



Lent 2026

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Understand the Bible in 10- minutes a day with clear and concise plans for every book and audio guides for every chapter of the Bible.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” Acts 8:30b- 31a

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Day 1 | Lent Introduction: Ash Wednesday & Isaiah 40

Hello my friends, and welcome to our journey through *Lent*. I'm Kris Langham, and I am so honored to join you for this *forty day journey* through one of the longest running traditions in the world. This year, we'll journey through the entire gospel of *Matthew* together, along with some of the Bible's most powerful Psalms—all leading up to the grand story of *Holy Week*.

And today, an introduction. Guys, this is so exciting. Lent is all about *preparation*. Isaiah 40 says:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3b).

That Old Testament passage is so important—it's the *only* one quoted in *all four* gospels. And it's about clearing a *path* for Jesus to enter. It's like—imagine you live somewhere hard to get to, and you get news that a great and wonderful king wants to visit—you. And you realize—the road is *terrible*. So you get to work. Isaiah paints a picture of filling valleys, leveling hills, and smoothing the rough patches to clear the way—to our *hearts*—for Jesus.

Because let's face it, the road that leads to our hearts—has some potholes. And barriers. And hills and valleys. Basically lots of ways to keep others *out*.

But what about God? How do we clear the path to let God *in*? Lent is about doing just that. Whether you follow Jesus, you *struggle* to follow Jesus, or you're just *curious* about Jesus, *preparation* is a game changer.

The prophet Hosea pictures it not as a broken road, but rather as hard soil:

**“Break up your unplowed ground,
for it is the time to seek the Lord”** (Hosea 10:12b).

Every gardener knows—you won't grow anything on hard soil. Lent is a season of plowing the tough dirt so that your *heart* will let good seeds grow.

In fact, the word *Lent* comes from the Old English word *lencten*, meaning spring—a reference to the time of year when the days *lengthen* (same root word).

As Christians in early English-speaking lands began to observe forty days of preparation for Easter, the name *Lent* became associated with that season.

Now the transformation from winter to spring is one of the world's quiet wonders. Every year, the rebirth of life and color astounds me. But Lent isn't *about* spring. After all, half the globe is heading into fall. But Lent is a *spiritual* journey. As the world around us is renewed, **Lent is about preparing the soul—for resurrection.**

“Prepare—the way—of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3b).

That verse was a prophecy of *John the Baptist*, whose message was *repentance*. Repentance clears a path for Jesus.

See, once a year—Easter Sunday—we honor the day that Jesus *rose to life* and *conquered death*. That one event is so monumental—so life altering, perspective changing, and mind *blowing*—I just don't know how to fathom it in just one day. That's like... it's like walking into the theater for the final scene of an epic trilogy—the audience in tears, hearts torn to shreds and resown—and you're like, “*What'd I miss?*”

So Lent is about preparing for resurrection—reengaging the full story and returning to God with your whole heart.

And think about it. Lent has been celebrated as far back as 325 AD—and likely further. And today millions of believers all over the globe and across countless denominations and churches set aside *this time* to draw near to God. That includes more than a hundred thousand people following *this plan!* Just think how that *connects* us.

Now you won't find *Lent* in the Bible—it's church tradition, not Bible mandate. So you might ask: *Why do it?* Well, if Lent becomes empty ritual or just going through the motions, that's more *performance* than *preparation*.

But if those motions have purpose—and if the tradition keeps you grounded in God’s story and reconnects you with God’s word, then Lent can be a powerful and *biblical* experience.

Joel 2:12 is a quintessential Lent passage:

**“Even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning”** (Joel 2:12).

Now you might ask why *returning to God* involves *fasting and weeping*. Well, in context, God’s people had gone *way wrong*, so grieving fit the moment. But more importantly, the heart of fasting is *clearing space for God* by *removing distraction and temptation*. And *weeping* is evidence that it’s *not* just going through the motions, but actually engaging the emotions. Then the next verse in Joel:

“Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13a).

That means don’t just tear your shirt to *look* like you’re grieving, *actually feel it*. Engage your *full self* with the *full story*. I think we’re put off by *fasting and weeping* when they’re *empty*. The Christian life looks miserable when it’s *endless* mourning that never *gets* somewhere. But when those are real, they make room for *joy*.

And back in Joel:

**“Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity”** (Joel 2:13b).

That’s the heart of it. Return to *who God is*. He is *good*. His plan for you is *life*—to give you a future and a hope.

So why *forty* days? Moses fasted forty days on Sinai, Elijah traveled forty days to Mount Horeb, and most importantly Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness in *preparation* for his ministry. He prepared forty, so do we.

Now various Lent traditions count *different* days. Orthodox Lent begins with *Clean Monday*—a day of cleansing through *asking forgiveness* from others. Most Catholics and Protestants start with *Ash Wednesday*—so named for the tradition of using *ashes* to draw a cross on the forehead, with the reminder that:

“From dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

That reminder of mortality is a great place to reset your perspective, and the perfect bookend—for resurrection.

Interesting—tradition has it that the forty days usually *don't* include Sundays, because Sundays should always celebrate resurrection.

Now a few quick notes on **what Lent isn't**. Lent isn't pagan—that rumor started with a discredited 1853 book. It's not just for Catholics either—Lent predates all the major church splits and is widely practiced today. And it's not about earning God's favor—unless we make it that way. Lent becomes powerful when we keep it humble and intentional.

And if someone argues with you, Colossians 2:16 and Romans 14:5 remind us *not to judge* each other on what *holy days* we choose to keep or not keep. *You* have freedom.

So how do we get it *right*? Lent tradition provides three spiritual practices: ***fasting, prayer, and giving.***

Fasting is a *temporary sacrifice* that *makes room* for Jesus. Life gets overcrowded by nature. It just does. Fasting clears the clutter. The sacrifice *can be* a particular daily meal or food group—but the key is to choose something that *distracts* or *occupies your focus*—and replace it.

During Jesus' fast, when he was tempted by bread, he remembered:

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

The bread isn't *bad*, but the fast helps you recognize and reset *priorities*. Choose a meal—or perhaps a daily sitcom or social media scroll—and replace it with prayer and God's *Word*. Don't aim to impress—you're not *earning*. Just make it meaningful and *make room* for God.

Prayer is seeking God more intentionally. Draw near with words.

And **giving** is your generosity in response to *God's* generosity. Serve and help—make a real sacrifice to make a real difference.

All three of those clear space in your life and heart.

But then, clear space—for what?

Do you remember the **parable that Jesus told of a farmer planting seeds**? Seed planted on the road, among the rocks, and in the weeds—all failed to grow. Only the good soil—free of rocks and weeds—bore fruit. But *what* was the seed? In Luke 8, Jesus explained:

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed _ is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

That's it. God's word. What brings new life? What transforms dead soil into living abundance. *The seed _ is the word.*

That's why this plan is *all Bible*. From here out, the fasting, prayer, giving, and church traditions are up to you, but we'll be here to plant God's word in your heart *every day*. Monday to Saturday, we'll cover *every* chapter in Matthew's gospel—the whole story. Sundays—the glory of the Psalms—penitent Psalms in the Lent tradition—with an audio guide just like this *every day*.

Now Lent runs right up to Easter, but *this* plan will *finish Matthew*, then on Palm Sunday we'll hand you over to our *Holy Week* plan to follow the events *day by day* in Jesus' footsteps. Don't miss the handover: Lent, then Holy Week.

So how do we begin? Well, you just did. If you decide to practice the *fasting*, *praying*, and *giving*, then make concrete and *reasonable* commitments to practice each one, and start *preparing that path*. *Make this intentional*.

And open up room to *plant* by setting aside fifteen minutes to journey with us—through the Word. We begin today by reading Isaiah 40—beautiful chapter. And tomorrow, Peyton Jones will be your guide to begin *Matthew*. I'll be back for several of the Psalms—and for Holy Week.

And invite someone to join us! Don't wait—you'll both be blessed!

And now, let's pray:

Lord, we open this season of Lent together with our hearts desiring to draw near to you. Lord help us to prepare. Help us to clear the path and plow the hard ground so that our hearts become good soil for your word to take root. Teach us Lord, and prepare our souls—for resurrection. Amen.

Day 2 | Intro to Matthew

When you first come to faith, someone hands you a 1000 page book and says, “Hey, read this...”

Most of it is the Old Testament, and it seems pretty important. It’s got the creation of the world, and a lot else in it. But the New Testament seems pretty small... It’s only ¼ the size of the Old Testament...

BUT IT SEEMS PRETTY IMPORTANT TOO!

I mean, that’s where you get Jesus. And it seems like most of the Old Testament stuff was prophecy, predicting the coming of Jesus himself.

Both are super important, and both teach us a HUGE amount about WHO GOD IS!

But the Old Testament and the New Testament seem pretty different...I mean, how do you line them up?

IF you were given the job of connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament; how would you do it?

Well, the answer is “Matthew”. You would do it like Matthew.

If you ever needed a book to connect the Old to the New, it’s Matthew’s gospel.

It was written primarily to a Jewish audience about who Jesus is. It’s got copious quotes from the Old Testament. If quoting the Old Testament were a competition, Matthew would win hands down! He quotes the Old Testament twice as much as any other gospel writer, Mark, Luke, and John.

Geek out with me a minute:

Matthew has 44 direct quotes from the Old Testament, Luke has 20. He has 20 indirect citations, Luke has 24. The others have total citations and allusions in number under 40, 50, and Luke at 70, but Matthew easily tops them again at 102.

And there's a reason for that; Matthew is writing to people who knew the Old Testament really well.

And he wrote Matthew to tell them that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament perfectly.

This is why he keeps repeating the phrase, "**This was to fulfill the scripture that was written by the prophet** (such and such)..."

In fact, reading Matthew is a bit like reading the Old Testament in some ways.

Way back in Genesis, a man named Jacob has a hard time surrendering to God, and one night, he stays up until dawn wrestling with the Angel of the Lord! From that night on, God calls him Israel, or "**he who wrestles with God**".

And the entire nation of Israel wrestles with God throughout the Old Testament struggling to surrender to God. When you read the Old Testament, it can be frustrating to watch them struggle. We think, "Man! Why don't they just surrender to God!?!?!?" But we are all like armchair theologians, aren't we? Like the fat guy on the barker-lounger who never exercises, but barks out criticisms and commands during games like it's the easiest thing in the world to win the superbowl. Why don't I just surrender to God? Why don't you?

Enter Jesus. He is the perfect Son in Matthew's gospel. Matthew Gospel considers Jesus the do-over. Have you ever wanted a "do-over" in life? Have you ever wished you could go back and right all the wrongs from your first attempt?

In the beginning of Matthew's gospel, Jesus seems to walk through Israel's history...but unlike Israel who screwed the whole thing up, struggling to surrender, Jesus passes every test with flying colors...

Rather than struggling, he JUST surrenders....

In chapter 2:15, Matthew tells us that Jesus comes up out of Egypt just like Israel did in Exodus, quoting Hosea, "**Out of Egypt, I called my son**". By the way, it's a gripe when God says it through Hosea. He recounts how Israel failed him, despite being delivered. But Jesus comes up out of Egypt like a perfect son, fully obedient. Fully surrendered. "**Growing in favor with both God and man**".

In Chapter 4: 1-11 we have the temptation in the wilderness...if you've read the Old Testament, you'll know that Israel was tested in the wilderness...and failed miserably. They complained about food...but Jesus quotes "**Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" He passes the testing in the wilderness, even though he's not eaten for forty days! Jesus is the perfect son.

Then in chapter 5, Jesus becomes the law-giver, like Moses. He says, not one jot or tittle will pass away from the law of Moses, but then goes on in the sermon on the mount to tell us that it's impossible for us to fulfill the law.

In other words, "The law will continue to be the standard, but you will never be able to fulfill it"

Not to worry, Jesus will do it for us!

Righteousness is a key to the book by the way... and Jesus says, "**Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees**", or the religious teachers, they'd not enter heaven.

That must have seemed crazy to them!

But Matthew continues to show Jesus as the one who fulfills all righteousness for us! It's Jesus's righteousness that we need!

And who better to tell us this than a failed Jew! That's right, Matthew was a tax collector, meaning that he was kicked out of the religious community. He wasn't even allowed to go to the temple or worship in the synagogue. So, later on when Jesus asks Matthew to follow him, Matthew throws a party and his only friends are **“sinners and prostitutes”**.

This theme of fulfilling righteousness for others, is first seen at the Jordan river, where John the Baptist is, well, baptizing.

Baptism means a new start of following God, and in the book of Joshua, God leads the people through the Jordan river, baptizing them into a new start as they enter into the promised land. But they fail too.

John the baptism has been baptizing people in that same water to give them a second chance with God...a new start...and suddenly, up walks Jesus.

John is staggered by the one standing before him, knowing that he's the savior, the Jewish messiah and refuses to baptize him. **“Surely, it is ME who needs to be baptized by YOU!”** John says, but Jesus's response in 3:15, **“It must be done John, so that righteousness be fulfilled.”**

Jesus is the one who will do everything that we were required to do before God, but he'll do it perfectly...without a struggle...without hesitation...without sin!

Maybe this is why in the very beginning of Matthew's gospel, he shares Jesus's nick-name with us. **“He will be called Immanuel, which is translated, God with us”**. God is with us. Which is another way of saying, “God is FOR us”.

That is the good news...or the gospel.

And Matthew wants us to know that this good news is not just for the Jews. It's for the entire world.

Jesus isn't just the Jewish Messiah...no, he's also the Jewish Savior. This good news is good news for the world! They may not have the law, but if they have Jesus, they have the one who fulfilled God's law perfectly for them. And on top of that, he died for them to pay for their transgression of God's laws.

That's why Jesus ends the book with the great commission. Or the great mission. Co-mission, meaning the one that we get to join God on. This mission is **“to go to all creation, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you, and truly, I will be with you until the end of the ages.”** (Matthew 28:19-20)

Good news again! This message is for all because salvation is to all. It came through the Jews, but was intended for the world. Way back in Genesis 12, God tells Abraham, **“I will bless you, and through you, I will bless the world.”** This was by bringing salvation to the entire planet.

God always had a heart for the nations. It's hardwired throughout the Old Testament, and it's even hardwired throughout the book of Matthew. We see the magi from Babylon worshipping Jesus, we see Jesus focusing his ministry on “Galilee of the gentiles” in chapter 4:12-16, and we see the Canaanite woman, a non-jewish pagan receiving mercy and miracle from Jesus. His first recorded miracle in the gospel is to the servant of a Roman Centurion.

It's all there...God's heart for the world...but first, he comes to his own people as their savior. The one who was promised long ago.

But he's not just the Messiah of the Jews, he's also the savior of the world. And Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus sending his followers out with an invitation for all to worship him.

What will Israel do with the perfect son? The true King of Israel? The savior? With God Himself.

I can't wait to go on this journey with you as we walk beside Jesus on the dry and dusty roads, listen to his teaching, watch him in action, and decide what we ourselves will do with the same offer Israel had.

Will we struggle, or will we surrender?

Those questions and more will be answered by YOU, on our journey together, through the word.

Day 3 | Matthew 1

Welcome back to Through the Word. My name is Peyton Jones and I'll be your guide today on Matthew chapter 1!

I'm beyond excited to start this journey with you through Matthew. That's because Matthew was the first book of the Bible I ever read. Someone who shared the gospel with me dared me to pick it up and promised that I'd hear God speak to me through it. As I picked up the bible and began to read for the first time, I felt a strange sensation. It's hard to describe, but putting it down, I said out loud to myself, "Whoa...there's something about this book..."

I'm hoping that you'll also feel the Spirit of God tugging on your heart as you read the words of Jesus and learn about who he is.

And who he is, is exactly where Matthew starts off! Matthew tells us Jesus is the Messiah in verse 1:

"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1)

The Messiah – What was the messiah?

The Jewish title of Messiah, meant savior – We'll come back to that. Savior from what though?

People today don't think that they need saving from anything, but a closer look at Jesus's lineage tells us right away that we all need saving, mostly from ourselves...

Jesus's lineage is filled with a colorful cast of characters. There's polygamists, prostitutes and a whole rogues gallery that tells us that he came from a less than perfect pedigree.

But that was the whole point, Jesus wasn't descended from them. Not really. Jesus's birth was **"of the Holy Spirit"**, meaning that he wouldn't be the sinner that they were...or we all are.

Jesus's heritage shows that everyone needs saving. But that's not why Matthew put it in there. No, Matthew knew his audience; the Jews would look for proof that Jesus was the Messiah, and in the temple, there were records that could be searched to verify that he was descended from David.

All Jews were descended from Abraham – and Abraham received a precious promise of the savior thousands of years before that, that from his line would come the savior. And David, 1000 years later received a promise that from his tribe, the tribe of Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, would come the King whose reign would never end. He would not only save his people from their sins, he would also be a king worth serving. IN some ways, David wasn't. He cheated on his wife, or wives, murdered others, and was desperately in need of a savior himself! To these two men, the promise of a savior was made, and the term of Son of David was a nickname for the Messiah.

But Jesus has a whole host of names coming to him before this chapter is done. Let's jump into the story in verse 18

"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit."
(Matthew 1:18)

Uh oh... Being pledged to be married meant an engagement, but in those days, your parents arranged your marriage, and your engagement lasted one year to make sure that you didn't sleep with anyone else, and entered the marriage as a virgin. But imagine the shock when Mary turns up pregnant.

"Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." (Matthew 1:19)

So Joseph was in a pickle. He was faithful to the law, but a decent man to boot. He didn't want to marry her if she'd been unfaithful, but he also didn't want to make a public spectacle; so he wanted to quietly drop the whole thing and move on... Mary's reputation would take a hit, but Joseph didn't want to trash her.

***But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:18-21)

The angel gives him the Name "Jesus" – or God saves. **"because he will save his people from their sins"**. So that's what Jesus saves us from! And though that was his birth name, there was a nick name the angel talked about **"they will call him Immanuel, which means "God with us"**

Joseph was going to need God to be with him, because marrying her pregnant would trash his own reputation.

But, verse 24 tells us, **"he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."** (Matthew 1:24)

Naming Jesus was a sign that Joseph was accepting Jesus as his own; adopting him as his son.

That didn't mean that Joseph was unaware that his child was the Son of God; another term that would stick.

There was a lot that Joseph didn't understand; why it had to be this way. Why all the shame if God was in this? And how God would save people from their sins through this little baby boy?

Whatever God was up to, it seemed like Joseph had a front row seat, but he'd have to wait for this child to grow, just as we'll have to wait till the next chapter to find out more about this infant's destiny and how it affects the destiny of us all, on our journey through the word.

Day 4 | Matthew 2

Welcome back to Matthew's gospel. Chapter 2 today, and it's feeling a little bit like Christmas in here; I don't mean like those old ladies that decorate too early and take down their Christmas decorations too late. I mean that we're going to talk about the birth of Jesus today.

It was Ebenezer Scrooge who said, "I shall honor the spirit of Christmas in my heart and aim to keep it all year" and that's the spirit, but before we're done with this chapter, I'm afraid you're going to think me a bit of a grinch. Matthew tells us the Christmas story as it happens, not as it sells Hallmark cards and nativity sets.

Let's jump right in (verse 1) **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."**

(Matthew 2:1-2)

Okay, who are these magi?

They were astrologers, men who studied the stars; most likely from Babylon or Persia. We're never told there were three; or that they were Kings.

These men were wealthy, as we learn from their gifts, but the mysterious thing about them is that they report seeing "his star".

What do they mean, "his star"?

Way back in the book of Numbers, as the children of Israel were traveling through the pagan lands, there was a man named Balaam, a prophet from the East, who is paid to curse the Israelites as they pass through the land, but finds it impossible...every time he tries to pronounce a curse on them, God puts a blessing in his mouth. And his very last one, is a doozy: **"The oracle of one who hears the words of God... I see him but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel..."** (Numbers 24:16-17a)

He prophesied that a star would come announcing the King of Israel. But then flash forward over a thousand years, and Daniel is taken to Babylon and prophecies of Jesus as well to the wise men, or magi of Babylon.

And this story is unique to Matthew; because despite his writing for a Jewish audience, Matthew is determined to tell them that their Jewish Messiah was also the savior of the world.

The King of Israel? The king of Heaven? This sounds like good news; unless you were sitting on the throne of Israel pretending to be a Jewish King. And that is exactly what Herod was; an imposter. He'd been put into power by the Romans, and given the title "King of the Jews" and he wasn't a Jew. He was an edumean, or edomite; descended from Esau. Verse 3

"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

**"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."**

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." (Matthew 2:3-8)

Herod isn't just a phony, he's also a liar! And he's also a murderer. He intends to pay his respects to Jesus with a gift of a clubbing to the head.

"After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.” (Matthew 2:9-12)

Okay, wait; I’m sorry, my heart must be two sizes too small because I’m about to go full grinch on our assumptions here. Jesus is a child here. And they’re in a house. So this doesn’t happen while Jesus was in the manger. Nope, in fact, we’ll see it was probably about 2 years after Jesus was born before we’re done. Note that they didn’t bow to him as a King; it says that they bow down and worship him.

This must have been awkward to this young teenage couple to be sought out; have their baby worshipped by important men who shower him with wealth; gold (because he was a king), frankincense (which was used in worship because he was God), and myrrh (an expensive burial spice; because Jesus was born to die). Die for us.

“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” (Matthew 2:13)

And that’s exactly what Herod did. Because he couldn’t determine which of the male children born in the last two years was the King the wise men sought, he wiped them out. All of them. But behind evil King Herod, we see the devil himself; as the book of Revelation plays this out on a cosmic level, telling us that the dragon tried to swallow up the infant child, but an eagle swept the child and his mother away. Colorful words, but in the black and white of the moment, it probably felt less than magical to Joseph.

“So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (Matthew 2:14-5)

Jesus would come up out of Egypt, the perfect son, whereas Israel being brought up from Egypt were the imperfect son.

(HOSEA) saying God disappointed with the people.

But the next passage tells us that the people were disappointed with God...

Nazareth - rejected.

“After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene. (Matthew 2:19-23)

What if I told you that statement, “He will be called a Nazarene” is not a direct quote from any one prophet, but an accumulation of verses

“By the prophets”

The root word for Nazareth is Nazar meaning branch. There are multiple scriptures that talk about the Messiah being a branch. So Nazar was a nickname for the messiah. Isaiah 11:1 – the very passage where the Messiah is called “the anointed one” **“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—”** (Isaiah 11:1-2a)

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord that I will raise to David a branch of righteousness; a king shall reign and prosper, and execute judgement and righteousness in the earth.” (Jeremiah 23:5)

“Behold, the man whose name is the branch! From his place he shall branch out, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; yes, he shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on his throne; so he shall be a priest on his throne.” (Zechariah 6:12-13)

It was to show that he grew out of the people. He seemed like one of them, but was anointed.

Seat of the Gentiles – In Galilee of the Gentiles.
Nathaniel “Can any thing good come out of Nazareth”

He would be despised
“Nazarene” would be a term of contempt by His enemies
Marking His rejection (on cross – sign)

Rejection as a Nazarene
Lastly, Isaiah 53 would point to him being a shoot out of dry ground.
He was the branch and they plucked Him up.

Day 5 | Psalm 51

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in Psalm 51.

Have you ever done something so bad that you wish you could just forget about it? Like it never happened? Where you pretend it never happened?

Blocking sin in the darkest recesses of our mind and heart, is like putting sushi in your locker at school. It might seem okay at first, but eventually it's going to cause problems. The title tells us David wrote this when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Let's go back to that moment and retrace David's steps from when he first spied on Bathsheba like a pervert as she bathed on the roof.

David had wives already, but he wanted Bathsheba so badly that he took her forcefully against her will. Then to cover his tracks, had her soldiering husband brought home to sleep with her to make it look like he got her pregnant. But her husband was such a man of honor that he slept outside, refusing the comforts of home while his soldier suffered on the battlefield without him. So David had him strategically placed on the battlefield within the range of enemy archers and had his men pull back, leaving him exposed to a certain death.

Well, nine months went by. David hides his sin, and the entire time, as his illegitimate child grows within Bathsheba's womb, so does his agony of suppressed guilt within his tortured soul, until Nathan the Prophet confronts David and reminds him that he can fool people, but he can't fool God.

Verse one is the prayer of David cornered, found out, defeated, and finally surrendered. **“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.”**

From the depths of David's soul comes the only thing David can say after nearly a year of silence, the only thing he can say after his crimes. Have mercy on me. And David appeals to God's unfailing love and great compassion.

Because if you've ever been shocked at your own behavior or asked, who am I? I don't even know anymore. After something you did was so terrible, you know not to appeal to your own character. God's character is all David has left.

His own character is in ruins, in tatters. But David knows God's character is merciful, loving, and compassionate, and David deserves none of it. That's why, even after asking God to blot out his transgressions, he asks in verse two, **“wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”**

Blot, wash, away, Cleanse. What does it mean to blot something out in a day before erasers? Blotting something out was covering it over with ink. But David needs more. There's something wrong with him.

Iniquity, disease and filth of his sin. This isn't just something David did. It's something deep inside. David's not just praying. Take it away from me. He's saying take it out of me as a haunted man. David continues his prayer of repentance in verse three, **“for I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. So you're right in your verdict and justified when you judge.”**

David was silent for nine months, but he knew his transgression. And a transgression is when you knew better. But you did it anyways. Thank God he forgives those two. That's why David says against you. You only have I sinned. What a strange thing to say, David. You raped Bathsheba and killed the man she loved. But above it all was the sin against God. You are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

David knows what he deserves. And God would be right to punish him. That, by the way, is when we know repentance is genuine, when we come into agreement with God about our sin and the nature of it. We begin to believe what God actually says about the sin and about us. We stop fighting him and we surrender to his judgment, and surrendering to his judgment is necessary before we can surrender to his forgiveness.

Verse five. **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb. You taught me wisdom and that secret place.”**

David's argument was God when I was born, sinful. Even then you loved me and put up with me. David clings to that ray of hope that God was with him then, and God may still teach him wisdom, just as he did when David didn't know any better as a fetus.

Verse seven. **“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”**

David's mind goes to the temple, the center point of the worship of God, where God meets with his people. And inside of that temple it's covered in blood. That is where his sin is blotted out, not by ink, but by blood. He had tried to block his sin out of his mind, but it stayed there and stained his mind.

But in the temple his sin is blotted out with the blood of innocent animals. Somebody else pays for David's crimes. And in the times where David goes there to symbolize the forgiveness of sins. An animal would be slain as David, one hand on the animal's head, confesses his own sins, seemingly transferring it to the animal. And as he did so, the priest dipped a hyssop branch into the blood and sprinkled David with the scarlet blood seven times.

The number of completion or perfection, showing that David was 100% cleared of his crimes. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. What price can you put on a clean conscience?

The irony that blood that stains everything else represents what will wipe him clean, make him whiter than white. David longs for the time when his sin and guilt aren't all consuming, and he prays for that release in verse eight. **“Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”**

It's as if David is saying, don't even waste time with this old heart, God. We've all seen what this heart does. Give me a new heart, Lord, one that has a steadfast or faithful spirit in it without knowing what he's asking.

David prays for what one day will be given to every believer in Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's why in verse 11 he prays, **“do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”** In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit didn't yet indwell believers. But the Holy Spirit did come upon them. That's what the anointing meant.

David was anointed as the king and as a warrior. The spirit came upon him to accomplish great feats. David hasn't felt that for a long time. David has been operating in his own strength under the guilt of his sin. He's felt cast away.

He hasn't felt the power of the Holy Spirit on him the entire time. He's locked up sin in his heart. Instead of looking back, David looks forward in verse 12, **“restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God, my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God will not despise.”**

David wants to sing loud. Sing proud of the Lord again. He lacks the joy of his salvation, that joy in knowing his sins are forgiven. But if he can just get back to God, know that he's forgiven. He says, I will teach transgressors your ways. He will turn sinners back to God, sinners like himself.

David knows that God doesn't want him to try to earn forgiveness. Offer more sacrifices which don't really cost that much to a king. Know what God wants from David is the same thing he wants from us all our heart. A broken spirit, a repentant soul. Those are the acceptable sacrifices of God. And my friend, God will never cast you out. Never will I leave you or forsake you. He said. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. How do I know?

I've known God a long time, and I'm still here. God has proven himself gracious to me for many years. And truth be told, I think as a young man, I must have read holes in the page of my Bible where Psalm 51 was. This Psalm was a lifeline to me. If God forgave David, I knew he could forgive me.

I am one of those sinners that David taught God's ways to to give hope. And like David, I found that coming to God with all of it and just spilling out my soul before him, not hiding, not bottling up, was a sacrifice that pleased God. You see, God already poured out the blood of his son, Jesus. That I could be forgiven. That you could be forgiven, my friend. Give him your heart, broken, contrite as is, and he will receive it.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 6 | Matthew 3

Welcome back to TTW, I'm your host Peyton Jones and today we'll be jumping right in to chapter 3 of Matthew's gospel like it was the Jordan river, let's go verse 1:

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

**“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’” (Matthew 3:1-3)**

Have you ever been sitting out in public minding your own business, when suddenly a loud, shouting voice breaks the silence? It's jarring and alarming, and we immediately think “danger”. It's out of place. It broke the silence. And usually, we associated it with somebody who's crazy. Well, that's how John the baptist appears to the people of Israel...

They call him “the voice” because there's been 400 silent years when God hasn't spoken by a single prophet, and then suddenly, John is on the scene, saying, “Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near”.

It seems an odd message to say the kingdom of heaven is near, but that's because they haven't met the King yet...

And it doesn't help that he's dressing strange and eating weird things...

“John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.” (Matthew 3:4)

There was a prophecy about John; that before the Messiah came, God would send a prophet in the spirit and Power of Elijah (one of the fieriest prophets in the Old Testament) Elijah wore camel hair clothes, and ate the same strange food; desert locusts and honey that could be foraged up out here in this wasteland.

So why were people flocking out to him in the middle of nowhere?

“People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.” (Matthew 3:5-6)

Okay, this was new. Not baptism; that was what a non-jewish Gentile did to convert to Judaism; that was normal. But what WAS new was that John is expecting Jews to get baptized, like they’re turning to God for the first time!

John the Baptist was scandalous for many reasons. If we lived 2,000 years ago, we’d all be talking about “the voice” in the Shops or to our neighbors in the street.

“Have you seen him?”

“I’m going Tuesday”

When you get out there, you make your way through the chalky rocks, down to the eroded banks, deep set, and cut by thousands of years by this same water, so symbolic, the Jordan River; a river that symbolized a new beginning in Israel’s past. A river that meant the fulfilling of God’s promises. A river that meant so much to so many, and that seemed to take on a new meaning today as people prepared to meet God, and start over with Him;

As you make your way down among the reeds, the wind rippling upon the water, the crowds moving forward, until they trickle one by one to be dunked under the depths by one man, the man whose booming baritone voice that seems made for canyons, rips through the souls of the people there like a hurricane.

You turn and look, and there up on ridge, at a distance, and pointedly not down with the rabble are the pharisees. They’re ready to report back to Jerusalem about this man baptizing Jews like they are pagans.

As they shake their heads, exchanging concerned looks that thousands of people are flocking to this crazed wild man down by the river, suddenly the voice echoes up to their level, and they can see that he's aiming his words at them.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:7-10)

Wow! Them's figthin' words!

Admittedly, confessing their sin was NOT their style. The pharisees probably didn't even think they had sin. Nevermind. John was all too happy to point it out. They needed to be baptized more than anyone else!

“The axe is already at the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down.” (Matthew 3:10)

John is religious. He's living like a hermit out here, in poverty; denying himself anything that would distract his mission. Living single-mindedly, and he says that these religious leaders aren't bearing fruit? They are like big dead trees that make good firewood... Good for burning...

Jesus would later echo these things, even quoting John the Baptist in the following quotes found later in Matthew when he tangles with them. “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those entering to go in.

You devour widow's houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones.

Even so you outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and sin.

Serpents! You brood of vipers! How can you escape the coming wrath?"

John isn't done. He makes one more statement.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Matthew 3:11-12)

What does Jesus mean by a baptism of the spirit and fire? There are two more baptisms coming; the Holy Spirit will come at Pentecost. The final baptism will be to cover the earth with a cleansing fire.

But as John continues baptizing, suddenly he looks up to see the next willing participant, and his confidence, and bold speech evaporates like his voice on the wind:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3: 13-17)

Remember, this was the baptism of repentance. People were coming to symbolize starting over with God.

Getting ready to meet him. And then John does. He can't compute why Jesus should be baptized for repentance, but Jesus says, "it fulfills righteousness"

And that's exactly what Jesus came for. Jesus had to do everything that was necessary for us, and he did it perfectly. Whatever God asked, Jesus did. Unlike us. But that's why he was our savior, and why the voice from heaven says, "I am well pleased"

Later, Jesus will make the bold statement, "I always do what pleases my Father in Heaven"

None of us can say that, but Jesus could.

And that's why we get a second chance. Jesus IS our second chance. By the way, there's another symbol here of a second chance. It's the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. In Noah's day, God baptized the world with water to cleanse it, but he kept sending birds out to check if there was dry land. If there was no land, the birds came back to the boat.

When the dove came back, he came with an olive branch, signifying that everyone got a second chance. And my friends, Jesus is the only second chance we'll ever get, because he ALONE pleased the father perfectly.

Baptism is the message that there is a second chance, but Romans 6 links it with Jesus.

There was someone who was baptized for you...but not with water, but with the judgment of God. He was completely immersed in it.

Day 7 | Matthew 4

Temptation.

Scary word isn't it? Puts my heart just a little on edge.

Something dangerous is knocking on my door. Maybe something tantalizing.

And it's just me here...will I open that door.

Temptation is risky business, but it's part of life. We are human.

But do you think that God understands what it's like; how it feels to see what you want, to know it's within reach? The race of thoughts that wonder if anyone is looking or if anyone cares anyway...

Temptation. Do you ever wonder if God can relate?

Now the story in Matthew 4 puts Jesus right in the fires of temptation:

**“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”
(Matthew 4: 1-2)**

You might think it strange that after the Spirit of God anoints Jesus in the previous chapter we're told that that same Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the (gulp) devil.

Remember, Matthew is playing out a retelling of Israel's history through Jesus, but whereas Israel kept failing, Jesus keeps succeeding. In the last chapter, Matthew quoted, “Out of Israel I called my son” quoting Hosea who pointed to Israel having a fresh start and failing miserably to trust God. Jesus however was the perfect son in whom God was well pleased.

So there's a pattern here; you'll see that Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness being tempted. This brings to mind Israel's next event after coming up out of Egypt; the temptation in the wilderness that lasted not 40 days, but 40 years. And again, where they fail, Jesus succeeds.

The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”(Matthew 4:3-4)

So what’s Satan’s angle here?

Why is he trying to get Jesus to use his God powers to meet his own needs? Well, Jesus was fully human and not allowed to tap into His God powers. When the Spirit anointed Him in the previous chapter, it was so that Jesus could be dependent upon God just like you and I are. He was still fully God, but he didn’t tap into it, but as Philippians 2 says, “He humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant.” This is why Jesus is fasting at the beginning of his ministry. Fasting is all about depending upon God; reminding yourself that you need to trust God for everything.

So Jesus is living as you and I were meant to live, fully dependent upon God. Looking out at those dusty stones, which looked like loaves of bread in the right light, Satan attempts to wean Jesus off of dependence upon God. The SAME temptation that Israel faced in the wilderness. God rained down mana from heaven, and they still rebelled against him... the irony was when they were being tested by God, they not only failed the test, they also tested God Himself. Maybe you’ve done that, you have attempted to test God rather than trust Him. If you’re God, do this or do that. That’s not the language of faith; that’s Satan’s native tongue talking.

Therefore, it’s not by accident that Jesus keeps quoting Deuteronomy. In fact, all three times Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy: “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Jesus one. Satan zero.

On to the next one, verse 5:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down.

For it is written:

**“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”**

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:5-7)

Wow, Satan quoting scripture? That’s a new one. Not exactly, Satan will quote scripture anytime that he can misrepresent God’s word, just like he did with Eve in the garden, “Did God really say not to touch he fruit?” Um, God said don’t eat it... Here Satan leaves out a little bit of the middle of this verse.

**“He will command his angels concerning you, (IN ALL YOUR WAYS)
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”**

So that verse was just a metaphor about trusting God in your everyday life. Not some weird way to test God in some game of supernatural chicken. Jesus’s comeback is **“Don’t put God to the test”**. The irony is that in tempting Jesus, Satan is doing that very thing. But Jesus lets him know, “Not today Satan!”

Jesus 2. Satan 0.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

(Matthew 4: 8-11)

One of my favorite songs by U2 depicts this scene in a song called Vertigo, which is about temptation. The bridge says, “All of this, all of this can be yours. All of this, all of this can be yours, just give me what I want and no one gets hurt.”

Satan offers Jesus what he wants, if Jesus will give Satan what he wants. Satan says, I’ll be your hype man Jesus. I’ll give you the glory of the world if you’ll give me the glory of heaven. If you’ll worship me, I’ll make sure all men worship you.

It must have been tempting.

Does God know how we feel? As God, maybe. He knows all. But as Jesus, God has lived through temptation. He’s felt the pull of it, the drawing out of desires that feel right, but would be so wrong.

Jesus hits Satan with a knockout punch, and Satan leaves, just like the Bible tells us, **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”**.

From there, Jesus goes preaching and lives in Capernaum. Have you noticed a pattern yet? Everytime Jesus moves, he fulfills prophecy.

“to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

**“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”**

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

(Matthew 4:14-17)

Matthew wants us to know that Jesus goes to Capernaum, a place known to be corrupted by gentile thinking, and from there, he picks his first disciples.

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

(Matthew 4:18-22)

From there, Jesus goes on a circuit tour through Galilee, taking these disciples with him, teaching, healing, and casting out demons. And people start to follow him, without help from the devil, thank you. It's all getting started now in Jesus's public ministry; he's got the Spirit, he's got the team, and he's got the following.

As they start their journey today, we're coming to the close of ours, but I'll see you next time, on your journey through the word.

Day 8 | Matthew 5

Have you ever heard a sermon that blew your mind? Something that cut you in two, turned you into goo inside, and blew your mind?

Matthew Chapter 5 is Jesus's version of that! It was a jaw dropping sermon that Matthew records in detail, and he tells us at the end of it, in chapter 7 **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”** (Matthew 7:28-29)

And “the law” was exactly what this sermon was about.

Jesus's main point? The law can't make you righteous! Somehow the religious teachers had gotten it backwards, teaching that obeying the law made you righteous before God, when in fact, the law was introduced to tell us we needed a deeper righteousness than one we could ever try and earn.

Let's join the crowds following Jesus and get a sneak peek at what his preaching was actually like:

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5: 1-12)

Okay, there's a lot to unpack there. We call these statements beatitudes and there are 8 of them, but I want you to notice two things;

Jesus uses the word “blessed”. When God gave his people the law, he told them, “you’ll be blessed if you obey, and further cursed if you disobey.”

So when Jesus says, “Blessed” he’s speaking to the secret longing of every Jew, who deep down wanted to know God’s blessing on their lives. But Jesus doesn’t talk about outward obedience, he talks about inward character. That’s the first thing, but I said I wanted you to pay attention to two things.

So what’s the second thing?

Each beatitude not only tells you about the inward character of a blessed person, it says that their blessing or reward is in the future tense. Read back over some of the examples;

“They shall inherit the earth”

“They will be shown mercy”

“They will be filled”

It's all future. Jesus is telling us that blessedness doesn't always receive its reward yet.

(Story of missionaries and Teddy Roosevelt - We're not home yet)

Jesus tells them that if they are those types of people who've been transformed inwardly, that they are different. Radically different to those around them. Verse 13:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

What is this light he's talking about? It's the light of Christ inside of us. And I'll let you in on a little secret. Jesus was the light of the world, and our transformation means we're more like him.

Jesus was poor in spirit, Jesus was meek, Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness, Jesus was poor in heart, Jesus was merciful, Jesus was a peacemaker. If we shine out, it's his light we're shining.

But they didn't know that just yet. What they knew was the law. That big book of over 1000 commandments that seemed so hard to keep. And Jesus has news for them, it's here to stay.

Verse 17, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”**

How would the law be fulfilled? It's as if Jesus is saying nobody has been able to live it out yet...and Jesus is saying God doesn't lower his standards for anyone.

I'm glad Jesus said this about the law, because many people want Jesus to just wish it away for them. But Jesus is about to shift again from outward obedience, and show us that we're all lawbreakers in our hearts.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

So from this we learn that the law that only deals with outward behavior seems pretty easy. I mean, most of us haven't murdered yet, right? But God sees the murder that lives in our heart.

We may not be taking people's lives, but what good does that do us if we're going around killing people all day in our mind? Is that what God wants in our hearts?

So maybe the law is there as a barrier to keep us from acting out the evil that's already in our hearts...

Okay, on to what the law says about adultery.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.
(Matthew 5: 27-29)

Okay, kids, you may need to leave the room here. I read this for years in the wrong way.

But Jesus is actually NOT replacing the law, which is impossible to keep with another law even MORE impossible to keep. No, he’s trying to show us that none of us can truly keep the law! We are all guilty.

This isn’t the new and improved “Don’t lust” command! This is Jesus leveling us all. That’s why Paul, who thought he was completely righteous in Romans 7 tells us, “When the law said, “Do not covet” I found every covetous desire sprang up within me.”

To covet by the way, means to lust. Paul thought he was righteous by his own efforts and obedience, until he encountered the tenth commandment that dealt with lusting in his heart...and he found he couldn’t control it. This is why Jesus says, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

The Pharisees were trying so hard to be perfect, that Jesus mocks them by saying, you’re going to have to start hacking off body parts if you’re trying to get to heaven by your own obedience and efforts, because, uh, they’re going to cause you to sin.

But if you thought that THAT one was hard. This next one is proof of God’s existence. When someone can love and forgive their enemies, it’s completely supernatural.

Verse 43: **"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

Again, Jesus is saying that when you're righteous, you're different. And at this point, Jesus is describing himself. He's the one that loves his enemies. He's the one that shows grace to the unjust. He's the one who greets the unbeliever with a sunset every morning. But us? We're just like the pagans next to us if we're honest. That is if we're left to ourselves.

Then Jesus says something completely daunting in verse 48 **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

Um...Jesus...I'm far from perfect. I'm afraid that ship has sailed.

Let's go back to something that Jesus said earlier. It's actually the heart of the entire sermon. **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."** (Matthew 5:20)

A righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law? But they were the most righteous people that they knew! The thought of being more righteous than them was staggering...impossible even.

And it IS impossible. That's why we need the righteousness of Christ. Our righteousness has to be perfect. And we can never do, be, or possess that by our own efforts. This is where Jesus is prepping them for what he's about to do for them. So far, in Matthew's gospel we've been hearing about Jesus fulfilling righteousness...and it's all been for us. Jesus is earning it FOR US, by living the perfect life we could never live. That, my friends, is why it's all about grace. God's law stays the same. His standards are changeless.

But Grace...grace changes everything, and gives us the righteousness of Christ; so much greater than that of the Pharisees, or of anyone else.

Day 9 | Matthew 6

We've all known the difficult choice between spending all of our money now on something we want, or saving it up for something even better.

This starts when we're kids. Mom or Dad gives us spending money, and we either blow it on junk, and don't have what we need later, or we learn that good things come to those who wait; and if money burns a hole through our pocket, we'll end up less happy in the long run.

In Matthew Chapter 6, Jesus talks about rewards in heaven. Some things are worth waiting for; saving up for, but the religious teachers were spending everything that they had now...and we'll see what Jesus means in verse 1.

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Welp, there it is. Or was. Gone. All gone. There could have been a reward from God for what you did, but you chose to blow it all on something now, approval from people. Like a kid blowing all of his money in the candy shop instead of saving up for the toy he really wanted.

Jesus gives us some practical advice in verse 2:

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

I love how confident Jesus is that God sees EVERYTHING. He sees every little thing we do in His name, and says, “The Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you”. Have you ever had someone give you a gift, and they don’t want any recognition, they just do it because it was the right thing to do? That’s the stuff that God loves, because you’re starting to get it!

Jesus then says the same thing about prayer. Praying to be seen by others like the religious hypocrites? “They have received their reward in full”.

Hypocrites by the way, means “false face” and refers to actors who would wear masks. These people weren’t even praying, they were playing a part. And they wanted your applause.

Verse 7 must have gotten a chuckle from the crowd:

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

So Jesus gives them an outline for prayer. It’s not about length of prayers, or many words, it’s about covering the basics. Jesus tells them the essentials of prayer in verse 9:

“This, then, is how you should pray:

**“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Notice that the first part of this prayer is all about God; not you. It affirms God as a loving Father...that’s important!

Then, it praises his name. Hallowed means holy. Set apart, Unique. There is nobody like YOU God. So you’ve already worshipped him out the gate. And if this is just an outline, then you can spend time worshipping him...just ease back and enjoy time in his presence.

Your Kingdom come. Not mine. Your will be done. Not mine. This is good stuff. In verse 11, the focus shifts to our needs.

**“Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”**

Jesus’s outline covers our physical needs, our social needs, and our spiritual needs, and they’re all somehow interconnected. But he gives one admonition, forgiving others is crucial when you’ve been forgiven. It’s not a choice.

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14)

Some people have a hard time with this, but Jesus is again telling us that people who have been made righteous, will act righteously. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Jesus gives a final motivation to save up for eternity, to focus on what God thinks: rather than blowing it on people’s opinions here. Verse 19

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

That part is pretty basic, but then Jesus talks about the eye being the lamp of the body and it can be a little confusing to us. Lamps back then were made of clay, and when lit, had a light inside of them, but Jesus gives a picture of a dark lamp. If our eyes are fixed on God, there is light inside of us, but if fixed on things down here, like money or people’s approval, then we have no light. And Jesus says you can only be looking at one and not the other.

Verse 24, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

But Jesus knows we think about money. We live in the here and now. In the real world. Baby needs a new pair of shoes. What do I do when others in the rat race are pushing ahead, and making a ton of money? It seems like I’m not. I give some of my money away. The bill stack seems to get higher, while the money stack gets lower?

Jesus speaks to those who are trusting God for the future, to trust Him for the present:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25-34)

Jesus says that our needs should not dictate our focus. Focus on God like I've been telling you. Seek first his kingdom. You'll be a trillionaire in heaven, and have what you need on earth.

So my friend, I'd ask you where your treasure is today, but each of us must ask ourselves. Can we do that together? Am I looking more to please people than I am to please God? Am I saving up for heaven, or blowing it all here on earth.

Day 10 | Matthew 7

Have you ever heard a sermon, or your boss lecturing the team, and you think, “Yeah, I hope Bob is listening to this!”?

So far in the sermon on the mount, Jesus has been talking a lot about righteousness. Getting to the heart of our lack of it! And the abundance of sin that lives in our heart.

The last thing Jesus wants the listeners to do is start elbowing their spouses. So Jesus drives his sermon home to the hearer themselves. Verse 1:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

It’s important to know that we will ALL be judged... so Jesus is speaking to HOW we will be judged. We will be judged with the same harness, or leniency we’ve judged others with. “With the same measure it will be measured to you...” That changes things.

Romans 2 – **“Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice such things.”** (Romans 2:1)

Jesus doubles down into our hypocrisy, showing that we are often our greatest enemies:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:3-6)

Jesus is quoting a palestinian proverb here and referring to confronting people outside of the faith. Pigs and dogs were the racist labels given to non-Jews, so Jesus is telling them that it's foolish to attempt to get non-believers to live like Christians. Again, it's important we keep our eyes on ourselves. We've got enough problems of our own.

So Jesus encourages us to keep seeking God for his grace in verse 7:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:7-12)

God gives us grace like a loving Father gives his child bread. So seek God with that kind of confidence. He sees everything in secret, and it matters. Every bit of your asking, knocking, seeking...MATTERS...because God loves you. Therefore, Jesus reveals the summary of the law, love. Love others, treat them as you'd be treated, or how God already treats you, for that's the sum of the law.

Then, as Jesus brings his sermon home, he encourages us to enter the narrow gate. The rest of the chapter gives a series of contrasts. There is a wide gate and a narrow gate. Enter the narrow gate.

There are good trees and bad trees when it comes to religion. People will tell you the wrong things. You can't tell a tree is diseased by looking at it...but you CAN tell from a bad life. If someone's life is just off, (they aren't humble, loving, or any of the things that Jesus has described as true righteousness) then they're bad trees. **Watch out!**

These people will argue with Jesus at the judgment that they were good trees, because they also did some good religious things too, but Jesus will tell them, **“Depart from me, I never knew you.”**

There are things I’m afraid of. Sharks, snakes, dolls with knives...but nothing scares me more than that passage.

Nobody wants to hear those words in eternity.

So Jesus tells us to be careful about how we’re hearing his words now, verse 24

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Each of us builds our lives like someone building a house. Day by day, we build. We either build our lives on the shifting sands of popular opinion, or what we think is right, or we build them on the timeless principles Jesus gives us in his words.

Judgment is coming as sure as a storm, and the question is, will everything we built stand?

It doesn’t matter how hard you built your life up doing what YOU think is right, because Jesus isn’t going to judge you on your criteria, but upon his. And if the Pharisees aren’t going to make it, neither will we. That’s why we need that righteousness that Jesus talked about. That perfection that he teased out here. But where to get it? It only comes from Him.

Remember, in this sermon Jesus said, Seek out your enemy on the way to court and make peace with him now, before you stand trial, or he'll throw you in prison until you've paid the last penny. He wasn't talking about going to court with men there, but with Himself.

We're told in verse 28

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching”

What about you? Has this amazed you? Have you heard the voice of God speaking with authority through this audio guide? Seek him today. He will give you the grace you need.

Day 11 | Matthew 8

Welcome back to Through the Word, I'm your host Peyton Jones and today we follow Jesus so closely that we just might get dust in our mouths. One thing we'll find out at each stop is that Jesus is in charge, and he starts to take charge in Matthew 8. Let's follow in his footsteps in verse 1:

“When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” (Matthew 8:1-4)

You can imagine, a leper bursts from the fringes, alarming everyone who is required to keep 10 feet from him for fear of contamination of this highly contagious disease.

Leprosy causes the sufferer to lose all sensation in their pain receptors, so that their tissue is being rubbed, or scraped away. The law said not to touch them, but where the law stops, Jesus is able to go. He does the opposite of what everyone's instinct is. He touches this man who hasn't felt the warmth of another human touch in years.

Jesus fulfills the law, and ends the curse which brought disease and death; as Jesus starts his ministry, we'll see him begin to bring an end to all of that ahead of schedule. The Kingdom isn't fully here yet, but it's coming, and anywhere the King is, sad things are becoming untrue.

And Jesus receives even the most rejected people in society...and speaking of, verse 5: **“When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”**

The centurion hears everything that goes on in his area. He's heard rumors. This Jesus may be able to help his servant, a man who he has depended on for years. He can't imagine finding someone else who can do what he does.

Verse 7: And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
(Matthew 8:7-12)

Did you catch that? Jesus is saying that this non-Jew, this pagan has more faith than any believing Jew that he's encountered. And this is just the beginning, says Jesus. There are more like him coming. In the same way that his faith is staggering, the lack of it, and refusal to acknowledge Jesus's authority will be just as staggering.

But Matthew tells us that he was healed at that very moment. But there's more of that to come also, verse 14

"And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.

That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:14-22)

Rumors spread quickly in a small town, and Jesus doesn't want nice Christians or people who haven't counted the cost to follow him, so he gets into a boat to let the crowd-swell die down a bit. After the miracles, life is still life and following Jesus costs.

This seemed harsh to me when I first read it, but the first is swallowed up with an emotional decision, so Jesus tells him, get ready for some hard traveling. I can do miracles, but I don't conjure up cushy hotel beds and down pillows.

The second man is saying, “I'll follow you but...not yet...I've got to wait for my folks to die first (whenever that is), and then, I'll follow you”. Jesus is telling both of them, following me involves sacrifice.

So far in Matthew 8, we've seen the authority of Jesus. The authority over disease, and the recognition of that authority from a Centurion; a man who understood authority very well, but the disciples get a front row seat to Jesus's authority when they get into the boat, and watch Jesus, awakened from his nap by a violent storm, calm it miraculously, causing them to get a deeper understanding of his authority, even over creation, verse 27

“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

I love that Matthew tells us here that the disciples don't fully realize who Jesus is exactly when they start following him. But in our next encounter, Jesus encounters two demon possessed men, who recognize him right away; In verse 29 they scream,

“What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.”

So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.”

(Matthew 8:29-34)

You can imagine the scene. The demon possessed men who are tormenting the area bow down in front of Jesus, screaming in terror. Suddenly, you see Jesus look at the herd of pigs.

You know as a Jew, you're not supposed to keep pigs. They're unclean animals and the law forbids it, and with a look at them, and pointing to the pigs, Jesus says, “Go!” And your entire group of pigs jumps off the cliff and drowns in the sea.

To all appearances, it seems that Jesus has come here to judge you for keeping pigs; so you and the other people beg this prophet, this man of God to leave them, out of fear of being judged.

It's an unfortunate incident of misunderstanding, because if they'd have seen everything we just read in this chapter, they'd have realized that Jesus receives the leper, the gentile, and yes, even the pig farmer.

Jesus was here to save. He was willing. Everyone in this chapter was desperate. Very desperate. They either knelt to Jesus, threw themselves on their faces, or begged him. And that leper nailed it, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Jesus said, I am willing. He still is.

Jesus was here to save, and he still is...and he was more than able to save, and we'll see him being more of the savior on our next journey, through the word. (Hope you didn't get too much dust up your nose)

Day 12 | Second Sunday of Lent & Psalm 27

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, everyone. Psalm 27 is my song. I claimed this one right away.

My fight song. Do you have one of those?

A song that takes you back to a time and place when you battled and endured. The opening chords start up and all the struggle and emotion and fight come pouring back. Crank it up and it always seems to come on when I need it. When life feels like 11 rounds in a boxing match. And I'm in the corner looking up through sweat and tears and blood.

But the music kicks in. Stand up, beat my chest and shout at the world. Bring it. I have to admit, Psalm 27 would not play on typical Christian radio. Not the way I hear it too raw. They hit the guitars too hard for my soundtrack. While studying I went back to my old school playlist, We Shall Overcome by the supertones until my heart caves in by Audio Adrenaline.

You might not recognize my songs, but I'm sure you have your own songs that carried you through the hard years. I think that's what the Psalms did for David and for faithful Israelites, centuries on. For something more familiar. Think I'm a survivor by Destiny's Child, or even immigrant song by Zeppelin.

Driving rhythm, primal scream. Let's go. Just don't play Psalm 27 on a flute. Put down the ukulele, plug in your amps and crank it til you feel it. David is a warrior and this is a fight song. Verse one.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?”

Just reading it. I feel it again. You know the feeling when the guitars kick in and strength floods your veins. The Lord is all of David's resilience and grit.

Begin here. The Lord is my light. No darkness shall overtake me.

The Lord is my salvation. No sin will condemn me.

The Lord is my stronghold. No weapon formed against me will stand.

So you tell me, of whom shall I be afraid? Verse two.

“When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.”

David's confidence nearly bursts off the page. This is no empty bravado. This is God confidence. David sees the field of battle. He knows the danger, though an army besiege me, but he also knows the one in whom he trusts.

My heart will not fear. I can almost feel the reverb in my chest. But then the music lifts above the field of battle, musically speaking. Verse four is a bridge, the kind that lifts you up by the heart and leaves your feet nearly floating.

“One thing I ask from the Lord, This only do I seek that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple.”

One thing there is great power in undivided focus. David makes one request and he seeks after it. He desires God's house and pursues God's presence. Verse five:

“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling. He will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock safe.”

Whatever life throws at me, he will shelter me. My life may be under siege, but my soul is safe. Tucked away in God's tent. And the music lifts higher still. Far above the din of sword and battle. Lifted high upon that rock. Verse six.

“Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me. At his sacred tent. I will sacrifice with shouts of joy.”

I love the imagery. A battlefield can overwhelm you and so can life. It crowds your vision until all you see is conflict. Yet David is lifted above his enemy's perspective. And in God's presence he gets his joy back. And every sacrifice is worth it. God is worth it. Back in verse six, I will sing and make music to the Lord. David is resilient.

The setting is still the day of trouble, but David is determined. He will sing. Life gets rough. The world drags you down. But pop in those headphones and let the song lift you. Sing to the Lord. And he's not content to just sing his song out into the void.

In verse seven he calls on the Lord to hear his voice. **“Be merciful to me and answer me.”** In other words, I need to know that you heard me. Lord, have mercy and answer. Verse eight, **“my heart says of you. Seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek.”**

And now the song of survival becomes a song of seeking. That's how it works, isn't it? Storm hits you. Brace your feet against it and battle by battle. It strips you bare. Your heart grows resilient.

But it demands something. If we're going to survive this storm, we need purpose. We need a direction to fight towards. David's heart calls to him. Seek his face. He listens, looks heavenward, and responds, your face, Lord, I will seek. Verse nine

“do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me. God my Savior.”

Now you might be tempted to tell David you don't need to pray that of course God won't reject you. He would never forsake you. But remember, respect the poet's Process. Let David process his feelings and he'll help you process yours.

The storm is on, and David needs to know that this fight is for something. He gives voice to his anxieties about being forsaken in order to give them to God and let them go. Verse nine is anxious. Verse ten is resilient. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.

David reminds himself that the Lord is not like people. People let you down. The Lord is faithful. People betray. The Lord is faithful. Even your own flesh and blood forsake you. The Lord is faithful. And when the fight is over, the Lord will receive you.

Verse 11, **“teach me your way, Lord. Lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.”**

David is focused now, determined to press on along the straight path God has called him to. Oppressors battle against me. Lead me Lord.

Verse 12. **“Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes for false witnesses rise up against me spouting malicious accusations.”**

At last we see the nature of David's battle. False witnesses, malicious accusations. A battle over words, reputation and truth. A life and death battle, indeed. Paul reminds us in one Corinthians that our battle is much the same.

Demolishing arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. Back here in Psalm 27, the music rises once more for the final crescendo, the culmination. And for me, verse 13 hits home like no other.

“I remain confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

You know how sometimes you hear a verse and it's missing something because you remember it from a different translation. This translation is good, but years ago when you read it, it was like God spoke it to you personally and you just need to hear those words again. That's verse 13 for me.

Mid 2000, 32 years young. I was a young dad with three kids to feed, guide and provide for. Bills piled up and all the demands of ministry and pastoring teenagers into adulthood.

Meanwhile, life didn't seem too concerned about my personal problems. My dad in the hospital stroke. I needed a fight song and I will survive song. I opened Psalm 27 and when I got to verse 13, it was like the clouds parted and I heard God's voice.

I'll read the new King James, because these are the words I remember. **“I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”**

The phrase I would have lost heart is not in the Hebrew italics in the new King James indicate that the translators added it to try to capture something inferred in Hebrew.

See, David begins verse 13 with the word unless. Like he's already halfway through a thought. Unless, like he doesn't even want to say the words, doesn't even want to think where he'd be. Unless I was sure, unless I was convinced. Unless I knew. With everything in me I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

That was my fight song. Those are the words that steeled my heart against the storm. The psalm closes with a quiet confidence. Like a warrior's heart that's found peace. Verse 14. **“Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”**

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 13 | Matthew 9

Have you ever thought something was impossible, until you see it?

In this age of content creators, we see things that beggar belief, and try to reconcile it afterwards...and in the back of our minds, we ask ourselves, was that real? Or did someone edit it?

“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’”

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, ‘This fellow is blaspheming!’”

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.’”

(Matthew 9:1-8)

You have to give it to Jesus, he makes a water tight case. I can say your sins are forgiven, but there’s no physical way to show that I have that power. So let me show you by something physically impossible to show you I can do the impossible.

This circulated quickly around town, “Hey, the guy doing miracles says that he can forgive sins...” and that couldn’t have meant more to anyone than Matthew...a tax collector who the pharisees had said was cut off from forgiveness forever.

Imagine his shock, when Jesus called Matthew out in the act of betraying Israel, collecting taxes for the Romans, **“Follow me,”** he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.”

When the Pharisees get mad, Jesus says in verse 12 **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

This is one of my favorite verses, not just because of what it says, but the way Jesus said it. “Go and learn what this means...” as if to say, you’ve been studying the scriptures, but you’ve missed the point. Matthew and his friends are sick, and the doctor is in! Jesus wasn’t just the healer of people’s bodies, he was also the healer of souls.

“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” (Matthew 9: 20-21)

Faith is a big deal in this chapter, and this woman not only needed faith to approach Jesus, she was ceremonially unclean, so pressing through the crowd would have been a big no no. She was to keep 10 feet away from everyone like a leper, because she was seen as filthy, and yet, Jesus looks at her, and to this woman who felt filthy, filthy like the sinner in the beginning, filthy like Matthew, he says, **“daughter”**.

“Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.”
(Matthew 9:22)

An intimate term, a tenderness she’s not heard in years...and the only time in scripture Jesus ever uses this term...Daughter... your faith has healed you. Not faith as some weird mythical super power. Faith = trust in Jesus. The object of her faith was Christ, and He is the power. you can put your faith in something powerless like a self-help book, or a tree, and it will do you no good. But put that faith in Christ, and miracles happen.

Faith isn't the only condition. Sometimes, Jesus's compassion trumps everything else, like when Jesus heals a dead girl in this chapter, despite everyone laughing when he says to the noisy crowd and professional mourners, **“Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.”**

He heals two blind men and says “According to your faith let it be done to you” and then goes on to heal a demon possessed man who couldn't speak until the demon left him. Jesus keeps doing the impossible!

Verse 33 **“The crowd was amazed and said, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.’ But the Pharisees said, ‘It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.’”**

The Pharisees can't believe what they are seeing...they're seeing miracles...but they just can't believe what they're seeing. So it must be the devil, yeah, that's it, that's the ticket.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

(Matthew 9:33-38)

Like sheep without a shepherd...the people had been left to themselves. The Pharisees weren't helping anyone, just leaving them to the harsh realities of disease and sin. Writing people off, and locking them up, and blocking them out. But Jesus saw a bountiful harvest of souls to be healed, sheep to be tended, fruit to be plucked before it died. Perhaps he could see the multitudes following behind him and in the right light, they looked like sheaves of grain. There were no harvesters, no shepherds because there was no savior. But he was here now, and all of that was about to change. Jesus can't just walk away from a situation...No, he's going to do something, or was he? Join me in Matthew 10 to see how you and I might be a part of the plan.

Day 14 | Matthew 10

Welcome back to TTW, I'm your host Peyton Jones. Matthew 10 today, are you ready for the journey?

There are two types of people, those who make a detailed itinerary of travel, and those who just kind of wing a trip by the seat of their pants. Which one are you? Well, Matthew 10 shows Jesus as a combination of both; Jesus sends out the 12 in this chapter, and gives them very detailed instructions without removing the unexpected, so that they'll have to rely fully on God for provision, protection, and providence.

Before we begin, let's remind ourselves of the context:
The last chapter ends with Jesus saying,

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

(Matthew 9:37-38)

Matthew is an accountant. He likes things ordered. He likes things all in a row. Organized thematically in his gospel. He's a bit like those weirdos who like math. Looking at you Kris Langham...math-ew. See what I did there?

More importantly, did you see what Matthew did there?

Matthew directly follows this with Jesus picking his 12 workers, or disciples to be set apart to minister to people.

Jesus wasn't actually training disciples though. He was training disciple makers.

So in verse 1, he sets them aside and sends them out:

“Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”

Skip to verse 5

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”

“Go to the lost sheep of Israel” So this was an Israel centric mission. You can see the lost sheep connection from the last chapter. Jesus was giving them His authority as the shepherd to go and round up the lost and wandering sheep.

Whenever we go on mission, it’s always so that people can see Jesus, even if he’s not physically there, you are, and how humbling that Jesus sends us in His place. It’s an incredible honor to be His ambassadors.

Jesus tells them the attitude they should have **“Freely you have received; freely give”** Someone came to us on mission, or we wouldn’t be here. Somebody gave us the message freely...so we need to be just as generous giving it to others.

And speaking of funding, verse 9

“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave.”

All of this has to do with dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Now, Jesus speaks about the response they may face. And most of it seems negative. So if you feel like a sucky missionary because people aren’t always happy to see you, you’re probably doing it right.

“As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.

Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

(Matthew 10:12-16)

Jesus goes on to tell them that they’ll be persecuted, betrayed, hated, and harried from town to town.

But then he drops this bomb in verse 23 **“When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”**

At first glance, this is confusing. But later, in Matthew 24, Jesus will clarify that his “coming in judgment” on Israel is when the temple was destroyed in AD 70 (He even makes a second time stamp statement “Many of you standing here will not taste death until all of these things are fulfilled).

We won’t dwell on that here, but keep it in mind as you read, and remember that the book of Acts shows the apostles making their way through Israel sharing gospel; and in a way, Jesus is speaking to the specific mission he’s sending THEM on, but he’s also prepping them for the mission they’ll be on for the rest of their lives.

Jesus reminds them that this maltreatment at the hands of others is par for the course. They should expect it, verse 24:

“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

“So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10: 24-31)

Jesus wants them to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that even if it comes to giving their lives for Him, they're not alone. They have NOT been forsaken.

They matter far more than sparrows...perhaps this is why Jesus is speaking so much of our value to Him and the severity of judgment for those who mistreat us. He doesn't take the murder and mistreatment of his kids lightly.

In fact, Jesus ends this chapter with the following words in verse 40 **"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."**

But back to verse 32, where Jesus says something truly staggering. **"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven."**

In other words, if you big me up down here, I'll brag on you up there. He's proud of us when we take the risk of persecution and rejection for Him. He treasures it, and he knows it's hard. He should...He did it for us. Jesus is drawing a line in the sand; and there's only two lines,

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn

**"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—**

a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'
(Matthew 10:34-36)

Whoa Jesus! These are fighting words! But he's not done. He knows that many people have been rejected or put out by the people they love most because they loved Jesus.

It's not fair when people ask us to choose between their love and Jesus's, but Jesus takes no prisoners in verse 37

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

So this is what it comes to then? Taking up a cross daily? Ready to die? Walking with a death sentence on us if need be? This is what it means to follow Jesus in many parts of the world now as it was then.

Throughout the ages people have followed Jesus until it cost them everything, including their last breath. When I came to faith, this hit me hard. Going to the high school library, there were two books there; both had to do with persecution and the cost of following Jesus; John Bunyan's Pilgrim's progress, and Foxe's book of martyrs.

John Foxe chronicles the deaths of hundreds of martyrs young, old, male and female who bled out their precious blood for the savior who bled for them. **“Worthy of me”**. Christlike in life, Christlike in death.

They lost their lives here, but found eternal life; one that cannot ever be taken from them. As a young man, I learned that this is what it meant to follow Jesus for the past thousands of years, but what I didn't know when I came to faith, was that in the 20th century alone, more people have been martyred than the previous 19 centuries combined.

Perhaps this is why Ignatius in the Roman colosseum was heard to say, “Today I become a Christian” as the first lion bit into his arm before the rest tore him to pieces. Hard to say what it will cost you to follow Jesus, or to be on mission for him, but whatever it is, Jesus says, it matters. It matters to him, and you WILL be rewarded.

Day 15 | Matthew 11

Matthew Chapter 11 today, where John the Baptist asks some difficult questions about Jesus.

“When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matthew 11:2-3)

John is in a tough space here, and I’m not talking about his small cell under Herod’s palace. John was placed in prison for speaking truth to power; telling King Herod that his marriage to his half-sister was incestuous and gross.

The Messiah, or savior was supposed to overthrow dictators like Herod, and throw off the shackles of oppression placed on Israel by the Romans and anyone else who sought to subdue them...so why was John still in prison.

“Are you the one to come, or should we expect someone else?” John used that word expect. Jesus wasn’t what he’d expected. Expectations can get us into all kinds of trouble with God, especially when he doesn’t jump through the hoops we think he should like a performing monkey or a trained pet.

Jesus replies in verse 4, **“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”**

Jesus doesn’t answer the question, but quotes the prophecies about the Messiah. John will understand...Jesus is saying, I’m doing Messiah things John. I’m the one.

But that last part, **“Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”** Jesus knows that He’s not living up to John’s expectations.

And in that statement, he's looking down the corridors of time to us, speaking to our hearts. People often say, if God is love, why does he allow all of this suffering?

Jesus has been preaching to a crowd when John's disciples relayed the message, and as they leave, Jesus asks the crowd in verse 7,

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

**“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’**

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

(Matthew 11: 7-15)

Okay, now Jesus is answering directly. By saying “he is the Elijah” who is to come, he's directly quoting a prophecy at the end of the Old Testament, in Malachi, that God would send the prophet Elijah to announce the Messiah. It was all foretold. Jesus isn't meeting their expectations, but they should have expected everything they were seeing.

And certain people were beating down the doors to Jesus. When Jesus says, **“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.”**

(Matthew 11:12)

He's referring to a mob rushing a store for a kids toy at Christmas, or like an army besieging a city. In other words, people flocked to John at the Jordan and they were flocking to Jesus. There were some who saw and heard the preaching of John and saw the signs of Jesus and took hold of the Kingdom of God with everything they had.

But to everyone else who stood back, and wondered about him, Jesus has something to say about their expectations of him in verse 16

“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

**“‘We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.’**

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.” (Matthew 11:16-19)

I love this scripture, where Jesus accuses the masses of being like spoiled children. Keep that in mind next time you're on social media. It explains a lot about public opinion.

These spoiled kids play on their flute and want Jesus to dance to their beat. Jesus refuses to be their dancing bear in a tutu.

Jesus ridicules their contradicting opinions, John fasted and you said he was weird and possessed, but the messiah came eating and drinking just like you and you said he was a sinner.

Nobody can please the crowd.

But then, Jesus looks up to heaven, with a sigh and smiles, like he knows a secret.

“At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.”

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matthew 11:25-27)

So, Jesus let's us in on the secret. You actually need to have who I am revealed to you. It's not about being wise, smart or brainy. Those people missed who Jesus was, but the Father revealed Jesus to those who knew their sin, like the people who got baptized, or thought that God was done with them, like the leper, or the possessed, or unclean woman who couldn't stop bleeding. These people got let in on the secret, and then, Jesus gives an invitation to all who may be like them...

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11: 28-30)

Jesus's words echo with depth and meaning today as they did then. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...they were hearing a lot of different things. They were getting philosophical whiplash from not knowing what voice to listen to, or who to believe. And through it all, Jesus says, God reveals himself to those who are desperate. To those who need him.

Day 16 | Matthew 12

Matthew 12 represents a time when people are polarizing over Jesus. People are picking their side. It's as dramatic as right or left, red or blue, Pro-Jesus, or anti.

Let's jump in at verse 1:

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

In Deuteronomy God told his people to leave the edges of their fields unharvested for travelers to snack on as they were traveling, because the Israelites had been sojourners and pilgrims; BUT the problem was that they were doing it on the wrong day; the Sabbath; or the day of rest.

Not only did the shucking of the husk of wheat constitute as work according to the religious teachers (who were wrong), but they were also traveling on the sabbath...a big no no for the religious customs of that day. But have you ever noticed how religious customs can sometimes be so different from what God actually said?

Let's hear what God actually said in the words of Jesus, verse 3:

“He answered, “Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

WHOA Jesus! That's as punk rock as it gets. Jesus doesn't just upend their religious customs and smash his doc marten's through their traditions, his big "OI!" is when he says, "I am the LORD of the sabbath". Make no mistake here, Jesus just claimed to be God...again.

With that mic drop moment behind them, they look to trap Jesus, verse 9:

"Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Okay, that had to sting a bit. They were all religious and indignant, until it was their property and it cost them money. Suddenly they had their shoulder to a sheeps bunghole, pushing it out of the mud. Very undignified, and very hypocritical.

"Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

**"Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.**

**He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory.**

In his name the nations will put their hope.”

(Matthew 12:13-21)

Again, Matthew is an accountant; a tax collector, remember? But no, he's not autistic, stop getting your theology from the Chosen. Great show as it is. Matthew DOES like to thematically tie things together, so he points to the Old Testament, to tell us yet another prophecy that Jesus fulfilled.

Maybe one of my favorite passages about Jesus ever: **“A bruised reed he will not break.”** If you're just hanging on by a thread, he doesn't snap you off. Or a smoldering wick, he doesn't put his fingers to his lips to wet it with saliva and then “HISS” snuff you out. No, he's so different than these Pharisees.

Jesus sees the people struggling under the burdens and yokes that he spoke about in the previous chapter, and he offers them rest. He sees the suffering of the sick and eases their pain; he sees the hunger of his disciples and fills the aching void.

Matthew lines all of this up for us, hoping that you and I reading this will do the math. And our conclusion will be that Jesus is indeed, the Messiah.

Now, I'm not particularly good at math, but I don't think I would have EVER come to the conclusion that the Pharisees do in our next passage. Let's see what happens in verse 22:

“Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

Whoa! They just saw miracles. And they think Satan is doing it? Okay, algebra is weird, but is this the new common core math or something? Coz, I'm pretty sure that this is the wrong answer. (Please don't write in complaining about anti-common core sentiments...it's a joke...(whisper voice) and I don't even understand what common core math is...)

But Jesus knows their thoughts, when their not even voicing them, verse 25:

“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.”

“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:25- 32)

Jesus had bound Satan, the strong man. The one that nobody could best; sin with all the effects of the curse; disease, pain, death...Jesus was plundering them all. But the pharisees went too far. They attributed the miracles to Satan.

They blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, that won't be forgiven. Blaspheme the Father, and He sends His son. Maybe Jesus can reach you. Reject the Son, and he sends the Spirit.

Maybe the Spirit can reach you, but when you reject the supernatural workings of the Spirit, there's nobody else left to send. Many Pharisees came to faith in Jesus according to the book of Acts, but these particular Pharisees were damned because despite the clear evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, they chose to give Satan glory, rather than God.

And Jesus drives it home in verse 36

“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Jesus tells them that they are going to be judged by their own words. We all know what it's like when someone throws our own words back in our face. We might stammer and say, “I never said that...” or “I didn't meant that” and I shudder to think what the judgment of these pharisees looked like as they stand before Jesus and these words come back to haunt them as they beg him not to send them to hell.

Jesus then gives a scathing statement about religion in verse 43:

“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

This is what religion does. It cleans the house of a certain sin, but only to make room for an even worse type of evil; the evil that the Pharisees had...the kind of hypocrisy that would make them think they were good, when they were actually plotting to kill God Himself. Talk about delusional thinking.

Well, about that time, Jesus's family begins to worry for him. He's tangling with the Pharisees, and although it's not openly spoken about, people who end up on the wrong side of the religious elite, usually ended up in body bags, or crosses, so his mother and brother stand outside trying to drag him away..."Um, Jesus? Time to come home now..."

**"He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"
Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.
For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and
sister and mother." (Matthew 12:48-50)**

Ouch. That had to hurt a bit, but his family had also crossed a line. They'd forgotten who he was as well. Mary knew that Jesus was on loan to her. She knew that He had another Father. And she also knew that the angel had said that a sword would pierce her heart also. Like the Pharisees, she'd forgotten who this really was...He didn't need her dragging him back home for supper.

He was doing the will of his FATHER, not His Mother. And as he points to his disciples and says, "this is my family...those who do the will of my father" he's also pointing to me and you. To those who will stand by him, on the right side of the line drawn in the sand, and follow him, wherever that may lead; whatever that may cost.

Well, it's time to move on and continue following Jesus to our next stop, on our journey, Through the Word.

Day 17 | Matthew 13

Welcome back to Through The Word, I'm your host Peyton Jones and today we'll be in Matthew 13, where Jesus tells loads of stories.

When my kids were young, they loved one minute mysteries where I'd craft a scenario, and they had to work out the mysterious circumstances of the scene. There was always that "aha" moment when they'd light up and finally solve the case.

Jesus's stories today are like that. In Verse 3 we're told "Then he told them many things in parables"

A parable is a word picture or story that illustrates a deep spiritual truth with everyday common objects. In Jesus's first parable, it's a farmer sowing seeds in his fields. Let's continue verse 3

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

(Matthew 13:3-9)

Now, Jesus will explain this parable later in the chapter, that the seed is the message of the kingdom, and Satan snatches the seed away from people who don't understand, so it never takes root. But then there are those where the seed seems to take root, but the sun is persecution...they find following Jesus too hard, and walk away.

Then there are others who hear, understand, and think about it, but other things just seem more important. But finally, the good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands...but not only that, it produces real fruit in their lives and multiplies out to others!

It's an amazing illustration, but before he explains it, the disciples ask him why he's speaking in riddles, pictures, and parables, rather than just speaking plainly. Apparently, the disciples just didn't get it, and they rat themselves out. Jesus, why speak in parables? Jesus's answer may shock you, verse 11:

“He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

Remember, Matthew the accountant likes things organized in rows, columns and in their pretty little boxes. This goes back to the previous chapter when Jesus thanked his Father that God not revealed everything to everyone, but hidden certain things to certain people.

Jesus continues to explain by quoting the Old Testament:

This is why I speak to them in parables

**“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.**

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

**“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.**

**For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.**

**Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'**

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. (Matthew 13:13-17)

Okay, so this is like the one minute mysteries. Some people get them, and some people don't. But the difference between those who do and those who don't has to do with the Spirit of God revealing the deeper meaning. If you're like the seed that the bird snatches away, then you just think Jesus is speaking about some guy sowing seeds, having pretty bad luck.

But if you've had that Holy Spirit "aha" moment, you see it. A parable puts you into the middle of the story, and you realize..."wait, that's ME!" It goes from being a message to an experience. So, Jesus explains the parable to them...but THEN, tells them a few more, a bit like when my kids can't solve the one minute mysteries...and we've got some legendary ones that they've never cracked...so I tell them some easier ones.

So, Jesus tells the parable of the wheat and the tares, where the wheat and tares grow up together, and look the same, but one has wheat kernels on it, but the tares, or weeds don't. The servants ask the Master, in verse 28,

"Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?"

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

(Matthew 13:28-30)

How did you do on that one? Did you see that there will always be fake Christians? Or people who seem to be following God, but aren't? They go to church, they do all the religious things, but there is no spiritual fruit?

Okay, on to the next one. Jesus tells two stories, one about a man sowing a mustard seed, verse 32,

Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:32-33)

Both of these parables have to do with something very small, expanding very quickly, like flour with yeast mixed into it, or the tiny mustard seed becoming a towering tree. In 300 short years, Christianity permeated the known world.

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (Matthew 13:36)

Okay, so the disciples are still stuck on the first parable. "Uh...Jesus, we still don't get it." So Jesus explains it. Again. Deeper this time.

But then he tells a couple more parables, to keep them guessing. Let's read them:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46)

What I love about these two stories is that they sound nearly the same, but they are so different. Both involve people finding something of extreme value, and giving all they have to obtain it, but the difference between them is that one person finds the kingdom accidentally, like a man stumbling over buried treasure in a field, whereas the other one was looking for it. And you know what? People find the kingdom both ways...some are searching for truth; others aren't. But when they both find it, it becomes everything to them.

After telling one more about a fish caught in a net, Jesus asks in verse 51 **“Have you understood all these things? ‘Yes,’ they replied.”**

Hmmm...I'm not sure I believe them this time... Maybe they're just saying it because minute mysteries are hard. One thing we DO know. Jesus knows that not everyone gets Him.

But I'm glad that the disciples DIDN'T understand everything. I'm still coming to understand these parables in a deeper way. Sometimes I see myself in them in new ways. Other times I struggle with them. Sometimes, it seems they're reading me more than I'm reading them.

The parables are designed to bring you personal “aha” moments where the Holy Spirit is within you, talking to you, revealing things to your soul in new ways.

I pray you've experienced some of that today, and there's more to come next time on our journey Through The Word.

Day 18 | Matthew 14

The four different soils from the parable of the sower all make cameos in this chapter, and we'll get to witness the different responses of people as they respond to the words of God. We'll see people who don't understand, people who are distracted by cares, and people who aren't willing to follow Jesus all the way.

But there's a more direct connection between John the baptist and his doubts about Jesus and who he was. In fact, we'll see fears and doubts make quite the cameo in this chapter, just like they do in our own lives. Let's get started in verse 1.

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

By this time, John the Baptist was dead, so Matthew gives us the backstory in verse 3.

“Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

John's preaching about Herod seducing his sister-in-law got him locked up, but during his birthday banquet, being drunk, he promised to grant anything his step-daughter wanted if she'd seductively dance nude for him and his guests. She asked for John the Baptists head to be served at the dinner table, and though it haunted Herod, he had no choice but to execute John and grant her macabre request. We're told in the other gospels that Herod used to visit John to hear him preach, and so he was like the soil that believed, but other desires, worries, and priorities choked out his reception of the word.

My heart goes out to J.B.

He fears the worst, and then it happens.

It's a tragedy.

It's like Jesus was giving his eulogy in the chapter before last. Like he knew what was going to happen. People still suffer, death still comes, tragedy still strikes.

But God is in control.

Jesus himself is going to taste all of it for us, including death. Back to Jesus.

Verse 12, "John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."

"As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

"Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

"Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children." (Matthew 14:12-21)

I love this. Can you imagine being the disciples? You want to send people home, but Jesus, being Jesus, has compassion on them and healed their sick. He ministers through his own brokenness and pain, because that's who he is. And that's what mission often requires.

And in this case, Jesus gets the 12 to minister despite being hungry and tired themselves. They want to send everyone home! Jesus says, **“You give them something to eat.”**

And as they begin to hand out the bread, and as they did, the miracle literally started happening out of their hands.

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” (Matthew 14:22-24)

Jesus walks around the lake, needing to get some alone time with His Father. His friend, cousin, partner in the work, and prophet proclaiming Jesus, his personal hype man, just lost his life for Jesus...Jesus needed to collect himself. So human. So much like us. So real.

“Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:25-31)

This reminds me a bit of John the Baptist. At one point, John the Baptist stopped looking at Jesus, a bit like Peter here stops looking at him, and looks at the wave in verse 30, “But when he saw the wind he was afraid, and beginning to sink...we always sink when we look at the wind and waves instead of at Christ.

John the baptist looked at his circumstances, knowing he was going to die, and he started to buckle; Jesus told him, “John, all the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled...the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear...” In other words, “watch this space!”

My friend, maybe God is calling you to minister to others while suffering. Or you're in a prison, trusting God, but it's not looking good. Or He's asking you to come out to him on stormy waters. No matter what it is, keep your eyes FIXED on Jesus, and you'll stay afloat.

“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (Matthew 14:32-33)

Peter, in the end, is that good soil. He receives the word, and with it, receives Jesus.

“When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.” (Matthew 14: 34-36)

And with that, the chapter ends with Jesus doing what he's been doing non-stop. Putting aside his own personal pain, and hardship and loving others.

Day 19 | Third Sunday of Lent and Psalm 19

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, my friend. We have arrived at 19. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands.

This psalm is beauty, elegance and power. Opening Psalm 19 is like driving out of the crowded city into wide open space. And that first moment when you stop, get out and look up. The sky opens above you and never stops widening as you feel yourself shrinking and your heart stretching open, the heavens declare back in verse one, the heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they reveal knowledge.

I have a little saying I keep. Always remember to look up. I use it to remind myself on those days when I'm doubting and questioning to stop and listen. It's amazing how many questions get settled when I look up. The heavens pour forth speech. What are the answers? I have no idea. I don't speak Sky. But I get the distinct impression.

It's saying a great deal about the glory of God. Glory means weightiness. Substance that endures in the Bible. It's the opposite of vanity. This whole world is fleeting. Glory is eternal. I may not get all the answers, but that reminder does my heart a lot of good. David has been asking God, why, Lord, how long, Lord? In Psalm 19, he steps outside, looks up, and listens. For me, its feel is captured musically by a pair of songs by Switchfoot, "Stars" and "On Fire."

Back Here", verse three. **"They have no speech. They use no words. No sound is heard from them, yet their voice goes into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."** Step outside into open space. Look up and take it in.

Do you ever wonder at it? The great big blue of it all. Glorious. Want to know why it's blue wavelengths? Sunlight is pure energy. Photons traveling through space as waves in a vast array of wavelengths. A small section of which is visible light and each wavelength is a color.

Now all those colors are streaming through space at 300,000,000m/s. When sunshine hits our atmosphere, those waves bounce off tiny particles of sky.

Short wavelengths bounce the most blue. More bouncing means more of them. Hit your eyes from all directions. All the others together make white and combined. Look up and it's sky blue. Come evening time, sunshine is traveling lower through more atmosphere. The blue bounces too much and dissipates.

Now the longer wavelengths come through yellow sun and even longer oranges and reds bend through water droplets in evening clouds and light up your sky for the glory of sunset. Every sky is a wonder, every moment and every viewpoint.

One cells meticulously designed to receive the hundreds of trillions of photons per second that bombard each eye, decipher every wavelength and translate them into electrical signals, a process that would require calculus faster than a supercomputer in every cell. You have millions of them, and those cells send signals to your brain, which interprets it all into a glorious skyscape of color and beauty.

Amazing! The fool says in his heart, there is no God. Notice in his heart not mind. Back in verse four, the heavens testify every day and every where on earth. Day after day and night after night they reveal. Speaking of night. Starlight travels millions of light years. Just to sparkle up your eyes and deliver the message. Are you listening? The galaxies are testifying.

David continues in the heavens. God has pitched a tent for the sun. The phrasing there simply means that God made a dwelling for the sun, a place it belongs in space, the sun, the source of light, the source of life, of all the energy that flows through every creature and every ecosystem. God gave that sun a home, and David watches with awestruck wonder. The sunrise opens the day like a bridegroom kicking off a wedding. The sun treks across the sky like a champion runner running with joy.

Verse six. **"It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other. Nothing is deprived of its warmth."** Then in verse seven, David jumps quite suddenly from the testimony of creation to the testimony of God's Word. The two testify together. Yet their testimonies are distinct.

Notice that creation testifies of God's glory. God is a title, but the law belongs to the Lord. The Hebrew there is his name, Yahweh. The I am creation declares God's nature. Scripture reveals his name. Verse seven. **“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.”**

That verse says a lot more in Hebrew than we here. Law is again Torah, God's will and God's way for us as revealed in God's Word. The Torah of the Lord is perfect, complete, flawless of the Lord is repeated six times. David is absolutely taken in because our creator has shown us a way to live that is right. He meditates upon it. It refreshes the soul. Refresh means turn back, restore to life. Peter says that we are born again of imperishable seed, the living, enduring Word of God.

That's David's experience here. God's word is trustworthy, right? Radiant. It is good. Meditate on that. The creator of all things, the God who designed our very being, has revealed for us a right way to be and act and interact. David Long lamented the wrongness of the wicked.

Now he looks up to heaven. Now he looks up to heaven and down to Scripture. Here is rightness. Here is good. I well remember this experience in my own life. In my youth, I too lamented the hatred and greed and cruelty of the world. Then I discovered the word Proverbs caught me first. Wisdom. Right? Living. Then one day on lunch break, I was reading Romans 12 and I was struck sincere.

Love others above self, serve joyfully, overcome evil with good, and I could feel my soul revived as I read. Imagine if people lived this way. This is right. This is good. Back in verse seven, the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. That was true for me. I was simple and I read God's statutes, trusted and found wisdom. Verse eight. **“The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”**

When the spirit awakened my soul to the scriptures. I remember so distinctly that I could see like a blindfold was removed I wasn't even aware of. I looked around and we all had them. But now the Lord's commands were radiant, shining. Verse nine. **“The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.”**

There is a purity cleansed from all the world's wrongness in the fear of God, the respect for his instruction.

And it endures. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. And there it is righteous in a world of wrong. David has found what is right, and when you find that you value it in verse ten, they are more precious than gold, sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. David is prioritizing here what a person values.

They invest in time, effort, cost, and a worthy investment pays off. David finds the payoff in verse 11. God's commands offer warnings. They save us from hurt and heartache. In keeping them, there is great reward. David is all in. Let's do this. This is the good life. But then another reality sets in. Verse 12. **“But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.”**

I too recall this realization when I first discovered the word. I became convinced that this is good and right. But I was also still pretty convinced that I was good and right, at least mostly better than others anyway. But then what if I don't see it? What if I'm nose blind to the stink of my own sin? Who can discern their own errors? David is on the verge of the third great revelation here. The first, God's glory is evident. Second. God's way is good. The third, I am not good. Isaiah saw it. He saw the Lord high and lifted up and replied, woe to me, I am ruined.

I am unclean. Peter knew it the moment he recognized Jesus true nature. Depart from me, for I am a sinful man. Paul wrestled with it. In Romans seven he wrote, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. The law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me?

David is just beginning to realize just how desperately he needs it too. He'll get there. It took me some time, but he makes a good start here back in verse 12. **“Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”**

David's closing prayer is a submission and a reliance upon the Lord, my rock. That safety, stability, my Redeemer. That's something different entirely. The Redeemer is the one who buys back out of foreclosure, out of slavery. To set right again, to set free. God's creation shows us glory. God's law shows us righteousness, but it takes God's redemption to make us righteous and bring us to glory. Lord, this is for you, my Rock, my Redeemer.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 20 | Matthew 15

Hey Through the Word. What if I told you that you'd been living a lie? That all you thought about personal hygiene, soap, toothbrush, and deodorant was all a lie. How much would that cook your noggin?

Matthew 15 today, and Jesus is about to put a metaphorical egg in the frying pan, and cook their brains by telling them that everything that the religious leaders told them was wrong.

“Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” (Matthew 15:1-2)

This was NOT in the law of God given to Moses, but made up rules that religious people followed to show their religious obedience.

Jesus answers a question with another question. He flips it around on them like a judo master.

Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (Matthew 15:3-6)

They gave the money to the temple, which went back to pay their OWN wages. Talk about ninja-level sleight of hand! You can fool people, but you can't fool God and Jesus calls them out. Directly, in verse 7

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

**“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.” (Matthew 15:7-9)**

Wow! Jesus goes on full offensive. His claws are out when it comes to religious hypocrisy. Perhaps because nothing causes quite so much damage as when someone manipulates the system in God's name. We all see through it, and it makes the whole thing look bad.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." (Matthew 15:10-11)

Jesus is saying, no food makes you unclean, but what comes out of your mouth is what is making you unclean. Their own words were what was disgusting before God.

When Jesus verbally punches the pharisees in the face, even the disciples wince, verse 12:

Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." (Matthew 15:12-15)

You and I have to understand that this was so radical for them...the idea that what you eat doesn't pollute you. It's what comes out of your heart, not what goes into your mouth that makes you sinful. They still couldn't see that the pharisees were blind guides.

It's difficult for them to grasp that the religious leaders they'd always trusted, might actually be wrong. There can be parallels today for us as religious leaders. We should never underestimate that if Jesus came back today, he might have some equally upsetting things to say to those who are supposed to represent him. And this should cause us to keep evaluating what we say, and how we act.

"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. (Matthew 15:16)

Okay, they still don't get it. We've been told that brushing our teeth prevents cavities, resulting in a twice a day ritual that we've embarked on for years. But what if suddenly 3 out of 5 dentists told us that they were wrong! That brushing your teeth actually did nothing! We'd be the same...wait! I don't understand. That's because brushing our teeth was fundamental to our understanding about life and our daily routines.

Jesus says it again, so that they can't miss it.

“Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.” (Matthew 15:17-20)

Jesus moves on, and encounters a Canaanite woman, or a non-Jew, and talk about breaking with tradition.

“Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matthew 15:21-24)

This is important for us to pause and comprehend. It wasn't that Jesus didn't care for the gentiles; it was just a matter of timing. Paul explains later that Jesus came to the Jews first, and when they rejected Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, he was then offered as the global savior to the rest of the world. Jesus wants to help her, but he's not come to save the gentiles...at least, not yet. He'd later hand that over to the apostles, telling them, “You will do greater things than even I've done.”

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

**Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.
(Matthew 15:25-28)**

It’s important to note that Jesus appreciates the pushback he gets here. He challenges her like he wants to be challenged back. We’ve all had people that make us work for it a little bit. And Jesus here, using the term dogs, knows that it’s a derogatory term given by the religious leaders to the gentiles. Dogs in those days were scavengers. They ate corpses, and filth. They were gross! But Jesus doesn’t think that about her; he wants to minister to her to make a point. There was enough of God’s mercy to go around, and what started as crumbs falling from the table here, would soon be a truckload of grace dumped on them.

Speaking of crumbs falling, Jesus runs into yet another all day teaching and healing packed day that leads people stranded without food, and in verse 32, he has a solution:

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.

(Matthew 15:32-36)

To be clear this is the second time this miracle has been performed, the first feeding 5000, and this one feeding 4000. But the important part is that Jesus gives them the bread, and the miracle takes place quite literally in their own hands. As the twelve break the pieces of bread off, the loaves don't seem to get any smaller in their hands, and they keep having enough. Perhaps this is the point... there was enough for the Phoenician woman to grab the crumbs from under the table. There was enough for the people here.

Day 21 | Matthew 16

Hi friends, Peyton Jones here to guide you through Matthew 16 today. In our last few chapters, Jesus pushes back on man made religion. And religion can hold a ton of power for people, therefore, when you push at power, it sometimes shoves you back as Jesus experiences in Matthew 16 on our journey through the word.

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven

He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ (Matthew 16:1-3)

You have to love Jesus’s sarcasm here. A sign from heaven you say? You can almost picture him wetting his finger and holding it up in the air, as he looks up and starts to talk about the weather. Cheeky Jesus is one of my favorite versions of Jesus.

“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.” (Matthew 16:3b-4)

Yeah, Jesus says, You’ve had more signs than you can process up until now. You’ve not been paying attention. Jesus DOES say that they’ll get “the sign of Noah”, but what was that? People repenting? They saw that. Jesus calming an angry storm? The disciples saw that. When Noah was vomited out of the whale, his pale skin, bleached white by the whale’s stomach acid made him look like the walking dead...it was a resurrection of sorts. Stay tuned Jesus says...and walks away. Cheeky Jesus is cool, but mic drop Jesus is even cooler.

Jesus knows that unbelief and cynicism spreads like a virus,

“When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. “Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:5-6)

This was a slam against their teaching, that had become all about opinions instead of what God actually did and said, so Jesus takes his disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi, an area noted for paganism. It’s the furthest out he’s taken them, and there were few people would have ever heard of him, Jesus asks his disciples about people’s opinions. Verse 13.

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

**“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”
(Matthew 16:13-15)**

Before we read Peter’s answer, let me pause to say that this is the most important question each of us will ever answer. And Peter doesn’t hesitate in verse 16:

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:16-18)

Caesarea Philippi was the place where the gate to the underworld, or Hades was supposed to have been. In fact, there was a grotto there with a cave, said to be the gates of Hades where Spirit were supposed to enter into the world according to pagan superstition. There, at the seat of Satan’s power, Jesus declares war.

But Peter’s revelation and declaration at the gates of hell was significant. This realization isn’t just mere intellectual recognition of Jesus being the Messiah, it’s a spiritual revelation according to Jesus.

In fact, if you see Jesus for who He is, it's not because you're smarter than others, but because it's been GIVEN to you to see. "Flesh and blood..." or your grey matter, the firing of your synapses didn't lead you to this...but the Father in heaven revealed this to you. Jesus continues (Verse 19)

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah." (Matthew 16:19-20)

What is all of this loosing and binding all about? Different people give different opinions, and some people get downright weird with it, but the reality was that the apostles would give the gospel to the rest of the world. In Acts 2:42, we read, "They gave themselves to the apostles teaching". The gospel they preached would set people free. Their preaching of Christ would loose captives on earth, and cause others to be bound for eternity, based upon whether or not they received this revelation that Peter here shares.

You'd think that after a statement like that, it'd be all pomposity and boasting, but Jesus knows how his kingdom will conquer the enemy, and it's not what anyone would ever guess, verse 21

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Matthew 16:21-23)

Oh, how the mighty fall. Towering on top one moment, crashing to the bottom the next. To be told "blessed are you" one moment and "get behind me Satan!" the next? Satan?" They're all stunned, but nobody has the wits to ask, "Jesus, did you just call Peter Satan?"

Before they can react, Jesus makes it very clear what it means to follow Him as the Messiah. Not only must we accept His death; we must accept our own, verse 24:

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

Trying to preserve our life? That’s what empires do. Preserve their power. In a war of attrition, one side musters their forces against another, and hopes that the other side runs out of warm bodies first. But in this spiritual battle between heaven and hell, the side that sacrifices the most wins. Losing our lives is the way to victory...and it starts with Jesus’ death.

Strangely, that’s the paradox. Jesus telling his disciples that the way to win is to die makes no sense. In fact, not long from now Jesus will suffer, be stripped naked, suffer at the hands of evil men and die...on a cross...like a common criminal. And there, he will deal the crushing blow to Satan. It will be the beginning of the end of Satan. It will devastate the gates of hell and completely break the bars, and loose the chains. The beginning of the story will look bleak...but then the sign of Jonah will be given. The resurrection. The church will march forward, preaching a gospel that teaches men and women not to fear death; so much so that it would turn the world upside down. Everytime the church seems to be losing, the gospel will be winning.

But Jesus isn’t done yet. There is one final victory coming, verse 27:

“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”

**“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”
(Matthew 16:27-28)**

Okay, I know that some are wondering, what in the heck does that mean? Does that mean that Jesus is saying that the return of Christ is right around the corner and time has ratted out Christianity as a fraud? Nope! If you read the very next verses, found in the next chapter, you can see that Jesus was actually shifting slightly as an aside...some of the people here will catch a glimpse of this... The movie wouldn't be released for thousands of years, but what was about to happen on the mount of transfiguration is like the trailer, where Jesus is seen like he is in revelation, shining brighter than the sun!

That's all the time that we have for today, but know that Christianity has only won by those willing to lose; lose their lives for Him, who lost it for them. Those that are willing to lose their lives on this side of heaven, find it eternally on the other side.

Day 22 | Matthew 17

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.” (Matthew 17:1-3)

This is who Jesus really is. His flesh is a veil, his humanity like the burning bush that contained fire, yet did not burn. And here, Jesus’s last words of chapter 16 are fulfilled, some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of man, coming in his kingdom.

Why are Moses and Elijah there? We’re not told, but it’s most likely about his coming death. Both of these men were integral to the Old Testament, Moses representing the law, and Elijah representing the prophets. Jesus was about to fulfill everything that these two had communicated in the flesh. It’s hard to say whether he’s receiving encouragement from Him or if they’re asking Him questions in awe of who he is and what he’s about to do. Add it to your list of “things to ask Jesus about” when you get there.

“Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (Matthew 17:4)

This is one of those occasions when Peter doesn’t quite know what to say, but being Peter, that doesn’t stop him from talking. It’s funny really. Here are Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament supernaturally standing there speaking with Jesus, in awe of Him and Peter says, “Let’s build tents”

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5)

A polite way of communicating a divine, “Shush.”

“When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.”

(Matthew 17:6-13)

Walking down the mountain they get into a theological conversation about Elijah. Elijah was still alive. But John the baptist was the Elijah to come. He came in the power and spirit of Elijah according to Jesus in chapter _____. Elijah was a lone voice in the time of corrupt Israel, calling his nation back to God and John the Baptist was also the lone voice prepping an entire people to prepare to meet their Messiah. Similar mission, dress of camel’s hair, and diet of locusts and wild honey. Looking back, it’s kind of hard to see how anyone missed it, but that’s the funny thing...they’re walking around with the ancient of days and he ate, slept, and went to the bathroom just like anyone else. Who Jesus is is still hitting them...

They get to the bottom of the mountain and a crowd is dutifully waiting for Jesus.

“When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:14-20)

Man, the false teachers love to have a heyday with this one. They love to say that people didn’t have enough faith when a miracle isn’t performed. But this passage seems to be saying the opposite. It’s true that faith is a big deal, but Jesus says you just need the faith of a mustard seed. It’s not the size of your faith, it’s who your faith is in. Faith isn’t some power you wield. It’s trust in a person; and that person is God. Just a little faith in God is all it takes for him to do great things.

Moving on, they arrive in Capernaum after Jesus tells them that he’s going to soon die. Two things are certainties in life; death and taxes. And in verse 24, the temple tax men come collecting. Verse 24

“After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first

**fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”
(Matthew 17:24-27)**

I love that Jesus sends Peter to do what he's good at. Catch fish. And here, Peter is a part of the miracle; again.

But what a contrast between Jesus radiating glory like the sun and humbly paying his taxes. But this is the divine mystery of the incarnation. Jesus is fully man, and yet fully God. We see the bush not burned up. We see the fire burning bright. With Jesus the ground we stand on is holy ground, and like Moses, who appeared in this chapter, we take off our shoes in worship and honor. Like God said to Moses, he's going to set his people free...not from taxes...but something worse. Death, sin, and hell.

Day 23 | Matthew 18

Welcome back to Through the Word, Peyton Jones here...the greatest teacher on Through the Word...wait, everyone knows that the greatest teacher is Kris Langham...or is it someone else on the app? Or does it even matter?

Well, it mattered to the disciples in Matthew 18 verse 1:

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:1-5)

Kids are amazing, and Jesus knew it. I mean, he should know it. He designed them, right? They are humble, gentle, ready to forgive, happy to serve, willing to go along with the group, and trusting. So trusting that Jesus gives a warning to those who would exploit that trust in verse 6:

**“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!”
(Matthew 18:6-7)**

As a church planting pastor, I've had to remind my teams that it's not a question of IF the paedophile comes into your gathering, but a question of WHEN. Therefore, we need to protect the vulnerable in our midst. Admittedly, it's frustrating when we hear stories of people taking advantage of children, but Jesus gives a haunting reminder that NOBODY, and he means nobody gets away with hurting kids.

“Better a millstone hung around your neck than what happens when I get ahold of you”. Now for those who are upset by that, I’d remind you that these are the words of Jesus, and my job is not to mute or muffle them. Besides, that’s how I like my Jesus, one who cares about kids and doesn’t mess around when it comes to protecting them.

It’s verse 10 that is a bit confusing,

**“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 18:10)**

Admittedly, this passage is mysterious, but It may mean that the angels that are little ones who believe in Jesus have first priority to God’s throne, like a special access pass. I’m not sure, but whatever it is, Jesus wants us to know; kids are special.

“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:12-14)

Still talking about kids here. Jesus is specifically talking about a lamb here, as lambs often wander away. Maybe you care deeply about your kids, but Jesus is saying here, God cares more. **“In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”** We forget that sometimes, but remember, your kids are on loan to you. I adopted my children. I am their Father, but frequently I am reminded that someone entrusted them to me. That’s true of you too. God entrusted your kids to you, and if they wander off, God is still seeking them.

What about wandering away? What about sin? What about people that do stupid things?

Well, I've been that person, and I'm sure you have too. We've all wandered off, and been in need of correcting, just like our children. Jesus gives us a famous passage for us to ignore...wait, what's that? We're not supposed to ignore it?

Oh, okay, well, you see, the thing is, so few people ever obey it that I just kind of assumed...silly me. Verse 15

**“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.
(Matthew 18:15)**

This is the one people seem to have such a hard time following. When someone sins, go to them, just you and them, and talk them through it with a heart of love.

“But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

**“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”
(Matthew 18:16-20)**

Okay, so Jesus is talking here about church discipline. I get so sick of people letting the authority part be the overriding concept. The context here is how much God cares for people. I've had to enact church discipline many times, but I'll tell you something, I bend over backwards for the people to know that I'm pulling for them. I'm on their side. That they need to repent and that God loves them. That even the discipline is for them to find their way back to God.

The focus is on restoration.

Peter has the same question we have. It's about boundaries. Verse 21:

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

“Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:21-22)

I've been keeping track and I'm pretty sure that he's forgiven me more than 77 times.

Then Jesus tells an absurd parable about a man who is forgiven a huge debt but won't forgive a small debt that someone owes him. The king has him thrown into prison.

Jesus says:

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (Matthew 18:35)

Again folks, the words of Jesus here. I don't think it's meant to make you feel good, so I'm not going to try. I think it's meant to get you to think about forgiving people just as God forgave you. **“Freely you have received, now freely give”**. Every day we are told to pray, **“Forgive us our sins, just as we forgive others”** and there is a connection. We must forgive others if we expect our sins to be forgiven. For us not to is as absurd as the man in the parable, and again, Jesus hasn't been messing around in this chapter, so I don't think we should either...

So forgive me for saying that I was the greatest teacher on Through the Word, and I'll forgive you for not thinking it in the first place...deal?

Day 24 | Matthew 19

Welcome back to TTW, I'm your host Peyton Jones and today we'll be tackling some difficult subjects as we follow Jesus' journey on Through the Word. Divorce is a tough topic because many of us have been hurt by it. I went through two divorces as a young child, and I don't recommend it. Neither does Jesus.

In verse 3, the Pharisees try to trap Jesus by asking **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"**

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

(Matthew 19:3-6)

Jesus gives a masterful answer, but they spring the trap in verse 7:

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

(Matthew 19:7-8)

Man, you can almost see the crowd wince as Jesus speaks to them as if it were their hard hearts that made an exception clause for divorce necessary. But it is, isn't it? Hard hearts is why divorce happens. Somebody in the marriage, if not both has hardened their hearts in some way.

Then Jesus drops the bomb in verse 9:

"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

(Matthew 19:9)

Jesus here is interpreting what Deuteronomy 24:1 was referring to when it said a man may put his wife away for “indecency”.

Some think that Jesus is saying that you’re not okay to leave a marriage that may be physically dangerous to you. Deuteronomy deals with that too and condemns it, but in this case, Jesus is simply interpreting what the “indecency” in the spouse may be, and he answers that adultery is what the “indecency”. So if you’re in a relationship where you’re being physically threatened, you need to get help for that, and the authorities notified.

Back to the passage, in regards to adultery; Forgiveness has been a common theme, and although we’re not told that we have to forgive the adulterous spouse, Jesus here equates it with hardness of heart. I’ve never committed adultery, nor had it done to me, but I still realize what a hard saying this is. It’s meant to be hard, which is why the disciples respond in verse 10 by saying,

“If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

**“Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”
(Matthew 19:10-12)**

You thought Jesus’s statement about divorce was hard? Try this one on for size. Some people are actually single for God; kids ask your mom and dad what a eunuch is if you don’t know.

Speaking of kids:

“Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.”

**Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.
(Matthew 19:13-15)**

I love that Jesus doesn't think of what he's talking about as just adult stuff, but he includes them in everything. After all, the kingdom belongs to such as these. When I think about my kids, there is not only a fascination with Jesus that never fades, there is also an interest, and even ability to hear what he says about difficult subjects. I wish someone had told a young Peyton about these things back when I was going through divorce, and watching my parents split up. The world was very confusing, and my family didn't have Jesus...but I needed Him. And it would have helped to have been talked through the very confusing world I was trying to interpret on my own.

As Jesus was talking about heaven belonging to people who are just like children, verse 16

“Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16)

This man, we find out later in the conversation, already thought he had eternal life. After all, he was moral, decent, and rich. Then as now, people equated wealth with being blessed by God. But more than anything, this man was proud, so Jesus sets him up for some self awareness:

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:17-21)

This man thought he was perfect already. IN some ways he was hoping to hear from Jesus, “Why you're perfect already! Everyone, you know how I was saying that kids were a model of the types of people in heaven?

Welp, let me amend that, they're also like this guy right here. He's the perfect model of the types of people you find in heaven." But no, Jesus goes straight to his heart and puts his finger on the greed, or covetousness that lived there. One of the ten commandments was "You shall not covet". And this man came to realize standing right there, that he was covetous beyond belief. Literally.

Mark tells us that "Jesus, loving the man, answered". So Jesus loved this man deeply, and because of this needed him to have an awakening awareness of his own sin...so that he would realize he needed a saviour.

"When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Matthew 19:22-30)

What a great encouragement. Every sacrifice you've ever made to God is precious. Every marriage you've fought tooth and nail to preserve and protect, matters. Every relationship you've lost for Jesus is special to him and will be rewarded.

A couple of thoughts here before we close: We all are sinners. If you've been through a divorce, Jesus never says here that you're unforgiven. Guess what...on the other side of divorce, you'll find that God still loves you.

Day 25 | Matthew 20

Welcome to Matthew 20, I'm Peyton Jones and I'll be your guide today on your journey TTW!

Can you remember something in class that was just hard to get your head around? I can remember being in 3rd grade when our teacher was trying to get us to tell time. I just couldn't get it! So the teacher held us through lunch until Peyton got the breakthrough!

Matthew has been holding us over for a few chapters now on this whole grace and forgiveness thing.

Why is grace such a hard concept for us to get?

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ (Matthew 20:1-15)

God is generous. Grace is God’s generosity poured out on us. The thief on the cross gets the same forgiveness that someone who lived for God all their lives. And that’s a hard concept for all of us to grasp because we’re so ingrained in our appreciation of hard work and earning things.

But grace you earn isn’t grace. And you just can’t earn forgiveness. It’s all about the graciousness of the forgiver.

Speaking of grace, Jesus goes on to speak about his death a third time. It’s what makes it all possible. Perhaps that’s why James and John’s mother kneeling down in front of Jesus right then was such odd timing.

Jesus asks, **“What do you want me to do for you?” (Matthew 20:21a)**

In verse 21 she asks, **“Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”(Matthew 20:21b)**

Okay, this is a very Mom-like thing to ask, but asking right when Jesus is speaking about his death was a little insensitive and non-mom-like. But Jesus's response in verse 22 takes us right back to the cross.

“You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” (Matthew 20:22-23)

The cup that Jesus is referring to is his death at the hands of hateful people. “Father, if there is any other way, let this cup pass from me” he'd pray in the garden. Well, both of these boys would eventually drink the cup of suffering and death...but to sit at his right hand and left, well, that was up to the Father to grant.

This doesn't stop the rest of the disciples from being a little put out,

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:24-28)

Again, it all comes back down to being willing to die as Jesus was. To serve others until it killed him is what Jesus is modeling all throughout the book of Matthew, and he tells the disciples that this is what greatness looks like in heaven.

Speaking of serving others, Jesus leaves Jericho in verse 30:

“Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

“The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matthew 20:30-31)

You have to admire these obnoxious and desperate blind men. They have no way to get to Jesus, their only weapon is their voice. From a distance, Jesus stops and yells back at them, **“what do you want me to do for you?”**

Verse 33 “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.”

Jesus walks over to them, and becomes the living embodiment of the mercy that they’ve asked for; the blind men also a visible picture of those who are desperate for mercy and grace. That’s why Matthew carefully words verse 34,

“Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.” (Matthew 20:34)

They aren’t the only ones who are blind after all. We can be so blind to our own need before God, but also blind to the compassion that Jesus gives us despite our weakness. These men immediately begin to follow him, marveling all the way that they are able to do so. May that same wonder and awe also be true of us, that we get to follow Jesus, all because of his compassion, mercy and grace that he’s shown us; not only at the cross, but every day of our lives since then.

Day 26 | Fourth Sunday of Lent and Psalm 23

Welcome, my friends, to Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. The 23rd Psalm is elegant, iconic, classic, powerful, and perhaps the most beloved work of poetry in the history of the world. A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. What is it about these words that can move the heart so simply, so powerfully?

Perhaps it's the relationship we long for. The Lord is my shepherd, David sings, and every line echoes with contented confidence. And when he carries that contentment without fear through the valley of the shadow of death, we can't help but long for what he has. For a musical rendition, I recommend Jon Foreman's *The House of God Forever*, and the band sings Psalm 23 in Hebrew. Both are deeply moving. Verse one The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. It is one of the most sublime statements in all of Scripture to look to the creator of all the universe, the weaver of your very DNA, and see in him your shepherd, your provider, protector, and the guide of your life. I lack nothing.

That tiny statement delivers a whole world of contentedness. Not that I have everything I could imagine, but I have God and he's got me. I'm good. It should be noticed that the first statement cannot be claimed by just anyone, for the Shepherd relationship works two ways. A sheep follows a shepherd. All the description that follows is testimony to that relationship.

Sheep belong to the shepherd. They are owned, not wild. Also poignant is the order of Psalm 23. Immediately after 22, the psalm of crucifixion, the good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. It's the foundation of our trust. Verse two. **“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul.”**

And what a picture is that so tranquil. It nearly invites you in green pastures like Ireland in springtime. But it's not just the pasture, it's the protection. Sheep are vulnerable. They will not lie down until they feel secure. With my shepherd on guard, I relax.

Do you know those rare moments when you know you're safe and you actually enjoy life the way it was meant to be enjoyed? He leads me beside quiet waters. No dangerous torrents. Cool and quiet waters to restore and refresh. And yes, at this point, I picture Bob Ross painting happy trees in a meadow. So what's the metaphor here? Some see God's Word in the green grass and the refreshing of the Holy Spirit in the quiet waters. You might see more still.

That's the beauty of poetry. And perhaps my favorite line of all. He refreshes my soul. Other translations say he restores. What a thing to do. The human soul can be weighed down with worries, harassed by fears, torn apart by grief, and just plain exhausted with life. He refreshes. He restores. The Hebrew word was used for writing a sheep that had fallen onto its back.

Sheep lacked the muscle to write themselves, and a flipped sheep is wolf prey for sure. But the shepherd restores our shepherd, restores a broken, tattered, and flipped over soul. Back in verse three, he guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Path guiding is crucial. No creature is more prone to wander than sheep, nor more lost when they do.

All we like sheep have gone astray. If you've ever been truly lost and desperate to find the way, the right path is a treasured commodity. He guides us on them again and again. There are two meanings here for his name's sake. God's name represents his character. He guides me because that's who he is. He is faithful. For his name's sake also means that my actions affect his reputation. I represent him and he shows me right paths so I can better represent his righteousness.

Now, the first three verses have been somewhat idyllic and somewhat idealistic. David well knows that the right paths are not always pretty. Green pastures. So in verse four, **“even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”**

The psalm turns sharply from lush pastures into shadow and threat. The land of Bethlehem, where David kept sheep, sits on a hill surrounded by hills. Guiding sheep to pasture meant traversing valleys darker, shadowed, even dangerous.

The Hebrew word for darkest valley carries gloom and terror, and just a subtle change in Hebrew pronunciation gave it the translation, you likely recall.

Valley of the Shadow of Death. Though the word death is not explicitly there, the feeling is, for every dark shadow in life looms toward that final shadow. That's why these words have been spoken over more hospital beds, funerals and gravestones than any others. Does verse four truly offer comfort or simply placate the grief?

That depends on how honestly I can sing verse one to my shepherd. Even though I walk through. There is a knowing in that dark valley. A deep sense of awareness that the Shepherd still guides and he will see us through. I can't help but think here of the frozen movies and Olaf's absurd confidence in the creepy forest, that this will all make sense when I get older. Silly, I know. But if you've seen it, his unfazed confidence is inspiring. If not, well founded.

David, on the other hand, has reason for his faith. I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Eyes off the shadows. Eyes on the shepherd. He's with me. Don't stop. Keep walking. Emmanuel. God is with us. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Rod and staff are the shepherd's tools for leading. The shepherd prods a sheep toward good pasture, and we quickly learn to associate that slight discomfort with his faithful guidance. We learn to trust it. That crook atop the staff is great for catching a sheep standing obliviously and dangerously close to a ledge. Ever been there? The rod was for guidance, but also for correction.

The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and the staff doubles as a weapon for protection. When I see the wolf watching from the hilltop, my eyes dart back to the shepherd's staff and find great comfort. I have deep appreciation for the word comfort in the Bible. It is often used for the consoling offered to one grieving. Here it is not a soft, pillowy sort of comfort, but the shepherd's strength and care that provides safety.

The firm boundaries delivered by rod and staff. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and he works in our lives very much like a shepherd's rod and staff. Guiding, convicting, correcting, protecting. Verse five you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Now, I must confess this line has long confused me. Why would I want to picnic in the company of enemies?

David has previously expressed great fear and frustration with enemies. Yet here in Psalm 23, David's heart is transformed. He is safe. He is content. The Lord is with him. God prepared a table. That's an invitation to relax and enjoy food, to enjoy the company of your host. The Lord is indeed a gracious host. And perhaps the most surprising part of it all is in fact, the presence of enemies. As a warrior, David knows that you don't stop to enjoy food when the enemy is near. Yet here is David, enemies still in view, but heart at peace, able to fully enjoy the hospitality of his Lord.

Wolves watching, but the sheep nibbles away at the grass. Trusting the shepherd to protect something I figured out. I can't afford to wait for my problems to go away. To enjoy life. Trust God and enjoy the table. Back in verse five, you anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. There is goodness in these words, a sense of deep gratitude. It is that moment when you look around at life and see all that God has given you.

Suddenly you realize how distracted you were with all that could go wrong and how you lost sight of what you have. My cup overflows. The picture is of a gracious and generous host welcoming you, the sort of host who really wants you to enjoy his generosity. That one's a life lesson for me. One that I too easily forget. Enjoy grace. Enjoy God's grace. Open your heart to enjoy it, and you'll find your heart running full over with plenty spilling over to share all around.

And as the Psalm closes, David looks at the feast before him with gratitude overflowing. He lifts his eyes heavenward in verse six, **“surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”**

And what a blissful place to close chase through life by the Lord's goodness and love, and a contented confidence for all of forever to come. I will dwell at home and at peace in the house of the Lord forever.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 27 | Matthew 21

Welcome back to TTW. Matthew 21 today and we're $\frac{2}{3}$ through the story. As we enter this chapter, Jesus enters Jerusalem. Once he sets foot into the area of Jerusalem, he won't exit it again. This is all leading up to his death, but as they approach the Mount of Olives where Jesus is going to sleep rough for the next few nights, Jesus sends his disciples to get a donkey. He's going to enter Jerusalem in style...and yes, I said style. Riding a donkey back then was a symbolic gesture of a king coming in peace.

But Matthew tells us it fulfills prophecy in verse 4:

“This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

**“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”
(Matthew 21:4-5)**

The people get it. Verse 8

“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

**“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”
(Matthew 21:8-9)**

This causes a stir. The crowds are ripping palm branches off of the trees. People are throwing their outer garments on the road before him like he's a king. If you're a pharisee, this is problematic. The Romans tolerate you, and your talk of the coming Messiah, but if another ruler comes to challenge Caesar, it's treason. And treason means wholesale slaughter.

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:10-11)

He's hailed as a prophet. All eyes are on him. What he does next is unfortunate for the religious racket, then. Jesus for the second time cleanses the temple. Verse 12

“Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’” (Matthew 21:12-13)

Jesus starts and ends his public ministry by breaking up all of the money making religious cons going on in the temple; a place that should have been dedicated to prayer and seeking God, but had been turned into preying on the helpless, and sucking them dry in the name of God. What made it worse for the religious teachers was Jesus's actions were backed up by miracles that they had no power to perform; showing God was with Him in this! Verse 14

“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

**“From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise?”
(Matthew 21:14-16)**

Always leave it to Jesus to give the Pharisees a good burn. As the salt rubs into an open wound, Jesus goes back to the mount of olives and spends the night. Verse 18:

“Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered. (Matthew 21:18-19)

We don't see Jesus killing things often but healing instead. So why does he curse the fig tree? Jesus told a parable about Israel being like a fig tree. In that parable, the fig farmer has a plant not bearing fruit. It's taking up space, but Jesus says, “Gives it a little more time to bear fruit. If it doesn't, we'll pull it up.”

But that time was up. Israel was meant to bear the fruit of worship like the triumphant entry; to worship and receive him as the Messiah, not just one day, like a glimpse of what could have been...but a complete surrender to Him.

He's about to walk into Jerusalem and never walk out again due to their rejection. And that rejection would lead to the destruction of their temple, when it would be razed to the ground and turned to rubble, never to be built again.

As he enters the temple, the rejection of the priests is on full display when they ask in verse 23 “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

You have to love Jesus's response in verse 24 where he answers their question with another question:

“Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

“They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’” (Matthew 21:24-27)

This is like watching people dummy up in court. “I don’t recall”. Remember, this started with them asking him a question about authority.

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Matthew 21:27b)

Touche Jesus!

But he’s not done. He tells a parable about a Father asking his two sons to work in the vineyard. One says, “Yes Father” but doesn’t go. The other son says, “No...” but goes and works; Jesus asks in verse 31

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

**“‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”**

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” (Matthew 21:31-44)

That's the choice then.

Fall on Jesus broken over your sin and rejection of him, or have Him fall on you in judgment.

Jesus tells one more parable about a vineyard that has become corrupted like the temple, and in this case, the servants want it for themselves, so the owner who lives far away keeps sending servants like God sent the prophets, but they kill them all. Finally he says, "Surely, they will respect my son..." But they kill him too.

Make no mistake, Jesus isn't messing around here. Reject or receive Him. There are only two responses to being confronted with who Jesus is. Will you worship Him as the people did in the entry into Jerusalem, or will you reject him as a threat to your way of life as the Pharisees did? Jesus leaves you a little time to decide...but not too much...be careful, and choose wisely before it's too late.

Day 28 | Matthew 22

Welcome back to Through the Word. Peyton Jones here and I'll be your guide on your journey through Matthew 22.

Most of us have been sucked into a video game at least once in our life, whether it's something like Zelda, or old school Pacman...but for ME it was Pitfall in the 80s. A 16-bit pixelated Indiana Jones was mine to control through swamps, across pits and over logs.

Well, Matthew 22 sees Jesus avoiding the pitfalls that the Pharisees try and lay for him with three carefully crafted questions designed to trap Jesus in his own words. Jesus, who cracked the whip in the temple and told unflattering parables about them in our last chapter, continues it in this one: Verse 1:

“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

**“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.
(Matthew 22:1-12)**

So, first, Jesus presents the Pharisees as “those unwilling to come” for whatever reason. And the city being destroyed in the parable is a reference to the temple being razed to the ground by the Romans; orchestrated by God in judgment against them for rejecting the living temple walking in their midst; Jesus. In the earlier chapter, Jesus had said that the prostitutes and tax collectors were entering heaven before the religious teachers because they RECEIVED Jesus, but at the end of the parable, we see “a man not wearing wedding clothes” and this refers to someone trying to sneak in for the free food...but he didn't know the guest.

That still happens today. People smell the food, see the party, and try to blend in. The religious leaders wanted to go to the King's banquet, but they didn't know the King.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

**“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”
(Matthew 22:13-14)**

The word chosen here would have stung. The religious teachers prided themselves on being God's chosen people, but here, Jesus is saying that God's chosen people are no longer defined by being Hebrews; they are those who receive Him.

The religious teachers are ready for a counter attack.

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

**They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.
(Matthew 22:15-16)**

The Herodians would surely report Jesus to the Romans.

“Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” (Matthew 22:16-17)

Note the elaborate set up, complete with two-faced flattery

“But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?” (Matthew 22:18)

I love that Jesus calls them out directly. A hypocrite is an actor, and Jesus tells them, “I see right through you.”

“Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

“When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.” (Matthew 22:19-22)

That is amazing! He literally tells them that if Caesar’s image is stamped on it, then they’re just borrowing it. But God’s image is stamped on you! Therefore, give YOURSELF to God. Jesus was beyond capable of handling these jokers.

But then, the Pharisees and Sadducees try and get him to take a theological side in their debate about the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, so they give a ridiculous scenario where a woman has the worst luck ever with men. They keep dying on her. In the end they ask which man will be her husband in the afterlife?

Again, Jesus's response seems so effortless. He sidesteps their pitfall, and answers in verse 29:

“Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”
(Matthew 22:29-32)

Not only did he tell them that THEY didn't know the scriptures to even ask a question like that, he also tells them that God introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob like they were ALIVE, and still worshipping Him.

Verse 33 tells us,

When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. In a way, he did pick a side on that one.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:33-40)

Okay, so far, Jesus has sidestepped every trap, alligator den, and covered pit that they've laid out for him...but like Indiana Jones, Jesus can fight and give as good as he gets. So he gives them a riddle in return, and they walk right into it.

**“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42
“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”**

“The son of David,” they replied.

He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

**“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.””**

If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.” (Matthew 22: 41-46)

Heheh. No one dared to ask him any more questions. They fell victim to one of the classic blunders. The most famous is “Never match wits with a Sicilian when death is on the line”, but a lesser known one is “Never go toe to toe in a battle of wits with the creator of the Universe”.

Until next time, I'm Peyton Jones, and I'll see you next time on our journey through the word.

Day 29 | Matthew 23

Welcome back! I'm Peyton Jones and it's time to open up a can of Through the Word as we jump into Matthew 23, where Jesus opens up a can on the pharisees...

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.” (Matthew 23:1-4

Listen, but don't imitate.

Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. (Matthew 23:5-7

Pomposity on parade makes me sick...how about you? Jesus wasn't crazy about it and tells us “Everything they do is done for people to see” - in other words, with them, what you see is what you get. All you see is a show. And a show is all there is.

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.” (Matthew 23:8-9)

There are people who think that Jesus is saying “don't call your earthly Father, Father.” But the gospel writers use the word “father” for Joseph, and other earthly fathers, so it can't mean that.

Context is key, and in context, Jesus means, don't exalt leaders to the position of God-like status putting them in the place of Exalted beings.

I remember once asking Warren Weirsbe to sign my bible. I know, I hear how it sounds now, but he helped me understand it so much, it seemed fitting at the time. Not to him though...he wrote "Be no man's disciple" and signed his name, and handed it back to me with a wry grin. Point taken Warren W. Weirsbe. (Whisper - "You're still one of the greatest...")

"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12)

We should always be careful exalting people who will be humbled in the presence of God.

Speaking of humbling...Jesus was about serve up humble pie to the Pharisees in a series of 7 Woes...which is a bit like saying curses; a bit like the cursing of the fig tree in the previous chapter. When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who" in the beatitudes, yeah, this is like the opposite of that.

There are 7 woes here, meaning their judgment was total, again, like the fig tree.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to." (Matthew 23:13)

Ouch, not only are the Pharisees NOT going to heaven, they are blocking the way of others trying to get in by misrepresenting God. Whew, so glad people don't do that today...(who said that sarcasm was lost on Christians...) 1 Curse down, 6 more to go.

The next one says that when they do make a convert, they convert them for the wrong team.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are." (Matthew 23:15)

Jesus goes on to poke holes in their religious hypocrisy, specifically the self-serving loopholes they exploited for their own gain.

Through all these woes, Jesus calls them hypocrites (or actors, fakers), sons of hell, blind guides, blind men, blind pharisees, and brood of vipers.

Note the three times Jesus called them blind. That's because they actually thought they were serving God when they weren't. That should cause us to sit up and take notice. Am I serving others? Or am I serving God? Or am I serving myself? In verse 25 Jesus summarizes:

“You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

(Matthew 23:25)

Jesus is almost finished as he lands the final woe in verse 29:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!” (Matthew 23:29-32)

Jesus now reminds them that despite boasting they would never have killed the prophets, they're about to kill Him, the Son of God. They never stopped to think that maybe they were missing who God sent to them just like their ancestors did. Jesus continues in verse 33.

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.” (Matthew 23: 33-36)

This is a direct reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. When the Greeks and Babylonians destroyed the temple, the prophets predicted it as God’s judgment. Here, Jesus is doing the same.

Matthew doesn’t tell us this, but the other gospel writers do. By the time Jesus speaks the words in verse 37, there are tears streaming down his face. It’s easy to hear the heartbreak in Jesus as you read these final words. Just like it’s not been hard to imagine that he’s hurt in the woes... Jesus’s heart is breaking over His people and their rejection of Him, brings Him pain.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” (Matthew 23: 37)

You know, that’s what he wants of all of us...to gather us together as a hen. To nurture and protect us...but they weren’t willing. Are we?

Day 30 | Matthew 24

Welcome back, I'm your host Peyton Jones and I'll be your guide through Matthew 24 today on our Journey Through the word.

Matthew 24 is one of the longest chapters in Matthew! Trying to fit it all in 10 minutes would be like trying to explore the grand canyon by flying over in a jetliner. So I'll leave you to put your pack on and hike down into the basin on your own because there's a LOT here! In this chapter Jesus is going to talk about what we call "the end times", and followers of Jesus have some different views on this subject. Jesus predicts something that happens in AD70 when the Romans rolled in and completely obliterated Jerusalem destroying the temple to melt down the gold in the Holy of holies. Some Christians think that Jesus is ONLY talking about AD70, while others think he's talking about something in the future. But what if it was both? AD70, being a mini-fulfillment of what's going to happen in the future as history repeats itself?

Let's jump in at verse 1, as Jesus is walking away from a hot debate with the pharisees:

"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

**"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"
(Matthew 24:1-3)**

Jesus is upset here, and perhaps the disciples are trying to ease the tension, "Lord, look at the buildings!" I can picture Jesus spinning around, "Do you see these buildings? They'er going to be destroyed?" The disciples have inquiring minds, and their inquiring minds want to know, "When will this happen, and what will the signs of your coming be, and the end of the age?"

Keep in mind, “the sign of your coming” means when will you show them all who you are? Jesus hadn’t died, so they didn’t understand the second coming the way that we do today. The chapter is Jesus’s answer to the question, a.) When will the temple be destroyed? b.) When will you show them who you are by riding in triumphantly, and c.) what’s the sign of the end of the age?” \

Also, the end of the age” doesn’t mean the end of all ages...just that one. What age was ending? God was shifting AWAY from the use of the temple, as Jesus was the fulfillment of the temple, the place where God met man, and dealt with sin. He even claimed once, “Destroy this temple and I’ll raise it up again in three days” but he was talking about his body. But here, he’s talking about the building itself being destroyed.

“Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.” (Matthew 24:4-8)

All of this happened and can be verified historically in the years spanning AD33 (when Jesus died) to AD70. In fact, the book of Colossians was written to a church that was completely destroyed during one of these great earthquakes. False Messiahs? The Romans actually descended upon Jerusalem because the Jews were rallied around a false Messiah and tried to resist Rome under him in AD70, bringing in the Roman General Titus!

Jesus says something interesting in verse 14:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Jesus is still answering the question about AD70 and the destruction of the temple, so had the gospel been preached as a testimony to all nations by then? Well, to what the apostles knew, YES! By AD70, Paul was already in full swing, having completed all three missionary journeys by around AD60. The gospel had to every nation they knew of at that time, particularly because Paul had purposely planted across the major trade routes, and through the Roman empire, the gospel went everywhere. But maybe, Christ's second coming will be fulfilled when all the nations WE KNOW today are reached!

And then the most mysterious statement Jesus makes about the anti-Christ is found in verse 15:

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Matthew 24:15-16)

“Let the reader understand.”

That's Matthew's way of saying, “Put your tinfoil hat on”. Actually, every gospel writer includes this aside, “Let the reader understand...”. That something like this happened during the 400 year silent period when Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed pigs in the Holy of Holies to mock Jewish worship. But here, Jesus is saying, it's going to happen again. Daniel prophesied that happening, but history is going to repeat itself. And it did, Roman General Titus lifted the Eagle standard, the symbol of Vespasian, the Emperor God in the holy place!

Jesus says, **“Let those who are in Judea flee”** and mentions those on their rooftops not going down into the house. That's a first century reference. He hopes it's not on a sabbath or during the winter. All things that don't make much sense in today's modern Israel.

People who argue that this is about the future, argue that verse 21 says “It'll be the worst ever!” Let's read it **“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again”** and think but it's the worst! How can that have been AD70?

Well, the siege was so bad that women ate their babies. That's bad, but the same hyperbolic phrase **"never to be equaled again"** was used for Babylon as well, and women ate their babies then too. Jesus is actually reusing Old Testament phrases and reminding them of all the things that the prophets said about God's judgment on Israel coming in times past. The sign of his coming is the sign of God's judgment...on them! Not on the pagans!

That was bad news for the Jews of that time, But let's move on to verse 22 to get some good news

"If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:22)

Interestingly, the believers who did survive the siege of Jerusalem survived because they took this passage seriously. When they saw "Jerusalem surrounded by armies" in Luke 21, they headed for the hills and were not slaughtered in the massacre. Remember, this was because of a false Messiah that gave the Jews false hope of a successful revolt against the Romans. The days were cut short because the Jews massacred everyone.

Jesus gives a solemn warning to his followers:

"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

"Immediately after the distress of those days

**"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'**

**“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”
(Matthew 24:26-31)**

This could be AD70 still if Jesus is using apocalyptic language like they did in the Old Testament, but it seems to me to have double fulfillment, directly for them then, and for his future coming as well. Joseph used the sun, moon and stars to refer to his Mom and dad, and brothers, the symbol of the nation of Israel, the powers that be, being replaced. And here, the temple is going to be replaced. Destroyed, never to be rebuilt for 2000 years...as if God is sending a message, all you need is Jesus!

One more warning in verse 32 using the fig tree, another symbol of Israel:

**“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.”
(Matthew 24: 32-33)**

What's near? What's right at the door? The destruction of the temple. Jesus is still answering the question the disciples asked about the destruction of the temple, “When Lord? When will these things take place?”

But then, Jesus puts a time stamp on the conversation in verse 34

“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Matthew 24:34-35)

Jesus finishes the chapter telling them to be ready. Life will go on as normal until these things take place. Remember, it was going to be nearly 40 years later. There would be upheaval and tensions that would finally break, just like they always do, but Jesus is saying, "You will know that it's me. You will remember this. I told you. We talked about it." Just be ready.

Regardless of your view, AD70 only, or AD70 plus more to come in the future, we know that we all need to be ready for his second coming!

Jesus is coming at any moment, and we must be ready today.

Day 31 | Matthew 25

Urban legends have been told since the dawn of time to scare kids into eating all of their vegetables, or not talking to strangers. I was told that eating raw cookie dough would give you worms...I'm sure that was the way my mom kept two boys from eating it out of the refrigerator.

But scary stories can also be told from the pulpit. Some Bible teachers have used this chapter to scare Christians into good behavior, but it's my humble opinion that we may have been reading them wrong. Notice verse 1 says, "**At that time...**" referring to the destruction of the temple...Jesus shifts gears from his predictions in chapter 24 about the destruction of the temple, and enters into story time. Chapter 25 is made up of three parables about being ready! Being watchful. Jesus follows up his predictions about the destruction of the temple in AD70, and the end of the age, with some parables that warn them to be ready for the coming destruction.

These parables therefore, that are often used to scare us about his second coming, are actually to that generation who had missed his first coming!

That's why Verse 1 says:

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

"Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep." (Matthew 25:1-5)

The young groom is coming across the sand to sweep his bride away, in the middle of the night. Hard to not get drowsy and fall asleep, but in this parable, they did. Suddenly, the watchman sees him coming, but as everyone is sleeping, their lamps have burned down and are out of oil!

Verse 7, **“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’**

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.” (Matthew 25:7-10)

What? They missed it. The bridegroom came, and they’d not been ready. This was certainly the case with the Israelites who didn’t recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They’d been waiting for so long for the promised one, but when he came, they couldn’t see...they had no oil to give them light.

“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:11-13)

They weren’t ready for the arrival of the groom and couldn’t be let into the father’s party. The Lord says, “I don’t know you” and won’t let them in.

Pretty simple stuff. A warning against missing who Jesus was...at his FIRST coming. The people who heard Jesus’s predictions about the coming destruction of the temple and the invasion of Jerusalem, were like those who fell asleep because it took so long to happen...

So why have so many preachers told me that it was really about a believer MISSING the return of Jesus and being left behind. The point of it isn’t a future tense warning for preachers to tell us boogie man stories about Jesus, that if we weren’t ready, he wouldn’t take us.

The key is found in Jesus saying, **“I don’t know you.”** Knowing Jesus is the key here, and if you’re a believer. You know Him. Rest easy.

Okay, on to the second parable in verse 14, the parable of the talents (which didn't mean your natural abilities, but about the weight of 50 pounds of money..it was a lot). Surely you've had people try to frighten you with this one too. They often say, "Don't bury your talents" and frighten children with being thrown into hell for wasting opportunities! But that doesn't sound like Christianity either. You go to hell if you're not good enough? Not resourceful enough? Not industrious enough? Not only does it not fit the context, it's also not like Jesus. He'll throw you into hell for other things first.

Let's take a closer look:

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey." (Matthew 25:14-15)

Jesus has just been speaking about the judgment on Israel at the hands of the Romans in AD 70. It would be nearly 40 years between the time that Jesus died and rose again, until the destruction of the temple, when most standing there would be slaughtered by the Romans sacking Jerusalem. So the term "he went on his journey" means again, he's gone for a long time.

Verse 16:

"The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money." (Matthew 25:16-18)

The first two servants did something with what they were given, and in this case, we could guess that Jesus means that they believed. They took what revelation God had given them through the Old Testament, and it went to work for them, and brought them to Jesus!

They responded to the Old Testament promises, and placed their faith in Jesus, and it just kept growing...but the third servant did nothing with all that time...and in verse 24, he gives us the reason,

“I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.” (Matthew 25: 24-25)

He thought God to be hard, and mean, rather than gracious, compassionate, and merciful as Jesus modeled so often during his ministry.. So out of fear, he avoided the whole thing altogether.

He's thrown into **darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**'

When the Master comes and looks for a return on the investment, he's angry with the person who did nothing with it and chose to ignore what he was given. He had all the chances to believe, all the same opportunity to respond, but didn't.

Not responding to Jesus sounds more consistent with what Jesus is saying here, than a scary story about believers being thrown into hell for not doing enough.

Okay, NOW we shift to the end of the world. How do we know? Well, he tells us in verse 31:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (Matthew 25:31-32)

Okay, now we're talking about the judgment seat of Christ at the end of the world, where verse 33 tells us:

“He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ (Matthew 25:33-36)

I love that the righteous are shocked...

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25:37-40)

Ah...they don't remember doing it for Jesus, but they DO remember doing it for what Jesus calls **“Brothers and sisters of mine.”** or his followers. Jesus is saying if you didn't do this FOR MY FOLLOWERS, you didn't do it for me! Mind blowing, but let's continue, as Jesus faces the goats in verse 41:

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ (Matthew 25:41-43)

The wicked are also in shock...they don't deserve this!

Sure, they mistreated Jesus's followers, just like they did Jesus. Kind of ironic that he stands before them now as their judge.

So in verse 44 they mount their defense:

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:44-46)

Again, all three are parables about missed opportunities. Missed opportunities to receive Jesus like the bridegroom. Missed opportunities to use what revelation you have about God to receive even greater revelation about Jesus! And finally, the missed opportunity to know God through his people. All three stories end with believers going to heaven, and nonbelievers going to hell.

That's important.

Believers, don't fall for urban legends, or spooky stories about how Jesus throws believers into the pit of hell...because it's just not true. It's just not Jesus.

And just like you shouldn't eat all the cookie dough out of the fridge, take candy from strangers, or stay out after dark, you shouldn't listen to anything that frightens you into believing that Jesus would leave you behind, or send you to hell for not doing enough.

Listen to Jesus instead. Listen to that last parable where Jesus tells you that however people treat you, is how they treat Him. That's what he thinks about you boys and girls, and there's nothing scary about that.

Day 32 | Matthew 26

Rejection.

We've all been through it. Family, friend, boyfriend - girlfriend, rejection hurts. And Jesus knows it. Jesus went through it. Rejected - by those he came to save. Imagine that - a doctor refused by the sick - or a firefighter rejected by people trapped in a fire.

Here, in the course of one night, we will see - Jesus rejected by the religious leaders, abandoned by his closest companions, and betrayed - by a friend. But first, we back up a couple days to begin the chapter on Tuesday. It's Passover week, and Jerusalem is bustling with the crowds of visiting Jews who have come to celebrate - and to remember - that God saves His people.

“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.” (Matthew 26:3-4)

The chief priests and elders have had enough. They have talked for a while about getting rid of Jesus, but now they've agreed it is time. But not just yet. In verse 5, **“But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”**

Jerusalem is packed with people, and the priests want to kill Jesus - quietly - without attention. But God has another plan. Jesus had already told his disciples that he would be killed at Passover, and 1 Corinthians 5 calls Christ our Passover lamb - the spotless lamb who rescued us from death itself. And God's timing would not be thwarted by the plans of wicked men.

While this was going on, Jesus was in a town called Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem.

“While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.” (Matthew 26:6-7)

John's gospel tells us this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. She poured out the expensive perfume, anointing him with the fragrant oils. It seems that she had been listening to Jesus more carefully than the disciples had. After all, he told them all that he would be crucified - and in verse 12, he says, **“When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.”**

But not all the disciples were pleased with this act of worship. **“When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” (Matthew 26:8-9)**

Now John also tells us that the ringleader of the angry response here was Judas. The reason he was upset was that he was the official treasurer, and he was skimming money off the top.

If Mary had just donated the perfume, Judas could have made some cash on it. He was so upset that he sought out the chief priests, and offered to betray Jesus to them.

I have often wondered at this man Judas. It's hard to know what was going on inside his twisted mind. To betray a savior. But then, I wonder at people today - who twist faith in order to fleece a few bucks off of God's people. They trade Heaven for a Rolex, and every tick on that diamond watch brings them closer to hell.

Well, we move forward two days, and in V 17 the disciples are making plans to celebrate the Passover meal. Passover is a beautiful tradition and great feast to celebrate God's deliverance out of Egypt, found in the book of Exodus.

There at the dinner, Jesus announces in verse 21, **“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”** The disciples are shocked, and all began asking, “Is it I?”

Jesus answered in verse 23: **“The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”**

There was a traitor in their midst. When Judas asked if it was He who would betray Jesus, Jesus said yes.

What is beautiful about this passage, is that despite His coming arrest, torture, and death, Jesus celebrated a feast that was about life and redemption. In fact, Jesus filled the meal with new meaning.

Now if you haven't caught on yet - this meal - is the one we call the Last Supper. And there at the table, Jesus broke bread with His friends. For the Jews, sharing bread - was a sign of fellowship - the same bread that's part of me is part of you. And according to Jewish custom - before the Passover meal, a special stack of three flat breads were wrapped together. The second of the three was removed, and broken in half. They would wrap the broken bread in *linen* cloth, and the master of the table would hide it. The kids all searched, and the finder won a special prize.

And some speculate - that Jesus chose this bread - to share with his disciples, and begin the tradition we call Communion. In verse 26, **“Take and eat; this is my body.”**

But consider the symbolism. The three pieces together - like a trinity. The second piece - removed, broken - as Jesus' body would be broken for us - wrapped in linen, and hidden away in a tomb. And for whosoever finds the risen Son of God, there is indeed a great prize!

Now the cups of wine at the Passover table also came with much ceremony and purpose. The cup that Jesus took in verse 27 was likely the last of four traditional cups on the table, commonly called the cup of Elijah, or the cup of redemption. This cup was usually left full, as the Jews would leave a place setting for Elijah, just in case he came. Remember, the Jews were looking for Elijah to come before the Messiah.

But here, Jesus takes the cup, and shares the cup of redemption with His disciples. And as he did, Jesus said in verse 28, **“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** Indeed, it is the blood of Jesus that brings us our redemption.

Now after the meal was finished, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Judas had already left to find the chief priests, but he is not the only one who would abandon Christ.

“Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ (Matthew 26:31)

Jesus knew they would run away, but Peter is still confident. In verse 33, **“Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**

Verse 34, **“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.” (Matthew 26:34-35)**

The disciples mean well - their spirit is willing, but their flesh is weak. Jesus moves to a garden called Gethsemane, and there He pours out some heart-wrenching prayers before His father. He knows what’s coming, but he submits humbly to His Father’s will. If it’s the only way to save us, Jesus will do it. But his disciples - fall asleep.

No time for sleeping now. Under cover of darkness, Judas leads the priests - along with a battalion of soldiers - to Jesus. They arrest him, and in verse 56, **“Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”** Funny how a couple hours and a few hundred soldiers can change your attitude.

But Peter comes back, and follows Jesus at a distance. He sits down in the courtyard of the high priest, as Jesus is taken to Caiaphas for a pre-dawn trial. Peter pretends that he’s just there to see what the commotion is about.

When a girl recognizes him as one of Jesus' disciples, Peter at first simply denies it. Then another girl, and Peter swears an oath.

A third accusation comes, and in verse 74: **“Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”**

The trial has begun. The Son of God - stands accused - in the courts of man. The hypocrites - the men whom Jesus called sons of hell, and vipers - finally have Jesus in their den, and the sun has yet to rise.. This is their hour - when darkness reigns.

Matthew 26, The Rejection of the King, on Through the Word.

Day 33 | Fifth Sunday of Lent and Psalm 130

Welcome back through the Word. I'm Melanie Hurlbut, and I'll be your guide for Psalm 130. A Song of Ascents that engages all Israel in a hope filled prayer for forgiveness in Psalm 121.

As the pilgrims were starting their ascent to Zion, they had sung out boldly. I lift my eyes up to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Now in Psalm 130, we hear the pilgrims corporately raise their voice to the Lord, calling for him to come quickly to their rescue. Let's join them in verse 1, **“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.”**

Notice where Israel locates itself at the start of this psalm in the depths. Isn't that surprising? This is the 11th of 15 of the Songs of Ascent. The pilgrims are starting the final third of their climb up to Jerusalem. As a traveling company, they have sung about Israel's remarkable restoration of fortunes when the Lord delivered them from Babylon.

Their travel ballads have replayed Israel's devastating history of conflict with the nations. They've declared that Israel stands alone, uniquely as God's people among the nations. And yet here they are in the depths, crying out to God for mercy. What's going on? A brief word study can help us.

The word here for depths means deep waters. Also used in Isaiah 51 to describe the peril of a watery grave. During the Exodus, when Israel had been trapped by Pharaoh's armies with their backs to the Red sea, escape had seemed impossible, and both Pharaoh's armies and the waters had threatened to obliterate them.

But instead, miraculously, Yahweh had made a pathway through the sea, their enemies were drowned instead of them, and they were brought safely to Mount Sinai to meet their god. Out of the depths, I cry to you, Lord. All these Exodus images are packed into these words. A groaning that becomes a national prayer for God to do again what he has done before.

This band of Jews on pilgrimage to Zion need the Lord to fight for them, their enemies all around them. Sometimes Persians, Samaritans, Amalekites, Greeks threatened to obliterate them. But that's not the worst of their problems. No, their backs are against their national sins of disobedience, disloyalty to God, their idolatry that continues to plague them.

Truly, Israel carries within them the sins of the world. They need a new kind of exodus. They need a new Moses. They need the Lord to fight for them. They need mercy, a new way of escape, not just from their enemies without, but from their enemy of sin within. They need forgiveness. And so they pray in verse 3, **“if you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you,”** face to face with Israel's ongoing failure.

What did these Jewish pilgrims do? They join their voices with Moses, as he had done in Exodus 34, and pray on the basis of Yahweh's name in faith. They press on, refusing to let their nation's sins deter them from their upward journey.

For Martin Luther, this psalm was immensely personal. When shut up in Coburg Castle in Saxony, under the Duke's protection from the Pope, Luther turned to this psalm to fight against depression and fear. He used this prayer to throw them back in the face of the devil, trusting God to make a way forward where there seemed to be no way. It was a prayer for himself, but also a prayer that would provoke a reformation away from penance to repentance, forgiveness and faith.

Similarly, John Wesley, shortly after experiencing his heart strangely warmed through Christ's work of faith, prayed this psalm to find mercy when he heard these words read aloud in Saint Paul's Cathedral. The forgiveness he received as a result was transformational a way out of sin not just for himself, but for England and America. The start of the Great Awakening that went global.

Isn't this incredible what might happen today if we let prayers for our own needs, for our own forgiveness, for our own rescue, become prayers for all of us? Forgiveness so that we can, with reverence, serve the Lord right here.

In these words we find hope and a prayer for a national rescue, for a global movement, for God's intervention to save those we love and with us through Jesus to transform his world. Why not another great awakening? Why not the nations baptized and disciplined in our day? After all, Jesus taught us to pray. Our father, forgive us our sins, so that together with him we can carry before our Father God the sins of the world, to see them forgiven and healed.

And so the pilgrims pray in verse 5, **“I wait for the Lord. My whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning. More than watchmen wait for the morning.”** There's a lot of repetition packed into these two short verses. Did you hear it? Five times.

The pilgrims declared that they're waiting for the Lord. But remember, this is a traveling song for their upward journey to Zion. Like Eugene Peterson's famous book. This kind of waiting is characterized by a long obedience in the same direction. It's an active waiting that leans into all the promises of God, with eager expectation of the dawning of a new day.

And with that new day, God's forgiveness that sets them free. And just as we've heard David throughout the Psalms admonishing his soul, telling himself, Saul, put your hope in God, for you will yet praise him. Listen in verse seven, **“Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from their sins.”(Psalms 130:7-8)**

This psalm proclaims Israel's one hope, and it was this one hope that set them apart from all the nations of the world. With the Lord is unfailing love. With him is full redemption. The Lord himself will redeem Israel from their sins.

Martin Luther called this a Pauline Psalm. It reveals the righteousness of God. It proclaims the good news that it's the Lord who brings salvation to everyone who believe. When deep waters overwhelm us and we see no way to save our planet, our nation, our family, or even ourselves. Like these pilgrims, we lift our eyes. We press onward in obedience. We cry out for help, and we put our hope in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

This amazing psalm has many fabulous musical renditions, but my personal favorite is by Shane and Shane. Why not listen to it now and join with all God's pilgrims in singing this prayer of redemption for Israel and for the world.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 34 | Matthew 27

Welcome back to TTW, Matthew 27 today and the ground that we tread on is holy ground.

Have you ever made a bad deal in your life? Man, I have. I'm the worst negotiator in the world. But not history. There have been some bad swaps in history; like the Louisiana purchase, where France sold some seemingly worthless land to our founding fathers and got swindled out of about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the United States land mass. Today we read about trades, and exchanges...one that Judas makes, and the one that Jesus makes for us. They are all considered one-sided trades.

Let's start in verse 3, where Judas on shaky ground takes actions that cause him to spill blood on cursed ground.

“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

“So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:3-5)

A sad end to a sad man's life.

Judas didn't value Jesus. Sold him for 30 pieces of silver, but realizes only too late how worthless his own life was without Jesus as he braces himself to jump from a cliff with a noose around his neck.

Meanwhile, Jesus stands before Pilate and refuses to defend himself **“to the great amazement of the governor.”**

Verse 15, **“Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.**

While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.”

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

“All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:15-25)

Whoa! That sends shivers up my spine; especially in relation to the previous chapters regarding the coming judgment on Jerusalem that Jesus has been predicting.

“Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.” (Matthew 27:26)

Barabbas, the guilty, is set free, while Jesus the innocent suffers in his place...just like he did for each one of us.

Jesus is flogged, beaten, mocked by soldiers and as he is so physically weak, he's unable to march through the streets to Jerusalem. As he stumbles in pain they make Simon from Cyrene carry the cross until verse 33:

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it." (Matthew 27:33-34)

Jesus refuses to drink the wine mixed with vinegar; despite his throat being tortuously dry from losing so much fluid from swelling, bleeding, and sweating. The vinegar will only make him more thirsty and was a cruel trick intended to slack his thirst in the short-term while increasing it in the long-term.

"When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Matthew 27:33-37)

"When they had crucified him". Our eternity hinges on what those few short words try to convey, but it's impossible to grasp on this side of eternity, all that Christ was suffering for our sins. The whole day was hard to grasp, but Matthew keeps recounting the scene, the madness, the behavior of the crowd, unwittingly fulfilling prophecy...

And then, verse 45

"From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). (Matthew 27:45-46)

It's at this very moment that God unleashes his wrath upon Jesus, and for the first time, Christ, the eternal son of God, who has never known anything but the pleasure of his Father in heaven, now feels the judgment and wrath of God unleashed in full upon Him.

Nobody else in the history of the world, before or since has ever tasted the unbridled fury of the Almighty...not yet. But Christ is broken by this...

As the fury of God pours out, the cruelty of man also continues

“When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

**“Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”
(Matthew 27:47-49)**

I hesitate to tell you this because it’s heart breaking, but the sponge was the Roman soldier’s sponge-on-a-stick used to wipe himself with. This is what they fill with wine vinegar to give him in mockery. But Jesus is unable to take anymore after taking the equivalent of our eternity in hell.

“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.”

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” (Matthew 27:50-53)

Sometimes we miss how strategic all of this was. Every sign here had a meaning. The temple splitting, the earth shaking, the tombs breaking open. They showed Jesus had just defeated sin, and death. The curtain separated man from God because of sin, but now that barrier is split, from top to bottom, showing that it was God who made amends. The dead rising would have been the newly dead; they weren’t in their resurrection bodies, and they’d die again in time. They were revived, resuscitated, giving a glimpse of what was to come.

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54)

The only one to really see who Jesus is so far are gentiles. First, Pilate's wife. Now, the Centurion in charge of the crucifixion. Things are shifting...the gentiles are starting to believe... but there's more to happen before that plan gets rolling.

There, they wrap and place Jesus carefully in the newly cut tomb of a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, and Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene sit outside, beside themselves, waiting to finish embalming him, and mourning the one they had placed all their hopes on.

“The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. (Matthew 27:62-66)

And there Jesus lay. Dead, but still a threat to the religious establishment. And they are right to be afraid. This story isn't over yet. Read Matthew 27 and I'll see you for the conclusion of the story next time on Through the Word!

Day 35 | Matthew 28

It's early, still dark when they set out into the sweet morning air while all others are sleeping. The women weren't able to finish embalming Jesus because the sabbath, which started at sundown Friday, ended at sundown on Saturday. They are going to need to get in there to finish the embalming, and they'll need the entire day for the process in verse 1:

“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.”
(Matthew 28:1-4)

Well, yeah. I think that'd make me faint as well. Knowing that his appearance like lightning is cause for alarm, he says in verse 5, **“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”** (Matthew 28:5-7)

This is the equivalent of “I have spoken”.

Jesus isn't in the tomb, but where is he? The women run off to tell his disciples and practically run into Jesus in verse 9, **“Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’”**
(Matthew 28:9-10)

Imagine you're there. You don't have a bucket to put this in. Death catches us unaware and puts us into the mental coma known as shock. The unbelievable is happening so fast that it's like the rapid acceleration, deceleration movement people experience in an automobile accident, where their brain suddenly slams into the front of their skull, then slams back into the rear of their skull.

Jesus's unbelievable death is so rapidly followed by his unbelievable resurrection that they've not had time to process and it shows. All they can do is fall at his feet, and worship. Matthew doesn't tell us, but when they go tell the disciples, they haven't been able to process in their own shock either, and they don't believe them.

The guards believe.

**“While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.”
(Matthew 28:11)**

In fairness, they were knocked out by the angels; fainting at their appearance, but when they tell the story, their commanders will say they fell asleep. And this could cost them their lives. But the body's gone. They have to say something.

“When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’

“If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.” (Matthew 28:12-15)

There you have it. The beginning of the angry atheist movement. If you've ever had a conversation with someone who fancies they're clever by postulating the theory that the body was stolen, it's fun to watch their faces fall when you tell them the bible talked about that theory two thousand years ago.

People back then were just as skeptical as they are today...and also just as willing to bury the facts, simply because they don't want their lifestyle to change. The chief priests knew the body was gone. They knew that Jesus rose from the dead. But they also knew that they'd lose everything they had if they responded to it.

Even the disciples had a hard time grasping that this was all happening...and far from being gullible, they had some skepticism of their own.

**“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”
(Matthew 28:17)**

Luke tells us that Jesus demonstrated to the disciples that he was alive with many undisputable proofs. Now you know why.

But there would be others who needed to believe; others who would doubt, and needed to see proof. Not proof of the resurrection, but proof that Jesus was alive and could transform lives. For this he turns to the disciples telling them, “I have one more job for you”.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

This is one of my favorite passages, partly because it's a task unfinished, given to the followers of Jesus in perpetuity. They were to make disciples that make disciples that make disciples, down through the centuries, across continents and cultures, and finally to you and me.

But it's also one of my favorites because Kris Langham and I have given our lives to fulfilling this verse. Kris and I became missionaries, Kris to Bay St. Louis after Hurricane Katrina, and me to Europe to plant churches. To this day, I continue to train church planters all over the world at one of Through the Word's key partners NewBreed training, a ministry that helps to train indigenous missionaries, using discipleship tools based around Through the Word.

I want to invite you to be a part of this great unfinished task. The job is not done. The field is ripe for harvest, and the Lord of the Harvest invites you to join Him.

Will you go? Will you disciple? Will you live as infallible truth that Jesus is alive and still transforming lives?

Day 36 | Psalm 118

Welcome back to Through the Word. Psalm 118 today.

A battle hymn. Something you had seen going out to war to inspire the troops.

It also happens to be the last of the Psalms that Jesus would have been singing at the end of the Passover meal, right before he left the upper room and took his last journey to the Mount of Olives the night before his death.

He would have had this song still running through his mind as he walked with the disciples to the place he'd be betrayed and would start the long battle, his personal battle to defeat sin, death, and hell. Verse one starts out giving thanks.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Let Israel say his love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say his love endures forever. And let those who fear the Lord say his love endures forever.” (Psalm 118:1-4)

The repetition in the song begins here with his love endures forever, but that repetition will continue all throughout the song through different phrases that will be repeated over and over. Remember the Beatles repeating the phrase life goes on after every verse of that song. Songs with more repetition are more likely to be hits and have higher chart positions.

They're also easier to memorize, which is good because Psalm 118 was most likely a marching song for soldiers on their way to war. The phrase his love endures forever is like saying the Lord is on your side.

He's committed to you. Imagine marching out into battle, possibly facing your own death or defeat, and reminding yourself through singing a song like this that God's love for you, for your people, for your nation, endures forever. That would inspire courage and replace fear with faith.

But you and I both know that having God on our side doesn't mean that everything goes our way. Nor does it mean that we don't have to fight battles. Quite the opposite, in fact. In the midst of our battles, maybe this is what. But we forget that.

Maybe that's why, in the midst of our battles, we often question God's love. We don't feel his love when we're going through hard times, and that's why the repetition here is important. In the face of fear, it's good to remind yourself of God's love.

As Martin Luther said, we need to be reminded of God's love every day because we forget it every day. Verse 5, **“when hard pressed, I cried to the Lord. He brought me into a spacious place on the field of battle.”**

A spacious place is a safe space. If you've ever seen movies depicting hand-to-hand combat, you'll know that knives and swords and spears are stabbing every which way. Shields bashing teeth out. And David knows the Lord is with me, and repeats that very phrase in verses six and seven. And then in verses eight through nine repeats. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than in men.

Each one of these repeated phrases is a war cry, and I can picture the men bellowing them at the top of their lungs as they march. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than in men, shouting this out to their fellow soldiers for inspiration on the field. But verse ten starts the hack and slash repetition.

“I cut them down. All the nations surrounded me. But in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

They surrounded me on every side. But in the name of the Lord I cut them down.

**They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns. And in the name of the Lord, I cut them down.”
(Psalm 118:10-12)**

Like Johnny Cash said, you can run on for a long time, but sooner or later God's gonna cut you down. The enemies of God swarm like bees here, but like a game of rock, paper, scissors. God always plays the winning hand and cuts them down. Fire trumps bees. And for inspiration, the psalmist draws on a past battle and quotes the victor's song from a thousand years before that battle.

That battle ended with the Song of Moses, and here it's quoted in verse 13, **"I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation."**

(Psalm 118:13-14)

The soldiers push back here and about to fall. The enemy has superior numbers, but they don't have a superior god.

They surround him, swarming like bees, but with God in the midst. It's like a soldier who reported his enemy's position over the radio. Sir, I've got enemy to the north of my position. Enemy to the south, also to the west and east. But I'm confident, sir, that they're not going to get away from us this time.

You can picture the psalmist being surrounded on the east, west, north, south. They swarm like bees. They come in from the left. I cut them down. They came in from the right. I cut them down. They went high, I went low, they went low, I went high I cut them down.

But then in verse 15, **"the victory shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous. The Lord's right hand has done mighty things."**

Shouts of joy and a victory song. Because the good guys won. Because God was on the side of the good guys. But thankfully good guys. Here is an elastic term because in verse 18 the psalmist tells us he's not all good. He's been chastened severely. **"The Lord has chastened me severely, but he is not given me over to death."** (Psalm 118:18)

I didn't die, but not because I was righteous. I'm alive. The psalmist is saying, because of his grace. He looks at the gates in verse 19, **"Open for me the gates of righteousness."** What gates is he speaking of? Are these the gates of Jerusalem, or the gates of the enemy city, or the gates of a righteous life? Hard to say.

But what we do know is that the psalmist finds himself outside those gates, and as much as he wants to enter, he knows he can't open it for himself. They have to be open for him. By God, **"Open for me the gates of righteousness, and I will enter and give thanks to the Lord."** (Psalm 118:19)

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me. You have become my salvation. This sounds like entry into God's kingdom, into his grace, into heaven. And those gates are graciously open because the foundation stone of this city is Jesus.

Read verse 22, **“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”**

The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad. We hear this verse quoted so many times in the New Testament about Jesus. Jesus quotes it about himself. Peter quotes it about Jesus, and so does Paul. But stay with the psalmist for a minute and hear it how the psalmist meant it as he wrote it before it was applied later to Jesus. The psalmist may have understood it to be about the Messiah, but maybe not. If he wrote it about himself originally, it's as if he's saying I was the underdog.

I wasn't predicted to win. I was like that stone the builders rejected. That became the cornerstone. They cast me aside. But the battle turned. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. I was victorious because the Lord was with me. I appeared to be losing. But with the Lord I crushed it. Now let's look at it through the eyes of Jesus.

Jesus quotes this verse to the Pharisees about their rejection of Him as Messiah. They rejected him for not being the conquering Messiah, the warrior king they expected. Yet he was the cornerstone, the foundation upon which Judaism was built. Everything pointed to him. They just couldn't see it. But the people in Jerusalem also rejected him days before they shouted crucify him!

They had been crying the very words out of verse 25 verbatim, **“Lord save us, Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord from the house of the Lord. We bless you.”**

If you know the New Testament, you know that in the Gospels they cried out as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Hosanna! Which is translated here, save us, Lord! And he would, just not the way they thought. Rather than freeing them from the oppression of the Romans, he'd throw off the yoke of their sin, guilt, and shame.

And in his defeat as they nailed him to the cross, he would defeat those enemies once and all. Three days later, he would emerge that conquering king with the victory song as he rose from the dead.

Verse 27 says, **“The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festival procession up to the horns of the altar.”**

A more literal translation reads. Bind the festal sacrifice to the horns of the altar. The gold horns that protruded from each corner of the altar represented God's wrath for sin. You could say his anger. Yet after the sacrifice was made and the blood poured out, the priest would cover those horns with blood to show that God's grace would blot out his anger.

After someone had paid the price for sin in those days, it would be a bull, a ram, or a goat. All pictures of the real thing. Jesus. This would be his victory and his alone. And this him would speak of so much more than the original victory of the psalmist. It would also speak of our victories.

You see, this battle hymn would become a battle hymn in Christ's honor. The one who won the battle for us alone. Just as the hymn begins with the words give thanks to the Lord, so it ends with the phrase as for all eternity we who have entered through the gates of righteousness because of what Christ did to open them for us. We will give thanks to the Lord for the battle he fought and won for us.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 37 | Psalm 22

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms. Psalm 22 is a lament written by David, and it's like nothing else in the whole Bible. But then again, it's a great deal like something else in the Bible, a connection that is almost stunning. Read with me in verse 1.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? So far from my cries of anguish?” (Psalm 22:1)

David is hurting. He cries out to God in anguish. Why have you forsaken me? David lived a hard life. And though you and I both know God's promise to never leave or forsake us, David is feeling forsaken. Another reminder that wrong feelings are still real feelings.

And the Psalms give us a language to process them with the Lord. But there's something different here. Scholars like to place David's Psalms within his story, but this one is a conundrum. The language is vivid, but it describes something David never endured. Pierced hands and feet.

And did you recognize that first sentence? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus said it a thousand years later on the cross, Jesus quoted this psalm and cried it out to his father from the very anguish of crucifixion. What's going on here? As before, we'll follow three steps as we read what it meant to the writer than to Jesus than ourselves. Applying to David is a challenge because it isn't David's experience.

I'm sure he was going through something, but his words are a graphic description of the feelings of crucifixion that won't be invented for another 500 years. While wrestling with his own trials, I believe that David has a vision so vivid, so powerful that it grabs a hold of him. He experiences it personally, feels it, and he fights to understand why. God? Why this?

So as we step into the Psalm, we also step into the vision and experience it with David and ask with him, why, Lord? And that will carry us directly into step two. What did it mean to Jesus? Psalm 22 is a unique opportunity to connect with Jesus on the godforsaken cross that saved our very souls. Then step three for us, the cross was for us. He considered you worth it.

But why, Lord? Why did it come to this? That is precisely what David asks. So we ask with him and await an answer. Verse 1.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day. But you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.” (Psalm 22:1-2)

Forsaken, abandoned. It's a formidable feeling. Why are you so far? Why don't you answer? The silence from God makes it that much harder.

Call! Emergency! No one picks up. My sense here is that David is only beginning to connect with the vision ahead. I think he feels this in his own life, but in that feeling, he begins to connect with a story he does not yet understand.

And he struggles with the feeling. It doesn't seem right. It shouldn't be like this. Why? Verse 3, **“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the one Israel praises.”**

The reason it doesn't make sense is that I know who God is. You are the Holy One, in verse 4. **“In you our ancestors put their trust. They trusted and you delivered them to you. They cried out and were saved. In you they trusted and were not put to shame.” (Psalm 22:4-5)**

Three times, he says, trust. There is no hurt so personal as broken trust. And David feels that from God and it doesn't make sense. Generations of ancestors trusted you and you came through. David's identity is built on his trust in God. Why God? Verse 6, **“but I am a worm and not a man. Scorned by everyone, despised by the people.”**

It is here that I believe David's vision becomes vivid. He's there feeling it, and what he feels is scorn people looking at him like he's less than human, like he's a worm to be crushed. Verse 7.

“All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord. They say, let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” (Psalm 22:7-8)

The crucifixion scene is growing clearer. Insults fly at him. Mockery is a subtle yet insidious weapon. It shouldn't hurt but gets under your skin. The cruel words attack his identity. He trusts the Lord. David feels it. Jesus feels it. David tries to pull himself out, tries to reason with God. Verse nine.

**“Yet you brought me out of the womb. You made me trust in you.”
(Psalm 22:9)**

In other words, I didn't just make this up. God, you did this. I trust you because you made me trust you. My whole life you've been my God. Now where are you? Verse 11. **“Do not be far from me. For trouble is near and there is no one to help.”**

The darkness is close now. No help. And David feels it all closing in from his words. I see David fully immersed now, experiencing it all with Jesus. Verse 12. **“Many bulls surround me, encircle me.”** His words now are dread, terror.

He describes it like facing a lion, mouth open, ready to slice through his flesh. Trapped. **“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.”** He's desperate, powerless. During his trial, Jesus took a beating that killed many men upon the cross.

Every last bone feels it dislocated. David feels it. My heart has turned to wax. It has melted within me. David is a warrior, his heart pumped enough courage through his veins to take on any foe. But now it's like wax melting in a fire. Emptied, lost, hopeless. Mouth dried up, tongue stuck. In verse 15. **“You lay me in the dust of death.”**

That's it. God. I'm done. But it's not done. It's worse. Dogs surround me. A pack of villains encircles me. They pierce my hands and my feet. Amidst the swirling emotions of dread and desperation, a sharp pain rings out. Hands pierced, feet pierced.

This is crucifixion. This is Jesus. 17, **“All my bones are on display. People stare and gloat over me.”** Look at the words on display. People staring. Worse.

Gloating. Why? The vision is sharper now. Shadows find clarity. David sees it. Verse 18. **“They divide my clothes among them. And cast lots for my garment.”**

What an odd and striking detail to include. David sees it feels the indignity. Like that's the only bit of him worth saving the man. Worthless. David sees that clarity a thousand years before it happened. We have a copy of this text from the Dead Sea Scrolls. But in verse 19, David's words lift from the scene back to God. **“But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength. Come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life. From the power of the dogs.”**

His words now are about saving. Deliver me. Rescue me. Watch the order. It's reversed. Rescue me from the dogs, the lions, the wild bulls. He's lifting out of it now. And notice the word choice. Help deliver. Rescue. Save salvation.

Words. Then in verse 22, salvation turns to praise. **“I will declare your name to my people in the assembly. I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you descendants of Jacob, honor him. For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one he has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help.” (Psalm 22:22-24)**

David is renewed and watch his words in verse six. He was despised and scorned. But not now, not by the Lord. The Lord listened. He is not forsaken. And David sings. 25, **“from you comes the theme of my praise. In the great assembly. Before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied. Those who seek the Lord will praise him. May your hearts live forever.”**

David's heart is restored. Strength returns to his bones. Courage floods his veins. And in verse 27, his vision expands, all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. What a transformation! David is taken from the crucifixion to the very ends of the earth to distant peoples, turning to the Lord, bowing before him.

Somehow this suffering leads to God's reign. Verse 29. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship. All who go down to the dust will kneel before him.

Those who cannot keep themselves alive. Now there's quite a phrase. Those who cannot keep themselves alive. All the living, all the dead. Kneel before the Lord. And all in response to a vision of suffering, of pierced hands and pierced feet. Verse 30. Posterity will serve him. Future generations will be told about the Lord. Now that's some audacity, David. The ends of the earth. Future generations. Who makes a claim like that?

But here we are, 3000 years later, 150 generations come and gone. And we're reading this psalm and sharing the story of the cross in every corner of the planet. Amazing. And one more verse, 31 **"They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn he has done it."**

And that's our job to proclaim it. He has done it. The word done is the same word for finished. It is finished.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 38 | Psalm 22 B-Side

Hello friends, and welcome B-Siders to the extra content for Psalm 22. And what a chapter!

If the Bible is holy ground, then Psalm 22 is like the Holy of Holies. Shoes off.

And God's design here is fascinating. The Gospels have the story of the crucifixion, but only here can you read it from Jesus' own perspective. And the detail that David chooses to share is riveting. The pierced hands and feet in verse 16, the casting of lots for his clothes in verse 18. And there's far more detail than that, much of it quite astounding and all a millennium in advance.

Keep that in mind as you read a thousand years before the crucifixion, 500 years before such a thing was even practiced, even the liberal scholars still set the writing no later than 500 BC. We have this Psalm in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet David describes the crucifixion, the mockery of onlookers in verse seven, all his bones out of joint in verse 14, and his heart turned to wax, so precise to the physical experience of crucifixion. The heart literally fights to pump blood through the veins until it gives out. The dehydration of verse 15 all fits the cross.

Now, I have to admit, I don't like delving deep into the gruesome details of Jesus death. I don't do well with graphic violence in general, and this one is real. And it's Jesus, my friend, my Lord. Closer than a brother. It is powerful to remember what he endured for us and that he considers you worth suffering for.

And we are reminded that this is how our sin was atoned for. The price is paid in full. No more payment necessary or allowed, but gruesome details. I'm just not wired to dwell there.

Yet there is one small detail so amazing I just had to give it a B-side here in Psalm 22. It's the worm. Read verse six with me. **“But I am a worm and not a man.”** Now, as far as David is concerned, I imagine that he wrote that sentence quite simply to express how he felt in the vision. Experiencing the cross with Jesus. He felt like a nothing.

He felt like the lowest creature he could think of as he saw the crucifixion through Jesus eyes, the scorn and derision, the mocking of onlookers, he felt like a worm. Now, the purpose of reading Psalm 22 is not to geek out on multi-layered Bible connections. That's why I save this for the B-side.

Reading Psalm 22 should be a powerful and personal experience. Reading what he endured, we remember that he is worthy and he is worth it, whatever our cross may be today. And I hope you had that experience when you read it. But now check this out. David wrote the word worm to express his feeling, but the word he chose is not a generic worm. If you consult a Bible dictionary, you'll see the Hebrew word is tola a very specific type of worm or grub, really.

In Hebrew, the full name is tola ashani, and the Bible sometimes says Tola and others Shani to refer to the same little bug. Also in the Bible dictionary, you'll see that the word tola comes up 43 times in scripture and Shani 42 times, but most of the time they're both translated as the color scarlet or crimson.

Why on earth is the word for worm the same as the word for scarlet? And that question opens up a rather fascinating can of worms. And yes, pun very much intended. So let's dive into this little worm. Can. You might want some goggles.

The first time Tola or Shani comes up is Genesis 38, with the scarlet thread tied on a baby's little hand. Why is the word for worm the same as scarlet? Then in Exodus 16, when the manna was supposed to be eaten, but some saved it overnight and it bred worms or maggots. There they are. Tola, if you recall that Jesus is the true manna from heaven and that manna represents Jesus body. The connections start to grow.

The manna was eaten by tola worms. The bread of life became a thing of disgust, just as the one who knew no sin became sin for us. Here in Psalm 22, I am a worm and not a man. Then the next time the word tola shows up is the instructions for the Israelites to gather offerings for construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25.

Those materials included fabrics blue, purple, scarlet, and fine white linen. Throughout the instructions, the word scarlet is either tola or shani. That same worm. Why is the word scarlet the same word for a worm?

Because the scarlet dye used to color all the fabric came from a very specific worm, the tola, now called *coccus ilicis*. That's Latin. I tried translating it using Google Translate and it means illegal cooks. Why? That's interesting, I don't know.

What is interesting is that it's actually a grub, a little insect, but it moves like a worm. Their color is deep red or scarlet tola. They're native to the lands around Israel. So when the Israelites were traveling through the desert to the Promised Land, they would have made scarlet dye for the tabernacle materials using the tola. Now we're getting interesting.

Recall that the tabernacle also pictures the body of Christ, the dwelling of God on earth, and tola were used to make the scarlet material. And check out this little scarlet bug. The female tola bears the young, and when she's ready to give birth, ready to give her children life. She climbs up on a small tree and attaches herself to it. She's stuck there and she will die there, hanging from a tree. See a connection. When she dies, the shell of her body hardens and it protects her little children still growing. She sacrifices her life to save theirs. Quite literally. When she dies, a crimson fluid comes out, staining both the shell and the tree.

It looks like blood. And that's the fluid used for the dye to make scarlet cloths, for the tabernacle and for the high priest's garments. Both picture Jesus and the scarlet pictures his blood back there on the tree. The mother sacrifices her life, but the children find new life and to grow. They literally eat the body and blood of the one who gave them life. Gross, yes, but they're bugs. And remember that Jesus, the one who gave us life, calls us to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

So the little tola atsani comes up throughout the tabernacle instructions, then shows up again in Leviticus, in the cleansing of a leper, and then in Joshua, when Rahab the harlot ties a scarlet thread in her window for the salvation of her household. Then in Job 25, as Job's friend, Bildad wrestles with the question of how a mere man can be justified before God.

How is that possible when man is like a worm, a tola, and he says, the son of man a worm? Interesting word choice. Then Tola shows up here in Psalm 22. I am a worm and not a man. But that's not the last of it. Next is Isaiah 118. Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Scarlet. Here is Shawnee, and crimson is tola.

Not just the color of blood, but here the color of sin. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall become as white as snow. Natalya is a Hebrew word, and the New Testament is in Greek. But the word scarlet does come up again. It's the color of Jesus robe at his trial, when he's being mocked at the very place that we meet him in Psalm 22.

He is robed in scarlet. I am a worm, the scarlet worm, and not a man. All of that pointing to the crucifixion. To a death on a tree. What an amazing little grub. Now, there's one last part to this story. What happens to the tola on the tree? As we said, the mother dies, but her story isn't over. New life comes out after three days. That's right, three days.

The little tola are stained with the crimson from the mother. But something amazing happens to the body of the dead mother. The scarlet color turns to white. It dries up like a wax substance. Look at a picture of it and it looks almost exactly like wool. Once dry, it breaks up into little white flakes and falls to the ground like little pieces of snow. Seriously? Come now. Let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. And that is the story of the little worm called Tola ashani. Amazing.

Join us next time as we continue the journey, one chapter at a time. And remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word.

Day 39 | Lenten Reflection

Hey friends, welcome back to *Through the Word!* Kris Langham with you to close out our Lent plan.

But hold on—Lent isn't over! The final stretch is called **Holy Week**, from Palm Sunday to Easter. And it's so big, it has its own plan. I'll be your guide as we walk in Jesus' footsteps through the most important week in history. Please join us—and invite a friend. Even if they missed Lent, Holy Week is a powerful experience.

Now I recognize that we already read through the crucifixion and resurrection in Matthew's gospel. That was on purpose. We wanted you to have the *full story* as Matthew presented it first—then step back to walk day by day through *all* the gospels to really experience the entire week. Did you know that a full *third* of the gospels content is devoted to that *one week*? Amazing.

But right now, we're taking one day to reflect on the journey behind us. Four weeks ago, we stepped into the season of Lent with hearts open—ready to seek God, to slow down, and to prepare for Easter. And now, here we are. So, what has God done in your heart so far this Lent?

Our journey began with—of all things—a genealogy. Forty-two generations came and passed from the promise to Abraham until the fulfillment. And at last, a baby. The born Messiah. The one called Immanuel, *God with us*.

The Magi visited, the family moved to Nazareth, years passed, and along came John the Baptist:

**“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’”** (Matthew 3:3b).

And that's the heart. *Preparing the way*. So what have you seen the Lord preparing in you? Are you responding? Are you following through? There's still time yet.

And there with John the voice of the Father proclaimed:

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”
(Matthew 3:17b).

We followed Jesus to the desert. Fasting and tempted, he held fast to conviction:

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4b).

Next came ministry. Disciples followed. And we followed too. Teaching. Healing. And preaching *the good news of the kingdom*.

Then we climbed a hill, and sat down with the crowd to listen.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 5:3).

Jesus’ words hit with power. They called us out, called us higher.

“You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13a).

“You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14a).

So stay faithful, love your enemy, turn that cheek, go that mile.

And he taught us to pray, to lift our voices to *our Father* in Heaven and pray for *His* kingdom come. And in prayer, to forgive and *be forgiven*.

He reset our priorities to store *treasures in Heaven*. To let go of worry and **“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”**

He taught us to check the plank in our own eye first, and to ask, seek and knock in pursuit of God, as we enter the narrow gate.

And he warned us—of false prophets, false disciples, and foolish builders. And he called us—to build on the rock. Do you remember how? By putting Jesus’ words into *practice*.

So, a simple question: Are you practicing Jesus’ words? Not perfect, but getting better.

Then we followed Jesus, and encountered some amazing people and powerful stories. The leper. The Centurion of great faith. The two demon-possessed men. Jesus even calmed a great storm, yet he traveled on with no place to lay his head.

When a paralyzed man came through a roof, Jesus made us think. Which one *is* harder to say: Your sins are forgiven, or *rise and walk*.

Jesus shocked just about everyone when he called a *tax collector* named Matthew to follow him. Who could have imagined that two thousand years later, you and I would be blessed by the writings of that one redeemed sinner?

A dead girl raised. Two blind men see. The needs grew, and Jesus called for prayer:

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37b).

Pray for more workers.

And right away, Jesus *sent* workers—with instructions. Faith over fear. Take up your cross, and follow me.

“Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

John the Baptist sent questions from prison, and Jesus pronounced *woe* to the unrepentant. And an invitation:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Rest—for your souls.

Pharisees continued to question over Sabbath issues, and Jesus called them to remember mercy over sacrifice. *Every* day is the right day for mercy.

Jesus performed miracles. The Pharisees demanded signs, and Jesus promised only one: the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12).

To help us understand all this, Jesus told parables. The sower and seed. *How's your soil?* The wheat and weeds. *What grows from your life?* The treasure discovered—worth trading everything. (Matthew 13).

Then we witnessed *power*. Feeding the masses—*twice*. Walking on water. He taught us what *true* uncleanness is, and warned of the Pharisees' yeast (Matthew 16).

Then came the great question:

“Who do you say I am?”

“You are the Christ, the son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16).

And from there on, Jesus told them: he had to die. And again he told us:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24b).

We followed three disciples to see Jesus transformed, then back to sea level for more needs, and more precious people. Jesus taught us that true greatness comes in humility, and that a good shepherd will chase down the *one* sheep.

More parables, insight on divorce, and a rich young man who needed a lesson on *true* goodness—from the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve.

And that brings us right up to the great King—who rode into town on a humble donkey. We'll come back to all that follows in the coming week, so I won't review it now.

But what spoke to you? What do you need to hold onto, or follow up on? Will *you* be the wise builder who *puts Jesus' words into practice*?

And then there were the **Psalms**.

In Psalm 51 we cried out:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me”
(Psalm 51:10).

In Psalm 27 we clung to our stronghold, and we remained confident:

**“I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living”** (Psalm 27:13b).

In Psalm 19, the heavens declared *to us* the glory of God. In Psalm 23, we remembered:

“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing” (Psalm 23:1).

In 130 we cried from the depths and *remembered*:

“With you there is forgiveness” (Psalm 130:4a).

In Psalm 118, a battle song—with powerful hints of Jesus’ arrival on *Palm Sunday*—and “the stone the builders rejected.”

And then Psalm 22 with its phenomenal prophetic glimpse of the cross itself, and that fascinating little crimson worm. What a reminder that the Creator of the Universe planned *all of this* from the foundations of the world.

So what do we do with this? We’ve come this far in preparation—clearing the path and plowing the soil for resurrection. So—are the rocks cleared out? Is the soil soft again?

Are you *different*? There is an ancient tradition recorded in the Jewish Midrash of leaving the temple courts by a *different* gate than the one you entered—to signify that you have changed. Your time with God has altered your view—your character—even your identity.

I encourage you—leave by a different door. After all, Lent is a *season*. One of the most useful insights I have made about life—is the simple recognition that God works in our lives—in *seasons*. If you find yourself in winter, fret not. Spring is coming. **“In due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart”** (Galatians 6). So *prepare*. The season ahead—is *different*.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this season of Lent. Thank you for helping us clear that path and till that soil. Now we invite you in. As we abide in you, grow in us. Bear fruit. Bring a harvest. And as we enter Holy Week, lead us through—to resurrection. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

That's it. Remember, go sign up for *Holy Week* on Through the Word *now*. Don't wait. And invite someone. Invite *everyone*. If you see one more day on this plan—it's just me reminding you to go there. So mark that last day done, and go find Holy Week.

We kept that plan separate because *this is perfect timing* to invite someone to join you for Holy Week!

Easter is coming, friends—On the other side, we will celebrate the risen King! Can't hardly wait. I'll see you on the journey.

Day 40 | Palm Sunday and First Day of Holy Week

Well hello everyone. Kris Langham here for Day 40 of our Lent plan. We hope you enjoyed the plan, and if you are following with us on the Lent timeline, *today* is Palm Sunday, which means that today is the *first day* of our Holy Week plan. In fact, Lent is not over. Now in some faith traditions, Lent ends on Holy Saturday - the day before Easter, while others finish on Maundy Thursday. Some timelines don't count *Sundays* so the forty day total differs.

But the key element for us is: we're not done. In fact, if this is Palm Sunday, Holy Week starts *now*. So while we are all done on *this* plan, you can head over now to find our Holy Week plan on the Browse page with our Bible Topics and Extras. If you're not on the same timeline, you're still invited to follow Jesus' timeline as we move into Holy Week.

Join me as we follow Jesus' footsteps day by day from the grand entrance on Palm Sunday to the cross on Good Friday to resurrection on Easter Sunday. And while you're at it, invite a friend to join us! What are you waiting for? Go find it - I'll see you there!