

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of **MATTHEW**

NOVEMBER

20

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of MATTHEW

NOVEMBER 1

20

THE LAST SUPPER

MATTHEW 26:17-30

NOVEMBER 1, 2020

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 26:17-30. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: IN THE UPPER ROOM THE NIGHT BEFORE HE WAS TO BE CRUCIFIED, JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES THAT ONE OF THEM WOULD BETRAY HIM, AND HE INSTITUTED THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: IN THE UPPER ROOM, WE SEE AN EXAMPLE OF A FOLLOWER WHO KNEW ABOUT JESUS WITHOUT KNOWING HIM, AS JESUS GAVE THOSE WHO TRULY KNEW HIM A WAY TO REMEMBER HIM.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: ONLY THOSE WHO TRULY KNOW JESUS ARE SAVED BY HIM.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Who is a person you know a lot about but do not know personally? How did you come to know so much about him or her?

- 2 Who is someone you know really well personally? What is the difference in knowing about someone and actually knowing someone?

- 3 What is an example of something you can only know through personal acquaintance?

Modern culture has given us unprecedented access to the lives of complete strangers, both noticeable and unnoticeable. Through social media we can know facts about people—who's in their family, what they like to do, what they watch on television, and their opinions on anything they care to speak about. Most people have at least some friends on social media they've never met in real life. There is a difference in people you know personally, and those you know digitally. Similarly, it is possible to read the Bible and know every fact there is to know about Jesus, but actually knowing Jesus in the context of a relationship is different than knowing facts about Him. Judas shows us that knowing Jesus and knowing about Jesus are two very different things. Jesus shows us that we know Him through active remembrance.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:14-16.

- Did the chief priests seek Judas out, or did he seek them? What does this teach us about Judas?
- Why do you think Matthew made mention that Judas was “one of the Twelve”?

Judas initiated these events; the chief priests just took advantage of the opportunity. The inclusion that Judas was “part of the Twelve” is meant to shock Matthew’s original readers. Being part of the Twelve meant Judas was right in the thick of Jesus’ ministry. However, Judas failed to connect with Jesus in a life-changing way.

- Look through John 12:1-8. What do we learn about Judas from that account and this account together?
- The amount that Judas betrayed Jesus for was much less than the value of the oil Mary used to anoint Jesus. What does this show us about the true nature of Judas’s complaints?

Taking John and Matthew together, a portrait of Judas emerges as shrewd, a betrayer, and a keeper of the money. Judas was in the perfect position to know Jesus, but he stopped short of knowing Him. Judas took his proximity to Jesus and His ministry and used it for his own advantage. Judas came to Jesus to get something other than Jesus.

True relationships are based out of mutual love and appreciation, yet Judas lacked appreciation for Jesus and did not love Him. For Judas, Jesus was only useful in terms of what Judas could gain from following Him. He performed a cost-benefit analysis, and a relationship with Jesus lost to 30 pieces of silver.

Notes:

- Re-read verse 16. What intentionality did Judas take in betraying Jesus?
- Over and over the Old Testament tells God's people to remember what God has done. What might have happened if Judas remembered what Jesus had done already?

The verb usage in verse 16 means that Judas continuously looked for the chance to betray Jesus. Judas was so focused on his own gain that he missed what was right in front of him. Judas saw Jesus heal the blind, feed thousands, and raise the dead. Yet none of this resonated with Judas at the level of his heart. He failed to recognize Jesus or remember Him.

However, Jesus recognized the importance of remembrance and instituted a celebration for His people to remember Him after He departed to be with the Father.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:17-25.

- What do you know about Passover? Why would Jesus use this specific time to teach His disciples about who He was and what He came to do?
- Why is it significant that Jesus made the preparations for this meal Himself?

Passover was a festival used to commemorate when God saved the people of Israel and delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 12). In celebration of the Passover, Jews would bring a lamb into their home and slaughter it. As Jesus prepared His Passover meal, He would take the place of the lamb. Like the sacrifice in Exodus 12, Jesus would cover His people with His blood and deliver them from the judgment of God. The timing of this meal in the upper room was intentional—the disciples would only see its true significance after the resurrection.

Notes:

- When Jesus announced that one of the Twelve would betray Him, how did the disciples respond? How did Judas respond? What is the difference in their responses?

While eleven of the twelve disciples responded with shock and dismay over Jesus' words, one responded with affirmation. Notice the other disciples called Jesus "Lord," a term of respect as well as identity. As the majority of Jesus' disciples were heartbroken and grieved, Judas showed his true colors by asking Jesus, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Judas gave Jesus lip service with a title, just as the scribes and Pharisees had done throughout Matthew's Gospel. Judas saw Jesus as another human teacher, not the exalted Lord, and Jesus acknowledged this with His response to Judas.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:26-30.

- What is the significance of the bread in the Lord's Supper? What is the significance of the cup?
- Ultimately, what are we doing when we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

- Why should we take the time to regularly remember what Jesus has done for us?

Notes:

The purpose of the Lord's Supper is for disciples of Jesus to remember and reflect upon what Jesus has done for them. The bread and cup are symbols or pictures of Jesus' body and blood. They serve as reminders for us that Jesus sacrificed His body on our behalf to pay for our sins and make it possible for us to have a relationship with God. One of the ways we get to know Jesus more intimately is through the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

- As the disciples observed and listened to Jesus at the first Lord's Supper, what do you think might have been going through their minds? How much do you think they understood when Jesus spoke about His body and blood?

- With what kind of reverence or respect do you come to the Lord's table? Why should this never be done thoughtlessly?

The Lord's Supper is a way for us to remember what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. While Judas missed the point of the Lord's Supper, we have the opportunity to actively commemorate Jesus' work and await His return. We meet the risen Lord at His table. It is a place for people who know Him, not for those who merely know about Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- What does remembering Jesus look like for you in an ongoing, daily way? What are some ways we can remember Jesus?
- Why is the Lord's Supper something that we do together as the family of God? What significance comes with this being an ordinance of the church?
- Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Many people—even outside the church—know that Christians take the Lord's Supper. How could this practice of faith be used to explain the gospel?

PRAY

Ask Jesus to give you a heart that is not content to only know things about Him, but to know Him personally and deeply. Pray that you would seek and find opportunities every day to remember and commemorate the work Jesus did on your behalf.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - How are you seeking to remember Jesus today?

 - Do you notice a difference between the days when you actively remember Jesus, and those when you don't? How so?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize Matthew 26:26-29.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Matthew 26:36-56.

MATTHEW 26:14-30

26:14-16. Judas Iscariot had already been introduced in the original listing of the disciples (Matt. 10:4), together with the one notorious act that would forever be associated with his name—his betrayal of Jesus. Matthew’s mention of Judas as one of the Twelve was intended to draw a gasp of disbelief from the reader.

Notes:

Judas knew who to approach, the chief priests, and he knew they wanted Jesus, Judas had watched these leaders suffer humiliation before the people many times, as Jesus defeated them with truth and his authority. Judas asked their price for his help to betray Jesus to them.

26:17-19. The phrase the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (27:17) was another way of referring to the day of the Passover. The feast derived its name from the fact that no yeast was used in the cooking for these meals. This commemorated Israel’s hurried departure from Egypt (Exod. 12). They had to leave on such short notice that they did not have time to leaven their bread, so they ate the first Passover meal with unleavened bread. This was some time before sunset on Thursday. Thus, the Passover meal would be eaten at or after sunset that evening, just as Friday began.

At the disciples’ inquiry, Jesus directed them to a particular man’s home in the city, referring to Jerusalem. The man apparently knew who the Teacher was, and would gladly welcome the Messiah into his home. Jesus’ words, My appointed time is near, indicated his awareness of the triumphant completion of his work of suffering, which would begin that night.

The reason Matthew included these details was to show Jesus’ careful preparation for this meal. The king himself was making these arrangements.

The lamb was selected, the leaven was burned, and then the lamb was sacrificed and roasted. The whole process was an elaborate ceremony that lasted several days. The order of the meal was a carefully prescribed tradition that had begun nearly fifteen hundred years before. A prayer of thanksgiving was offered over the first of four cups of wine. A preliminary course of bitter herbs was eaten. A ceremonial question was asked and answered about the meaning of

the meal. Throughout the meal, at prescribed times, certain parts of the great Jewish Hallel (Pss. 113–118) were sung.

26:20-24. The words evening came refer to the setting of the sun and the beginning of the Passover celebration.

Notes:

In the middle of the meal, Jesus made a statement that shocked the disciples. Jesus' announcement of a betrayer in their midst met with denial, tinged with self-doubt. They all knew they were weak, but it was hard for them to conceive that they could betray their Lord. Their denials took the form of a question that expected a negative answer: Surely not I, Lord? Matthew noted that they were very sad, a word that amplified their grief to the extreme. The disciples were beside themselves with sorrow. Jesus' response to their denials was an allusion to Psalm 41:9. This psalm of David praised Yahweh for protecting him from the most treacherous of his enemies.

Matthew recorded Jesus' words in 26:23 in such a way that Jesus is seen as emphasizing the travesty of a person who shared his meal serving as his betrayer. Matthew's point was the unimaginable depth of the betrayal, not the identity of the person who betrayed.

In 26:24, Jesus made it clear that, on the one hand, the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But, on the other hand, woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! The Messiah-King's death as the sacrificial Son of Abraham must take place. But this did not relieve the betrayer of his guilt. God's sovereignty does not remove human responsibility. Even though the outcome would be the salvation of all who would believe, it would be better for the betrayer if he had not been born—so severe would be his judgment.

26:25. Judas joined the chorus of denials, hoping that Jesus' answer to his Surely not I, Rabbi? would be "No, of course not." This would indicate that Jesus did not know of Judas's plans. But Jesus' response took Judas's question and turned it into a confession: Yes, it is you.

Judas's use of the respectful Rabbi was a smokescreen that hid his disrespect for Jesus. Judas was just like the hypocrites who built Jesus up with false compliments even as they were trying to take him down.

26:26. John was the only gospel writer who recorded Judas's departure from the meal (John 13:30). Apparently Judas's presence at the Lord's Supper was not an important detail to Matthew. He wanted to focus our attention on the Supper.

Notes:

Jesus' comment, Take and eat; this is my body, must have caused a stir among the disciples. Matthew did not record Jesus' further elaboration on the significance of the bread, but the symbolism of sacrificial provision was unmistakable. This new rite had direct links with all of redemption history. Just as Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt was remembered in the Passover, so all of Messiah's people were to remember his death in this communion ordinance.

26:27-29. At one point in the meal, Jesus took the cup of wine, again gave thanks, and gave it to his disciples, commanding them, Drink from it, all of you. On this occasion, Jesus shocked the disciples by breaking the order of the centuries-long liturgy and offering the cup of his own blood. Thus, Jesus rendered the earlier Passover ceremonial meals obsolete and introduced a brand-new ceremony, the communion. But his further explanation must have surprised them: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (27:28). The disciples had witnessed the pouring of an animal's blood on the temple altar as the required Mosaic sacrifice for the sins of Israel (e.g., Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34). But Jesus introduced something new to their understanding. It would no longer be an animal's blood that would cover sins, but his blood—the blood of the Messiah-King. The blood of animals sealed the old covenant between Yahweh and his people (Exod. 24:8; Zech. 9:11). The blood of the Messiah would seal the new covenant (Matt. 1:1-17, 21; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; Heb. 7-10).

Jesus concluded the institution of the ordinance with a solemn affirmation (I tell you), vowing not to celebrate this symbolic meal until the eschatological feast with you in my Father's kingdom (26:29). This verse anticipates Christ's future reign on the throne of David. We are commanded to celebrate this meal regularly on earth to remember what Jesus has done for us. But he will take part in it again when he can celebrate the final reunion with all his people. This reality emphasizes the symbolism of unity when we celebrate communion together as members of his body.

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of MATTHEW

NOVEMBER 8

20

ARRESTED IN GETHSEMANE

MATTHEW 26:36-56

NOVEMBER 8, 2020

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 26:36-56. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: AS JESUS PREPARED FOR HIS CRUCIFIXION, HE LIFTED THREE AGONIZING PRAYERS TO THE FATHER FOR THE STRENGTH TO DO HIS WILL.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: BEFORE JESUS ENDURED THE SHAME OF THE CROSS, HE INTENTIONALLY SOUGHT THE COMFORT OF THE FATHER.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: OFTEN, DOING THE WILL OF GOD INVOLVES SUFFERING. FACING SUFFERING, JESUS DEVOTED HIMSELF TO A TIME OF PRAYER IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH ALL GOD HAD ASKED HIM TO DO. THROUGH PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE, JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FULLY TO THE WILL OF GOD TO SAVE SINNERS.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 When was the last time you couldn't sleep because you were concerned about something? What did you do when you couldn't sleep?
- 2 Where do you turn when you are faced with hard choices? What goes through your mind as you consider these things?

In Jesus' time on earth, He faced the gamut of human feelings and emotions. He experienced joy and hope as people believed and were healed. He felt rejection and shame from His friends and family. Ultimately, He experienced unimaginable physical agony and death as He was mocked, beaten, and nailed to a Roman cross. Through it all, Jesus remained completely committed to the will of God. One of the ways He maintained His commitment was through the intentional time He set aside to connect with the Father through prayer. Jesus' example is instructive to us today. Prayer is essential to every believer, especially those making difficult decisions.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:26-39.

After Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples, He went to a quiet place to pray. Jesus, fully aware that He was soon going to be arrested and executed, used His last moments as a free man to pray.

- Why did Jesus pray? Why is it significant that this was His last act before His arrest?

- Do you respond as Jesus did when you are facing an extremely difficult situation?

Notes:

- Why do you think Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden?

Gethsemane was a garden among the olive groves on the western side of the Mount of Olives. Jesus chose a quiet, secluded place to pray before He was arrested. He brought all His disciples with Him, but only asked His closest friends Peter, James, and John to go further into the garden while He prayed. It was important to Jesus to be both close to the Father and His friends. Jesus knew what awaited Him and told His dearest friends that He was “very sorrowful, even unto death.” Matthew did not try to hide Jesus’ inner turmoil from us.

- How did Matthew describe Jesus’ emotional state? Do you think He was most distressed by the physical pain or was it something more than that?
- When you think of Jesus do you ever imagine Him like this? What does the portrait of Jesus’ very real distress teach us about Him?
- Notice that at first, Jesus did not ask the disciples to pray but to watch. Do you think Jesus asked the disciples to stay more for His sake or theirs?
- What was Jesus’ physical posture as He prayed? What does this reveal about His relationship with the Father? Do you ever adopt a similar posture as you pray?

- What was the cup that Jesus had to drink?

Notes:

These verses paint a very human picture of Jesus. He was deeply distressed about what was about to happen to Him. For all of eternity Jesus has enjoyed perfect and uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It was not simply the fact that He would die that distressed Him so deeply; many lesser people have gone to their death calmly. But when Jesus died, He died separated from the Father and covered in our sin. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "He became sin, who knew no sin." Jesus had a realistic understanding of what was about to happen to Him. Ultimately, Jesus was submissive to the Father's will. His mission was clear: to defeat the enemies of sin and death and restore all who would believe in His name to a right relationship with God.

- What was Jesus asking God in His prayer in verse 39? State this in your own words.

- Why is it important to know that it was God's will for Jesus to suffer and die in the manner that He did?

Even though Jesus was perfectly capable of letting the cup pass from Him, He actively obeyed the will of the Father in all that He did and continues to do. Jesus' highest priority, more than His own comfort or renown, was accomplishing the task given to Him by God. Jesus was vigilant in His own prayer life, and God honored Him for that.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:40-46.

- Do you think Peter, James, and John understood the gravity of what was taking place? How do you think their inability to stay awake with Jesus made Him feel?

- When Jesus returned to the disciples He modified His original directions and commanded them to watch and pray. Why do you think He told them to pray this time?
- Where did Jesus turn when He did not find companionship in His sleeping disciples?

Notes:

Each time Jesus returned to His friends, He found them sleeping. Despite Jesus' attempts to alert the disciples to what was taking place, their actions revealed that they understood very little about what Jesus was going through and what was about to happen. Jesus realized that they were limited in their understanding and ability to do as He asked. This time He directed them to watch as well as pray. Like Peter, James, and John were two thousand years ago, we are often limited in our ability to follow the will of God. Jesus recognized and modeled for the disciples that they needed God's presence to do God's will. Jesus' admonition to His friends is one we would do well to listen to today.

- What did Jesus mean when He said the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak?
- When have you experienced this in your own life?
- How were Jesus' and the disciples' temptations different?

Jesus followed all that God purposed for Him to do. He did what none of us could do for ourselves. Jesus prayed three times that God would remove the cup of suffering from Him, and was obedient knowing that His suffering was God's plan. God never had a plan that did not involved Jesus suffering and dying for the sins of mankind. When Jesus tells His disciples to rise and go, it is not a means of escape, but an acknowledgment of fact. Jesus had already fought the battle with dedicated time in prayer. Rather, Jesus embraced God's plan for Him and was faithful unto death.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:47-56.

- Why did the Pharisees want to take advantage of the night to arrest Jesus?
- Why do you think such a formidable force was sent to arrest Jesus? What does this reveal about His reputation at that time?
- In Luke's account of these events (Luke 22:47-53), he pointed out that along with the chief priests and the elders, a group of Roman officers accompanied Judas. This meant that both Jews and Gentiles played a part in Jesus' arrest. Why do you think Luke pointed this out? What does this detail tell us about Jesus' affect on people? About human nature?

Judas's group included a detachment of Roman soldiers stationed in Jerusalem and some temple officials or temple guards from the Sanhedrin. Judas, the Roman soldiers, and the temple police must have appeared to be a formidable force, whatever their total number. This group was prepared for trouble and equipped to meet it. These verses illustrate the universal rejection of Jesus on the part of humanity. Historically, Jews have been labeled as Jesus' murderers. In

this text we see that it was Jews and Gentiles that came to arrest Jesus, an illustration of hatred and enmity toward God on the part of the entire human race.

- What do we learn about Jesus' commitment to His mission from His response to Peter when Peter sought to defend Jesus against the crowd who sought to arrest Him?

Notes:

The refusal to meet force with force was used by Jesus as a sign of the true nature of His kingdom. In Matthew's account, Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its place . . . for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Luke added that Jesus healed the servant's ear (Luke 22:51). Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him; He came to earth for that very purpose. He willingly gave up His life. Though His disciples were caught off guard, Jesus was not.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- How do you use prayer as a means to discern and live out God's will? Is prayer a regular practice in your life? How can you intentionally set aside more time each day to be alone with God?
- How does Jesus' willingness to obey God in going to the cross encourage and/or challenge you in your faith?
- What sacrifices does God ask of us today, and what influence should the cross have on our response?

PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for His provision in Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Ask God that He would help you to be a people who are utterly dependent on Him. Pray that like Jesus, those in your group would actively seek God's presence and will in their lives.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - How will you make a point to set aside time each day this week for prayer?
 - What impact has this week's study had on your perspective in daily life?
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- > The challenge to memorize Matthew 26:41.
- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Matthew 27:32-56.

MATTHEW 26:36-56

26:36-38. The place called Gethsemane, on the west slope of the Mount of Olives, faced Jerusalem. The name means “olive press,” so it may have been an olive grove with its own press. Jesus left eight disciples in one place, while he and his inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—went a little further for the purpose of prayer. Knowing the physical, emotional, and spiritual torture he was about to bear, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. Matthew used these words to communicate the extreme emotional distress Jesus experienced.

Notes:

Jesus’ own words further explained his emotional state: My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (cf. Ps. 42:5-6,11; 43:5). Jesus was on the verge of dying from a broken heart, so extreme was his emotional distress. In deep sorrow, the Messiah-King instructed his three closest friends to stay near and keep watch with him, probably to support him through their own prayers. He—fully God—put his own emotional well-being in the hands of his creatures!

26:39. Then, moving just a little further on, the king fell with his face to the ground—a posture communicating desperate entreaty— and prayed to his Father. He prayed if it is possible, knowing that his request could not be granted if he were to remain obedient. But Jesus’ model is a comfort to us. We need to pour out our hearts honestly to God (Ps. 62:8), even if we know our deepest “want” is not what he will grant. God desires us to be able to come to him feeling the safety of total honesty. He is competent to handle the cries of our souls.

Jesus’ request to be spared suffering and death was the desperate cry of a Son’s heart to his Father. And his Father accepted it, as a loving Father—but without granting it. And the Son accepted his Father’s love, but without receiving his specific request. A Son’s loving request and a Father’s loving wisdom; let this be a model for our own prayerful exchanges with the Father.

This cup refers not only to Christ's suffering and death (Isa. 51:22; Jer. 25:15-16; Ezek. 23:31-34) but even more uniquely to the Father's wrath upon sin. It was an anticipation of Matthew 27:46 and the Father's turning his back on him. Jesus' extreme grief was rooted in the fact that he was about to become the object of his Father's wrath—an experience that many people on earth will encounter in eternity, but which no one but the Son of God could possibly anticipate ahead of time.

Notes:

The Father's holy wrath was about to crush the Son (see Isa. 53:10), when the Son had done nothing to offend him. Here Jesus was facing more than humiliation, torture, and physical death. He was about to enter hell. We can only begin to imagine how fearful this prospect was to him. He and the Father had always been one. No wonder he cried out in desperation!

But we are not to confuse Jesus' honest expression of desire with a willful decision to disobey. In the same breath, Jesus continued, Yet not as I will, but as you will. As always, the Son remained thoroughly submissive to his Father. There was no other way to fulfill the eternal plan that the Father, Son, and Spirit had foreordained from eternity. His mission was to defeat the adversary by restoring the kingdom and to redeem a rebellious people.

26:40-41. Returning to the three disciples, Jesus found them sleeping. He rebuked Peter on behalf of the others, using plural verbs throughout verses 40-41. His question did not expect an answer: Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? The disciples' sleeping showed that they were unaware of the spiritual danger and that their guard was down. This time when Jesus commanded them to watch and pray, he was referring to more than staying awake physically. They were on the verge of entering into the temptation to deny and abandon him, and they needed God's help to stand fast.

Jesus acknowledged their uninformed willingness to remain loyal when he said, The spirit is willing. But they were unaware of how weak their flesh was. Without prayerful

dependence on God and continual spiritual watchfulness, the flesh would win at the first moment of weakness.

26:42-44. Then Jesus left them to pray again to his Father. This time the words Matthew recorded demonstrate less distress and even greater resolve to obey. The wording of may your will be done is a more complete thought than the fragmented wording of the prayer in 26:39.

Notes:

After some time, Jesus again returned to the three. But again they were sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. Matthew acknowledged their human limitations, even as Jesus seemed to do by his decision not to rebuke them the second time. Still with a heavy heart, the Son sought the companionship of the Father a third time, not having found it in his disciples.

26:45-46. For the third time Jesus returned to his disciples. The hour is near, he declared. There was no longer any time for sleeping or prayer. He awoke them with a rebuke that might be taken as a question: Are you still sleeping and resting? Jesus was not satisfied with their faithfulness.

Jesus' word Look may have drawn the disciples' attention to the sound of the approaching crowd, or perhaps to the light of their torches. The time he had been warning them about—the time for action, the time when the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners—had arrived. Sinners refers to those who had rejected his authority as Messiah and who were about to arrest, try, and execute him as a common criminal.

With the moment of crisis at hand, Jesus spurred his disciples to action: Rise, let us go. Again he drew their attention to the reality around them—to the approaching crowd, led by Judas Iscariot. Things were now moving too quickly for the disciples. Thanks to his time of watchful prayer, the Messiah-King was ready for what lay ahead. Most people would have taken this opportunity to escape, but his purpose did not lie in escape. Jesus went boldly to meet his enemies.

26:47. Jesus' enemies arrived while he was still speaking. Matthew again referred to Judas as one of the Twelve, to draw attention to the irony that one of Jesus' closest associates would be turning on him. He came leading a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. Perhaps they thought they would have to overpower an armed revolutionary. If any of the chief priests and the elders of the people were among this crowd, they must have been few in numbers. This was consistent with their desire to exercise caution about incurring popular disapproval (26:5). Instead, these armed guards were sent from the Jewish leaders to do their dirty work for them.

Notes:

This was an unexpected opportunity for the Jewish leaders. Because Jesus was usually surrounded by a crowd, they did not expect to have an opportunity to apprehend him until after the Passover festival (26:5). But Jesus deliberately chose to come out to Gethsemane with his disciples. This created the opportunity for his enemies to arrest him. The king was sovereign even over the timing of his arrest.

26:48-50. Judas had arranged a sign with Jesus' enemies, hoping to identify Jesus in the darkness. The signal was to be a kiss, a customary greeting between members of the same sex in that culture. Judas at once went to Jesus with a greeting and a kiss.

Judas could not have expected Jesus not to know what he was doing. But the eleven were unaware of Judas's treachery, and perhaps he could fool them. Judas, however, was the fool. Before the men seized him, Jesus declared, Friend (referring sorrowfully to the friendship that had been betrayed), do what you came for.

26:51-54. The phrase with that was intended to draw surprise from the reader at the next step of narrative action. One of Jesus' companions was (according to John 18:10) none other than Peter. But we should not make much of this knowledge of the identity of the sword-wielder, since Matthew (as well as Mark and Luke) chose not to include it.

This rash disciple struck out in an effort to defend his master. He cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, although he was probably aiming for the man's neck. Matthew's point was to show that the eleven were apparently ready to fight to the death. But they were not ready to see the king give in meekly to what must have seemed like disappointing defeat to them.

Notes:

Jesus rebuked the sword-bearing disciple, telling him to put his sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword (26:52). Jesus would provide the disciples with more effective weapons, suited to a different type of battle, to win a victory much greater than a military triumph. He wanted them alive to carry on the spiritual battle until the gospel of the kingdom was preached to all peoples of the world (24:14).

Jesus further explained why such retaliation was inappropriate. He had the power to end this fiasco any time he wished (26:53). He did not need others to defend him. He expressed continued submission to my Father, through whom he could request an angelic army. But, at the same time, he asserted that if he were to make such a request, the Father would grant it at once.

A legion consisted of six thousand soldiers. So the number Jesus used (twelve legions) was equivalent to an army of 72,000 angels. Because a single angel was capable of defeating an entire army (e.g., 2 Kgs. 19:35), Jesus had at his disposal an infinitely larger power than was needed to handle the mob. This was not the time for a fight. God's perfect plan would be carried out this night.

Finally (26:54), Jesus reminded the disciples that there was a purpose to all that was happening. He was not struggling to escape, because he was here to fulfill the Father's eternal purpose. This had been revealed centuries before through the Scriptures . . . that say it must happen in this way.

26:55-56. Turning from his confused disciples, Jesus addressed his captors, shaming those who had come in treachery and deceit to arrest an innocent man. They had

had many opportunities to arrest him in the temple. He had been there teaching regularly. Jesus confronted their true motives by demonstrating that it was these hypocrites who had much to hide, coming out to this lonely place to capture him in the middle of the night, with swords and clubs. This was inappropriate and unnecessary. It was by his design that they were here to arrest him, and it was his plan to go with them to trial and to the cross.

Notes:

Jesus had planned this event from eternity past and had written about it through the writings of the prophets (Isa. 53; Zech. 12-13; cf. Matt. 26:54). And now it was being fulfilled exactly as he had planned (26:56).

This was the last response the disciples expected from the king. They had watched him heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They had seen him calm the sea and walk on water. Before their eyes he had provided food for thousands. And he had put the hypocritical leaders in their place, embarrassing them time after time. Why now was he so easily “giving in”? What happened to the authority he had displayed?

In their perplexity and confusion, the disciples deserted him and fled. In fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction (26:31-32), these men lost their nerve. They relied on human courage rather than spiritual preparation. Their downfall was their failure to follow Jesus’ advice to keep watch and remain dependent on God in prayer (26:41; cf. 24:42). They had been so distracted by their own preconceived ideas that they did not recognize Jesus’ exercise of authentic authority when they saw it. Neither did they recognize that the path to victory was through the valley of sacrifice (16:24-28).

Now the king was alone, and he would face the rest of his passion without a single human companion at his side. Even his communion with the Father would soon be severed. He was beginning the bleakest season of his existence. Yet, the king was still in control, marching victoriously downward to death.

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of MATTHEW

NOVEMBER 15

20

THE DEATH OF JESUS

MATTHEW 27:32-56

NOVEMBER 15, 2020

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 27:32-56. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THE WORDS JESUS SPOKE ON THE CROSS GIVE US INSIGHT INTO WHO JESUS IS, WHAT HE CAME TO EARTH TO ACCOMPLISH, AND HOW HE WANTS US TO LIVE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS DID NOT WASTE A SINGLE MOMENT OF HIS LIFE ON EARTH.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: BY LOOKING AT THE WORDS HE SPOKE WHILE ON THE CROSS, WE SEE WHAT CHRIST HAS ACCOMPLISHED FOR US THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION AND HOW HE INTENDS FOR US TO LIVE.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 In our culture, what crimes would one have to be convicted of in order to face the possibility of receiving a death sentence?
- 2 What is the execution of a criminal meant to communicate to the general public?

Only the most heinous of crimes, usually those that involve taking the life of another, lead one to face execution. Proponents of capital punishment emphasize that it serves as a formidable crime deterrent to the public. In effect, it is said to communicate, “If you commit these crimes, we will use our power to do this to you.” Roman crucifixions held similar purposes, but something else took place in Jesus’ crucifixion other than a display of Rome’s power. In Jesus’ execution, God the Father powerfully demonstrated His righteous judgment and gracious love.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE TWO VOLUNTEERS READ MATTHEW 27:32-44 AND LUKE 23:32-49.

- The Gospel writers described how Jesus was crucified between two criminals. What might Jesus’ position between such people communicate to those watching? Why?

- How did the actions of the soldiers and others in this passage fulfill prophecy about Jesus (see Psalm 22:18; 69:21)?

Notes:

Jesus' placement between two thieves was a position probably intended to disgrace the Lord. But even the position of the cross fulfilled prophecy, since Isaiah had said, "[He] was counted among the rebels; yet He bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels" (Isa. 53:12).

- In Luke's account, what did the first criminal affirm about Jesus and His mission (Luke 23:39)?
- Despite his statement, how would you describe that criminal's character? What words help us understand his intent?

One of the criminals hanging there picked up the theme of the leaders and soldiers. He began to yell insults at Jesus. This man verbalized a blasphemous, evil attitude. His demand that Jesus "Save Yourself and us!" expressed no belief that Jesus could. That same statement, if made from a different heart, could have saved him. Yet, Jesus endured this insult to His saving mission. He retained His determination to obey God by a refusal to bow to human pressure.

- What was the focus of the taunts directed at Jesus by the leaders who wanted Him crucified?
- Why do you think the people were saying these things? Why were they being so cruel to someone who had shown them such kindness through healing and teaching?

- How do you typically respond, both internally and externally, when people make fun of you? What allowed Jesus to remain focused on the task at hand?

Notes:

Jesus' desire to forgive those responsible for crucifying Him provides assurance that He will also forgive us. Those who crucified Jesus and mocked Him had no idea of the salvation He was providing for sinners. His prayer of forgiveness for His tormentors (Luke 23:34) vividly characterizes this salvation. Jesus practiced what He preached when He told us to love our enemies.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 27:45-56.

In this passage that describes Jesus' sacrifice, the setting helps us understand the story's message. Matthew records how darkness came over the whole land from noon until three in the afternoon. It was midday, and it was dark at the time the sun usually shines brightest.

- Of all the miracles God could have done to draw attention to the cross, why do you think He utilized darkness?

In some places in Scripture, darkness is a sign of disorder and corruption. In other places, it signals judgment and tragedy. In Genesis 1:2, darkness described the disorder of creation before God formed it for His good purposes. In Exodus 10:21-22, darkness fell over all of Egypt for three days as judgment. In Amos 8:9-10, darkness was used to describe the judgment that would fall on Israel. In John 1:5, darkness was used to describe the sinful rebellion and corruption of the whole world. As much as darkness is a negative symbol in Scripture, light is a positive one.

- Why did Jesus say, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” What did Jesus experience on the cross that made Him cry out so desperately?

Notes:

Jesus endured the pain and suffering we should have endured for our sins. When Jesus was on the cross He said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” as He bore the wrath of God for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). This tells us that God has not abandoned us and that He personally understands the afflictions we face. He endured them on our behalf. Though our suffering may not be directly tied to our own sin, it is always tied to sin in some way—the sins of others or the reality of living in a world broken by sin.

- Knowing He would soon die, why do you think Jesus asked for something to drink? How did this fulfill prophecy about Him?
- What did Matthew mean in stating that Jesus “gave up His spirit”? How does this phrase compare to simply saying, “Jesus died”?

Jesus’ cry was one of accomplishment, not defeat. Through His death, Jesus loved His disciples to the end and completed all that the Father had charged. It truly was accomplished (John 19:30). In dying on the cross, Jesus provided the answer to our biggest problem: our sin problem. We can know that God hasn’t abandoned us when we suffer because Jesus endured the cross for us so that He might bring us to God (see 1 Pet. 3:18).

- How did people approach God throughout the Old Testament? What role did the curtain of the temple play in this relationship? What was the significance of the temple curtain being torn at the time of Jesus’ death?

The curtain of the temple separated sinful people from a Holy God. Once a year the high priest, risking his own life, passed through the curtain to make atonement for the people. But with Jesus' death, the curtain of separation was torn in two—both literally and spiritually—granting us access by faith into the grace in which we now stand as followers of Christ (see Rom. 5:2), opening the way for spiritual life. Here again we see that Jesus was not merely a religious teacher.

Notes:

The strange occurrence of the earthquake is only recorded in the Book of Matthew, but it was this earthquake that woke the dead, opening the tombs of holy people who had died and raising them to life, that they might proclaim and verify the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was clearly more than a courageous leader.

- How were women typically viewed in this culture and time? Why might Matthew have intentionally identified them as the primary witnesses to Jesus' resurrection?
- In what way does this make Jesus' death and resurrection even more unique?

In Jesus' day, women were regarded similarly to property and were considered to be unreliable witnesses altogether. As a result, Matthew made a significant cultural and spiritual statement by deliberately identifying three of the many women present at the death of Jesus. This unique element is yet another indicator that the death of Jesus accomplished a whole new way of relating both to God and one another. But Jesus was no mere revolutionary. After considering all of the facts and each of the unique elements surrounding Jesus' death, Matthew concluded that Jesus Christ must be declared the true Messiah—God among us, the Savior of the world.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Jesus accomplished everything God had planned for Him to do. What actions can you take to accomplish more of what God has planned for you to do?
- What are some practical ways we can be light-bearers to the people we know who are trapped in the darkness? Who is someone you can help this week?
- How might the endurance with which Jesus faced the cross change the way we approach the afflictions and difficulties we face?

PRAY

Spend time praying specifically for the people you know who still live in the darkness. Pray that their lives will be transformed by the light of Christ. Close in prayer by thanking God for the cross and everything it symbolizes for us—light in the darkness, redemption of our broken world, and reconciliation with God.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

> Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:

- What can you do this week to be reminded of the power of the gospel in your life?

- What opportunity do you have to sacrifice something for the faith of another person—your spouse, a coworker, a parent? How will you do that this week?

> A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

> The challenge to memorize Matthew 27:50.

> The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Matthew 28:1-20.

MATTHEW 27:32-56

27:32. Crucifixion victims normally carried the cross's (Gk) patibulum (crossbeam) to the execution site. Having lost much blood, Jesus was too weak to carry it beyond the city walls. The soldiers impressed Simon, a Cyrenian, to carry the beam the rest of the way. Simon's sons were later known in the early church (Mk 15:21). This suggests that Simon became a disciple of Jesus. Cyrene was situated near the Mediterranean coast in northern Africa. Simon was probably an ethnic Jew visiting Jerusalem for the Passover (Ac 6:9).

Notes:

27:33-34. This wine was probably intended to dull the pain of crucifixion or hasten death. Jesus's refusal to drink it expressed his determination to suffer the full agony of the cross.

27:35-36. Crucifixion was a horrifying and torturous means of execution. Naked victims were tied or nailed (Jn 20:25) to a cross. The victim might remain alive for days, and after death they were often consumed by dogs, carrion birds, or insects. Josephus described crucifixion as "the most wretched of all ways of dying" (War 7.5.4). Cicero (106–43 BC) said that crucifixion so frightened Roman citizens that they refused to speak the word cross.

27:37. A wooden placard called a titulus was often tied around the criminal's neck as he marched to death. This sign announced the reason for his crucifixion. When Jesus arrived at Golgotha, the placard was nailed over his head. Although Roman crosses were sometimes shaped like X or T, the placement of the titulus on Jesus's cross shows that it was shaped like a lowercase letter "t."

27:38-44. Jesus's final temptation was to abandon the cross. But "although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" and thereby was "perfected" so that "he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb 5:8–9). "It was the power of love, not nails, that kept him there" (Robert H. Mounce).

27:45. The bystanders naturally interpreted the darkness as God's judgment (Am 8:9). While they likely thought the judgment was against Jesus (as if he were a heretic), in light of his later resurrection they came to see the darkness as judgment against the sin that Jesus became on our behalf (2Co 5:21).

Notes:

27:46-49. Jesus's lament quotes Ps 22:1. The psalm reads as if it were written by someone standing near the cross (see esp. Ps 22:7-8, 14-18). Jesus's cry expressed the alienation from God that he endured as he bore the Father's wrath against sin. Although Jesus elsewhere addressed God as "Father," he addressed him merely as my God in this verse.

27:50-51. Jesus's death at 3:00 p.m. coincided with the afternoon sacrifice. Thus the priests were present in the temple to observe the rending of the curtain. The curtain of the sanctuary separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. According to the Mishnah, it was sixty feet long, thirty feet wide, and as thick as a man's palm. It was so heavy that it took three hundred men to lift it when it was wet (m. Shek. 8:5). That it was torn in two from top to bottom shows that it was torn by God. This signified that Jesus's death granted sinners new access to God (Heb 6:19-20; 10:19-20).

27:52-53. Although the tombs were ruptured at the time of Jesus's death, the saints did not depart from them until after Jesus's resurrection. This demonstrated that Jesus's victory over death guaranteed that God would also raise his people (1Co 15:20).

27:54. Gentiles again recognized and confessed Jesus's true identity. This hints at God's worldwide plan for salvation.

27:55-56. Mary the mother of James and Joseph was probably the mother of two of Jesus's lesser-known disciples (Mk 15:40).

LIFE GROUPS

TEACHING PLAN



Study of MATTHEW

NOVEMBER 22

20

THE RESURRECTION AND GREAT COMMISSION

MATTHEW 28:1-20

NOVEMBER 22, 2020

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 28:1-20. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS PUTS AN END TO ALL OUR REASONS FOR FEAR AND MOBILIZES US TO JOYFULLY GO AND SHARE THE GOOD NEWS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION CHANGES EVERYTHING.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE CALLED TO TAKE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION TO THE WHOLE WORLD.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Have you ever served on jury duty? What is the criteria for someone being proven guilty? How certain would you have to be to render a guilty verdict?
- 2 What steps would you take to ensure that you weighed the evidence carefully?

Serving on a jury is an intense responsibility. Your decision will forever alter the course of someone's life, so you want to be very careful to pay attention to all the evidence presented and to be as objective as can be. You must keep in mind that everyone is innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. It is no simple task!

Surveying the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is even more serious than serving on jury duty. Certainly, we are ultimately persuaded by the power of the Holy Spirit, but understanding the evidence for Jesus' resurrection not only gives us more confidence personally, it gives us more confidence in our witness to others. The gospel will not only change the course of a life here on earth, but also will change the course of a life for eternity!

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 28:1-10.

- If only a few people were around to see it, why do you think God announced Jesus' resurrection in such dramatic fashion?

- The fear the guards experienced is in clear contrast to today's main point, which is that the resurrection of Jesus puts an end to all fear and mobilizes us to joyfully go and share the good news. Whose fears are not relieved by the resurrection of Jesus? Why?

Notes:

The two Marys had witnessed Jesus' horrific death on the cross just days earlier. He was their friend, their Lord, and their hope in the world. It was in this state of grief and loss that they came to the tomb. Still, it was not these disciples of Jesus who were overcome by fear, rather it was the armed guards.

- How does the fact that the two Marys were "looking for Jesus" (v. 5) help explain why they responded differently to the events than the guards did? Practically speaking, what does it mean to look for Jesus when you are afraid?
- What reason did the angel give the two Marys not to fear? In what sense is Jesus' resurrection an answer to your every fear?
- Instead of being paralyzed with fear, what did the angel tell the two women to do?
- What fears might believers have about sharing the good news of Jesus?

We are often afraid of going and telling others about Jesus; however, the good news about Jesus was exactly the reason the angel told Mary and Mary to put aside their fear and go tell others. The resurrection means that every follower of Jesus can have courage and boldness in the face of our most trying

times. We are not alone, and Jesus has conquered death, so there is nothing for us to fear in this life. Instead, our lives should be filled with the purpose of sharing that good news so that the fears of other people might also be relieved.

Notes:

- The angel had already given the two women instructions and they were on their way to carry them out. Why, then, did Jesus meet them to reiterate the angel's message?
- How does entering into Jesus' presence in worship help reiterate the truths we know about Him? What are some ways we can enter His presence on a regular basis?
- Verse 8 tells us the women left the tomb with "fear and great joy." Can you relate? As believers, why do we still sometimes experience a measure of fear in obeying God's commands when we know even death cannot defeat us?
- Is there a situation right now in your life that is causing you to fear? How does Jesus' resurrection encourage you in that situation?

Mary and Mary knew great joy because Jesus had risen from the dead. Still, they also departed from the tomb "with fear." They likely still had many questions left unanswered. That's why Jesus met them on their way. The truth of the resurrection in full view was the only answer they needed. It is the only answer any of us need. There will always be questions and concerns that we face, but the presence of Jesus and promise of resurrection will always assure us and compel us to joyfully share the good news of the gospel.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 28:11-15.

- If the priests wanted to prove that Jesus was not the Messiah, what would have been the easiest course of action?
- What does the bribe tell us that the Jewish leadership knew? Why did they promise to keep the soldiers out of trouble?

Notes:

If the Jewish leadership had wanted to stop the “Jesus movement” once and for all, all they would’ve needed to do was produce His body. Nicodemus, himself a member of the Sanhedrin, had requested the body of Jesus and could have easily shown everyone where the tomb was. However, the Jewish leadership could not produce Jesus’ body, so they had to concoct a story to explain its absence. The fact that they could not produce a body is telling!

They bribed the soldiers in order to spread the lie that Jesus’ body was stolen. They had to pay them because if they told the truth of what they saw, things would be even worse for them with the people. Plus, by allowing Jesus’ body to be stolen, they would have been in danger of capital punishment themselves. The Jewish leadership promised to keep them out of trouble in case the governor heard about their supposed dereliction of duty.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 28:16-20.

- Why did Jesus lead His command with a statement of His authority? In what is His authority rooted?

In this familiar passage, known as the Great Commission, Jesus first reminds us that everything He commands us to do is through the authority He was given from God the Father. God doesn’t make promises He won’t keep and doesn’t give

commands we can't obey. If He tells us to go and make disciples of all nations, then it must be possible to reach the world by obeying His commands.

- What do you think it means to have all authority “in heaven and on earth”? What does the authority of Jesus do to the confidence level of His disciples?

Notes:

Jesus told His disciples He had received all authority “in heaven and on earth.” Jesus’ resurrection validated His teachings and deeds and proved to the disciples all authority over everything rested with Him. Then the disciples knew the true nature of Christ. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Daniel had prophesied that the Messiah would be given “authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him” (Dan. 7:14). The scope of His authority encompasses everything in heaven and on earth.

To carry out the Great Commission, the disciples had to clarify their belief about Him. They had to believe deeply that this One standing resurrected before them was more than just a man. He truly was God in flesh, God in power, and God in authority. As Jesus’ disciples today, we have been given the same command of discipleship, and understanding and believing in the authority of Jesus must precede our obedience.

- Why is it important for every believer to get involved in the Great Commission? What happens when you don't own your part of the effort?

The Great Commission reminds us that we truly can take the gospel to the nations. But to have that worldwide impact, we must first acknowledge that the world needs to know who Jesus is and commit to telling them. If we do this, not only will our personal faith grow, but the Christian faith will expand around the world.

- How does Jesus' promise of His presence (v. 20) influence our attitude in making disciples?

Notes:

- How is Jesus with us today? Read John 14:25-26 to help you answer.

Jesus' authority and presence empowered His disciples then and still empowers followers now to fulfill His commission. Jesus' first disciples did not evangelize and disciple based on their strength. Jesus empowered them with courage, love, and joy. In this same way, He empowers all believers.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- What truth did you learn about Jesus this week?
About the church?
- What does God desire for you personally and the church corporately to do in response to that truth?
- How is the church impacted by Jesus' involvement with it?

PRAY

Praise Jesus for conquering your greatest enemy and fear by defeating death. Acknowledge that you still find yourself afraid sometimes and ask Him to replace that fear with joy and obedience. Invite Him to give you opportunities to share the Good News of the gospel message with someone this week.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - In your present circumstance, who do you relate to more: the guards who were paralyzed by their fears or the women whose fears were overcome with joy and obedience to Christ's commands?
 - In what situation do you need to be encouraged and emboldened by the resurrected Jesus?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize Matthew 28:6.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Luke 1:26-38.

MATTHEW 28:1-20

28:1 These events occurred early Sunday morning. Mark indicates Salome went with them (Mk 16:1). Since the ancients did not view women as trustworthy, a writer who made up an account designed to convince readers of Jesus's resurrection would not have made women the first witnesses of the resurrection. That Matthew included the women confirms that he was faithful to record actual events, even if they would be seen as discreditable by society.

Notes:

28:2-3 The angel's appearance identified him as a heavenly being (see Dn 7:9; 10:6).

28:4 The soldiers lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

28:5-7 The words just as he said recall Jesus's prophecies about his resurrection (12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). Jesus taught that the OT prophecies had to be fulfilled since they came from God (5:18; 26:54, 56).

28:8-10 During his wilderness temptation (4:10), Jesus quoted Dt 6:13, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" (Mt 4:10). By accepting worship here, Jesus identified himself as "the Lord your God."

28:11-15 Wide circulation of this story probably led to the emperor's edict in the Nazareth Inscription (likely dated ca AD 41-54) that threatened death to anyone who removed an entombed body. Several aspects of the soldiers' story make no sense. If the soldiers were all asleep, they could not have known that it was Jesus's disciples who removed his body. Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that all of the soldiers would have slept at the same time. Finally, soldiers were severely punished or even executed for sleeping on duty.

28:16-17 On the significance of the disciples' worship, see note at 28:8-10. The lingering confusion among them about Jesus's resurrection undermines the skeptical

theory that the disciples shared a hallucination of Jesus's resurrection because they all expected him to arise.

28:18 Before the resurrection, Jesus had authority (7:29; 9:6, 8; 11:27; 21:23). However, through the resurrection, the Father granted him all authority over heaven and ... earth, an authority far greater than that which Satan had vainly promised him (see 4:8–9).

Notes:

28:19 The command to extend their mission worldwide brings to a climax Matthew's repeated theme of Gentile participation in God's salvation. The inclusion of four Gentile women in Jesus's genealogy and the summons of the magi to worship the infant Christ foreshadowed the disciples' mission of making disciples of all nations. Baptism marked a person's entrance into the faith community. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is a reference to the Trinity. Matthew's language shows that a clear understanding of Jesus's nature and identity as God was required before baptism.

28:20 The Great Commission (vv. 19–20) is preceded by a reference to Jesus's authority and followed by the promise of Jesus's spiritual presence among us. Both are necessary if we are to fulfill our God-given mission.