

# Introduction to the Gospels – Christ’s Final Ministry in Judea & Perea – Part 4

## Table of Contents

Introduction to the Gospels – Part 4 .....	2
Lesson 1 – What’s Love Got to Do with It? .....	3
Daily Devotional – Lesson 1.....	4
Lesson 2 – A Matter of Faith .....	5
Daily Devotional – Lesson 2.....	6
Lesson 3 – Presenting Christ to Israel.....	7
Daily Devotional – Lesson 3.....	8
Lesson 4 – Israel’s Sins of Rejection.....	9
Daily Devotional – Lesson 4.....	10
Lesson 5 – Questioning the Messiah .....	11
Daily Devotional – Lesson 5.....	12
Lesson 6 – Confronting Religious Hypocrites.....	13
Daily Devotional – Lesson 6.....	14
Lesson 7 – Signs of His Return.....	15
Daily Devotional – Lesson 7.....	16
Lesson 8 – Jesus Prophesies His Return.....	17
Daily Devotional – Lesson 8.....	18
Lesson 9 – Parables of His 2nd Coming (#1).....	19
Daily Devotional – Lesson 9.....	20
Lesson 10 – Parables of His Coming (#2) .....	21
Daily Devotional – Lesson 10.....	22
Lesson 11 – Judgment at His Return .....	23
Daily Devotional – Lesson 11.....	24
Lesson 12 – The Last Supper (#1) .....	25
Daily Devotional – Lesson 12.....	26
Lesson 13 – The Last Supper (#2) .....	27
Daily Devotional – Lesson 13.....	28

Unless otherwise noted all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

We are pleased to share these lessons for your spiritual enrichment. As with the ACTS magazine, we would like to take a moment and remind our readers that the General Council Churches of God, (Seventh Day), is in a state of constant growth and we all have different backgrounds, it is possible that your views may differ somewhat from those presented in this study. We pray these lessons may be used as a point of entry for your own study.  
“Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

## Introduction to the Gospels – Part 4

### The Journey to Jerusalem

Just six weeks after the raising of Lazarus from the dead in Bethany, Jesus journeys from the obscure wilderness and arrives again in the small town that is a suburb of Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin and other Jewish religious leaders have been searching for Jesus, that they might seize Him privately and avoid public resentment, but this popular “miracle-worker” has the audacity to show up on their doorstep in full public view! To make matters worse for them, Jesus is now reunited with Lazarus, the man who after spending four days dead in a tomb has drawn a large and curious crowd. If only they could have captured Jesus before He got near to Jerusalem. In their thinking, there would be no secret arrest and death of Jesus now, not unless...

Suddenly, Lazarus comes under the malevolent scrutiny of the chief priests. Lazarus must be removed! With his death, the man who had become the most visible icon of Jesus’ power, the crowds would go away. When the host of people dispersed, Jesus could be privately seized and put to death. Yes, a living Lazarus was too much of a nuisance for them to deal with Jesus. They failed to realize, however, that Jesus was about to take the conflict to a higher level.

The Messiah’s enemies were stunned when the popular Rabbi came riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, like some long-awaited King! The multitude gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread and joined with Jerusalem’s inhabitants to welcome Jesus with open arms. They waved palm branches, and carpeted His path with them, shouting “*Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’*” (Mark 11:9). Imagine the fury of Jesus’ enemies, when under the protective acceptance of the vast throng, the Rabbi again entered the Holy Temple and drove out the moneychangers and the sellers of animals for sacrifice for the second time. It became clear to the Jewish leaders at that juncture, that they would need another plan to deal with Jesus.

The ministry style of our Savior changed radically during this time. First of all, while Jesus had previously avoided most direct confrontation with the Jewish religious hierarchy, He now confronted them openly. The 23rd chapter of Matthew records Jesus’ comprehensive and scathing rebuke of them. The way Jesus condemns their hypocrisy stands in point-by-point contrast to His teaching of the Kingdom citizen from the Beatitudes.

In addition, Jesus had very little time left to spend with His disciples. His direct ministry and teaching took on more urgency. He had taught them all of the important things, but it was time for a focused review of the most essential. In the Kingdom University, these men were about to be given their final exams. If there was one week they’d spent with Jesus that they wouldn’t forget for the rest of their lives, this was it.

Jesus prophesied about the world conditions and events that would occur just prior to His second coming. Of all the warnings He gives, the strongest one concerns religious deception. They were to understand (as we are today), that false prophets and even some proclaiming to be the Messiah would arise and lead many astray. By understanding that our Lord’s return would be a cataclysmic, unmistakable, worldwide occurrence, they could avoid the attempts of others to subvert their faith in Christ. Secondly, they were told to brace themselves for the terrible calamities that would come upon the world prior to His return.

The Lord also gave them further parabolic teachings about God’s Kingdom covering topics such as tenacity in prayer, true righteousness, divorce and celibacy, the cost of discipleship, servant-style leadership, childlike faith, the danger of pride, and the dangers of making carnal comparisons. The last parables and object lessons of Christ related directly to His second coming: the cursing of the fruitless tree, the faithful and unfaithful servant, the marriage supper, the wise and foolish virgins, the parable of the talents, the commendation of the faithful, and the condemnation of the unfaithful.

At the Last Supper, just prior to Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord conducted the most intimate and important training class yet experienced by His disciples. In the upper room, Jesus performed His last great act of love to them prior to His trial and death, kneeling before them to wash their feet, bestowing upon them the most fundamental principle of Kingdom service: to love one another even as He had loved them. Jesus would ask just one thing of them for Himself, that they would remember Him by gathering to partake of the bread and the wine to commemorate His death. The Lord would also teach on faithful ministry, the Holy Spirit, coming persecution upon the church, and further directives to love one another, but these will be considered in the final lesson studies covering the gospels.

Sadly, there isn’t enough room in this study to address everything these Scriptures entail. We trust, however, that your study of God’s Word will be enhanced by our effort. May the Lord bless your study!

# Lesson 1 – What’s Love Got to Do with It?

**Primary Text:** Luke 18:1 -14; Matthew 19:1-30

**Memory Verse:** *Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 19:13-14

## Introduction:

Perhaps the most difficult truth Jesus needed to convey to His followers was that genuine, persevering love was the central theme of the Kingdom of God. While the orthodox Jews zealously pursued their beliefs, their religious commitments were based more upon intellectual understanding than upon a personal relationship with the One True God. This showed not only in the way they related to God, but in the way they treated others. Jesus worked constantly to teach them a better way to live than by their heartless legalism.

The Master did this in several ways, all of them working together toward the same end: to bring men into a personal, trusting, love relationship with the Eternal Father: (1) *He demonstrated it by illustrative parables;* (2) *He used direct teaching on daily life;* (3) *He modeled these living principles in the way He treated others.*

Assuredly, love is found at the core of all genuine spirituality. Without it, there is no grace, no mercy, and no true fulfillment. God is a divine being of pure and infinite love, and we were created to be like Him! Love has *everything* to do with it!

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)*

## Studying the Word

### Lesson Study

1. Why did the widow in Jesus’ parable of Luke 18:1-8 end up with a judgment in her favor? Luke 18:2-5
2. What advantages does a child of God have over the widow in this parable? Luke 18:7-8
3. Discuss the ways in which the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable of Luke 18:9-14 was in error in his thinking. Luke 18:11-12 How easy is it for us to fall into this same snare?
4. In contrast, what was the attitude of the publican? Luke 18:13 What was the primary point of this parable? Luke 18:14
5. What were the pertinent truths behind Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ question about divorce? Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12
6. What is the importance of Jesus’ teaching on celibacy? Matthew 19:10-12 How does this compare to Paul’s teaching on celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35?
7. What vital kingdom truth did Jesus teach through the little children? Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17
8. What did Jesus teach to His disciples about riches through the wealthy young man who turned away from following Him? Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-25; Luke 18:18-25
9. Can you imagine why Peter wondered what personal gain there was to following Jesus Christ? Matthew 19:25-30; Mark 10:26-31; Luke 18:26-30 How can we be assured that serving God is worth all the effort?

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 1*

### **Sunday: The Persistent Widow — Luke 18:1-8**

This widow had three major obstacles: 1) being a woman, she had only minor rights under the law of that day; 2) being a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court; 3) being poor, she could pay no bribes. What hope did she have? First, she wouldn't give up! Furthermore, as a stranger to the judge, she kept pleading her case until he responded in her favor. Finally, although the judge was unjust, he gave in to her just to gain personal peace. As God's elect, we've a much greater hope and every reason to persevere. We're granted privileged access to the perfect Judge. We aren't strangers to Him, but accepted and cherished. In Him, we are rich beyond measure!

### **Monday: The Pharisee & the Publican — Luke 18:9-14**

Jesus tells this story about two men praying in the temple to illustrate true spirituality. Publicans were regarded as thieves and traitors: those who worked for the Roman government, extorting unfair amounts in taxes from their own countrymen. But Jesus condemns the religious pride of the Pharisee, who was: deluded about prayer (using it to tell God and anyone listening how good he was); deceived about himself (thinking he was accepted by God solely by his good works); and wrong about the publican, who cried out in true repentance. Which of these men left the temple cleansed and justified?

### **Tuesday: Jesus on Divorce — Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12**

Divorce is at epidemic levels in our day, because people view it as an easy way out. In answering the Pharisees, Jesus strikes the heart of the issue: God intends marriage to be a lifelong relationship. Therefore, God expects devotion and fidelity of both man and woman to each other. While the Pharisees are trifling with the technicalities of marriage and divorce, Jesus turned them to God's original intent: *committed, enduring love*.

### **Wednesday: Jesus on Celibacy — Matthew 19:10-12**

Everyone should consider God's will for marriage. If one marries, the only way to fulfill that union and please God is to give it their all. If one can't or is unwilling (for any reason) to do this, then rather than marry and have a mediocre or poor marriage, he/she should remain single. The idea behind being a "eunuch," is that of refraining from all sexual pleasures. Jesus teaches this, as does Paul (see 1 Corinthians 7), as a viable option.

### **Thursday: Little Children & the Kingdom — Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17**

It appears Jesus' disciples considered the little children to be unimportant. They forgot Jesus' teaching on greatness (Mark 9:36-37). The Lord wasn't teaching here that adults should behave immaturely (1 Corinthians 13:11), but that they should live by simple faith as do little children. We must enter God's kingdom in this manner, in helplessness, relying totally on God's mercy and grace to save us. We must live by simple faith (Colossians 2:6-7).

### **Friday: Riches & the Kingdom — Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-25; Luke 18:18-25**

Jesus loved this young man. He had good manners, the respect of others, and great potential. Yet he was superficial in spiritual things, for he trusted in riches to make his way in life. Money can be a wonderful servant, but is always a treacherous master. Multitudes will be denied entrance to God's kingdom due to a covetous heart. Is God above everything in your life?

### **Saturday: The Benefit of Following Christ — Matthew 19:25-30; Mark 10:26-31; Luke 18:26-30**

Perhaps you've wondered, as Peter did, what we gain by following Christ? We can never "out-give" God, but what He is most interested in are the motives of our hearts. Industrialist R.J. Le Tourneau said, "If you give because it pays, it won't pay!" Do we follow Christ for reward, or because we love Him? Do we work for Him because we love others and desire to see them saved, or for self-acclaim? God rewards the sincere, true heart.

## Lesson 2 – A Matter of Faith

**Primary Text:** Matthew 20:1-34; Luke 19:1-10

**Memory Verse:** *“And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* Matthew 20:27-28

### Introduction:

Do we rely entirely and absolutely on God? Total faith is impossible for us without a true understanding of the person and character of God. But by special revelation, (the power of God’s word), perfect faith is imparted to the human heart. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17: *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* The apostle also wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* God’s work of grace on the behalf of saving men, and the quality of genuine faith which secures our salvation is completely the gift of God. There is not a single aspect of salvation for which man can rightly credit himself. Salvation, grace, and faith, and the love of God which made it possible, are all a divine gift. But we must go even further with faith than this.

The way we plan our lives, set our priorities, order our days, and engage in life’s many activities both small and great are all to be accomplished by faith in God. How we live our lives makes a profound difference in promoting God’s kingdom. Pride and selfishness are natural enemies of serving God, and the old human nature is steeped with an abundance of both. Christ must dwell within our hearts if we are to have the daily, overcoming power to defeat our corrupt natures. Seeking more of His indwelling Spirit, keeping our hearts sensitive and pliable to the Master, is vital to spiritual victory. No life of faith and power is an accident.

Seeking God must become our daily passion! The author of Hebrews wrote concerning faith: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* (Hebrews 11:6). The key word here is “diligently.” It means that all else is set aside. To seek Him with diligence is to make Him our first priority. We should stop and ask ourselves: *Is knowing, serving, and loving Jesus Christ the first thing in my life?*

### Studying the Word

#### Lesson Study

1. Examine the employment strategy of the master of the vineyard in Jesus’ parable of Matthew 20:1-7. What difference was there in the hiring of the second and third groups from the first?
2. Discuss the joy of knowing that God uses laborers to build and promote the kingdom of God. John 4:34-37; 1 Corinthians 15:58
3. When the master of the vineyard paid his workers, what problem did those hired early in the morning have? Matthew 20:8-16 What were the important points of this parable?
4. How specific was Jesus in sharing about His trial, death, and resurrection with His closest disciples? Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34
5. What important details were involved in the self-seeking of James and John? Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41
6. What truth did Jesus reveal to them through this situation? Matthew 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45
7. Describe the unique faith of Bartimaeus. Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43
8. What can be learned about the way of salvation from Jesus’ encounter with Zaccheus? Luke 19:1-10

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 2*

### **Sunday: The Master Hires Workers — Matthew 20:1-7**

This parable shows clearly that God uses laborers to work in His vineyard. What a privilege to be wanted and appointed to do God’s work! Notice that all of the laborers willing to work were employed. Some were hired early, others later, but all of them were given important tasks to do. God is still calling workers to labor for Him. Will we set aside our own tasks and agendas to answer His call?

### **Monday: The Master Pays His Workers — Matthew 20:8-16**

How generous is the master of the vineyard! When the workers stand in the pay line, even those who worked the least were rewarded as if they had worked all day. Those hired in the morning received the same wages, but we must remember that they were paid exactly what they contracted for. The master wasn’t unfair to them. Perhaps, if they had been willing to go to work depending solely on the generous character of the vineyard’s owner (as the other laborers did), they’d have received more. When they saw what the master paid the late-in-the-day workers, they suddenly felt they deserved more. The wages can’t be confused with salvation, for we don’t “earn” it. Neither is it speaking of rewards, because we won’t all receive an equal reward. This parable deals with our attitudes. We would do well to trust God, and put an end to self-promotion and jealousy.

### **Tuesday: Another Prediction — Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34**

Jesus takes His closest followers aside to make this vivid announcement of the manner of His death. They needed to understand what was going to take place, for the rest of Jesus’ followers would need strong leadership and encouragement after His death. But were they really listening? When Jesus is actually arrested in Gethsemane, they can’t believe it. After His resurrection, when they discover an empty tomb, they are astonished. Did they not hear Him?

### **Wednesday: Warning Against Pride — Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45**

This request for promotion is framed in ignorance, tragically misdirected, and motivated by the same prideful desire shown by the devil. Perhaps they couldn’t know that the path to a crown is by way of a cross; great suffering and loss precedes high reward. They were misdirected in wanting to “rule over” the others. But the road to ruling in God’s kingdom is by “serving.” Lastly, in wanting the honor of a throne, they showed ugly pride. Jesus uses their presumption to teach an important truth: the proof of greatness is not power or position, but character. Even Jesus was perfected through suffering. (see Hebrews 2:9-10)

### **Thursday: Bartimaeus — Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43**

While the world often turns a cold face toward human need, Jesus embodies compassion and mercy. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he desires, and the blind man responds with deep faith, knowing that Jesus can heal him. There are too many, however, who merely want a donation—they’ve found a way of life in their infirmities. Do we want healing or a handout?

### **Friday: A Seeker Is Found — Luke 19:1-6**

Zaccheus sought Jesus with the zeal of a child excited over a parade, running ahead of the crowd and climbing a tree so he might see. This government official set aside his pride to seek the master, only to discover that the master was seeking him. Truly, all who seek Jesus find that He was seeking them!

### **Saturday: Converting Zaccheus — Luke 19:7-10**

Zaccheus wasn’t saved because he was committed to good works, but because he responded to Christ by faith. Zaccheus didn’t gain “religion” the day that Jesus came to his house; he gained a divine “relationship.” Amazingly, by hosting the Lord in his home, Zaccheus willingly became the guest. This is the only way we can truly know the Lord—it is not a thing to be manipulated—we must accept His lordship.

## Lesson 3 – Presenting Christ to Israel

**Primary Text:** Mark 11:1-8; John 11:55-12:26

**Memory Verse:** *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”* John 12:24-25

### Introduction:

The events and teachings studied in this lesson propel us toward the betrayal, trial, suffering, and death of Jesus. The Lord’s style of ministry changed dramatically at this point, as He moved purposely from obscurity in outlying areas into the public eye of Jerusalem. His strategic public boldness was a blatant challenge to the religious leadership of Israel who had been against Him at every turn. How preposterous that this son of a Jewish carpenter would ride like royalty into the streets of Jerusalem, allowing the people to honor and celebrate Him as a divine prophet and teacher!

Due to the power Jesus had demonstrated and the miracles He had performed, especially the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, many of the skeptical had begun to believe and were embracing His teachings. As the number of followers multiplied, the chief priests knew they must act quickly, before popular opinion was turned completely against them.

While Jesus would soon confront the religious hypocrisy prevalent in Jerusalem, His own physical approach to the holy city was with tears. He knew the destruction that would soon befall it, the human suffering involved, all because of Israel’s hardness of heart. In stark contrast to the life-giving ministry Jesus had sustained for over three years, He destroys a fig tree for its fruitlessness as a demonstrative rebuke to the Jews, and then cleanses God’s Holy Temple a second time. Jesus made it clear to all that divine judgment was upon them.

Yet, in one of His most personal and poignant illustrations, Jesus likens His life, and the lives of all who would follow Him, as seeds that must fall into the ground alone and die. Only in this way—from death to life—would the Kingdom of God be established. The way is being set for His crucifixion.

### *Studying the Word*

#### Lesson Study

1. What plan did the Jewish leaders have to gain information about Jesus so that He could be seized at the earliest opportunity? John 11:55-57
2. Why was Mary’s anointing of Jesus such a powerful demonstration of love and worship? Matthew 26:6-7, 10-13; Mark 14:3, 6-9; John 12:1-3, 7-8
3. What was Judas Iscariot’s reaction to the anointing, and what was his motivation for speaking against it? Matthew 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5; John 12:4-6
4. Why were the chief priests also intent on killing Lazarus? John 12:9-11
5. What was entirely unique and significant in Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem contrasted with His prior ministry? Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40; John 12:12-19
6. What were the dynamic lessons being demonstrated when Jesus cursed the unfruitful fig tree? Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-26
7. Discuss how Jesus must have felt by God’s Temple being turned into a public bazaar of corrupt profits and the extortion of those who came in sincerity to worship. Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48
8. In what manner did Jesus say that He would be glorified? John 12:23-24
9. What is the calling and destiny of every devoted follower of Jesus Christ? John 12:25-26

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 3*

### **Sunday: The Plan to Apprehend Jesus — John 11:55-57**

The Sanhedrin had already determined that Jesus must be put to death, but they were aware of His immense popularity. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders sought to take Him into custody, but the Lord also knew His work was not yet complete, so He had withdrawn to the city of Ephraim (near the wilderness). Yet the leaders conspired, knowing that Jesus was likely to attend the annual Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem. They now planned to seize Jesus at the first opportunity.

### **Monday: The Anointing at Bethany — Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8**

Mary let down her hair (something Jewish women never did in public), humbling herself and laying her glory at Jesus' feet. She poured the fragrant spikenard out on the Lord's head and feet, a costly perfume equal to a common laborer's wages for a year! Here is the Jewish woman who heard Jesus' words as she sat at His feet, and she must have listened! While His disciples didn't comprehend that Jesus was soon to die, Mary knew this was her last chance to lavish love and worship on the Master prior to His suffering and death. There will always be those who criticize the cost of true worship, and seek to demean its importance.

### **Tuesday: The Plot to Kill Lazarus — John 12:9-11**

Isn't it awful that a man can be hated merely because God has miraculously blessed him? Such is the demonic treachery of an evil, prideful heart: it hates God and anything that is touched by God (John 15:18-19). The priests now plot to kill Lazarus because Jesus had raised him from the dead, and many were therefore putting their faith in Christ.

### **Wednesday: Entering Jerusalem — Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19**

This is the only time in Jesus' life that He planned and took part in a public demonstration. By fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, (the donkey upon which the Messiah rode was actually the royal animal of Jewish monarchs (see 1 Kings 1:32-33, 38-40)), Jesus indirectly proclaimed Himself King of the Jews. The fact that Jesus had now come openly into public view was a direct challenge to the Jewish leaders. To hold any significant control over the people, they must act quickly.

### **Thursday: Cursing a Fig Tree — Matthew 21:17-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-26**

Besides the drowning of demon-possessed swine, this is the only time that Jesus used His power to destroy something in nature. Why wasn't His power used to restore the tree? First, Jesus used it as a lesson on failure, for Israel had failed to be fruitful for God. In the Prophets, the fig tree represented Israel (Jeremiah 8:13; Nahum 3:12; Hosea 9:10). Second, Jesus used it to teach about faith: His words, "*Have faith in God*" (Mark 11:22), mean to live in a constant attitude of trust and utter dependence on God.

### **Friday: Second Temple Cleansing — Matthew 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48**

After Jesus first cleansed the Temple, it wasn't long before it was again operating for lucrative gain. After all, the priests also got their cut! A "*den of thieves*" is where thieves run when they want to hide. The place that should have been devoted to prayer, worship, and evangelism had again become corrupt.

### **Saturday: The Fruitful Grain — John 12:20-26**

Jesus' response holds a powerful truth for many sermons! At the heart of His statement is the fact that no one can be fruitful and remain comfortable! It is never easy to be planted and die so that we can be productive; our flesh fights against it. But losing our lives for His sake is the calling of every believer.

## Lesson 4 – Israel’s Sins of Rejection

**Primary Text:** Matthew 21:28-22:14; Luke 20:1-8; John 12:27-50

**Memory Verse:** *Then Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”* John 12:44-46

### Introduction:

The love, grace, and mercy of Almighty God are made the more wondrous against the ugly backdrop of the fickle, desperately wicked human heart. It would have made the most sense that of all the peoples on the Earth, Israel would have been the ones to embrace God’s plan of salvation. But even the Israelite prophets had prophesied that this would not be so. The very nation that had been chosen through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the portion of that nation through whom the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ would descend, the tribe of Judah (Jews), would be the people who would utterly reject the Messiah. This rejection wouldn’t be committed just once, but in a three-fold manner:

First, Israel rejected and abused the holy prophets that God had sent to reveal to them the way of salvation and call them back to God in repentance. The epitome of these servants (the prophets) that God sent to them was John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He preached the Kingdom of God, calling Israel to repent of their sins and be baptized. When the religious leaders rejected him, it was a rejection of the Father, the one who had given John his mission and authority.

Secondly, Israel rejected the *Son of God*. Jesus came to the lost house of Israel, wooing them back to God. There were many that received Him, but the majority of the Jews, especially the “religious crowd,” hated Him. Ultimately, they had Jesus crucified, with the thought of obliterating His ministry. Their malevolent reaction to the Messiah is what God used to extend salvation through faith in Christ to the entire world.

Lastly, Israel rejected the ministry of Christ through the early believers. This was a direct rejection of the *Holy Spirit*, the powerful Comforter that was the divine anointing that empowers the Church of God. Amazingly, despite this three-fold rejection, God is still reaching out to Israel, desiring to draw them back.

### Studying the Word

#### Lesson Study

1. What inner struggle did Jesus express concerning His impending crucifixion? John 12:25
2. Discuss the significance of what God said audibly from heaven the third time in Jesus’ ministry, and the specific reason that God had spoken. John 12:28-30
3. In what manner did Jesus press the people listening to Him that they must believe in Him before it was too late? What dynamic picture of light and darkness did He use? John 12:31-41
4. What did Jesus say about those who would not receive Him? John 12:42-49
5. Identify the inspiration for every word spoken by Jesus. John 12:50
6. How did Jesus foil the Jewish leaders’ attempt to discredit His ministry? What specifically was the trap Jesus laid for them? Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8
7. Explain the meaning of Jesus’ parable about the two Sons. Matthew 21:28-32
8. Explain the parable of the wicked vinedressers. Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19
9. As God’s “Chief Cornerstone,” how is Jesus the ultimate downfall and salvation of mankind? Matthew 21:42-45; Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:14-25
10. Describe the essential elements and the primary application of the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14.

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 4*

### **Sunday: A Voice from Heaven — John 12:27-33**

Have you ever experienced an inner struggle, pulled between walking the easier path or serving God? Be assured that Jesus also faced the weakness of His flesh, and made the hard choice of doing His Father's will. The ultimate price Jesus would suffer was an agonizing death, yet He knew this was His destiny. He turns His eyes from Himself to the Father, and places glorifying God's name above everything. For the third recorded time in Jesus' ministry, the Father speaks audibly from heaven. The reaction of the people shows that they weren't looking for the kind of Messiah that would die for their sins, but One that would deliver them from Roman tyranny.

### **Monday: Light of the World — John 12:34-50**

Even as darkness is the absence of light, the absence of the living Messiah would cause a deep darkness. Many who refused the 'Light' while He was with them would never trust in Him. The Lord had drawn a line in the sand to say, in essence, "Receive Me now, or be lost forever." The tragic thing is that they feared men more than God. Making a decision for Christ was a radical and dangerous proposition. The offer today is the same: *believe Christ, despite the cost, and receive eternal life!*

### **Tuesday: Questioning Jesus' Authority — Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8**

Attempting to discredit Jesus' authority and destroy His credibility, the chief priests and elders ask Him a leading question. Sensing their motives, Jesus turns the question back on them with His question about John's authority. If they admitted that God had sent John, they would be trapped, for they hadn't accepted him. If they said that John was empowered only by the people, the people would have turned on them, for the people had received John as from God. The real key is that these leaders had rejected God—they were snared in their own trap!

### **Wednesday: The Two Sons — Matthew 21:28-32**

The vineyard in this parable represents the Nation of Israel. The two Sons represent two classes of people within Israel, namely, the self-righteous religious group, and the publicans and sinners. The religious crowd rejected John the Baptist's ministry, while the nonreligious people repented and were baptized. But those who rejected John's teaching were actually rejecting God. It means nothing when we "talk the talk," unless we "walk the walk!" (Read James 2:18)

### **Thursday: The Wicked Vinedressers — Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19**

This parable is based on Isaiah 5:1-7. Despite God's goodness to Israel when He sent His servants (prophets) to them they were mistreated or killed. In merciful response, God sent His own Son to them to restore them. But the husbandmen seized the Son and slew Him without the camp just to claim the Son's inheritance. Caught up in the story, the crowd unknowingly passes judgment upon their leaders and themselves!

### **Friday: The Chief Cornerstone — Matthew 21:42-46**

To those who reject Jesus Christ, the Messiah, He is a stumbling stone, meaning that rejecting Him is the ultimate cause of their downfall. But to those who receive Him (the Church), He is the cornerstone. Everything in the building is measured and aligned with that principal foundation rock.

### **Saturday: The Wedding Feast — Matthew 22:1-14**

The period described in this parable must follow Jesus' resurrection, as the Father is still inviting the people of Israel to come to the Feast in spite of what they did to His Son. Yet again they reject His bidding, and it seals their doom. The Father turned then to others, opening the celebration to "whoever" would come. The timing of this story would identify the servants as ministering believers in the early church.

## Lesson 5 – Questioning the Messiah

**Primary Text:** Matthew 22:15-46; Mark 12:38-40

**Memory Verse:** *Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”* Matthew 22:37-40

### Introduction:

Can a man win an argument with God? Turning to Job in the Old Testament, we remember his assumed knowledge, but when God finally began to speak to Job, this sincere man of God found himself confronted with a plethora of questions unanswerable from any human perspective. From Job 38:1-41:34, God confronted Job’s pride and self-righteousness in two ways: (1) by asking questions about the ways of life for which Job had no knowledge; (2) by asking Job to perform those things that only God can by His infinite power. Job’s initial response to God is: *“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.”* (Job 40:4-5 NKJV)

Paraphrasing, Job essentially said, “It’s time for me to shut my mouth and listen.” When God confronts man, this is the only wisdom we can exercise! Job’s last response shows the new revelation and respect he has gained:

*I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:2-6)

But the religious leaders thought they could trap Jesus?

### Studying the Word

#### Lesson Study

1. Discuss why the Pharisees and Herodians set aside their differences to band together that they might ensnare Jesus. Explain the wisdom of Jesus’ response to them. Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26
2. What hypothetical situation did the Sadducees use to try to trap Jesus? Matthew 22:23-28; Mark 12:18-23; Luke 20:27-33
3. How did Jesus unravel the Sadducees’ attempt? Matthew 22:29-33; Mark 12:24-27; Luke 20:24-40
4. What leading question is posed to Jesus by a scribal lawyer, and why was it a dangerous question? Matthew 22:34-36; Mark 12:28
5. Explain the profound wisdom of Jesus’ response to the lawyer. Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-30
6. While Jesus partially commended the lawyer for his response to Jesus’ statement, (stating, “you are not far from the kingdom of God”), discuss why this lawyer wasn’t told he was “part” of God’s kingdom. Mark 12:31-34
7. How did Jesus silence those who tried to ensnare Him with questions? Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44
8. What condemning warning did Jesus give concerning the Jewish leadership? Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45- 47  
Teacher’s Note: Jesus identified that David spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit when declaring Psalm 110:1, *“The LORD said to my Lord...”* The first word for LORD is *Yahweh*, God’s covenant name (I am that I am). The second word for Lord is a different word that the Jews used as a title for God. King David illustrated that *Yahweh* spoke to the Messiah, whom David calls his Lord. The point that Jesus was making is that David would never have called one of his descendants Lord, unless that descendent had transcendancy (above mortal man). By this, Jesus identified His true Father as divine, and therefore, His own nature as possessing divine status. Jesus’ true identity is debated to this day.

## *Reading the Word*

### *Daily Devotional – Lesson 5*

#### **Sunday: Pharisees & Herodians — Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26**

Because Rome empowered King Herod, the Herodians supported paying taxes to Caesar. Because the Romans were a paganistic Gentile nation, the Pharisees abhorred the taxation. But to trap Jesus, these two enemies join together. If Jesus had answered their question on taxes either way, He would have been ensnared. By Jesus' astonishing answer, He avoided the trap and taught important truths: (1) rulers must be honored and obeyed (Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4); (2) God must be honored and obeyed (Acts 5:27-32); (3) man bears God's image and owes God everything (Genesis 1:26-27).

#### **Monday: Questioned by the Sadducees — Matthew 22:23-28; Mark 12:18-23; Luke 20:27-33**

The Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch (the 5 books of Moses), and didn't believe in any resurrection. They tried to trap Jesus using a hypothetical situation of preserving a man's name lest he die with no male heir, a brother in the family would marry his brother's widow (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). But could a woman end up with seven husbands in an eternal kingdom? It was entirely by this concept that the Sadducees felt they discredited any resurrection.

#### **Tuesday: Answering the Sadducees — Matthew 22:29-33; Mark 12:24-27; Luke 20:34-40**

Imagine the looks on their faces when Jesus told the Sadducees they were ignorant of the Scriptures, and ignorant of God's power! Referring back to Moses' writings, Jesus reminds them that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (not *was* the God...), meaning that these men *would one day live again!*

#### **Wednesday: Questioned by a Lawyer — Matthew 22:34-36; Mark 12:28**

Now, a lawyer tests Jesus by asking, "What is the greatest commandment?" This had been debated for centuries, and the scribes had listed 248 positive and 365 negative commands in the Law. Who could hope to know and keep them all perfectly? So the experts had separated them into "heavy" (important) and "light" (trivial) commandments, and encouraged an emphasis upon the "heavier" ones. But this thinking was in error: for you need break only *one law* to be guilty of all! (James 2:10).

#### **Thursday: Answering the Lawyer — Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-34**

Jesus quoted the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), a verse recited daily by every orthodox Jew, identifying that the core of serving God is in loving Him: it is a matter of the heart. Surprisingly, Jesus also quoted Leviticus 19:18—love for one's neighbor—and made it equal with the Shema! Love is the foundation for all obedience, for all of the Law is summed up by the command to love (Romans 13:8-10). If we love God, we'll strive to please Him; if we love our neighbor we won't do anything to harm him. Take note that Jesus only partially commended the lawyer's response.

#### **Friday: Jesus Asks a Question — Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44**

Jesus put an end to the tricky questions being posed by asking the ultimate doctrinal question: How could Christ be the Son of David when David called Him Lord? This inspired question from Psalm 110:1 points to the divine status of the Messiah. For David to call Christ, "Lord," Messiah would have to be much more than mere man. (See note at the end of Lesson Questions)

#### **Saturday: Beware the Lawyers? — Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47**

It is character that makes a person valuable, not his uniform, not his title, nor the office he holds. All that derives from the carnal is superficial and artificial, and leads to carnal pride. Real character is developed as we walk with God, and His nature is developed within us. Only this truly makes the man!

## Lesson 6 – Confronting Religious Hypocrites

**Primary Text:** Matthew 23:1-36

**Memory Verse:** “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Matthew 23:11-12

### Introduction:

The Messiah’s denouncement and condemnation of the Pharisees is organized in the form of seven woes (remember that “seven” is God’s spiritual number of “completion”). It is most interesting to compare these negative qualities with the positive teaching that Jesus gave in the Beatitudes about the spiritual character of the citizens of God’s kingdom. Although far from a joking matter, the woes pronounced upon the personal conduct of the Pharisees, who had assumed a “self-appointed authority,” can be poignantly contrasted with the Beatitudes, and could be called the “Brat”-itudes. Inasmuch as the nature of a brat (spoiled child) is to act selfishly, even at the expense of others, the term is appropriate. The Pharisees were hypocritical, selfish, childish, destructive brats.

To aid you in your study, take note of the contrasts between the behavior of the Pharisees and the Beatitudes:

<i>Beatitudes</i>	<i>Pharisees</i>
Matthew 5:3 “ <i>poor in spirit</i> ” (total absence of self-sufficiency)	Matthew 23:13 “keep themselves and others lost” (total focus on works)
Matthew 5:4 “ <i>those who mourn</i> ” (those grieving their condition)	Matthew 23:14 “destroyers” (hurting the disadvantaged)
Matthew 5:5 “ <i>the meek</i> ” (those with supreme self-control)	Matthew 23:15 “winning converts to condemnation” (empty religion)
Matthew 5:6 “ <i>hunger ...for righteousness</i> ” (heavenly treasures)	Matthew 23:16-22 “greedy for gain” (earthly, carnal treasures)
Matthew 5:7 “ <i>the merciful</i> ” (having compassionate hearts)	Matthew 23:23-24 “rejected mercy (majored on minor issues)
Matthew 5:8 “ <i>pure in heart</i> ” (clean before God)	Matthew 23:25-28 “defiled within” (emphasized outward cleanliness)
Matthew 5:9-12 “ <i>peacemaker</i> ” & “ <i>persecuted for righteousness</i> ” (respect and honor for others)	Matthew 23:29-33 “the devil’s children” (like the devil, they were liars, v. 30, and murderers, v. 34)

### Studying the Word

#### Lesson Study

1. What were the false concepts of the Pharisees’ religion that Jesus condemned? Matthew 23:1-12
2. How did the Pharisees “*shut up the kingdom*” so that others could not enter? Matthew 23:13
3. How did the Pharisees mistreat people, particularly those who were vulnerable and in need of mercy? Matthew 23:14
4. What were the Pharisees producing by converting others to their religious system? Matthew 23:15
5. How did the way the Pharisees swore oaths show their greed and misunderstanding of life’s true value? Matthew 23:16-22
6. What woe upon the Pharisees does Jesus state when He refers to them paying tithes even on their spices and herbs? Matthew 23:23-24 By declaring this, was Jesus in any way promoting that it was not essential to pay tithes and give offerings?
7. Explain the symbolic illustrations Jesus gives in declaring woe upon the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. Matthew 23:25-28
8. Why is Jesus’ final denouncement of the Pharisees the strongest of all, and what things does He speak prophetically to them that will lead ultimately to their complete condemnation? Matthew 23:29-36

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 6*

### **Sunday: False Concepts of the Pharisees — Matthew 23:1-12**

The Pharisees had assumed an authority not granted by God. Jesus pointed to three major flaws: (1) a false concept of righteousness (vv. 2-3), which to them meant outward conformity to God's Law, while ignoring the inward condition of the heart (see Psalm 51:6); (2) a false concept of ministry (v. 4), handing down laws to the people to add to their burdens (see Matthew 11:28-30), but not applying those laws to themselves; (3) a false concept of greatness (vv. 5-12), showing off their dress, titles, and position to be praised by man (see John 3:30; 13:12-17).

### **Monday: Shutting Up the Kingdom — Matthew 23:13-14**

The first two woes Jesus spoke against the Pharisees were: (1) shutting up the kingdom of God to those who wished to enter in, obscuring the way of salvation by teaching man-made traditions instead of the truth of God; (2) taking advantage of the very people who needed their mercy and assistance, by acting supremely pious so that even widows would forfeit any inheritance from their husband's estate to support the "spiritual" work of the temple. They had no heart for serving the needy but instead found them easy prey for deception. It has always been the strategy of false religion to use those who are vulnerable.

### **Tuesday: Condemning Souls — Matthew 23:15**

By introducing converts to their legalistic system of religion, the Pharisees were actually obscuring the living God! By leading people down the wrong spiritual path, they were leading them to destruction. A "son of hell" is equivalent to a "child of the devil." It is literally a person who has rejected God's way of salvation to embrace his own religious self-righteousness. To make it worse, a convert often shows more zeal than his teacher, so this misguided, extra devotion produces even worse error and condemnation.

### **Wednesday: Hearts of Avarice — Matthew 23:16-22**

With their priorities confused, the Pharisees were blind to life's true values. To make their vows more valid, they vowed by the gold in the temple and the gifts left upon the altar but never made vows by the temple or the altar. The reason for this is that the gold and the gifts had more "intrinsic" value. This system of swearing vows was wrong altogether, but the way they did it showed their covetous avarice.

### **Thursday: Majoring on the Minors — Matthew 23:23-24**

Legalists are sticklers for tiny details and blind to great principles. Faithfulness, justice, and mercy are the character qualities to be developed, but the Pharisees had overlooked them. Religion devoid of the living God becomes an empty, superficial thing. Despite their religious efforts, they were lost.

### **Friday: Clean Without, Defiled Within — Matthew 23:25-28**

A most graphic illustration of hypocrisy is declared concerning the cups and platters, and sepulchers. On the outside, these can be entirely clean and sanitary, but real defilement comes from within. The Pharisees were meticulous in keeping the "appearance" of their lives to be deeply spiritual and zealously dedicated, because they cared most about receiving honor from men. But God focuses primarily upon the heart.

### **Saturday: Persecutors, Liars, Murderers! — Matthew 23:29-36**

Jesus' final declaration against the Pharisees identifies them directly with the evil serpent, Satan (Genesis 3:1). From the parable of the tares, the Master taught that Satan has a family (Matthew 13:38). Satan is a liar and murderer, who delights in persecuting God's representatives and leading men to destruction. These were men who had vast knowledge of the Scriptures, and yet they knew not God! They would likewise stand against the early church (vv. 34-35), and it would ultimately be their doom.

## Lesson 7 – Signs of His Return

**Primary Text:** Matthew 24:1-12; Mark 12:41-44

**Memory Verse:** *And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”* Matthew 24:4-5

### **Introduction:**

Included conspicuously with the major events leading up to trial and death of Christ, the Son of God stopped to watch those who were giving offerings in the temple. It seems there was only one with whom He was impressed that day, and it was the widow who put in a scant amount. Before proceeding to speak prophetically about His second coming, He made a profound object lesson of this widow’s giving. While covering just a few verses, it is perhaps the most profound teaching on giving in the Bible. It is appropriately covered with this lesson because there has been no more covetous age than the one in which we live; pride and greed are at their very worst.

Jesus’ lament over the spiritual degradation of Jerusalem is reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah’s sorrow that inspired the book of Lamentations. There has always been, and will continue to be, a special place in God’s heart for Israel. Jesus’ grief is deep and genuine, for He knows that for a long, dark season, God’s favor would be turned away from them. Through the church of true believers, God continues to reach out to them.

As Jesus spoke of the signs that would indicate the nearness of His return, He paints a dark portrait of a world roiling in global disasters and harrowing despair. Our Lord described a world in crisis on every front, with not a single geographic area untouched by unrest and devastation. Wars, famines, natural disasters on a greatly increased scale, religious deception, and the harsh persecution of those believing in the true God would descend like a midnight blanket upon all of mankind.

But Jesus’ prophecy also contained the powerful and positive comfort that God would draw near to His people, giving them courage, divine grace, and His enduring protection. The end-time church will be granted special wisdom to mark and avoid spiritual deception, and to endure the vilest and most personal hatred and rejection. It is a critical age for God’s faithful in Christ to encourage one another and stand unified.

### ***Studying the Word***

#### **Lesson Study**

1. What important lesson is to be learned by the widow’s mite given cheerfully? Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4
2. What sorrow did Jesus express when He lamented over Jerusalem? Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44
3. Why is it very likely that Jesus’ prophecy about the total destruction of the temple seemed odd to His disciples? Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6
4. What was the warning Jesus gave His disciples about false Messiahs and spiritual deception in the last days? Matthew 24:3-5; Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:7-8
5. Describe what Jesus meant by an increase of natural disasters and tribulations on a worldwide scale. Matthew 24:6-8; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:9-11
6. What action did Jesus say the world would take against His church close to His second coming? Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12
7. For discussion: Do you believe we are already seeing global hatred building against the Church of God more today than in times past?
8. What was promised by the Lord for those who, in the end times, would remain true to the faith despite the rejection of family and society? Matthew 24:10-12; Mark 13:10-12; Luke 21:13-18

## *Reading the Word*

### *Daily Devotional – Lesson 7*

#### **Sunday: The Widow's Mites — Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4**

It is not the amount of the gift, but the attitude of the heart that is most important. Pride of living and pride of giving must be avoided, but the true and cheerful giver will always receive God's favor. See 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

#### **Monday: Jesus Laments over Jerusalem — Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44**

This is only the second time that Jesus weeps openly, (the first was at the tomb of Lazarus). Like Jeremiah weeping bitterly over Jerusalem's destruction (Jeremiah 9:1ff), Jesus mourns the future destruction of Israel. Jesus looked back to see that Israel had wasted its opportunities to repent; He looked within and saw spiritual ignorance and blindness; looking around, He saw religious activity with no eternal purpose; when Jesus looked ahead, He saw the terrible suffering and destruction that would soon devastate them. He didn't relish their doom; Jesus wept.

#### **Tuesday: The Destruction of God's Temple — Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6**

The temple in Jerusalem was started by Herod the Great in 20 B.C., but it still wasn't finished when the Romans destroyed it in 70 A.D. It was one of the most impressive structures in the world in Jesus' time, built with massive stone blocks perfectly fitted together, then decorated with gold. The temple buildings consisted of gleaming white marble, and the eastern wall of the huge main structure was covered with gold plates that reflected the morning sun. But Jesus said it would be left *desolate* (utterly destroyed). In 70 A.D., the Romans devised a way to bring the stones crumbling down using intense heat. Afterwards, they sifted the rubble for the gold and valuables, leaving not one stone upon another.

#### **Wednesday: Great Spiritual Deception — Matthew 24:3-5; Mark 13:3-6; Luke 21:7-8**

One element that will be prevalent before the second coming of Christ is that of false prophets and false Messiahs. They will look and sound convincing, for many will be deceived. Undoubtedly, they will come with pleasing words, and much of their doctrine will speak of love toward our fellow men and uniting the world in the spirit of peace. Their charismatic demeanor will warm the human heart. And they are tools of Satan!

#### **Thursday: Worldwide Tribulations — Matthew 24:6-8; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-11**

The world has always known political unrest and warfare, and famine has often accompanied it or been the result of seasons of draught or devastating plagues. Mankind is no stranger to the horrors of mass deaths, nor are natural disasters unusual. However, what Jesus spoke of taking place was tribulation on an intensified scale with devastating effects: cataclysm and sorrow reaching around the world.

#### **Friday: The Church Hated — Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12**

The early church was scorned by many, especially by the Jews and by those of pagan religions, and there were many martyrs who died for the faith (as there have been down through history). But what Jesus spoke of is a world community united in their hatred and devoted to the complete annihilation of the church. The end-time church will prevail in the faith by the grace and covering of God, yet many will be martyred in the last days.

#### **Saturday: An Enduring Testimony — Matthew 24:10-12; Mark 13:10-12; Luke 21:13-18**

Jesus taught that persecution for our faith would occur by government decrees and by societal and family rejection. The positive word Jesus spoke was of those who endure to the end. Divine protection and a special grace will empower believers who would remain faithful despite public and personal persecution. Whether we stand strong in the faith in the hour of testing depends on our standing strong in the faith every day.

## Lesson 8 – Jesus Prophecies His Return

**Primary Text:** Matthew 24:13-31

**Memory Verse:** “*But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*” Matthew 24:13

### **Introduction:**

The rejection and death of the Messiah, and the pursuant destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., could be considered the “beginning of the end” in the Olivet Discourse (Jesus’ final apocalyptic teaching). The direct references to the “*Abomination of Desolation*” (Matthew 24:15) and the warning to those living in the region of Judea indicates the world’s initiation into the “dark ages,” a time when spiritual truth was obscured, and even general knowledge would suffer severe limitations. Finally, the darkened age would culminate in worldwide calamities and sorrows, which would usher in the second coming of the Messiah.

It is important that we understand the long period of time which Jesus’ prophecy covers, lest we try to squeeze all of the events He prophesied into a short number of years. Great calamities would begin an age of severe darkness that would signal the “beginning of the end of the age.” But the return of Jesus would not be until the very culmination of the end. Just prior to His return, He discusses more events that sound similar to those which began the age of darkness, but will blanket the earth on an even more severe scale. Never does Jesus tell the church that they will escape persecution through a secret rapture. On the contrary, Jesus showed vividly how true believers will face public and private persecution, and that they must be deeply committed to withstand it. Jesus’ promise is that we would be strengthened in our faith, not removed from the scene.

God’s plan in and through the church, the body of Christ, was that it would become the new agency for keeping the truths of God alive, and to spread this good news of salvation to all of the Earth. The church would transcend Israel to encompass the Gentiles; national identity would no longer be the essential element, but faith in God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Studying the Word***

#### **Lesson Study**

1. What did Jesus teach about enduring tribulation for the faith? Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19
2. What exact event would trigger the actual second coming of Jesus Christ? Matthew 24:14
3. Describe what was meant by the “*abomination of desolation.*” Matthew 24:15-18; Mark 13:14-16; Luke 21:20-22
4. What instructions did Jesus give to His people about escaping the coming calamity of Jerusalem’s destruction, and how were they directed by the Lord to pray? Matthew 24:19-20; Mark 13:17-18; Luke 21:23-24
5. According to Jesus’ words, why would the days of destruction be shortened, and why do you think that is important to the church? Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20
6. What additional warning and instruction did Jesus give about false prophets and messiahs? How can we apply this warning today? Matthew 24:23-26; Mark 13:21-23
7. Discuss the main point of Jesus’ words when He spoke of His coming being like lightning from the east. Matthew 24:27-28
8. How is the description of the destruction of Jerusalem and world events just prior to the return of Christ similar? Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 8*

### **Sunday: Enduring to the End — Matthew 24:13-14; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19**

Two elements of truth in these verses indicate the presence of a strong church on the earth at the very time of Christ's return: (1) a reward to those who remain strong until the end; (2) the fact that the truth of God's Kingdom will be preached to the entire world, which will trigger the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. There are those who teach that the church will be raptured and held in stasis for as much as three and a half years before Christ returns to the earth, but this isn't established by biblical prophecy. What Christ teaches here indicates the opposite: the presence of a strong church until the very end.

### **Monday: Abomination of Desolation — Matthew 24:15-18; Mark 13:14-16; Luke 21:20-22**

The Master had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, but here He gave them definite indications to warn them of its approach and help them escape to safety. When they would see the abomination of desolation (heathen idolatry) standing in the Sanctuary, and the Roman army encircling the city, they would recognize the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The Roman legions of Titus would burn the Temple and offer heathen sacrifices to their ensigns, placed by the eastern gate, when they proclaimed Titus emperor (70 A.D.) The time would be marked by the destruction of life and property, and more delusions of false Messiahs.

### **Tuesday: Intense Tribulation — Matthew 24:19-21; Mark 13:17-19; Luke 21:23-24**

Intense tribulation was foretold, and was unavoidable. Yet, Jesus told them to pray not for the events to be withheld, but that they would befall at such a time and way as to be the easiest from which to escape. Praying that it not happen on the Sabbath day was because Jerusalem's gates were locked on the Sabbath, making escape impossible.

### **Wednesday: The Days Shortened — Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20**

We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus promises that not all would be lost during the days of affliction. At the fall of Jerusalem there were those who survived and we can further conclude that Jesus' promise that when the mirrored event of the tribulation occurs, there will also be those who are spared.

### **Thursday: Be Not Deceived — Matthew 24:23-26; Mark 13:21-23**

Jesus returned again to the topic of spiritual deception—a double warning—obviously because the pull to follow the false messiahs or prophets would be so strong. Even in today society we have a pull towards “spiritualism” and similar ungodly supernatural occurrences, we need to heed Jesus' warning and pray that we are not deceived.

### **Friday: The Sure Sign of Judgment — Matthew 24:27-28**

Jerusalem fell beneath the weight of God's judgment, and Rome was merely His sword. At the second coming of Christ, He is coming to judge the nations. The main point is that God's judgment is certain and unmistakable.

### **Saturday: The Coming of the Son of Man — Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28**

Any overturning of kingdoms or cities, or dethroning of kings, is represented by the darkening of the sun and moon, and by a convulsion in the elements: great calamity is the primary theme conveyed. There seems to be a dual application: both the destruction of Jerusalem (beginning the dark age) and the approach of Christ's presence as King of kings at His second coming, are powerful events of His “coming.”

## Lesson 9 – Parables of His 2nd Coming (#1)

**Primary Text:** Matthew 24:32-51

**Memory Verse:** “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.” Mark 13:31-33

### Introduction:

The subject of the destruction of Jerusalem gradually drops out of sight in the second main division of the Olivet Discourse. After revealing to His disciples the horrible ordeals through which His people must pass before the final, full establishing of God’s Kingdom, He turned their attention to teachings that would strengthen His church’s stability through the age of darkness:

To paint the picture graphically, Jesus used not only direct prophecy, but also a series of parables to illustrate these divine truths about the end of the world. Three parables and two highly visual portraits are taught by Jesus in Matthew 24: (1) The Fig Tree; (2) The Sign of Noah; (3) Workers in the Field; (4) The Goodman of the House; (5) The Faithful and Unfaithful Servant. Presenting His teachings in this manner would have likely made them more unforgettable.

Jesus used the “fig tree” to illustrate the season for the Second Coming of the Son of Man.

“Watchfulness” is the primary aspect of the illustration of “Noah,” which shows that the most hideous nemesis employed by Satan against those of true faith is worldly complacency. Lulled into a false sense of security by the delay of Christ’s coming, we too may fall victim to spiritual lethargy, and center our lives on merely living out our lives on this earth. Eternity can fade from view, and we can merely live each day for the joy we may extract from it, as though there is no greater hope or joy.

Jesus addressed the importance of “readiness” in the parable of the “Porter” (assigned the duty of watching), the “Master of the House” (ready at every watch of the night), the “Wise versus the Unfaithful Servant” (the unwise servant who gave up on his master’s return and gave in to debauchery, drunkenness, profligacy and brutality).

### *Studying the Word*

#### Lesson Study

1. What did Jesus’ reference to a fig tree illustrate? Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33
2. In context, what does the phrase “*these things*” refer to in Luke 21:31?
3. What important characteristics does Jesus want of His followers who are awaiting His return? Matthew 24:36; 26:41; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36; Colossians 4:2
4. What evil was rampant during the days of Noah? Luke 17:26-30
5. How is the attitude and actions of people in these days similar to the people in Noah’s time? Can 2 Timothy 3:1-7 be aptly applied to our age?
6. What evils should a “faithful servant” guard against? 1 John 2:15-17; Acts 20:30-31
7. Where should the “faithful servant” put their efforts? Colossians 3:1-4; Ephesians 6:11; Titus 3:1
8. Why does Jesus compare the coming of the Son of Man to a “*thief*”? Matthew 24:43-44; 25:13; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:46; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10
9. What does it mean to “*stand before the Son of Man*”? Luke 21:36; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 9*

### **Sunday: The Fig Tree — Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33**

In Scripture, the fig tree is used as an example of Biblical truths. Here Jesus used the fig tree to once again touch on the theme of His Second Coming, comparing the time to a fig tree in the spring. The branches of the tree are “*tender;*” (Matthew 24:32 & Mark 13:28) that is, “full of life.” The leaves are budding and growing. This parabolic analogy describes the time of Jesus’ return as being a time when the Church is full of life and growing. Jesus is pointing out that just as the disciples would know that Summer is near when they see the signs of Spring appearing, they can know that the return of the Son of Man is near when they “*see these things happening*” (Luke 21:31).

### **Monday: Watch & Pray — Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36**

Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples to be watchful and stay alert. There would be signs and hints, but because no one knows the actual day or time when Jesus will return, we must always be ready and prepared. He cautioned them not to be worried or anxious, and not to engage in worldly vices. But He advised them to be diligent and vigilant, continuing in steadfast commitment to the things of God. Additionally, He emphasized the importance of putting priority on prayer; knowing that prayer is our lifeline to God.

### **Tuesday: As in the Days of Noah — Matthew 24:37-39**

For approximately 100 years Noah and his family were building an ark and warning the community of a massive flood that would soon come and destroy the world. No one believed him. The years dragged on and no flood came. It was difficult for them to believe in something that had never happened before, and that they had never seen. Their lives were so consumed with the cares of the world that they had no heart or mind for the things of God. Jesus taught that people in the last days before His return will conduct themselves just like they did when Noah was warning them.

### **Wednesday: One Taken, the Other Left — Matthew 24:40-42**

In the days of Noah, God preserved His people and destroyed the unrighteous. Noah and his family remained on the earth and were protected by God in an ark that withstood the violence of the flood. The unrighteous, on the other hand, were swept off the face of the earth by the flood God brought. Jesus compared the events that occurred in Noah’s day to the events that will occur when the Son of Man returns.

### **Thursday: The Goodman of the House — Matthew 24:43-44**

If you knew that a thief would enter your home this evening, wouldn’t you prepare for it? This was the question Jesus posed to His disciples. He knows that any man would guard his home and make sure that his family was safe. Likewise, Christians are to be prepared for the return of Jesus, as if it were to happen any moment. We are to be just as diligent and earnest in following His commands as we would be to fend off any robbers.

### **Friday: The Faithful Servant — Matthew 24:45-47**

The faithful servant is one who is ready and watching for the return of Jesus. It is a person who puts effort into serving God by being fervent in prayer and consistent in fasting; it is a person who dedicates time witnessing God’s grace and mercy to those who might need it; it is a person who is committed to a local church and to ministering to the needs of others. In other words, this servant is one who is faithfully committed to Jesus, in all circumstances.

### **Saturday: The Unfaithful Servant — Matthew 24:48-51**

The parable of the unfaithful servant is an example of the cost of procrastination. The servant doesn’t think that Jesus is returning any time soon, so he selfishly occupies his time with worldly pleasures thinking that he can quickly straighten out when he sees that the Master is returning. But because no one knows when that will be, the unfaithful servant will be caught in his evildoings.

## Lesson 10 – Parables of His Coming (#2)

**Primary Text:** Matthew 25:1-30

**Memory Verse:** “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” Matthew 25:29

### Introduction:

Matthew 25 focuses on two major parables: one about a wedding party; one about household servants. Both have similar themes and deal with our responsibility as followers of Jesus. They focus on the importance of what we’re doing with our time here on earth and stress the need to be “*found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

In the parable of the Ten Virgins, the virgins (bridesmaids) are maintaining the necessary supplies so that when the bridegroom comes they have their lamps lit and prepared with enough oil to go with the bridegroom to the wedding feast.

In the parable of the Talents, the servants who are faithful invest the talents that they are entrusted with. When the master of the house returns, he finds that they have brought profit and honor to his household by their actions while he was gone.

There are four major themes to both these parables—resources, labor, time, and accountability—and all of them hinge on the sovereignty of God. As His children, God gives us the resources to live faithful lives in His service. Among the many resources He provides are strength, comfort, wisdom, and boldness. With these tools we are able to stand against the wiles of the enemy, bring others into the knowledge of the saving power of Jesus, and bring glory and honor to the Kingdom of God.

The problem is that many become lazy, like the servant in the Parable of the Talents. He made excuses and laid blame on his Master, but the truth is he just didn’t see the work needed to be productive in the Kingdom as being important. Additionally, the foolish virgins didn’t place a high priority on Kingdom living either. When the Master/Bridegroom returned neither was prepared and neither had any fruits of their labors that would glorify and honor the King.

This is a great challenge to us: how are we occupying our time? Are we in active service for the Kingdom of God, or are we just spinning our wheels and accomplishing little for the greater purpose—our heavenly Father’s purpose? Are we “worldly-focused,” or “eternally-focused”?

### *Studying the Word*

#### Lesson Study

1. What does being “prepared” require of Christians? Matthew 25:1-13; 19:17; 7:17; 2 Peter 3:14
2. Discuss the value of faithfulness. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:10
3. Do we ever reach an age when we should stop actively working for the Kingdom of God? Hebrews 4:11; Matthew 24:45-47; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 5:12-14
4. Are our works the key to the “faithfulness” God wants to find in us upon Jesus’ return? Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:9-26; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-8
5. What should be a motivating factor of our Christian walk? 1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Philippians 1:20; 1 Peter 4:11; Matthew 20:28
6. How is “spiritual profitability” judged? Matthew 25:16-17; 6:19-21; 25:29
7. Explain the sentence for the servants who are unfaithful. Matthew 25:29-30; 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18; 19:26-27
8. What is the reward for faithful service? Matthew 25:21, 23; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5; James 2:23; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Timothy 4:8

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 10*

### **Sunday: The Ten Virgins — Matthew 25:1-4**

In this passage the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to the events of a wedding ceremony in Bible days. The marriage ceremony was a week-long celebration. The bridegroom would come for his bride at any hour of the day or night to bring her to the wedding party. If he came at night, the lamplights would need to be burning. This showed the preparedness of the bride's attendants. Jesus warns, that like the bridesmaids, we need to be prepared for the Son of Man's return. We don't know when this will occur, so we need to remain in a state of readiness at all times.

### **Monday: The Bridegroom Approaches — Matthew 25:5-9**

There was a delay in the bridegroom coming for his bride. When the bridegroom did appear, the wise bridesmaids were ready. Their lamps had the necessary oil and wick. The lights are symbolic of a Christian life that is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and upon His return is actively participating in Biblical principles. The oil is representative of the Spirit of God and reminds us that, besides our lives being ready, we need to have our hearts ready also. When the bridegroom comes we should be engaged in vigorously pursuing the Kingdom of God in our words, in our actions, and in our heart.

### **Tuesday: Opportunity Lost for Eternity — Matthew 25:10-13**

The foolish bridesmaids were asleep when the bridegroom came. They had no oil. They tried to get the wise virgins to give them some, but ended up having to leave to purchase the supplies. While they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. When they were finally prepared, they tried to enter the party, but found that the door was shut. This will be the fate of many who talk about being ready, but don't actively pursue their faith. When Jesus comes to take His people home, they will find the doors to eternity are forever locked.

### **Wednesday: The Talents — Matthew 25:14-19; Luke 19:11-15**

The parable of the talents addresses our productivity as Christians. It reminds us that we are accountable to God for the service we offer Him. As His disciples we are called to minister to the body of Christ and to have concern for souls. Our tasks include the responsibility to plant, to water, and to harvest those souls, always keeping in mind that it is God who gives the increase.

### **Thursday: Faithful Service — Matthew 25:20-23; Luke 19:16-19**

The key to the parable of the Talents is that the King is not really concerned with how much money is produced, but that His servants have demonstrated their faithfulness. The King doesn't give them a monetary reward, but because the servants were faithful in the small things, the King increases their responsibility and makes them ruler over even greater things.

### **Friday: The Lazy Servant — Matthew 25:24-28; Luke 19:20-25**

The contrast between the faithful servants and the lazy servant is dramatic. The lazy servant gives excuses for his lack of effort on the King's behalf. He accuses the King of being a harsh master. The King shows His displeasure that the unfaithful servant wasn't even willing to find a simple way to earn interest.

### **Saturday: A Just Recompense — Matthew 25:29-30; Luke 19:26-27**

The wicked servant has not been merely lazy, but has deliberately done nothing that will benefit his master. There is no second chance after deliberate rebellion. God removed the blessing from the lazy servant and gave it to His faithful one. Likewise, God said that He will punish His enemies. Who are His enemies? You are not God's enemy if you fail—He loves you and has grace sufficient when you repent. But you are God's enemy if you refuse to productively serve Him. If you set your will against His, you are His enemy. That is a deadly place in which to stand.

# Lesson 11 – Judgment at His Return

**Primary Text:** Matthew 25:31-46

**Memory Verse:** “*When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’*” Matthew 25:38-40

## **Introduction:**

It is important to understand that as Christians we are accountable to do good works. By the very act of our being saved by the grace of God, we are to reach out to others and share that grace with them.

Our salvation is the act of justification, which is a free gift from God. It is not earned by any effort on our part. It is instantaneous and is completely based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (1 Peter 2:4). It is received by faith (Romans 5:1) and it is freely given. Justification has no requirements of work associated with it—we can do nothing to earn it (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Sanctification involves the growth of godly character within a believer. Once we are justified (saved from sin’s penalty) the act of making us more like Him begins. Romans 6:1-4 teaches the accountability we have to walk in righteousness. As we exercise Biblical principles in our lives, we grow and produce fruit. We begin to demonstrate the Biblical principle of multiplication. As we develop a deeper walk with God, we deepen our commitment and strengthen our understanding. We become more and more like Him...more and more “Christ-like.”

It is in the process of sanctification that our acts of faithfulness are important. We work towards being more godly (Galatians 5:22-23) and actively submit to God’s will, resisting temptation, and seeking holiness. We desire to be more like Him and to serve Him with our entire being. It is this type of fervent commitment to following after righteousness that is expounded in Philippians 2:12-13, “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” We seek to serve Him knowing that He gives us the strength and ability to do it, and knowing that we are unworthy without Him.

## ***Studying the Word***

### **Lesson Study**

1. What event needs to transpire before the Day of Judgment can take place? Matthew 25:31
2. Who does Matthew 25:32 indicate will be judged?
3. What criterion will be used to separate those who receive the rich rewards from those who receive eternal punishment? Matthew 25:34-40
4. What implications does the information in Matthew 25:37-40 have for Christians today? Isaiah 58:6-10
5. Discuss ways that the Church of God can answer God’s call to His children in Matthew 25:40.
6. Explain what the punishment will be for the unrighteous. Matthew 25:41, 46
7. What will the reward be for the righteous? Matthew 25:34
8. How does the unmerited favor of God balance with the responsibility Christians have in service of their King? Matthew 25:35-40; Romans 3:28; James 2:24, 26; Ephesians 2:8-10

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 11*

### **Sunday: The Nations Gathered — Matthew 25:31-33**

When the Day of Judgment comes all people will be gathered together, sinners and faithful alike. From every place on earth, from the farthest reaches of the world, all will be gathered together to give an accounting of their lives before the King of Kings. Christ's tribunal will judge the hearts and motivations of mankind. He will separate out the wheat from the chaff—the good from the bad—and will deliver just sentences to all.

### **Monday: Reward to the Righteous — Matthew 25:34-36**

God has great rewards for His children who walk in righteousness. To them He has promised the riches of His kingdom and life everlasting. Walking in righteousness carries with it a responsibility to minister the love and grace of God to others. God freely gives grace to us and He expects us to spread that grace. He directs that we spread His gospel by ministering to the needy, the downtrodden, and the broken-hearted. The good works of the children of God will bring great blessings on this earth and rewards to come.

### **Tuesday: The Righteous Ponder — Matthew 25:37-39**

The righteous are surprised to hear that they had ministered to their Lord. “When did we do this?” they asked. They recognized that they hadn't actually done anything to their Master. But the Master's answer gives them much to ponder. He expounds a list of various times when they ministered to those around them, bringing God's hope, love and grace: times when they went into the prisons to bring hope to those who were held captive; times when they gave a cup of water to someone who was thirsting; times when they assisted strangers, aided the sick, and gave shelter and clothing to the needy. “When you did it for them,” He explained, “you did it to me.” Are we looking for opportunities to bless Christ today?

### **Wednesday: The King's Favor — Matthew 25:40**

There was a story written about Martin of Tours, a young Roman soldier who lived in the 4th century that is reminiscent of the main theme of the parable of the sheep and goats. One day he met an unclothed man begging for alms in the freezing cold. Martin stopped, cut his coat in two and gave half to the stranger. That night he dreamed he saw Jesus seated on a throne and robed in a torn cloak. Around Him were a host of angels. One of the angels asked, “Master, why do you wear that battered cloak?” Jesus replied, “My servant Martin gave it to me.”

### **Thursday: Curse upon the Unrighteous — Matthew 25:41-43**

The consequences of not sharing the love of God through selfless acts and of not walking in righteousness are harsh. The result is that they are completely separated from God. The words, “*depart from me,*” are a command to the unrighteous. It indicates that they did not leave willing, they were driven away. Their fate is permanent separation from God.

### **Friday: The Unrighteous Complaint — Matthew 25:44**

The unrighteous ask the same basic question that the righteous asked of the Master: When did these things happen? They recognized that they had not seen the Master sick, unclothed, or in need of food and drink. The answer they receive is similar too: the unrighteous are told that every time they saw someone in need and did not minister, they were rejecting Christ Himself.

### **Saturday: Judgment upon the Unrighteous — Matthew 25:45-46**

The contrast between the judgments meted out to the righteous and unrighteous are quite dramatic. The righteous are blessed with eternal communion with God. The fruit of their faithful walk with their Lord is eternal life and unending joy. The unrighteous suffer eternal separation from God, an eternal punishment.

## Lesson 12 – The Last Supper (#1)

**Primary Text:** Matthew 26:14-25; John 13:1-30

**Memory Verse:** “*You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*” John 13:13-15

### Introduction:

The Last Supper is replete with symbolic meaning. From the footwashing to the bread and wine, the types and shadows represented have great spiritual significance. Close examination of these symbols reveal lessons about the Kingdom of God for every Christian.

First, the footwashing involves water. Water, in the Hebrew tradition, represents the Spirit of God. Scriptures about water explain that water can cleanse us, fill us, and satisfy us. Understanding the symbolic meaning of water helps us understand what Jesus meant when He told Peter that, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me*” (John 13:8). Jesus was referring to more than what was occurring in the natural (e.g. the act of footwashing), but also to the necessity of being filled with the Spirit of God and allowing Jesus to fill us, cleanse our sins, and satisfy us with abundant life.

Additionally, the act of footwashing was done by Jesus to demonstrate to His disciples the humility He wanted them to practice. By meekly washing His disciples’ feet, Jesus showed a selfless act of servitude. He then instructed His disciples to follow His example by serving others in the same spirit of submission, unpretentiousness, self-sacrifice, and love.

The shadow of the cross had been evident since Jesus had first entered Jerusalem and Jesus knew that His hour had come. Even in the footwashing, we are reminded that Jesus’ reason for coming to earth was to sacrifice Himself for mankind. Consider the setting of the footwashing: taking place as the Passover was about to begin, Jesus knew that He was the lamb to be slain for the sins of the entire world. Also, He bowed before each disciple: showing that He would submit and give Himself to be crucified. He “took off” His outer clothing: an allusion to laying down His life. Then He wrapped a towel about His waist: a declaration that He would again “take up” His life (John 10:17-18).

### *Studying the Word*

#### Lesson Study

1. What did Jesus understand about the events that were about to take place in the final days of His life?  
Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:3; Luke 21:37-22:2
2. What motivated Judas to betray Jesus? Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6; 1 Timothy 6:10
3. What instructions did Jesus give when the disciples asked about where they would eat the Passover meal?  
Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1
4. Discuss the significance of footwashing. John 13:2-17
5. What directive does Jesus give His followers regarding footwashing? John 13:12-17
6. Explain what Jesus meant by the statement, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me*” (John 13:8).
7. What does the fact that Jesus knew who would betray Him indicate about Jesus? Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:18-20

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 12*

### **Sunday: The Plot Against Jesus — Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 21:37-22:2**

Jesus often spoke of what He was to suffer; in fact, His betrayal was so imminent that the Jewish leaders were meeting to plot the details of how they would arrest Jesus without causing an uproar, and how they would eventually put Him to death.

### **Monday: Thirty Pieces of Silver — Mathew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6**

Even among those whom we'd consider the most spiritual or those who seem to be walking ever close to the Master, human failings and Satan's temptations can creep in. If we aren't diligent to keep our focus on Jesus, we can fall into sin's temptations. Judas was one of the chosen. He walked with the Master and was part of the 12. Yet Judas was enticed away from the path of the Master by the temptation of silver. His love of money caused him to stray from his love of Jesus.

### **Tuesday: Preparing the Passover Meal — Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1**

The disciples were worried about where they would eat the Passover meal. They knew there were important preparations to be made. They approached Jesus with their concern, but Jesus was not worried. He gave them instructions that showed that He knew all the details of where they would spend the Passover and with whom they would stay. This reveals that our Lord, like His Father, knows all things even before they come to pass and it certainly cements Jesus' claim that He is the Son of God. Additionally, the backdrop of the Passover holds deep significance in consideration that Jesus is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world.

### **Wednesday: The Servant, Jesus — John 13:2-5**

In John 13-17 the theme is Love. In these chapters alone, the word "love" appears 31 times. In these first verses, Jesus showed how ministering to others is the ultimate expression of Love. When He introduced the emblem of footwashing, He demonstrated the humble service of the King of Kings to mankind. And as we continue to share in this service, we reiterate that as Christians, we follow His example and serve each other.

### **Thursday: Washing Simon Peter — John 13:6-11**

The disciples didn't realize the significance of what Jesus was doing when He washed their feet. At first Peter objects, but when Jesus explained that without being washed, Peter has no part with Him, then Peter enthusiastically embraced the act. Still, though, Peter doesn't understand the symbolism of the water nor act of servitude that footwashing represents.

### **Friday: Do as I Have Done — John 13:12-17**

Jesus instructed His disciples that as He had ministered to them by washing their feet, so they are to minister to others. The disciples are commissioned to pass on the selfless love that Jesus freely gave. Unlike other religious leaders of their day, Jesus wanted the disciples to shun pride and selfish ambition, and seek to serve in humility, thanksgiving, and grace.

### **Saturday: Announcing His Betrayal — Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:17-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:18-30**

Even as Jesus told His disciples to love one another, Jesus fully realized that one of those there would betray Him. This is a fulfillment of Psalm 41, which describes a betrayal by a friend and is a shadow of the method by which Jesus Himself was betrayed. Then Jesus reminds that He has grace to receive any who come to Him and accept Him—even the vilest of sinners.

## Lesson 13 – The Last Supper (#2)

**Primary Text:** Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:24-38; John 13:31-35

**Memory Verse:** “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” Matthew 26:28-29

### Introduction:

A lot of instruction for Christians is packed into the events of the Last Supper of our Lord. One of the most significant is that Jesus Himself directed that the supper He instituted, with its symbolism, was to be followed by the Church.

When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded of the New Covenant Jesus established for us. A covenant is a contract between two parties. In the Old Testament, God made covenants with His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Old Covenant required the slaying of an animal, as exemplified in the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15:9-21. Establishing a covenant was costly and involved the shedding of blood, a sacred meal and a solemn ceremony.

When God established His new covenant with His children, it was very costly indeed. The cost was His only son, and demonstrated the deep love that God has for the world. Jesus’ blood was shed to solidify God’s promise to His people. Through the emblems of the cup and the bread, God reminds us of the precious life and blood sacrifice of His son, Jesus.

Following Jesus’ example by observing the Lord’s Supper and footwashing is a simple act of obedience, a simple act of remembrance, and a simple act of faith.

But there is spiritually profound meaning, as well. Its symbolic representations affect us deep within the soul—convicting us, challenging us, calling us, forgiving us, and renewing us.

It convicts us of our imperfections and challenges us to holiness. It reminds us of the servanthood of Jesus and His calling us to serve one another. It emphasizes the importance of Jesus’ sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, and it confirms and renews within us the significance of the covenant relationship we have with God and His promises and faithfulness to us as His children.

### *Studying the Word*

#### Lesson Study

1. What are the qualities of love that Jesus wants His disciples to have? John 13:31-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
2. Why do leaders have to guard themselves against pride? Luke 22:24; 1 Corinthians 13:4
3. Discuss why we so often try to seek “titles” for ourselves. Luke 22:25
4. Compare and contrast the qualities of a leader who serves with one who “lords it over others.” Luke 22:26-27; 1 Peter 5
5. List the promises Jesus made to His disciples in Luke 22:28-30.
6. Explain the significance of eating and drinking at Christ’s table. Luke 22:30
7. What does it mean to “rule and reign” with Christ? Luke 22:29-30
8. What did Satan hope to gain by sifting Peter like wheat? Luke 22:31-32
9. Why did Jesus instruct His disciples to be prepared? Luke 22:35-38
10. How was being “*numbered*” with the transgressors fulfilled in Jesus’ life? Luke 22:37; Isaiah 53
11. What vital command about partaking together of the bread and wine did Jesus give to His disciples at the Last Supper? Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20

# *Reading the Word*

## *Daily Devotional – Lesson 13*

### **Sunday: A New Commandment — John 13:31-35**

After giving His disciples a concrete example of servanthood (footwashing), Jesus went on to exhort them in the importance of love. Jesus knew He wouldn't be with them much longer, and He wanted to leave them with wisdom concerning how to deal with every relationship they encounter—that of love: love towards God, and love for their fellow man. Jesus knows that the characteristic that would have the most influence on the world, is love. Indeed, that's why it's said, "They'll know we are Christians by our love."

### **Monday: Worldly Greatness — Luke 22:24-25**

Lord John Acton (1834-1902) said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This was a lesson the disciples truly needed to learn. Even after seeing their Lord kneel and wash their feet, like a humble servant, the disciples still bickered among themselves trying to determine a hierarchy of who was the greatest among them. The word used for "*greatest*" in this passage is "meizon" and is basically translated as "pertaining to the perception of being in authority." The disciples weren't so much concerned about who had the actual authority, they really wanted to know who the people thought had the most authority among them. Because of their pride, it was the perception that troubled them.

### **Tuesday: Kingdom Greatness — Luke 22:26-30**

Jesus cautioned that the Kingdom of Heaven was about service, and not about who had authority. It's not that authority didn't exist among Jesus' followers, but it was how they exercised that authority that was important. He instructed that they should be like the "youngest," unassuming and ready to listen and learn. They should be servants to one another. They should be humble and willing to give everything to help their brother, just as He came as a humble servant and was willing to give up His life for us.

### **Wednesday: To Sift You as Wheat — Luke 22:31-32**

Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked permission to "sift him as wheat." Jesus is predicting the temptation that will befall Peter. This temptation would shake Peter to the core and reveal his weakness. Even knowing this would happen, Jesus encouraged Peter to strengthen the brethren after the experience.

### **Thursday: Predicting a Denial — Luke 22:33-34; John 13:36-38**

Jesus predicts that Peter will deny Him. To his credit, Peter says that is impossible because he's willing to even follow Jesus to His death. But this is an example of being willing to "talk the talk," but unable to "walk the walk." Peter was full of bravado when his life didn't depend on it, and lost his courage when faced with the very real probability of imminent danger.

### **Friday: New Traveling Preparations — Luke 22:35-38**

Jesus began this sad discourse by reminding the disciples of happier days. "Those were the easy times," Jesus told them. "But once I am gone, you will face hardships and hostilities." When the Master was with them, they needed little preparation. Now that the Master was leaving He wanted them to be prepared and ready to be flexible no matter what they were called to do. Jesus recognized that His disciples had to be reliant on God and also prepared for whatever trials and temptations might come.

### **Saturday: The Lord's Supper Instituted — Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20**

Jesus intended that His disciples partake of the Lord's Supper, even after He was gone from this world, as a remembrance of Him. He wanted them to continue to do this very act—that of sharing in the cup and breaking of the bread—just as He was doing with them now, so that in the future they would have a reminder of who He was and what He represented.