion to Jesus. While the rich young ruler was reluctant to let it go, Peter boasts that he has already left it all behind — his business, family, and future plans.
- vs. 29-30 – Jesus affirms what Peter is saying and agrees that following Him does come at a cost. However, he continues, those who do so will be taken care of both here in this life and in “the age to come.”

8. Jesus the Servant Leader: Mark 10:32-45



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

When Jesus initially called the Twelve, he invited them to follow Him. Now, at the end of their three-year sojourn with Jesus, Jesus is leading the way down the road to Jerusalem, and the disciples seem to be struggling to keep up.

This is now the third time Jesus predicts his death and resurrection in the Gospel of Mark. See the previous two chapters, Mark 8:31 and 9:31.

Jesus clearly articulates the very heart of His mission, just days before He gives himself over to suffering and death. Even now, his followers fail to understand, and that failure leads them into trouble. At the close of this passage, Jesus presents Himself as the Servant, inviting us to take up the same role: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” v.45



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 32-34 – Jesus Foretells His Suffering, Death and Resurrection

- Why were the disciples both “astonished” and “afraid”? Amazingly, Jesus was striding ahead of them into great danger with great courage, even though he knew what lay ahead, which he clearly described to his followers: His suffering and death. The disciples were afraid of what was waiting in Jerusalem, even though they had not yet fully grasped the plan of God. No doubt, Jesus was also afraid as he was fully man and experienced the full range of human emotions. But fear did not deter Jesus from His purpose.
- Stopping along the way, Jesus took the Twelve aside and clearly and very graphically explained what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. Have you experienced that when someone explains to you in detail the difficult things that lie ahead, that could serve to lessen your fears? Even though the disciples found it hard to take in, later they would look back and remember that Jesus told them ahead of time exactly what was going to happen. This advance warning later gave comfort that everything, in some unexplainable way, was working according to plan.

vs. 35-37 – James and John Seek Status

- In Matthew’s account, the mother of James and John is the one who poses the question to Jesus on behalf of her sons (Matthew 20:20-28). In Mark’s version, it is the brothers alone who make a bold demand of the Son of God.

- Jesus has a very diplomatic answer to their question. He neither answers “yes I will” or “no I won’t.” Instead, he asks for more information. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. Jesus is a master communicator.
- It is likely that James and John were imagining Jesus as an earthly king, reigning on a throne in Jerusalem like the Jewish kings of old. With that picture in mind, perhaps they also imagined themselves ruling beside him over the nation of Israel.

vs. 38-40 – An inappropriate request reveals the heart

- Jesus told James and John that they did not know what they were asking. They did not understand the implications behind their question. The request seemed reasonable to them at the time, but it was problematic from the start. James and John wanted to be important. Jesus did not come to be important, as the world defines importance, but to be a servant who suffered and died for us. (Romans 5:8) His death paid the price for our freedom, so we could be set free from slavery to sin and death. But freedom from sin does not mean freedom from suffering. Those who really want to be like Jesus must follow Him in His suffering, as Paul often taught. (see Phil. 1:29,30; 3:10)

vs. 41-45 – Jesus Sets Us Free to Serve, Following His Example

- It wasn’t only James and John who got things wrong. Jesus stops to rebuke all twelve of the disciples for their sinful attitudes. Granted, things were tense. No doubt there was a feeling of foreboding made real by Jesus’ foretelling of his sufferings. The disciples were on edge. In their anxiety, James and John defaulted to pride, while the other ten defaulted to jealousy and anger. Pride, jealousy and anger served to rip the community apart at the very time they needed each other the most.
- James and John were missing the point. Position and power were not the point. Service and sacrifice were the points. While the world’s leaders always jockey for power, this is not the way of the Kingdom of God. “Not so with you,” Jesus says. Instead, “whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all.”
- In verse 45, Jesus describes himself as a “ransom.” A ransom is money paid to purchase freedom for a slave. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,” Jesus said. He became a ransom to set all sinners free from slavery to sin and free to become servants, like him, serving others in His Name. All praise and glory to Jesus Christ!

9. Jesus the Puzzling King: Mark 11



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

Until now, Jesus strongly urged people *not* to reveal who He was. But by arranging for a donkey to ride and choosing the time and place, Jesus initiates a moment for the people of Israel to give Him the praise He is due. Yet this “triumphal entry” is nothing like what one would expect of a King entering a royal city. Sitting on coats laid on the back of a borrowed donkey, Jesus enters Jerusalem while peasants shout His praises. Thirty-three years before, his humble birth in a cattle shed marked the beginning of His sojourn. Now, He rides into Jerusalem looking more like a servant than a king.

The area of the Temple where Jesus overthrew the money changers’ tables was thought to be the Court of the Gentiles, the only part of the Temple complex where non-Jews were allowed to enter. Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7, stating that the Temple was to be a “house of prayer for *all nations*” but the people had made it “a den of thieves.” Vendors sold animals for pilgrims to sacrifice at the Temple. This was convenient, but wrong. Money changers exchanged various currencies into Temple-approved currency at exorbitant exchange rates so pilgrims could pay their temple dues.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

Mark 11:1-11 – The Triumphal Entry

(Compare with the other accounts in Matt. 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-19)

vs. 1-6 The Donkey’s Colt

- Did Jesus prearrange this transaction with the colt’s owner? Jesus sent the two disciples to Bethphage, less than a mile from Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha where Jesus often visited. In John’s version, we find Jesus in Bethany the day before he borrows the colt. It would seem the two disciples were given a countersign prearranged between Jesus and the owner.

vs. 7-11 – Praise and Honor to the King of Kings

- One would expect a conquering king to ride a war horse or a stallion. So why a donkey’s colt? The prophet Zechariah had written 500 years before, “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)
- v. 9 – What were the people shouting? The shout came from Psalm 118:25-26. While “hosanna” is best translated as “Save us now!”, by the time of Christ it had come to be a cry of celebration something like “Salvation has come!” In John’s version, the people also shout, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!” (John 12:13)

- The Pharisees were offended and, in Luke's version, reprimanded Jesus, saying, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, 'I tell you, if they keep silent, the very stones will cry out!' (Luke 19:39-40) The time had come to honor the King of Israel, and no one could stop the praise.
- v. 11 – The conclusion of the parade seems like an anticlimax. The joyful crowd somehow dispersed. Jesus entered the city, looked around, and left. But nothing Jesus does is insignificant. In 445 BC, Nehemiah rode around the ruined walls of Jerusalem in the dark of night and made a plan that he soon executed. Likewise, Jesus looked around, assessed the state of Israel, and left for the night while planning for the morning.

vs. 12-14 – Jesus Curses a Barren Fig Tree

- Cursing the fig tree seems unfair, especially, as Mark notes, "it was not the season for figs." While there are many explanations as to why there was no fruit and why Jesus cursed the tree, the things we know for certain are these: Jesus was hungry, He hoped for figs, found only leaves, and cursed this tree. The reason this tree had leaves but no fruit is uncertain.
- Two questions might be: "why did He do it?" and "how did He do it?" We may find the answer to the question "why?" hidden in what Jesus does immediately upon reaching the Temple grounds. Jesus answers the "how" question in verse 22. But something else happens first.

vs. 15-19 Jesus Cleanses the Polluted Temple Grounds

- vs. 15-17 – Jesus shows up on the Temple grounds with both actions and words. Notice what he did and what he said.
- v. 18 – The leaders have one reaction to what he did and said, and the crowd has a different one.
- Why is this story sandwiched between the cursing of the fig tree and the disciples' reaction to its withering, starting in verse 20? The fruitless fig tree is an analogy of the fruitless nation of Israel.

vs. 20-24 – The Withered Fig Tree

- The next morning, Peter, astonished, points out that the tree Jesus cursed had withered. Jesus does not respond to Peter's comment with an explanation as to "why" he cursed the tree. Rather he answers the question of "how" it withered. In Matthew 21:20, the disciples ask, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" not "why" did you do it?

vs. 25-26 – Prayer and Forgiveness

- If lack of faith is one obstacle to prayer, then failure to forgive is another. But there is an answer to the forgiveness problem: the Father will forgive you as you forgive others.
- Most modern translations leave out verse 26, which does not appear in earlier manuscripts.

vs. 27-33 – Who Gave You Authority?

- The Jewish leaders were still reeling from yesterday's cleansing of the temple grounds as well as Jesus' previous day's royal entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus answers their question with a question, he is not evading the question about the source of his authority, but pointing them back to John the Baptist who, three years earlier, unequivocally proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. If the leaders acknowledge John's ministry was from God, and therefore what John taught must be true, then they would be forced to concur with John that Jesus was God and had all authority. This they were not willing to do.

10. Jesus the Prophet: Matthew 24:1-31



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

Jesus had just spent his teaching time scolding the Jewish scribes and the Pharisees because they had created many barriers for people to draw near to God. These leaders focused more on rituals and self-righteousness than on mercy and forgiveness. As they left the Temple complex, Jesus' disciples pointed out the grandeur and beauty of the buildings. However, Jesus' response was that "not one stone will be left here on another."

Even though the Temple at the time of Jesus was smaller and less elaborate than Solomon's Temple, it was certainly one of magnitude and splendor. Josephus, a Roman-Jewish historian of the 1st century, wrote that it was constructed of limestone blocks that measured 37.5 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide. Some of the foundation blocks weigh nearly 400 tons! They were also covered with large gold plates. Mark and Luke also record the conversation about these massive, beautiful stones.

The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Roman military was extensive with massive loss of life, fires raging through the city, and ended the sacrificial system altogether. The Temple stones were torn apart as the soldiers searched for the melted gold and silver. More grievous was when the Roman soldiers raised their standards in the Temple ruins, offering sacrifices to their pagan gods and acclaimed the Emperor Titus as *imperator*, which means supreme commander.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 1-14 – Signs of the End Times

- vs. 1-8 – The disciples, like us, wanted to know "when the end will happen" and "what happens before the end." They seem to recognize that Jesus would be "coming back" at the end of the age. There had always been a strong prophetic connection between the Messiah coming to set up His Kingdom and the "end" of hostility against God's people. Most likely, they still had a limited view of what those prophecies referred to.
- Jesus does not answer the "when" question as they had hoped. Rather, Jesus warns them against thinking that any disaster and war would be the sign of the end times. He also warned that many will proclaim that they are the Christ, yet these are false or "pseudo-Christes."
- vs. 9-14 – Beyond the signs of nature and the battles between the nations, persecution would be rampant. Jesus continues the warning that many will be killed, betrayed, and hated because they are His followers. "The love of many will grow cold" shows that the heart of our faith, the love we

have for God and our neighbors, erodes through persecution. An assurance throughout this is that the Good News of Jesus will be proclaimed in all the world despite persecution.

- v. 14 – Today there are over 7,000 unreached people groups in the world. That’s over 42% of the global population, or roughly 3.4 billion people who live with little to no access to the Gospel. Our goal is not to proclaim the Gospel to somehow trigger His Second Coming, but so that many more might enter the Kingdom of God before His return.

vs. 15-28 – The Great Tribulation

- “Abomination of Desolation” is a reference to the prophesy found in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11. These passages have further details of tribulation and destruction. Some say these prophesies were fulfilled by the desecration of the Jewish temple by the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BC (before Jesus’ time). Others point to the events in 70 AD, a few decades after the resurrection of Jesus, since Jesus had pointed to something yet to come.

However, since not everything described in these prophesies happened in either of these two destructions, the fulfillment is still pending, especially as we look forward to the coming of the Son of Man appearing from the east like lightning across the sky. Some would suggest that since the “abomination of desolation” is *standing* in the holy place, this might refer to an object rather than a person. People also ask whether “the holy place” refers to the Temple; and if so, therefore speculate that it would even now need to be rebuilt for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

- Jesus warns that many false messiahs and false prophets will come to deceive and draw people away from the truth. These deceivers get their inspiration from Satan, the real liar, deceiver, and adversary. These influencers might be similar yet different from the “anti-Christ” foretold in 1 John 2:18-22, 4:2-3; and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

vs. 29-31 – The Coming of the Son of Man

- The coming of the Son of Man will follow the “abomination of desolation,” extreme distress around the world, but also devastation in the heavens — sun, moon, and stars. These are unimaginable events when the sun is darkened more than an eclipse, the stars fall, and the “heavens will be shaken.” Here Jesus echoes Old Testament prophetic language describing cosmic upheaval. While we don’t know how literal or figurative this will be, the good news is that this is the sign that Jesus is on His way with power and glory. Angels with trumpets will gather every Christ-follower.
- In Matthew 24, Jesus teaches extensively about the end times. We can add to this many other passages throughout the Bible that also speak to the end times. While a study of eschatology is captivating, it’s important to not get caught up in speculation and details. In 24:24, Jesus says we are to be alert and ready because we just don’t know when this will happen. In 24:26, he says we are to keep busy doing what He has called us to do, so that when He comes, He will be pleased and will share His rewards with us.

11. Jesus the Sacrifice: Matthew 26:1-30



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

The Jewish Passover was an annual day of remembering when God rescued His people from Egyptian slavery. Thousands would flock to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It required much preparation including getting rid of any leaven (representing sin) from the house — a spring clean-up. A lamb without blemish was sacrificed as the blood of a lamb was God’s provision to spare Israelites from death in the last plague in Egypt when the destroying angel passed over any house where lamb’s blood was on the doorposts. The lamb was then roasted and eaten with the Passover meal. Many aspects of the *Seder* meal symbolized the events of the great Exodus.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a 7-day festival featuring *matzah*, or unleavened bread, which symbolized Israel’s journey in the wilderness following the Exodus from Egypt. The feast began on Passover. It’s important to note that Jewish days began at sundown. This helps when attempting to create a timeline of events.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 1-5 – The Plot Against Jesus

- v. 1 – “When Jesus had finished saying all these things...” perhaps refers to more than just the teachings of the previous few chapters but to all the teachings Matthew recorded since chapter five. Jesus now moves from teaching to preparing for His death, burial, and resurrection.
- v. 2 – Jesus has already foretold that He would be crucified. This might have triggered Judas’s realization that Jesus wouldn’t be the king he was hoping for, someone to overthrow the Romans.
- vs. 3-5 – Caiaphas served as the high priest for 18 years. This was not common during these times because of the necessity of “playing politics” with the Roman governors. This shows that Caiaphas bridged the gap well of appeasing Roman influence and Israel’s desire to remain independent. We see this play out when Caiaphas didn’t want any rioting to develop. It wasn’t only because it was the Passover, but perhaps also because he was guarding his position.

vs. 6-16 – Adorned and Betrayed at Bethany

- v. 6 – The man known as “Simon the leper” most likely no longer had leprosy as we find him living in a house rather than in a leprosy community. Jesus retreated to Bethany each night after his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.
- v. 7 – This unnamed woman might be the Mary that is mentioned in John 12:3. However, there are several differences in the details between the accounts, which suggest it might be two separate events.

- v. 11 – Jesus is not saying we shouldn’t take care of the poor. Rather, He was highlighting the honorable sacrifice this woman did by pouring out her expensive perfume, often reserved for a loved one’s burial.
- v. 15 – The value of the thirty pieces of silver is unknown. If it was 30 shekels it could have been worth 120 days’ wage. More than likely, it was the replacement price for a slave. (Ex. 21:32)

vs. 17-25 – Day of Preparation

- v. 17 – The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread technically did not start until that evening when the Passover started, the 14th day of the month Nisan. The events starting in verse 17 occurred during the day of preparation on Nisan 13, as the disciples asked Jesus where they should *prepare* for the Passover.
- v. 20 – There is some debate whether Jesus’ Last Supper was the Passover meal. John’s account in John 13 has Jesus crucified when the Passover lamb would have been sacrificed, on the day of preparation. However, Matthew, Mark and Luke record this as the Passover meal, or at least record Jesus incorporating many *seder* traditions and rituals into this supper.

vs. 26-30 – Symbols Redefined

- v. 26 – Jesus highlights two of the traditional elements of the *Seder* meal and redefines them to point to His own body and blood, soon to be given and shed to liberate us from the slavery of sin. He creates this new ordinance for believers with the announcement of a new covenant relationship between man and God. Jesus becomes the substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf, the perfect Lamb of God.
- v. 30 – Songs from Psalms 113-118 were typically sung during and after the Passover meal. These were called *Hallel*, or praise hymns. Most likely Jesus and the disciples sang Psalm 118, which emphasizes themes of deliverance and God’s enduring mercy.

12. Jesus the Dying King: John 19:16-42



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

These verses and the following chapter form the climax of John's Gospel. Jesus' earthly mission is completed, and the Church's mission is just beginning.

Crucifixion as practiced by the Romans was intended to shame, inflict maximum pain and serve as a deterrent against rebellion and crime. It was carried out in public places to heighten this effect. Those crucified died of asphyxiation and blood loss, combined with shock. The breaking of the legs as noted in this passage would accelerate the asphyxiation as breathing would be restricted by the victim's weight load being borne by the victim's chest and arms.

There is an overarching message in the passage affirming God's Sovereignty. It appears that the "world" is winning and in control as Jesus is crucified. As John peels back all that is going on, it becomes clear that God is in control, with His prophecies being fulfilled and Jesus declaring when His mission is finished.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 17-24 – The Son of God is Crucified

- v. 17 – Jesus would have been carrying the crossbeam or horizontal part of the cross. These beams generally weighed between 75 and 125 pounds, a heavy load for an individual weakened by emotional agony, sleep deprivation and severe beating.
- v. 19 – Pilate posted the sign to irritate the Jewish leaders. Without realizing it, he was proclaiming the truth of Jesus' identity.
- v. 20 – Aramaic, Latin and Greek would have covered the common languages of the day. In Palestine, Aramaic would have been the common language more than Hebrew. Latin covered the Romans. Greek was the universal language of learning and culture across the Roman Empire.
- v. 23 – Clothing was a valuable asset in the 1st century. Jesus spoke of people investing in clothing only to have moths destroy the value. The tunic was the inner garment, worn closest to the body. Typically, tunics were made from at least two pieces of fabric sewed together at the shoulders and along the sides. A single woven piece would have been especially valuable. It may be a symbol of Jesus' priestly role.
- v. 24 – See Psalm 22:18, a prophesy about Jesus' clothing being distributed.

vs. 25-27 – Jesus Provides for His Mother

- There are four women at the Cross: Mary, Jesus' mother; her sister, who is not named here but is likely Salome (Mark 15); Mary, the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene. Their presence shows their devotion and courage. Watching her son die would fulfill the prophecy given to Mary in Luke 2:35. The disciple mentioned is John. As Jesus honors his mother even while dying, he also foreshadows a new type of family soon to come, a spiritual family of faith.

vs. 28-30 – The Finished Work

- John recounts that Jesus prepared himself to loudly declare that His redeeming work was completed by ensuring His mouth was moistened to speak clearly and boldly. He did so by asking for a drink. The proclamation, "It is finished!" is in the perfect tense, indicating an achievement that has ongoing, lasting impact.

vs. 31-37 – The One Who Was Pierced

- The Sabbath began at sundown on Friday and lasted until sundown on Saturday. Friday prior to sunset was known as Preparation Day. To hasten the death of those crucified prior to sunset, their legs were broken to expedite their suffocation. Jesus was found to be already dead, which was confirmed by the piercing of His side. Blood and water carry great symbolism: blood for forgiveness, water for new birth.

vs. 38-42 – The Body in the Tomb

- The death of Jesus drew two closet believers out into the open: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (see John 3). Seventy-five pounds of spices is equivalent to "royalty" treatment, fitting for the King of Kings. The oncoming Sabbath time pressed them into using a nearby tomb, a cave-like structure dug out from the side of a hill. The stone would have been shaped like a wheel which could roll over the opening following a groove carved in the soil or rock. These wheels were extremely heavy.

13. Jesus the Risen Lord: John 20



BACKGROUND TIDBITS

John 20:30-31 states that the purpose for John's Gospel is to provide evidence to confirm that Jesus is the Messiah and that faith in Him leads to eternal life. John 20 plays a pivotal role as it relays why Jesus is more than just a dead martyr, but instead is a risen, life-giving, Lord. The chapter lays out a series of events which show individuals and groups — all eyewitnesses — coming to this realization as they encounter the risen Christ: Mary, Peter and John together, the Apostles minus Thomas, and then Thomas.

Jesus clearly states in John 20:29 that those who believe without having a physical encounter with the risen Lord will be blessed.

There are accounts of Jesus' Resurrection in all four gospels. They highlight different aspects and events of that first Resurrection Sunday, but they all affirm the same truth — Jesus is alive, confirming His Messiahship. Those companion accounts are found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24.



COMMENTARY & NOTES

vs. 1-10 The Empty Tomb

- v. 1 – Mary Magdalene, moved by grief and devotion, proceeds to the tomb in the predawn hours. As we learn from the other gospels, she did so to finish any burial treatments that might have been overlooked in the rushed treatment as Sabbath approached at Friday sunset.
- v. 2 – The other disciple mentioned in the passage is John, the author of this Gospel.
- vs. 3-10 – The English translations in this passage fail to illuminate a progression in the disciples' understanding that is reflected in the original Greek. The word "saw" in verses 5, 6 and 8 could have been translated "glanced," "observed," and then "perceived." John *glanced* in the tomb, Peter *observed* what was there, and then John *perceived* the truth behind the evidence of the empty tomb. John understood and believed that Jesus was alive!

vs. 11-18 – Jesus Appears to Mary

- Questions swirl as to why Mary did not "recognize" the angels in the tomb or Jesus when she first encountered Him. The suggested causes range from the dim light of the pre-dawn hours, her heavy tears and grief, and the unusualness of the events — an unexpected Resurrection. Symbolically, it highlights that the difficulty of believing in an incarnate Son of God does not mean that it could not or did not happen.

- Jesus' probing question, "Why are you crying?" invites us also to embrace reality — this was not a moment of defeat and death, but of life and victory. Sorrow has turned to rejoicing!
- v. 17 – The first one commissioned by God to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection was a woman. This is not to invite a discussion on gender roles, but to highlight the authenticity of the account. If someone in the 1st century was seeking to create a "credible" story, this is a detail they would have avoided as women were perceived to be unreliable witness. In this context, it affirms that the account is factual because no one would have added that if they wanted to be believed.

v. 19-23 – Jesus Appears to the 10 Disciples

- Despite all that the disciples had heard about Jesus, they still feared their circumstances rather than celebrated the news of the Resurrection. They hid in fear.
- Peace ("shalom" in Hebrew) is a rich biblical term. It refers to wholeness, healthiness, the absence of conflict and the presence of all that is needed to thrive. Here it highlights how Jesus' Resurrection changes everything. The peace Jesus offered to His disciples and to us is that of forgiveness and right standing with God.
- v. 21 – This is John's version of the Great Commission that we find in Matthew 28:18-20. As Christ's followers we are to engage the world redemptively and pastorally.
- v. 23 – This can be a troubling verse if pushed too far — thinking that somehow, we have the power to forgive or to condemn. It is better to understand this simply as a statement that Christians have a role to play in God's redemptive mission. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can announce that forgiveness is available and warn unbelievers of the dangers of ignoring the grace of God.

v. 24-29 – Jesus and Thomas

- The truth being stressed in this section is that Jesus was truly physically resurrected.
- Having missed the resurrected Jesus' earlier visit with the disciples, Thomas embodies the difficulty of believing in a resurrected Redeemer. Unless he receives his own indisputable confirmation, he just cannot be convinced. His encounter with Jesus does just that. It also served to offer further proof to us that we can legitimately believe in the Resurrection. And by doing so without access to the same confirmation Thomas got, we are blessed if we confess, like him, "My Lord and My God."

vs. 30-31 – The Gospel's Agenda

- It is clear we have not been told everything Jesus said and did. Questions remain. We have, however, been told everything we need to know to believe in Him as the Messiah and to receive eternal life as a result. (John 3:16)

