



The Gospel
According to Matthew
Part four

Small Group Study Guide

PART FOUR

WINTER-SPRING 2010

Compiled by the Adult Discipleship Team

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Winter-Spring 2010

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- 7) The ending of Matthew's Gospel in 28:16-20 contains so much that we would do well to slow down in our reading of these final verses and ponder each line, indeed each phrase, to see how they gather up the whole gospel and pack it tight into the final meeting between Jesus and his followers. What instructions does Jesus give his disciples and therefore us as well?
- 8) What are the promises which begin and end Jesus' words?
- 9) Jesus promises "I am with you" every day and to the end. When have you been especially grateful for his presence?
- 10) Jesus has "all authority" (28:18). It is basic to the most elementary New Testament faith that Jesus is already ruling the whole world. What perspective does that give you on the everyday situations you face and on the world as a whole?
- 11) Looking back over the passage, where do you see signs of obedience from the women and the disciples? How is their obedience central to the spread of the gospel?
- 12) How has the Gospel According to Matthew changed your view of Jesus as the Messiah? Of the Kingdom of God? Of Jesus' ministry? Of your call to ministry?

Application:

What proof does your life give of the Resurrection? How can you share this proof with others this week?

Consider Jesus' three instructions to make disciples, baptize and teach (28:19-20). Pray about how you and your church can better fulfill the commission. Thank the Lord that he remains with you always and that his authority will have no end.

Title: *All Authority*

Text: **Matthew 28:1-20**

Opening: Recall a moment when you received news that was so good you could hardly believe it. How did you react? What did you do? What did you say? How did the news change your life?

Discussion:

- 1) In a culture where the testimony of women was not seen as valid in a court of law, what significance is there in women being the first one's to witness the empty tomb?
- 2) What range of thoughts and emotions do you think go through the women's minds during all these events? How do you think they felt as they met Jesus?
- 3) How did Matthew rule out the possibility that Jesus' disciples would later steal his body?
- 4) "Take away the resurrection of Jesus, and you leave Matthew without a Gospel." How do you respond to that statement?
- 5) If the resurrection of Jesus was true, and if people were to start reordering their lives by it, they would be on a collision course with the rest of the world. *Read Matthew 28:11-20.* How do Jesus' enemies fabricate an explanation for what happened?
- 6) What alternative explanation have you heard for Jesus' resurrection?

"Matthew's gospel presents Jesus in a rich, many-sided way. He appears as the Messiah of Israel, the king who will rule and save the world. He comes before us as the Teacher greater even than Moses. And, of course, he is presented as the son of man giving his life for us all. Matthew lays it all out step by step and invites us to learn the wisdom of the gospel message and the new way of life that results from it."

-N.T. Wright, Matthew for Everyone.

Matthew's gospel is thoroughly rooted in Judaism. It was written by a Jew (Matthew or Levi the Tax Collector) to other Jews to convince them that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah foretold by Old Testament Scripture. As a result Matthew refers to many Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled by Jesus. He uses the phrase "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophets" sixteen times.

Interestingly, while the gospel can only be understood through the lens of the Hebrew scriptures, Matthew also emphasizes the universal nature of the gospel-that it is for all people. This emphasis is found right from the beginning, with the inclusion of several gentiles (non-Jews) in the genealogy and the clear claim that Jesus is the Savior for the world. In the end Jesus sends His followers out to "make disciples of all nations," indeed this good news for all people.

The center-point of the gospel is the teaching Jesus gave on true discipleship and the every day images (parables) that Jesus incorporates to describe life in the kingdom of God.

"Several important messages stand out in this Gospel (1) We can be sure that God's Word is true, for the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah came true in Jesus. (2) Jesus wants us to acknowledge him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and to follow his instructions for our daily lives. (3) The Sermon on the Mount is one of the best summaries of how to serve God and love our fellow human beings. (4) We learn in the Gospel of Matthew how to relate to and care for fellow church members, particularly those who are having problems. (5) Jesus wants us to tell our friends and neighbors, as well as people throughout the entire world, the good news about salvation in his name."

-NIV Topical Study Bible.

Title: *Will We Reconcile?***Text:** Matthew 18:15-35**Opening:**

When have you seen or felt reconciliation create a closer bond between people?

Discussion:

1. What stands out to you about the process of conflict resolution/reconciliation that Jesus outlines here?
2. Why is it important to be as direct as possible with the person who has “sinned against you,” before involving others? At what point does it become helpful to involve others?
3. What is the ultimate goal we should have when we approach someone who has sinned against us? What does it mean to “win your brother (or sister) over” (v.15)? Does that mean you have convinced them that you are right? Reconnected relationally? What do you think that looks like?
4. When someone has sinned against you, what is the difference between saying, “it really didn’t matter,” and genuine reconciliation?
5. Just prior to this passage, Jesus talks about who is greatest in the kingdom, calling us to a child-like faith, he tells the parable of the lost sheep (vs. 10-14) and then lays out a process of conflict resolution. Set in this context, what is Jesus telling us in his contrast between binding and losing (v.18)?
6. What do vs. 19-20 contribute to your understanding of how relationships are healed? What place does prayer have in this process?

¹⁶“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 have ordained praise⁽⁶⁾?”

¹⁷And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

¹⁸Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing 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.

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

²¹Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For 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.

The Parable of the Tenants

³³“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

Title: *Jesus Enters Jerusalem & The Parable of The Tentants***Text: Matthew 21:1-11; 33-36****Bible Study Method: Manuscript Style.**

Take 10-15 minutes and read the text through silently on your own. During this time note any repeated words or phrases, any comparisons or contrasts, or cause and effect with underlining, circles, and connecting lines. You may want to use different colored pencils for added visual emphasis. If you have any questions that come up as you read, write them down in the margin. After people have spent a sufficient time in the passage on their own, pull back together to share insights and questions. Start by going around and having each person share something that they observed, then invite people to share their questions and seek to address them as a group. Finally discuss, what are some possible application points from this passage?

Matthew 21:1-36 NIV The Triumphal Entry

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵"Say to the Daughter of Zion,

'See, your king comes to you,

gentle and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"^[a]

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna^[b] to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"^[c]

"Hosanna^[d] in the highest!"

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

¹¹The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Jesus at the Temple

¹²Jesus entered the temple area 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. ¹³"It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,'^[e] but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'^[f]"

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at **the temple, and he healed them.** ¹⁵**But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.**

7. The rabbis of Jesus' day said if a man offended you, you should forgive him two times. But if he did it a third time, he did not need to be forgiven. What do you think Peter expected of Jesus when he asked his question?
8. When Jesus tells Peter to forgive his brother seventy-seven times (v.22), what is his point?
9. In your own words, how would you describe what the "kingdom of heaven is like..." as a result of Jesus' parable (vs. 24-35)?
10. What do you think is the central meaning of the parable?
11. What does the behavior of the "wicked" servant tell us about human nature? Why is forgiving so difficult?
12. What do we learn about our Heavenly Father from the parable?
13. Think of someone you have had a difficult time forgiving. How would it help to compare their actions to what God has forgiven you for?

Application: Reflect on one relational conflict that you have had in the past. If it was resolved well, what contributed to its' resolution? If not, is there a way that Jesus' teaching on reconciliation would have been helpful to apply?

Prayerfully Reflect On: Who in your life do you need to be reconciled with right now? Who is God calling you to forgive? What step is God calling you to take to seek this out?

Title: *Divorce***Text:** Matthew 19:1-12

Introduction: “We live at a time when what used to be thought of as Christian behavior in the area of marriage and family has been rejected by large swathes of western society... The rampant individualism of the last few hundred years in the West has left families and children in bad shape, as people act on the belief that they have, as individuals, a “right to happiness” which overrides all considerations of loyalty, keeping vows and duty to bring up lovingly the children one has brought into the world.” -NT Wright

Opening: When have you found satisfaction in keeping a promise? How have you benefited from other people keeping their promises?

Discussion:

- 1) What were the Pharisees trying to do by asking this question to Jesus? How do you think the Pharisees expected Jesus to answer (v.3)?
- 2) What main points about marriage and family does Jesus make? What does Jesus tell us about the priority of the marriage relationship?
- 3) While the “oneness” quality of marriage may be related to the physical aspect of the relationship, what other ways can a couple experience oneness in marriage?
- 4) What permissible grounds for divorce does Jesus give?
- 5) What does Jesus say about Moses’ teaching on divorce? Does he disagree with it? Expand on it?
- 6) Is this a hard-and-fast rule that anyone who divorces except for marital unfaithfulness and marries another woman commits adultery?

- 5) Give one or two examples in which you have personally seen the principles of verses 11 and 12 worked out in real life. In what ways did Jesus live out these principles?
- 6) From the context of these seven “woes”, how would you define the word woe? What different nuances does this word express?
- 7) In six out of the seven woes Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites”. In what ways were they being hypocrites?
- 8) How do the first two woes directly conflict with Jesus’ ministry? Think of two major themes in Matthew: the kingdom of God and discipleship (v. 13-15).
- 9) Describe what the scribes and Pharisees were doing when they made an oath? Why was Jesus condemning their practice? (v. 16-22)
- 10) In what ways were the scribes and Pharisees “majoring on the minors”? Without gossiping, describe an instance when you or someone you know missed the forest because the trees were in the way. (v. 23-24).
- 11) What is Jesus holding this generation accountable for? (v. 34-36; also see Heb. 11:35-38.)
- 12) Do you think Jesus is just talking about Jerusalem or the entire nation of Israel (v. 37)? Why do you think Jesus uses the picture of a mother hen gathering her offspring (v.37)?

Application: In contrast to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, what is one God is calling you to “practice what you preach” (v.3)?

In what ways can the church fall into the same destructive patterns of the Pharisees and teachers of the law by placing heavy loads on people rather helping them bear their burdens? What is one thing that the Church could do to help remove these burdens?

Optional Exercise: Jesus’ picture of externally clean cups and tombs, but dirty and decaying interiors is vividly powerful (v. 25-28). Take a moment to pray and ask God to reveal the areas in your life in which you have cared more about appearing holy than actually living holy. Repent and thank him for his forgiveness!

Title: *Religion Gone Wrong***Text:** Matthew 23:1-39

Context: Jesus' striking words in Mathew chapter 23 of warning, condemnation and sorrow, in reference to Israel's hypocritical religious leaders, come as a climax to the confrontation between him and the religious leaders that began back in 22:23. On the Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus gives a series of three parables that pronounce judgment on the leaders for not accepting Jesus' invitation to the kingdom of God (21:28-22:14). This is followed by four encounters in which the religious leaders vainly try to entrap Jesus, while he uses their words to bring further judgment upon them and to reveal his messianic identity (22:15-46). After, Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees and his lament over the city of Jerusalem (Ch. 23), Jesus and his disciples will leave both the temple and Jerusalem to go up to the Mount of Olives where he will foretell of the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and of events in the distant future (Ch. 24-25).

Discussion:

- 1) Why does Jesus tell the crowds and his disciples to follow what the scribes and Pharisees teach, but not what they do? Is Jesus telling them to follow their non-Biblical tradition that laid heavy burdens on the people? (v. 2-3)
 - 2) Contrast verse 4 with Mathew 11:28-30. In what ways is Jesus' burden light for the Christian? Try to use examples from your own experience.
 - 3) What inward motivations and attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees is Jesus condemning in verses 5-7?
- Note:** Phylacteries are small cube-shaped boxes that were attached to one's left arm and forehead with a piece of leather and contained a small piece of parchment with a scripture written on it.
- 4) Is Jesus forbidding his followers from *using* these titles (i.e. rabbi, father and instructor) or is he pointing to the *way* in which these titles are used? (v. 8-10)

Note: In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul allows a further ground for divorce: if an unbelieving partner desires to separate from a Christian believer, the believer should not ultimately refuse. But in both cases it is quite clear that the Christian norm is life-long marriage. God is the business of making people new from the inside.

- 7) Based on Jesus' teaching about divorce and adultery, the disciples are left questioning whether it would be better to not marry if this is the situation between a husband and wife. Why do you think the disciples respond in such a drastic way?
- 8) Jesus qualifies his teaching by saying that not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given, that the one who can accept this should accept it. On what basis would someone accept Jesus' teaching, on what basis would someone not accept it?
- 9) If you or someone you know has remarried after a divorce, what would you say based on this passage?
 - a. Put the past behind you
 - b. Repent and renew your present marriage
 - c. Pray for forgiveness
 - d. Make the most of your marriage now
- 10) Why might someone renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God?
- 11) In summary, what were some of the main points about marriage and family does Jesus make? What is the most important lesson you've learned from this section?

Application:

How do you feel about divorce? How has it influenced you?

What advice would you give to a couple contemplating marriage?

Week Three**March 7-March 13****Title: Reserved Seating In God's Kingdom****Text: Matthew 20:17-34****Opening:** When you were a child, what did your parents want you to be when you grew up? What did you want to be?**Discussion:**

- 1) At the beginning of the passage, there is an emphasis on Jesus to “go up to Jerusalem. What does this “going-up” journey entail for him?
- 2) What does he say will happen to the Son of Man? What awaits him there? How do you explain the gulf between Jesus’ prediction of what will happen to him and the request that James and John’s mother makes?
- 3) If you were one of the disciples, how do you think you would have received this news?
- 4) What motivated the mother of the sons of Zebedee to come and make this request of Jesus (v. 20)? What kind of kingdom was she thinking of? How was this different from Jesus’ kingdom?
- 5) Have you ever asked Jesus for something and in hindsight realized that you didn’t know what you were asking? If so, what brought you to the realization that you weren't asking for something that would ultimately be beneficial ?
- 6) What is “the cup” that Jesus is going to drink and which he says that the disciples will also drink from? Is this what they understood it to be when they said that they could drink it also?

- 7) What is the path to greatness according to Jesus (vs. 25-27)? How does Jesus’ understanding of greatness compare with the world’s understanding of what greatness is about?
- 8) How are pagan rulers and Christians to contrast with one another (20:24-28)?
- 9) What does it mean that Jesus gave his life as a “ransom for many”? What other pictures or metaphors come to mind that help you make sense of what Jesus has done for us?
- 10) The mother of the sons of Zebedee wanted her sons to experience reward, while the priority for Jesus is on following him in the here and now. What implications does this have for you and where you place your focus?
- 11) Contrast Jesus’ response to the request of the two blind men with his response to the mother of Zebedee’s sons. Why do you think that Jesus responded so differently to these two situations? What motivated Jesus’ response to each request?
- 12) How would you compare the blindness of these two men with the blindness of the disciples in 20:20-28?

Application:

If Jesus were to ask you “What do you want me to do for you?” How would you answer?

What is one area of your life where you need to apply Jesus’ understanding of greatness? In what ways are you being called to serve in this area?