

LIFE GROUPS

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



*Study of* **MATTHEW**

OCT | **LARGE PRINT**

**20**

LIFE GROUPS

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



*Study of MATTHEW*

OCT 4 | LARGE PRINT

20

# THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 21:1-17

OCTOBER 4, 2020

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## HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: ON PALM SUNDAY, THE KING OF GOD'S PEOPLE MADE HIS TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS IS THE KING WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR, IN FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY AND FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: PALM SUNDAY BEGAN JESUS' LAST WEEK ON EARTH AND HIS DIRECT JOURNEY TO THE CROSS.

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## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Think about the events surrounding the inauguration of a president. What are some of the preparations that go into preparing for this event?
- 2 Why do we treat events like this with such reverence and pomp and circumstance?
- 3 What do the circumstances around such an event communicate to us about the person and the office they are taking?

Presidential inaugurations are day-long affairs with concerts, multiple balls, and other festivities. The amount of preparation is exhaustive. The security required is enormous. Leaders and citizens from all over the country attend. Such events are meant to celebrate the democratic process and honor the office of the president. In the hit Netflix drama “The Crown,” an entire episode was devoted to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the first such event broadcast on television. The decision was made to do this in order to communicate that Elizabeth II was a woman of the people and to give the people something to which to aspire. Palm Sunday was the day that Jerusalem’s rightful King came to town. From this historical event, we can learn much about King Jesus.

## UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 21:1-3.

- What was the significance of the city of Jerusalem in Israel’s spiritual and political life?

Jerusalem was the city of a great king, and it was the center of Israel's spiritual and national life. King David ruled in Jerusalem and made plans to establish the temple there. All of the Gospels make a point to emphasize Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in some way. In Matthew's Gospel it is the ascent to the climax. When Jesus entered the city, He was not coming as a visitor to celebrate Passover, but as a King who was coming to claim His rightful authority as the true and better center of Israel's life.

- What directions did Jesus give His disciples in verses 2-3? What authority and power does Jesus reveal in these words?
- Why does it matter that Jesus arranged these preparations Himself?
- What does the term "Lord" teach us about how Jesus saw Himself and how His disciples received His directions?

Jesus clearly envisioned that the disciples and the owners of these animals would take His directions and obey them. Jesus took charge and asserted His authority. He knew where these animals were and knew that the owner would give them to the disciples. He intentionally chose these animals; it was not for lack of options. Jesus wanted His entry into Jerusalem to take place exactly according to His plan. The use of the term "Lord" is one of authority. Jesus believed that He was one in the same with God and was coming to rescue His people. Such a self-reference reveals what Jesus understood His purpose to be as He entered the gates of Jerusalem.

> READ MATTHEW 21:4-5.

- Matthew cited from Zechariah 9:9 to support what occurred in verses 1-3. What does Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy reveal about Him?

- Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. What light does Paul shed on Jesus' prophetic fulfillment?

Zechariah's prophecy says, "Look, your king is coming to you." Only the king Israel had been waiting for could fulfill this prophecy. That makes the attention Jesus gave to preparation all the more important. He wanted to communicate to everyone in Jerusalem, "I am the king you have been waiting for." He was making a declaration that He is the Messiah. This is one of many prophecies Jesus fulfilled during His earthly ministry. As Paul noted, all of the Old Testament reaches its conclusion and fulfillment in Jesus. No one person could statistically fulfill all of these prophecies. It would be impossible, unless that person is the sovereign King of the whole universe.

- What statement did Jesus make by riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey? What did it reveal about His nature and purpose on earth? How did that separate Him from other rulers?

A political or military leader would typically ride a war horse into town to celebrate a victory. It was only during times of peace that such a king would ride a donkey. In coming this way, "gentle, and mounted on a donkey," Jesus communicated that He came to bring peace. The peace He brought would come at the expense of His life; yet through His death, Jesus' followers gain access to the *shalom* that Jesus brings.

> READ MATTHEW 21:6-11.

- How did the crowd receive King Jesus?
- Read Psalm 118:25-26. What was the purpose of this psalm? Why is it fitting to use on this occasion?

- The cry “Hosanna” means “save us.” Yet at the end of the week, the crowd would be yelling something entirely different. What does this teach us about the fickle nature of our own hearts?

Both the actions of the crowd and their announcement were indicative of Jesus’ status as the Jewish Savior. Psalm 118 was a psalm of ascent, which would be sung on ascent to the highest point in Jerusalem, the temple mount where Jesus was headed. Here we see further affirmation and clarification of Jesus’ identity. Though at this point, Jerusalem seemed poised to welcome and receive her king, they would quickly turn on Jesus. Many of the same people crying “Hosanna!” would soon be shouting, “Crucify Him!” The tide began to turn in the next few verses.

- What was behind the people’s question in verse 10? How do you know? How can we see the change in the temperature of the city already happening?

In the same way the whole city was shaken when Jesus was born thanks to Herod’s rage (Matt. 2:3), the city of Jerusalem was shaken here. The question in verse 10 is more of a, “Who does He think He is?” question rather than a harmless curiosity. The religious leaders looked at Jesus and saw Him as someone who needed to be eliminated, and their plans were about to come together. But no person could stop the plan of God.

> READ MATTHEW 21:12-17.

- What was the purpose of the temple? How had the temple been corrupted?
- Read Isaiah 56:6-8 and Jeremiah 7:11-15. How did Isaiah and Jeremiah describe the temple’s purpose and its potential problems?

Jesus went into the temple, the place where God was to be worshiped and praised, and found the temple courts filled with money traders and people selling birds and other animals for sacrifices. These merchants turned the practices of the temple into an opportunity for financial gain. Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7, stating the temple should be a house of prayer for all nations. Instead, the Jews made Gentiles change out their money to make an offering. Jeremiah said the temple would be turned into a place to steal and rob, and that was precisely what took place in Jesus' day.

- Why did Jesus overturn the tables and chairs? Why did He kick people out of the temple? Did Jesus have the authority to do this? Why or why not?

Jesus drove the people out of the temple, tossing tables and chairs. Jesus wanted to restore the true purpose of the temple. The temple was not fulfilling its purpose, although it looked like it would, just as the fig tree looked like it would be producing fruit. Some were amazed and pleased at Jesus' authority and teaching, but the Pharisees feared Him and sought to destroy Him.

- Compare the responses to Jesus of the children, the blind, and the lame with the religious leaders around the temple. How does this encourage us toward childlike faith rather than religious elitism?



## APPLICATION

- All the details we see in today's verses, along with the rest of Scripture, are meant to show us who Jesus is. Do you receive and respond to the Jesus who is, or a Jesus of your own making? Explain.
- What are the implications of Jesus being King of this group? How will we respond corporately to His kingship?
- All people are actively making a choice: accept Jesus as King or reject Him. What does the response of the crowd teach us about the people we encounter every day? How can we live in a way that shows we believe Jesus is the true King?

## PRAY

Give thanks to King Jesus. Proclaim His ability to save, and confess your allegiance to Him as Lord of your life.

LIFE GROUPS

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



*Study of MATTHEW*

OCT 11 | LARGE PRINT

20

# THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

## PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 22:1-14

OCTOBER 11, 2020

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### HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY EXTENDED THE INVITATION OF SALVATION TO ALL WHO WILL ACCEPT IT.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE CALLED TO TAKE THIS INVITATION SERIOUSLY, BOTH IN ACCEPTING IT OURSELVES AND EXTENDING IT TO OTHERS.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: THE INVITATION OF SALVATION HAS ONLY BEEN MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS ON OUR BEHALF.

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## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Think about a time when you received an invitation that you really didn't want to accept. What did you say or what excuse did you give to get out of it?
- 2 What are some excuses people make to avoid sharing Jesus' invitation with others?

Most of us have used a polite excuse to get out of an event at some time or another. This is what happened in a parable that Jesus told to a group of Pharisees in Matthew 22. In the parable, a group of guests rejected the gracious invitation of a host with run-of-the-mill excuses. When they rejected, their invitations went to unexpected guests who gladly accepted. Through this parable, we see that Jesus is interested in inviting all types of people into His kingdom.

## UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 22:1-3.

- Compared to the way weddings and receptions are held in our culture, what is unusual about the way the king attempted to gather people for the wedding banquet?

The sending of the servants corresponds to the standard practice of issuing an invitation to an event without specifying the exact time until a later date. It took weeks to prepare a banquet. It could also take days to come to a banquet. And the banquets would last for days. The people invited at this stage of the parable are those who had already said yes. Now the messengers were simply going out to announce the beginning of the party.

- Who did these first invitees to the party represent in Jesus' parable? Who would that be in our culture? How would we know one if we saw one?

Those first invited to the banquet most likely represent Israel's religious leaders at the time. In our culture, we would certainly compare our own pastors or seminary professors with these people, but we ought to also look inward. Truly, anyone who has been baptized, goes to church, and takes the Lord's Supper is a type of religious leader in our culture. Like the religious leaders Jesus had in view, we have effectively told the king that we are coming to the wedding banquet by virtue of our religious lives. The question is whether or not we will actually come when news of the banquet's beginning comes our way.

> READ MATTHEW 22:4-6.

- What reasons did the invited guests give for not going to the wedding?
- Why did choosing not to go escalate into hostility toward the one inviting them to his banquet?

Though they had promised to go to the banquet, this group of people ultimately decided that their immediate concerns related to everyday life were more valuable than the announced banquet. Underneath that indifference is actually a harsh hostility. To be indifferent to the banquet is to be hostile toward the king throwing it. It is to say to the king, "You can't tell me how to run my life." This hostility is symbolized in the killing of the servants.

- What was the king's response in verse 7? What might this be a reference to?

Verse 7 is often viewed as an after-the-fact prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. But the imagery also parallels stereotypical Old Testament and intertestamental descriptions of destruction in war (see Judges 1:8 and Isaiah 5:24-25). Still, the Roman invasion of Jerusalem may be seen as a partial fulfillment of the principles enunciated here, even if Jesus had Judgment Day more prominently in mind.

> READ MATTHEW 22:8-10.

- What was the shift in strategy for the king? How did these people compare and contrast with the first group?
- This section ends with the statement that the wedding hall was filled with guests. What point was Jesus making about the kingdom of heaven here?

This time, the king sent his servants to the main crossroads in the community, where one would find people of all walks of life, not only with regard to ethnicity, but also morality. Here would be the kind of people the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day would certainly shun, and it's these people who enjoyed the banquet. In the end, the king's purpose worked out. With this parable, Jesus left His hearers to see that God's purposes will take effect. Those He calls will be present at His heavenly feast.

> READ MATTHEW 22:11-14.

- What do we make of this last scene in the parable? What does it mean?

Though the king graciously let anyone who responded to the call into the wedding banquet, that kind of limitless grace does not come without demands. In the parable's terms, one must wear a wedding garment at a wedding. This wedding garment is provided by the king upon entry, and is to be worn proudly. In practical terms, this means that there is no presuming upon our presence in the banquet. We must "put on" the righteousness of the One who graciously invited us to His banquet and gave us His righteousness. For another perspective on this parable of Jesus, we will consider the version recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

> READ LUKE 14:15-20.

- Read Revelation 19:7-9 also. To what was the man in verse 15 referring? What assumption did this person make?
- What are some reasons today that people are hesitant to "go all in" in their relationship with Jesus?

People do not want to live with constraints on their lives. They want the ability to determine the course of their lives. The man in verse 15 missed the point of Jesus' parable entirely. He saw himself as an included and honored guest. Jesus' parable showed the man had much to learn. The desire for life on our own terms causes people to reject a gracious invitation.

- What would be a comparable to the excuses given in these verses in the 21st century? Regardless of the quality of the reasons, why did these guests (and us today) let good things keep them from the best thing?

The original guests used all manner of excuses to get out of their commitment to attend. Likewise, the Jewish leaders saw what Jesus' kingdom would cost them, and they rejected it and Him. However, the party would still continue even though the honored guests refused. Their place of honor would go to people who were willing to accept the invitation.

> READ LUKE 14:21-24.

- Considering the context of this parable, who were the people who rejected the invitation? Read Luke 4:18-19. Who was the second group of people?
- Who was Jesus referring to in His third invite? Why would this invitation have been such a surprising invitation?
- In verse 23, the master told the slave to compel the extra guests to come to the dinner. Why did he use the word “compel”?

This parable likely saw the Jewish elite as those who rejected the master invitation, and the second group would have been those on the outskirts of Jewish life. The last group referred to Gentiles and those outside of a covenant relationship with God. Many in the second and third group would've seen an invitation like this as too good to be true, which is why the servant was called to compel them. Jesus has prepared a place for the desperate and needy to meet Him.

- Thinking about people in your life who have refused Jesus' invitation, what would you say keeps most people from rejecting the invitation?
- How do we, who have accepted the invitation, still seek to define the terms of the invitation? How do you do this? What rights do we lose when we accept the invitation?

Most people reject Christ's invitation because they don't realize how desperately they need it. Sin blinds those who reject from accepting and even works in the lives of those who have accepted from seeing the implications of their RSVP. Accepting Jesus' invitation is not merely a “get out of hell” free card, but an invitation to be a member of God's



family and a citizen under God's rule. It is not an invitation to come in, be comfortable, and go about living your life however you choose. Rather, it is an invitation to lose your life and find it (Luke 17:33).

## APPLICATION

- How is the parable of the wedding banquet unsettling to you? How is this parable relieving?
- What does this parable say about what the nature of personal evangelism or church ministries should be?
- Who is God calling you to extend His invitation to now?

## PRAY

Praise God for inviting you to know Him and follow Him. Pray that you would honor your invitation by graciously extending that invitation to anyone who will listen.

LIFE GROUPS

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



*Study of MATTHEW*

OCT 18 | LARGE PRINT

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# SEVEN WOES

## PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 23:13-32

OCTOBER 18, 2020

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### HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: LOVING CHRIST REQUIRES A GENUINE FAITH THAT EXPRESSES ITSELF IN ACTION.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST SHOULD NEVER STOP WITH OUR WORDS BUT SHOULD ALSO IMPACT THE WAY WE LOVE OTHERS.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: CHRIST LOVED US NOT ONLY IN WORD BUT IN DEED THROUGH HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS.

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## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Share about a time when your children or someone younger than you caught you failing to adhere to your own rules or standards. How did you respond?
- 2 What does the fact that we sometimes fail to keep our own rules tell us about ourselves?

Someone who fails to practice what they preach is a hypocrite. Our failure to keep our own rules reminds us that, apart from God's grace in Jesus Christ, we would be hypocrites. In Matthew 23, Jesus strictly warned His followers against the dangers of hypocrisy, using the Pharisees as an example. Because we are sinners, we know that we will, at various times, fail to live up to Christ's teaching. The difference between a true follower of Christ and the Pharisees is that true followers of Christ refuse to continue in hypocrisy by submitting to and living out the teaching of Jesus.

## UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 23:1-12.

- What do you know about the Pharisees? How were they regarded by the Jewish people in their day?
- What did Jesus mean when He said the scribes and Pharisees were seated in the chair of Moses?
- What did Jesus identify as the chief concern about the Pharisees' life and teachings? What did their teaching communicate about what they valued the most?

- How did the Pharisees elevate themselves over others? What are some things we do, with or without meaning to, that make us seem like better people than we are?
- Re-read verse 12. How were Jesus' values different from the scribes and Pharisees?
- How does focusing on external behavior and the desire to maintain an image choke out our identity in Christ?

Though the Pharisees are often viewed as the “bad guys” in the Gospels and in Christian teaching, in their time they were hugely popular, well respected, and widely followed. However, Jesus saw them differently. His principle concern in these opening verses was simple: the Pharisees did not practice what they preached. There was a disconnect between their words and their hearts (v. 3). Whereas Jesus welcomed all who came to Him, the Pharisees created an unapproachable and exclusive sect that elevated exterior appearance over internal change. The lesson for believers today is an important one. Doing all the right things and being popular with the right people are not what's most important to Jesus, your heart is.

> READ MATTHEW 23:13-32.

- Of the seven woes Jesus gave in this passage, which stands out to you most personally? Explain.
- In your own words, what was the main idea Jesus conveyed in these verses?

These religious people needed to get right on the inside before any of their outward actions would be pleasing to God. Their hearts and minds needed to be made right. Left on our own, this kind of cleansing is impossible, but God makes all things possible in Jesus Christ. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

- How did the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees “shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces” (v. 13)?

Salvation comes by God’s grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). The strict, extra-biblical rules of the scribes and the Pharisees were impossible for anyone to bear, and as a result actually hindered people from seeking God.

- What does the Pharisees’ teaching on oaths tell us about them (vv. 16-22; see also Matt. 5:34-37)?
- What does love require regarding our commitments and promises to others?

When the Israelites vowed in God’s name, they took special care to not break their word. If a person invoked God’s name in oaths to the Lord, then God’s character was associated with the person’s promise to keep the oaths. God meant for His people to be known as always telling the truth so transparently that they wouldn’t need to take an oath at all. The Pharisees would swear oaths by all sorts of things other than the Lord. They did so in order to make an oath less binding than if they swore by God. Jesus, however, taught that all oaths are directly connected to God in His greatness and majesty. For followers of Jesus, oaths should be unnecessary. We show respect for God, others, and ourselves when we practice straightforward, simple honesty.

- What “weightier matters” did the scribes and the Pharisees neglect (vv. 23-25)?
- Discuss Jesus’ metaphor of a whitewashed tomb. What did He mean? How are church people who adhere to every imaginable expectation but are never changed in their hearts like whitewashed tombs?

- The gospel should change the way we live. How can we know the difference between behavior changed by the gospel and behavior changed to meet expectations?

Above all else, the Pharisees were legalistic. Their perceived adherence to the law was so rigid that it actually kept people from seeing the light of the gospel (v. 13). They elevated traditions of the past over the more important matters of the law (v. 23). Such attitudes of the heart blinded them to the value and worth of those who were not like them. Unyielding uniformity created an impossible standard of piety no one could approach. Vibrant and living faith always produces action, but that action is not done to earn favor with God or others. Rather we act because we love Jesus and delight to do what He says.

> READ MATTHEW 23:33-39.

- How did Jesus' words here reveal His heart for even these hypocritical and unteachable religious leaders?
- What would it have looked like for the Pharisees and experts of the laws to respond well to Jesus' accusations here?
- Why do you think they didn't examine themselves to see if there was truth in Jesus' words, but instead began to look for ways to trap Him (Luke 11:53-54)?

Jesus didn't water down the truth. He spoke against the actions of the religious leaders, but He never lost His compassion for them—as evidenced by what He did on the cross. In Matthew 23:37 (and in Ps. 17:8; 91:4; and Isa. 31:5), the image of a hen sheltering her chicks portrayed Yahweh's protection of Israel. By rejecting Jesus, Jerusalem rejected God's protection. Even as Jesus rebuked His wayward people, He affirmed God's identity as their Father and reminded them of His intimate, personal care for them. However, they had to make a choice to follow their traditions or to follow the way of the Messiah.

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## APPLICATION

- How did the scribes' and Pharisees' actions demonstrate a lack of love for their neighbors? How might actively looking for ways to serve our neighbors help us guard against hypocrisy?
- Read Philippians 2:5-11. How did Christ demonstrate humility? What is one step you could take this week to follow His example?
- How might we as a group help one another humbly and genuinely live out our faith? Why is it important that we guard against pride as we do so?
- Considering Jesus' words in today's passage, what needs to change in your life?

## PRAY

Pray that God would expose the hypocrisy in our hearts so that we might repent and begin taking steps toward a genuine faith. Thank Him for loving us and promising to help us grow.



LIFE GROUPS

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



*Study of MATTHEW*

OCT 25 | LARGE PRINT

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# THE SERVANT OF THE MASTER

## PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 24:45-51

OCTOBER 25, 2020

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### HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THOSE WHO PROVE THEMSELVES AS CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM BY FAITHFULLY OBEYING THE MASTER WILL BE REWARDED, BUT THOSE WHO PROVE THAT THEY ARE NOT CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM BY THEIR WICKEDNESS WILL SUFFER CONDEMNATION AND WRATH.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE SHOULD CONSIDER WHICH SERVANT WE WILL BE FOUND TO BE. WE MUST EXAMINE OURSELVES TO DISCERN WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE LIVING IN A WAY THAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: OUR FAITHFULNESS IS DRIVEN BY CHRIST'S PERFECT FAITHFULNESS BEFORE THE FATHER.

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## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Do you remember the first time your parents left you in charge of something? Maybe it was caring for a younger sibling or preparing a meal. How did the responsibility make you feel?
- 2 How did things turn out? Were there any consequences (positive or negative) to the way you handled it?

Most of us have had the experience of being left in charge of something and feeling a mixture of excitement and fear. It's thrilling to be given responsibility over something new, but it's also scary because you might fail.

There is a parallel in the Christian life. The Bible teaches that followers of Jesus are meant to be about their Master's business. God has given His children clear instructions about how to live life according to His will. Yet, it is easy to become distracted by the things of this world. This is what Jesus addressed in the parable we are studying today.

## UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 24:45-47.

- According to verse 46, what is good for a servant? Why is this the case?

This servant would be blessed because he was faithfully obedient. The master found this servant fulfilling his duties when he arrived. This servant would be set over all his possessions. This description recalls the story of Joseph, who was found faithful by both Potiphar and Pharaoh and was set over their households (Gen. 37–50).

Jesus referred to a whole-hearted obedience that reflected an internal reality of submission, trust, and devotion. Indeed, the sort of obedience that Jesus preached and exhorted was one that is compelled by love (John 14:15). Verbal confessions of devotion and love aren't indicative of a heart reality; rather, obedience and submission with joy and thanksgiving are true signposts of love for God (Matt. 7:21).

- What are the characteristics of the faithful servant? How should we seek to follow this example?

The faithful servant is the faithful Christian who has been given the truths of Scripture and has done well to steward them. This servant was no doubt the example and model that Jesus desired for His disciples to follow. It is the example that the apostles would follow and that pastors today should strive toward. Christians who are not pastors must also seek to be found faithful, but the theme of this parable is stewardship of entrusted resources. No person has been entrusted by Christ with more responsibility than pastors (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

In 1 Peter, Peter wrote that the faithful elder (pastor) would receive an unfading crown of glory when Jesus returns. But, there is also blessing to be enjoyed now for all Christians who walk in faithful obedience. A joy in the Lord that provides strength (Neh. 8:10), a peace that guards

the heart and mind (Phil. 4:7), the privilege of prayer, and the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) are just a few of these blessings.

We should recognize that we aren't owed any further blessing than the unfathomable salvation that the Lord has wrought in our lives. In fact, if the Lord never blessed His children with a single blessing more after wiping away their sins and adopting them into His family, they would still be blessed beyond measure. Yet, our good Father continues to lavish His goodness and kindness on us as His children. Our cup truly does run over (Ps. 23:5) when we walk in faithful obedience to our Master.

> READ MATTHEW 24:48-51.

- What are the characteristics of the wicked servant in this parable?

Jesus described the wicked servant as having no regard for the return of the master and the gall to live in open rebellion against the will of the master.

Some commentators see this servant as a backslidden pastor who abuses the authority given him by taking advantage of his position. He mistreats the flock that has been entrusted to him. This position, however, is not tenable in light of the promised punishment for such a person. Jesus said that the master will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful.

This description is beyond the limits of God disciplining one of His children. Rather, it is a reference to the punishment that awaits one who has completely rejected the authority of Christ. The phrase, "assign him a place with the unbelievers," especially indicates an eternal judgment and separation from God.

Luke used a parallel phrase in 12:46: "The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers." This clearly refers to the punishment of the unbeliever.

- Why is it necessary that those who reject God be punished so severely?

The punishment is eternal condemnation. He will spend eternity separated from God in hell. The only aspect of God that he will experience forever is God's wrath and judgment.

Many wonder how a God who is merciful and loving could permit such a punishment to take place. But because of man's sinfulness and rebellion against God, the better question is how could a just and holy God take on the sin of man by dying on a cross in order to rescue man from his plight?

That God would save us is a mercy and kindness beyond comprehension. Those who question God's judgment and wrath have not fully comprehended the sinfulness of mankind.

> READ LUKE 12:47-48.

Luke's account of this parable provides further insight on two additional servants, which gives context to the point Jesus was making.

- What was the issue with the servant in verse 47?

This servant knew the will of the master, but he did not do it. After giving two extremes (faithful servant and wicked servant), Jesus described two other possible scenarios.

Most likely, Jesus was referring to a person who is truly a Christian but needs strong discipline in order to bring him to a place of faithful obedience. His punishment isn't destruction, but "many blows." The New Testament time and again condemns those who hear the Word of God but don't faithfully obey it. James said that they are like "a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (1:23-34). We

might say that this servant is lazy. He knows what he ought to do but doesn't do it. Yet God is faithful to discipline this servant to continue his progress in sanctification.

- What about the servant in verse 48, what was his deficiency?

Again, it seems that Jesus was referring to a Christian here. This servant is guilty of wrongdoing, but his wrongdoing is due to his ignorance. Therefore, his punishment is less severe. His ignorance is still blameworthy because there is opportunity to know what is required. The Scriptures say that God's will for His people is plain (Rom. 1:20).

Implicit in the example of the ignorant servant is the exhortation to seek wisdom and knowledge concerning the will of God found in the Scriptures. The Bible is replete with encouragements to the people of God to grow in grace and knowledge through intentional remembering, rehearsing, and meditating on God's Word.

- How should we understand the punishments that these servants received? How should we respond to these warnings?

The punishment of these two servants was distinct from that of the wicked servant. While the wicked servant's punishment ended in complete destruction, these servants' punishments were meant to correct and restore. These servants would remain servants and, presumably, grow through discipline.

The punishment of these servants is best understood as God's loving discipline of His children. Hebrews 12:6 says, "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." God's correction of His children is proof of His love and mercy toward them. This discipline may come in the form of confrontation from other believers, consequences of sin, or some other means. His discipline is meant for our good and is a critical part of our becoming more like Jesus.

## APPLICATION

- Are you like the faithful servant? Is your life above reproach and an example of Christlike devotion and service? What areas of your life are lacking? What needs to change?
- Does the example of the wicked servant remind you of your life in any way? What about people who are close to you? What does a person who resembles the wicked servant need more than anything?
- Are there areas in your life where you are lazy or ignorant like the other servants described in Luke? Has the Lord disciplined you? What can you do to change those areas?

## PRAY

Take time to pray for wisdom and discernment about how this parable would apply to your life. Ask the Lord to help you see which servant you are most like. As you see sin in your life, take time to repent of it and thank the Lord for the forgiveness that is yours in Christ Jesus.