

Matthew-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

Since we began Cultivate in August of 2015 I've been asked why we go back to the Old Testament with every other book. Why not spend the greater majority of our time in the New Testament? Perhaps the very best answer I can give to that question is right here before us in Matthew 1.1, the very first words of the New Testament: *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* To properly understand the very first thing the New Testament teaches us about the Savior of the world, we have to understand who David was. And who Solomon, David's son, was. Who Abraham was. And who Isaac, Abraham's son, was. Somehow this Jesus—to whom Matthew is introducing us—is the final fulfillment of David the king, Solomon the temple-builder, Abraham the faithful father of many nations, and Isaac the (near) sacrifice. The whole story of Israel—summarized quickly in vs.1-17—is completed and fulfilled in *"Christ"* (vs.1,16,17,18), the Greek word for "Messiah," the Long-Expected One, who will save the world. *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken,"* v.22.

Chapter 2

In our chapter 1 reflection we noted how Matthew presents Jesus as the True and Greater David, Solomon, Abraham, and Isaac. But that is not all! In chapter 1 there were also themes introduced of Jesus being the New Genesis (*our New Beginning!... as the Greek word for "Genesis" appeared in v.1, "genealogy", and v.18, "birth"*) and the New Joshua (*the one who conquers our enemies and brings us into the promised land... as Jesus' very name is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua,"* v.21). In chapter 1 we also had v.23's *"virgin"* remind us of Isaiah 7.14 and the same verse's *"Immanuel"* remind us of Isaiah 7-12. Over and over Matthew proclaims that Jesus is God's Old Testament Promised Purpose coming to enfleshed fulfillment! And this beautiful theme of Matthew's continues in chapter 2, as the *"fulfillment formula"*—first seen in 1.22—is repeated in chapter 2, vs. 5, 15, 17, and 23. And more subtle Old Testament echoes in chapter 2 could be added! But the point is: nothing about Jesus was haphazard or random. *"All the promises of God find their Yes in him"* (2 Corinthians 1.20).

Chapter 3

So far we've seen Matthew strongly proclaim that the coming of Christ is the fulfillment of everything promised and foreseen in the Old Testament (see Luke 24.44-46!). The time of shadows is over; the promised Messiah has now come into the world. But what is the proper response—among sinners like us—to his coming? Repentance. John clearly declares this in v.2, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Note that Jesus will echo this call when he formally begins his ministry, in 4.17. Note again that the disciples continue the call when they are sent out, in 10.7, etc. Let's think about what repentance means. It's not merely feeling guilty about some of the things we do. Nor is it simply the act of giving up some bad habits. True repentance is a gift of God's grace whereby the heart of the sinner grieves over its sin. Hates its sin. Turns from its sin, by turning deliberately to God Himself! As John points out in vs.8 & 10, true repentance bears real fruit in our lives. Remember how in the book of Joshua the *"wilderness of Judea"* (v.1) and *"the river Jordan"* (v.6) symbolized new beginnings?

Chapter 4

In v.19 Jesus starts calling disciples to himself: "*Follow me.*" Note carefully that it's a call to follow him "*wherever he goes*" (see Revelation 14.4). Yesterday we looked briefly at how such a Jesus-follower must inhabit the call to repentance. Today let's consider how Jesus-followers should deal with the testing that comes through temptation (see vs.1-11). First, we must recognize how the temptations to sin are calling us to actively doubt God's Word and God's goodness, just like Adam and Eve ended up doing in Genesis 3. Second, see how sin and the devil are powerfully resisted by exercising faith in specific truths of Scripture. Jesus did so with an array of Scriptures from Deuteronomy 6-8, which he called to mind at need. Are you able to wield Scripture like this? Like a sword, to defeat the enemy? If not, consider jumping into DPC's Scripture memory ministry; new verses come out every first Sunday of the month. Adam failed in the face of temptation and brought us death and condemnation; Jesus conquered temptation and brought us life and righteousness (see Romans 5.12-21).

Chapter 5

Back in 3.2 John announced, "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" This, of course, is God's kingdom; through his Son Jesus, God's effective rule on earth is now established. In 4.8-9 Satan offered Jesus a shortcut to having authority over "*all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.*" Jesus takes the path of obedience instead, and so inherits all kingly authority, not just on earth, but also in heaven (see 28.18). In 4.17 Jesus began to preach the "*kingdom*": God is King, and his rule has now come in a new way. In 4.23 we see the beautiful ways that God's "*kingdom*" was manifested and pictured in the work of Jesus. And now, in chapter 5, we launch into the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus teaches us about life and discipleship in the "*kingdom*" (see 5.3,10.19,20; 6.10,33; 7.21). As we will see, "kingdom life" involves great privileges and great demands. The central focus is on the King's (Jesus') authority, and the allegiance that is owed him. This theme is powerfully concluded at the end of the Sermon, in 7.24-29. So, come... the King has taken his seat on the mountain (5.1). Let us give heed.

Chapter 6

How would you summarize the characteristics of the people whom Jesus says are members of his kingdom? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to begin with the "Beatitudes," in Matthew 5, and keep going straight through the whole of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In chapter 6 Jesus addresses many aspects of kingdom life: retreating from a tendency to practice righteousness merely for the praise of other people... faith in the greater rewards of our Father in heaven... instructions on "*secret*" giving... instructions in "*secret*" prayer... a model for prayer... a promise and a warning regarding forgiveness... instructions for "*secret*" fasting... training on how possessions and treasures and money are viewed in the kingdom... and finally, the freedom from sinful anxiety, fear, and worry in which God wants his children to live. After all, he is the "*Father*" of the believer—something Jesus stresses 12 times in this chapter.

Chapter 7

In chapters 5 & 6 we took a "big picture" view of the Sermon on the Mount. With chapter 7 let's dive into a particular or two. The first topic dealt with is the critical, judgmental spirit (vs.1-5). What does it mean when we sit in judgment of other people? Especially what does it mean when we **hypocritically** do so—meaning that we have not been willing to expose our own hearts to the judgment that our sins deserve? It means that we are still sitting on the throne, thinking that this is *our* kingdom. When, in fact, it is the kingdom of Jesus—which is a kingdom of grace. A kingdom where the Spirit of Jesus opens our eyes (through the power of his Word), that we may see the judgment that we are actually under, until we find God's mercy in the gospel of the Lord Christ. And now that same Spirit teaches us to show that same mercy to others, that *they* may find deliverance, as we have. But... may we not be so foolish as to then

suppose that there's no such thing as God's judgment. See vs.13&14, 17-20, 24-27. Which "way" are you walking on, what kind of "tree" are you, what kind of "house" are you building?

Chapter 8

In the Sermon on the Mount we saw Jesus's astonishing *authority* (see 7.28,29); from 8.1 - 9.34 we see his astonishing *power*—which is really just another angle from which to consider his overwhelming authority: even authority over sickness, over demons, over sin, and over nature. Looking at 8.1 - 9.34 as a whole for just a moment we see that Matthew has chosen and assembled nine different miracle stories (though the story in 9.18-26 is really two different miracles forever wrapped around one another, helping to interpret one another... so we could say ten). But seeded within the miracle stories we find brief passages in which the Lord Jesus speaks about the demands of discipleship, the cost of following him (8.18-22; 9.9-17). If we bear the name of Christ and profess to follow him, we should pay careful attention to those passages for sure. What a great Savior Jesus is! He teaches with kingly authority and then confirms that teaching with powerful miracles. And yet, he came to bear the curse for his people (8.17), sacrificing many things to do so (8.20). Glorious, yet meek. Kingly, yet humble.

Chapter 9

We have read much about Jesus' ministry in chapters 5-9, all of which is neatly and beautifully summarized for us in 9.35: "*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.*" In the next chapter Jesus is going to turn his attention from public ministry (to the crowds) to private ministry (to his disciples), but first there is a "bridge" of sorts, connecting these two accounts. That bridge is 9.36-38, when Jesus "*saw*" the crowds and then "*said*" something to his disciples. Matthew now tells us how Jesus deliberately prepared his disciples (including us!) for participation in his mission. Note that this mission has as its starting point the "*compassion*" of Jesus. Jesus was sinless, and therefore had nothing within himself (as we do) to stifle godly compassion. Why do we not take strong, caring action more than we do? Because our sinful selfishness smothers and suppresses and squelches such compassion. But Jesus is free of sin, and therefore full of compassion. And "*the harvest is plentiful.*"

Chapter 10

We saw yesterday, with the "bridge" of 9.36-38, that Jesus deliberately turned the focus of his attention from "*the crowds*" to "*his disciples*," and today we will see the Bible use the word "*apostles*" for the first time—referring to those twelve disciples (10.1-4). But "*the crowds*" are still on Jesus' heart and mind! The great compassion he had on them in 9.36 has not evaporated; the very word "apostle" means "sent." Where is he sending these twelve, and why? He's sending them to all the villages and towns of Israel, to proclaim that "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (v.7), and to demonstrate such with power over sickness, death, leprosy, and demons (v.8)—a power that Jesus himself had imparted to them (v.1). This chapter it taken up with Jesus giving instructions for this particular mission (an urgent appeal to Israel, that the Messiah had arrived, vs.5-16), warnings of opposition to the mission (vs.17-39), and a reminder of what a privilege it is to represent and receive the good news of Jesus (vs.40-42). Let us give profound thanks to Christ for his mission and for all whom he has "sent" on his mission.

Chapter 11

There are five big "discourses" (teaching portions) in Matthew's gospel... which is often compared to the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). After all, Matthew is

writing this gospel to inform the Jewish perspective about the person and work of Jesus, and one way he's doing so is by presenting Jesus as the "New and Greater Moses." Anyway, Discourse #3 will begin in chapter 13. With each of the two discourses thus far, Matthew has skillfully prepared the reader beforehand for the subject matter of the discourse to come. He does so here as well, using chapters 11 & 12 to prepare the ground well for the discourse coming in chapter 13. That discourse will give particular emphasis to the division that Jesus' ministry creates among different kinds of people who respond to Jesus in varying ways. To get us ready for that teaching we have chapters 11 & 12, featuring several different responses to Jesus: honest puzzlement, hard-hearted rejection, glad acceptance, suspicious accusation, murderous hostility, blasphemous allegations, etc. So... what's your response to Jesus?

Chapter 12

As we said on Friday, chapters 11 & 12 are preparing our hearts for the discourse to come in chapter 13, by demonstrating various responses to the person and work of Jesus. The first two stories in chapter 12 revolve around the theme of Sabbath. And we see here two responses to Jesus' approach to the Sabbath: the response of accusation (v.2) and the response of conspiracy to destroy (v.14). The Pharisees regarded Jesus as a dangerous, radical heretic who was undermining obedience to Sabbath law. But surely we can't trust their interpretation. After all, their response is to plan murder (v.14), which tells us a great deal about the sincerity of their respect for God's law. No, Jesus was not declaring the Sabbath to be just like any other day. He declared himself to be Lord of the Sabbath, and he is here teaching us how to rightly observe it. The Pharisees were ruining the gift of Sabbath by cluttering it up with an enormous, exhausting bulk of secondary, man-made laws and regulations designed to determine exactly what was and exactly what was not permissible on the Sabbath. But Jesus everywhere shows God's LOVE for the Sabbath! We should also love the Sabbath... and keep the Lord's Day, with wisdom and joy.

Chapter 13

A consistent theme of the last two chapters was the deep division and wide variety of responses that Jesus and his teaching always bring to bear upon humanity. And now in the third great discourse of Matthew (chapter 13), Jesus expounds on that very subject. Why is there such a mixed response to Jesus? Just how much does your choice of whether or not to give attention to Jesus really matter? First, we must ponder the parable of the sower (vs.3-9). Then we have an interlude, in which Jesus discusses the purpose of his parables (vs.10-17). After the interlude he explains the parable of the sower (vs.18-23). Which soil are you? Note that Christ is here interpreting **you**. This parable is a call to search your heart. Are you hearing? Are you understanding? Are you bearing fruit? Then there are three parables of growth, another brief interlude about parables themselves, an explanation of the first parable of growth, followed by four more short parables. Then we're back to a living example of how people actually do respond to Jesus in this world (vs.53-58). May Jesus and his work and word transform our whole lives. May he be counted as our greatest joy and treasure. And may we bear the fruit of changed hearts.

Chapter 14

We first met John in Matthew 3. He was preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus, calling everyone to repentance, *"for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (3.2). Then Jesus the Christ himself came to John to be baptized (3.13-17)—not because Jesus needed to repent, but because he wanted to identify himself with us *"in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people"* (Hebrews 2.17). Then we hear a one-liner in Matthew 4.12, telling us that John had been arrested. Then, in chapter 11, we saw John sending questions to Jesus, from prison;

questions that rose from a heart that was faint and weak. Yes, all sinners are weak in themselves, even John. But Jesus directed John's weak heart to Himself, for Christ Himself is God's answer to all of our doubts and all of our fears. Then Jesus told the crowds how mighty John was, in the Lord. John (like us!) had to learn Romans 5.4-5 the hard way. And now, in chapter 14, we finally learn what landed John in prison (vs.3,4). And then we hear how he died. He died because of his faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. He was declaring truth and warning sinners right up to the end. Are we?

Chapter 15

The first 20 verses of this chapter deal with issues of great importance for the Christian; let's follow the action closely. The religious officials come to Jesus with a complaint that he isn't teaching his disciples a certain "*tradition*" (vs.1,2). Note that this is not a matter of hygiene, but a matter of religious ritual, to allegedly cleanse oneself from the defilement of Gentiles one might meet in the marketplace, etc. And note that it was not a law of God from the Old Testament; it's merely a "*tradition*" of their own making. Jesus counters with a question that illustrates the sharp distinction between "*your tradition*" and "*the Word of God*" (v.6). The quote from Isaiah shows how a mere "*commandments of men*" religion is empty and therefore displeasing to God (vs.7-9). Jesus then returns to the whole matter of cleanliness and defilement in vs.10-20. The heart of sin is not external—those filthy Gentiles in the marketplace, etc. The heart of sin is internal—see verses 18&19. Note that Jesus' strong words in vs.13&14 (weeds!, blind guides!) are not the result of some personal feud. It's rather a total rejection and disapproval of man-made religion. Sin is deeply rooted in our hearts. We must be healed on the inside, by grace, not rules.

Chapter 16

Yesterday we considered Jesus' judgment of false, man-made religion. Note that—apparently—this is not something we can easily get over, once we've been deeply exposed to it. Here in v.12 Jesus is still trying to unseat, dethrone, and remove the power of false religion in the lives and hearts of his disciples. Like leaven, it influences and infects all that it touches. So, contend for the faith, believer (Jude 1.3), and don't be afraid to warn others away from religious teaching that is not centered on Jesus Christ (Jude 1.4). After all, these are matters of eternal life and eternal death. In v.15, Jesus asks his disciples the most important question in all of life... and Peter's answer (in v.16) is the climax to which this first part of the gospel of Matthew has been building. Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" But vs.24-28 caution us against making that confession in an empty, vain, meaningless way. Does my life declare that this is what I believe about Jesus? That is the question. Our lives are issuing a constant and public verdict of whom we really believe Jesus to be. Is he just someone we run to in emergencies? Or is he the Lord and Master of all that we believe and all that we do? The call to sacrificial discipleship is real.

Chapter 17

In the last chapter Jesus announced—for the first time—that he would soon "*suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*" (16.21). That announcement is repeated in today's chapter, vs.22-23. And in between those two pronouncements we find the Transfiguration, where Christ's heavenly glory is revealed (vs.1-8). The veil was pulled back for a brief moment, "*and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light*" (v.2). He's found talking with Moses (who represents the Law) and Elijah (who represents the Prophets). Just stop right here and review what the New Testament says of Jesus and the Law and the Prophets: Matthew 5.17; 7.12; 11.13; 22.36-40; Luke 22.44; John 1.45; Acts 28.33; Romans 3.21,22. But note again that the revelation of Jesus' true, heavenly glory (in the Transfiguration) takes place between two announcements of

his humiliation and suffering and death on the cross. The Lord Jesus did not seek the crown of glory apart from the cross. And neither should we. If we hope to partake in the heavenly glory ourselves, it will only be through the cross of Christ. Man's wisdom, work, and intentions will never get us there.

Chapter 18

Take a look at v.20: *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."* Do we realize what an extraordinary claim that is? If you or I said that, people would be looking at one other nervously, wondering whom they should call to help us. But for Jesus, it's just one of many such drive-by comments he makes which are plain and unadorned claims to deity. And the one who said that also gave us the parable found in vs.21-35, which we now briefly consider. A tradition among the Jews suggested that forgiving someone three times was reasonable and doable for a mature person. Compared to that, Peter's offer of *"seven times"* (v.21) seems very generous indeed! What a saint! But what does Jesus have to say about forgiving our brothers and sisters who have wronged us? He dismisses exact calculations altogether (v.22), and then tells a parable. To enter into the story well, ponder *"ten thousand talents"*

(v.24). One talent was about 20 years wages. But do the math and Jesus is comparing our sin against God to 200,000 years' wages. Which is still not enough, but he's combined the largest Greek number with the largest unit of currency to make a point. The forgiveness God has freely and lavishly given us is incalculable. How can we possibly be so *"wicked"* (v.32) as to refuse to forgive others?

Chapter 19

In the first two verses we are reminded that when Jesus was doing and teaching all of this, he was making his way to Jerusalem (in the region of Judea), to sacrifice himself for our sins. Everything in the next few chapters takes place under the deliberate shadow of the cross. **In vs.3-12** we are reminded that marriage is not a cultural institution which we have invented and that we may treat as we please. It is a sovereignly-designed institution of our Creator, and it is He who defines it. If we desire to live in his blessing, we must honor God's will for sexuality and marriage. **In vs.13-15** we are reminded that children are treasured in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's promises are given to the children of believing parents (Genesis 17.7; Acts 2.39; 1 Corinthians 7.14; etc.), and we are to do all we can to bring them to Jesus. **Verses 16-22** remind us that mere respect for Jesus and desire for eternal life is not enough. We are not essentially good people, obedient to God's law, who come to Jesus as a good teacher. We are depraved sinners who desperately need a Savior, and we must willingly place ourselves completely at our Savior's disposal. Jesus provides a test that exposes this man's sin... and he walks away.

Chapter 20

Whenever we see repetition in the Bible, it's good to stop and reflect more deeply. Take a look at the question Jesus asks the mother of James and John in v.21: *"What do you want?"* Now take a look at the question Jesus asked the two blind men sitting by the roadside in v.32: *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Having noted the repetition, we now begin to really study what's going on here, looking for comparisons, contrasts, common themes, etc. And what we find is that the mother of James and John was asking for places of glory for her sons. She seems to be motivated by pride, by ambition, by desire for personal honor and prominence, prestige and worldly greatness. In contrast, the two blind men are asking for *"mercy"* (vs.30,31), that their eyes may be opened. Their eyes *are* opened by a compassionate Lord. And they followed him (v.34). And in the greater context we find much that enhances what we have noted. Jesus himself came as a servant to us. He *"came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as*

a ransom for many" (v.28, and see vs.17-19!). The shape of his kingdom is service and mercy, not prominence and pride. In his kingdom the servants are great and the slaves are first (v.26).

Chapter 21

There is great spiritual treasure found everywhere in today's chapter, but let's zero in on the seemingly (at first) odd thing that Jesus does in vs.18 & 19. What is that all about? If you or I did this—which we couldn't—it would probably just be a pointless act of power, originating from grumpiness or intending to show off. But Jesus is not like us in that regard. The fig tree that produces leaves is also promising fruit. But when Jesus draws near to the fig tree he finds no fruit at all. And this is a perfect picture of the temple, which Jesus just visited and "cleansed" in vs.12-17. The temple promises to be a place where God is worshipped, but Jesus obviously found that to be an empty promise. See Jeremiah 8.13. And as the fig tree withered at Jesus' word, so the empty temple will wither at Jesus' word (see 23.38; 24.2). Which it did, in A.D. 70. Which was within that generation, as Jesus promised (see 23.36; 24.34). A fig tree with healthy leaves but no fruit represents the kind of hypocrisy among the people of God in which we desire to look nice on the outside. But when God comes by to gather our fruit... there is none to be found. For all of our fine appearance and spiritual-sounding words, we remain disobedient. See vs.28-32.

Chapter 22

In v.35 we see someone rise to "test" Jesus. But that attitude is not limited to v.35. Look at v.15, and Jesus' interpretation of that question in v.18. Look at v.23, look at v.34 (which gave rise to v.35), look at v.41. And then appreciate all of Jesus' answers through the very satisfying conclusion we find in v.46. Are you familiar with the type? The type of person who uses religious / theological debate as a means to hide themselves from actually dealing honestly with Christ himself? The phenomenon is certainly not limited to various platforms of social media, but it definitely thrives in that habitat. But arguing incessantly about this or that so-called spiritual matter is not the devotional equivalent of loving the Lord your God "*with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" (v.37). The Bible doesn't command us to beat everybody with sarcastic arguments, in the name of Christ. It commands us to "*kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him*" (Psalm 2.12). And the call to come and enter into the feast of forgiveness and life and love and joy in Christ is amazingly free and wide and available (vs.8-10). But one must come "in Christ" (vs.11-14).

Chapter 23

In the last chapter, Jesus seemed to be on the defensive side of things, answering questions and thinly-veiled attacks which were plainly designed to test, trap, and entangle him. But in this chapter Jesus goes on the offensive, delivering a tightly concentrated rebuke to the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus loves truth and he loves you, and he's obviously perfectly willing to make enemies in his campaign to deliver you from the power of lies and the seduction of superficial religion. Jesus has gone after this religious establishment before: see 5.17-48 and 15.1-20. But this time it's perhaps a bit more confrontational. "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*," he says. Six times. In v.16 he decides to go with the slightly more diplomatic and tactful: "*Woe to you, blind guides.*" They loved scrupulous observation of man-made religious rules, but they did not love God. And the proof of that, by the way, is this: when they met God, they plotted to kill him (see chapters 26 & 27). There are many things you can learn here about the superficial, empty religion that God hates, but perhaps the heart of it is the self-righteous pride that blinds us to our sin and leads us to think highly of ourselves (vs.6-7). We need the gospel.

Chapter 24

As we've said, there are five major discourses in Matthew, and we have now come to the last one, in chapters 24 and 25. To prepare us for this discourse, consider 23.37-39 again: Jerusalem is about to reject and kill their Ultimate Messenger sent from God, who came to gather and call them to repentance and faith. And after they do this, judgment will certainly fall. Their "house" (23.28) will be left "desolate." Jerusalem's "house" is the temple. Jesus explicitly reinforces this in 24.1,2, by making a prophecy that literally came true in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed the temple. The disciples then ask two questions, in v.3: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" In general, this discourse is often interpreted this way: Jesus is answering the 1st question (about the destruction of Jerusalem) in 24.4-35, often in very symbolic language, the understanding of which is found through the Old Testament. All of that would happen before "this generation" would "pass away," as Jesus said in v.34. But all of that provides a strong historical picture of what the end of the age will be like, when Jesus comes again... which was their 2nd question, dealt with in 24.36-25.46.

Chapter 25

Jesus made two particular prophecies during his ministry: 1, that he would be killed and resurrected; 2, that Jerusalem would be destroyed within a generation. Both of these things happened, just as he described. And as surely as Jesus was seen alive again by great crowds of people (see 1 Corinthians 15.6)... and as surely as the Roman army crushed Jerusalem in A.D. 70... just as surely, Jesus will one day return with his angels to judge this world and bring the salvation of his faithful servants to its ultimate consummation. Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord? That is something about which chapter 25 has much to say. The three sections of this chapter provide us with three questions, by which to examine ourselves. (*"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"* 2 Corinthians 13.5). **Question #1**, vs.1-13: Are you prepared to wait long and faithfully for Jesus? **Question #2**, vs.14-30: Are you earnestly serving him now, by faithfully stewarding all that he's given you, for his glory? **Question #3**, vs.31-46: Are you compassionately serving others in God's family, in their needs?

Chapter 26

We have now walked through 25 chapters of Matthew together, and it's all been building up to this climax: the appointed sacrifice, which accomplishes full and free redemption for sinners like you and me. The death of Jesus was not an accident. It was not an unforeseeable tragedy with Jesus as the helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control. As his institution of the Lord's Supper demonstrates (vs.26-29), he fully intended to suffer and die in this harrowing, grueling manner... in order to secure your salvation from the dread penalty of sin. He would endure all of this, explicitly and knowingly, "for the forgiveness of sins" (v.28). Jesus threw down the gauntlet when he rode into Jerusalem. In the days that followed, he confronted false religion head on. He declared God's judgment on all who would reject his appearance. And then, that which he himself had prophesied in Matthew 16.21, 17.22-23, and 20.17-19 found fulfillment. This has been God's revealed purpose in all of Scripture, first hinted at in Genesis 3.15. Does this not move you to love and adore the Lord Jesus, the way the woman in vs.6-13 loved and adored Jesus? May we devote ourselves to him today. Not to an idea or a cause. But to the one who died for us.

Chapter 27

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once asked: "Do you think that you deserve forgiveness?" His response was: "If you do, you are not a Christian." As we read of the death of our Savior today, may God open our eyes to the severe beauty of his grace. Jesus physically suffered more terribly than we can imagine. But that was just the suffering at the hands of men. His greatest and deepest suffering was in his being forsaken by his Father (v.46). Why was he thus forsaken? Because he was bearing the sins and iniquity and transgressions and guilt of his people; therefore, it was the will of God that he be crushed (Isaiah 53.10). He who knew no sin was made sin, for our sake, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5.21). He became a curse for us, so that through him we might receive blessing and the Spirit (Galatians 3.10-14). Christ's awesome sufferings in this chapter are what we deserve, actually. All of this is what our sin deserves. And it is what our sin has received, in Christ. Do we think we deserve forgiveness? A thousand times, no. But forgiveness is freely given, at Jesus' cost. Have our eyes been opened to this? The curtain is torn in two (v.51). "God and sinners reconciled."

Chapter 28

As the gospel concludes we look upon a mighty reversal of what happened in the last two chapters! Jesus is risen from death. He is alive and victorious. And he now enters into his kingship and launches the church's dramatic mission to "*all nations*" (v.19). This is not a fairy tale, this is not a myth. This is a fact of history. "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people*" (Luke 1.68) from the ravages of sin and the terrors of death. We are invited to meet Christ ourselves, through his Word and his Spirit. We are called into his worship; "*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*" (Psalm 95.6). We are commanded to give glad and joyful obedience to his eternal and universal authority (v.18), which is the glorious fulfillment of Daniel 7.14: "*And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*" The Lord Christ has purchased people from every nation with his own blood. It is the church's work to take this good news everywhere, making disciples of the King. And he himself is with us! Always.

-Reflecting on Matthew-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Matthew. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Matthew before we move forward?

"I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food." Job 23.12

