



NEW TESTAMENT



MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

Watching a sequel without having seen the original movie is difficult. Trying to pick up the story line without a transition can be hard. The Gospel of Matthew serves as a transition that connects the story of the Old Testament with the story of the New Testament, helping us understand how the life and teaching of Jesus built on what had come before.

WHO WROTE THIS BOOK?

Matthew, sometimes called Levi, a tax collector who became one of Jesus' 12 disciples.

WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

To offer irrefutable proof that the long-awaited Messiah had come to establish God's kingdom on earth.

WHEN AND TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

Matthew possibly wrote this book in the AD 70s (though some believe he may have written it in the 50s or 60s), primarily for Jewish readers. He offered a persuasive account of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, citing Old Testament evidence that supported the claims believers had been making about Jesus.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN MATTHEW:

The Big Ideas of Fear of Failure, Life and Death, Community, Suffering, The Power of Words, Sharing Faith, Christian Basics, Sex and Dating, Service, and Hypocrisy. Also, notice Matthew's frequent use of the Old Testament and how his Jewish orientation flavored his descriptions. For example, he frequently used "Son of David" instead of "Son of God" (which is used in the Gospel of John). One of the major themes of Matthew's Gospel is the kingdom of heaven. Note Jesus' teachings about what it means to be a citizen of that kingdom.

WHEN DID THESE THINGS HAPPEN?

10BC AD 1 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

HEROD THE GREAT'S REIGN (C. 37 – 4 BC)

JESUS' BIRTH (C. 6/5 BC)

JESUS' FLIGHT TO EGYPT (C. 5/4 BC)

BEGINNING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY (C. AD 26)

BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY (C. AD 26)

JESUS' DEATH, RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION (C. AD 30)

PAUL'S CONVERSION (C. AD 35)

BOOK OF MATTHEW WRITTEN (C. AD 60 – 70)

Why give the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah? (1:1)

Matthew wanted to highlight Jesus' human birth into a family with traceable roots. A Jewish male always traced his lineage through his father—and Joseph was Jesus' legal, though not biological, father. The genealogy also introduces a major theme in this book: Since Jesus was a descendant of both David and Abraham, Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies and of the covenants God had made with them.

LINK (1:1–17) *The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah*

Luke also listed a genealogy of Jesus (Lk 3:23–38), with some differences. See

Why are the genealogies of Matthew and Luke different? (Lk 3:23–38; page 1591).

Why is Uriah's wife listed in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah? (1:6)

Matthew's Jewish readers would have known the story of David and Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had Uriah killed (2Sa 11:1–27). By not hiding David's well-known sin when telling Jesus' family history, Matthew was displaying God's amazing grace to sinful humanity.

What's the significance of calling Jesus the Messiah? (1:16)

The Greek title "the Christ" and the Hebrew title "the Messiah" both mean "the Anointed One" and refer to the special one sent by God to save people. See **Who is the anointed?** (Ps 2:2; page 818).

MATTHEW

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

1 This is the genealogy^a of Jesus the Messiah^b the son of David, the son of Abraham:

²Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^c and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹²After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

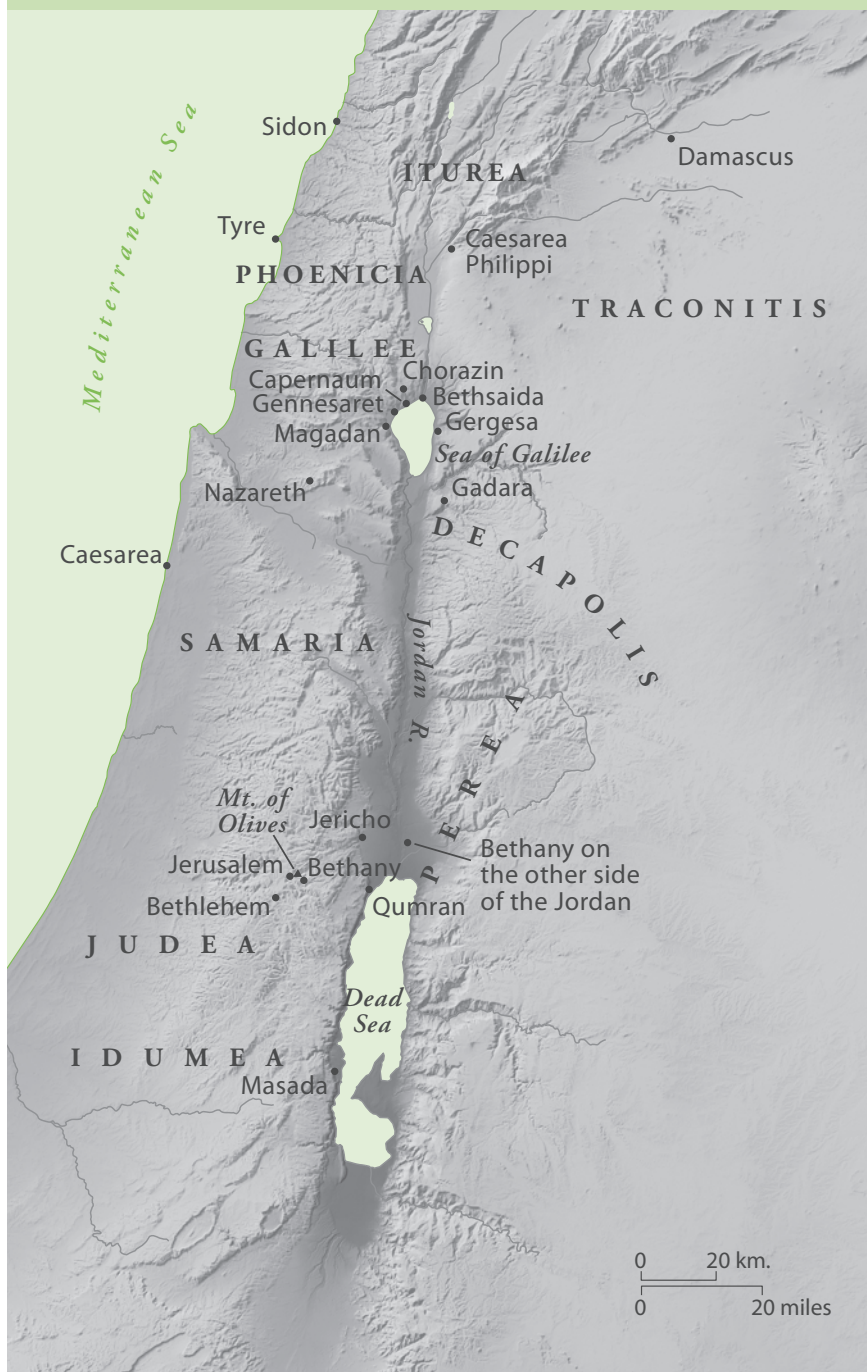
Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

^a 1 Or *is an account of the origin* ^b 1 Or *Jesus Christ. Messiah* (Hebrew) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean *Anointed One*; also in verse 18.

^c 11 That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12

SETTING OF THE GOSPELS (1:1)



Why was divorce necessary when Joseph and Mary were only engaged? (1:19)

Unlike today, a first-century engagement was a binding premarital contract leading to marriage. During the year of engagement, the couple were considered by society to be husband and wife (except that they didn't live together or have sex). Joseph's wife-to-be was pregnant, and her child wasn't his—a disgrace in any era. To break off their engagement, a divorce was required.

Why would Joseph be afraid to take Mary as his wife? (1:20)

In the eyes of the community, Mary had committed adultery (see the preceding note). This sin was punishable by death, usually by stoning. If Joseph took her as his wife, it would be equivalent to admitting that he was the father of the child. He was afraid to do this because it would bring him social disgrace and cause him to become religiously impure. No one would have wanted to associate with him for fear of becoming contaminated.

Why was a virgin birth necessary? (1:23)

Some think it was because Adam's original sin is passed down to humanity through sinful parents. According to this view, Jesus, to be free of sin, needed to circumvent the natural method of conception and be conceived in a supernatural way. Others think Jesus' birth, a miraculous birth to a sexually pure young woman, served to underscore his supernatural beginning—a sign of his divinity. See the article *How was Jesus born of a virgin?* (Lk 1:26–38; page 1584).

Who was King Herod? (2:1)

This Herod was Herod the Great, who reigned over Judea from about 37 to 4 BC. A non-Jew, Herod was a bloodthirsty tyrant who murdered his wife, mother-in-law and three sons, among others. His mother was a Nabatean, and his father was a convert to Judaism, which gave Herod an understanding of Jewish traditions and thinking. The Roman Empire gave Herod his authority to rule the Jews, but most Jews hated him, even though he referred to himself as the king of the Jews.

Who were the Magi? (2:1)

Some have suggested that the Magi were a priestly tribe of Medes who lived northeast of Israel near the Caspian Sea. Others say they were Persian elders from Babylon who were schooled in philosophy, medicine and science, and devoted to astrology, divination and the interpretation of dreams. They may have belonged to the same order of astrologers as those who served Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in Daniel's day (Da 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7).

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

JOSEPH ACCEPTS JESUS AS HIS SON

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^a: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^b did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^c because he will save his people from their sins."

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^d (which means "God with us").

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

THE MAGI VISIT THE MESSIAH

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^e from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."^f

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child

^a 18 Or *The origin of Jesus the Messiah was like this* ^b 19 Or *was a righteous man and*

^c 21 Jesus is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves*. ^d 23 Isaiah 7:14 ^e 1 Traditionally *wise men*

^f 6 Micah 5:2,4

was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^a

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^b

THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ²and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^c

⁴John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and

^a ¹⁵ Hosea 11:1 ^b ¹⁸ Jer. 31:15 ^c ³ Isaiah 40:3

If astrology was forbidden, why give this special revelation to astrologers? (2:2)

God used the knowledge and curiosity of the Magi to lead them to the infant Jesus. God can use all things and all people. In fact, the Magi represent the non-Jewish world and all who search for truth. Matthew’s Gospel often stresses how people of all nations worshiped Jesus as Lord. With this story, God shows right away that Jesus is the King of kings—even the King of the Gentiles.

ESCAPE TO EGYPT (2:13)



Why did God warn Joseph but not the families of the other male children? (2:13,16)

Sometimes God dramatically intervenes in human history; at other times he allows the consequences of sin to play out. People’s inhumane treatment of one another causes much suffering in this world, and though this grieves God, he permits people to make destructive choices. God allowed Herod’s lust for power to run unchecked through Bethlehem, though he protected his Son for the purpose he intended. See the article *If God is good, why do bad things happen?* (Na 1:7; page 1436).

Did Matthew take this prophecy out of context? (2:15)

No. The original prophecy, from Hosea 11:1, used son as a metaphor for the entire nation of Israel. Though the grammar in Hosea 11:1 seems incorrect because it moves from a singular form (son) to a plural form (they) in the next verse (Hos 11:2), Matthew quoted the Hosea 11:1 prophecy in the Hebrew instead of the more commonly used Greek translation because he took what appeared to be a grammatical error as a prophecy about the Messiah. This interpretation may also have come directly from Jesus (Lk 24:44–47).

LINK (3:1–12) John the Baptist
See Mark 1:2–8; Luke 3:2–17.

Why did John the Baptist dress so strangely? (3:4)

He was not the only one to dress this way. Poor people of this time wore camel hair clothing and leather belts and even ate locusts and wild honey out of necessity, not choice.

Did John preach that sins are forgiven by baptism? (3:6)

There is no evidence that John linked baptism with entrance into God's kingdom. See **Does baptism save us?** (1Pe 3:21; page 1919).

Did John invent baptism? (3:11)

No, but John's baptism was unique. New Testament Jewish rabbis used baptism as a rite of cleansing. John redefined this sacred use of water as a public sign of repentance. See the article **Why do Christians need to be baptized?** (Ac 19:1–5; page 1728).

What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire? (3:11)

The precise meaning of this phrase is difficult to specify since fire can symbolize both God's presence and his judgment. This phrase suggests a figurative baptism, one in which believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit and non-believers are baptized with the fire of judgment. The baptism of the Holy Spirit then gives the believer the power to live a changed life, while it convicts the non-believer of sin.

LINK (3:13–17) Jesus was baptized

See Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:31–34.

Does the Spirit lead us into temptation? (4:1)

God does not tempt us to sin—that's Satan's specialty. However, God may see fit to test us. In this case, the Spirit tested Jesus by allowing Satan to tempt him to sin. Jesus' victory over temptation was crucial to his divine mission. Jesus demonstrated his unwavering commitment to God's plan and his word. For us, this passage shows that as we rely on God's help to win battles over temptation, we become more prepared to fulfill God's purpose for us. See **How are temptations different from trials?** (Jas 1:13; page 1907) and the article **Would God ever ask me to do wrong?** (Ge 22:1–12; page 32).

JESUS IS TESTED (4:1)



wild honey.⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹"I baptize you with^a water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^a the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

JESUS IS TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^b by the devil.² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'^c"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."^d

⁷Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'^e"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splen-

^a 11 Or in ^b 1 The Greek for *tempted* can also mean *tested*.

^c 4 Deut. 8:3 ^d 6 Psalm 91:11,12 ^e 7 Deut. 6:16

dor. ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’^a”

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”^b

¹⁷From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

JESUS HEALS THE SICK

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,^c Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them.

LINK (4:1–11) Jesus was ... tempted by the devil

See Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13.

Was there a risk that Jesus might have yielded to Satan's temptations? (4:3–11)

Some say Jesus was never at risk of yielding to temptation because Jesus' divine nature could not have given in to temptation. Others say that because Jesus was human, yielding to temptation was possible. Those who hold the latter view say that if these temptations had not had a possibility of actually leading Jesus into sin, then this whole incident would have been a meaningless display and our salvation would not be legitimate (Heb 2:14–18; 4:15).

Does the devil really own the world? (4:8–9)

This claim is only partially true. The Bible does speak of Satan's power in the world (Eph 2:1–2). But Satan was exaggerating by presenting himself as sovereign over all of the earth's kingdoms.

What is the kingdom of heaven? (4:17)

In the Gospels, this phrase refers both to God's reign over the whole universe and the heavenly realm where God's rule is currently in full effect. The kingdom of heaven (also called the kingdom of God) resides both inside and outside the believer. In fact, although we don't see its fullness now, God's kingdom is all around us. Jesus taught that the kingdom exists both in the future (where it is unhindered) and in the present (where it is somewhat hindered by sin but still evident). For example, God's kingdom is here on earth today, but it is blurred by the presence of evil. At the end of the age, however, the power and influence of Satan will be vanquished forever and God's reign here will be as full and complete as it currently is in heaven. See the article **Where is heaven located?** (Heb 1:3; page 1886).

How was the kingdom of heaven near? (4:17)

Because the King was near. Jesus was introducing God's plan of salvation, of which he was the central figure.

LINK (4:18–22) Come, follow me

See Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:4–11; John 1:35–43.

Were Simon and Andrew acting on impulse? (4:20)

Some see their immediate response as a model of Christian discipleship: They immediately surrendered their lives for a greater calling. Others, with clues from John's Gospel (Jn 1:35–51), think Simon and Andrew may have already been following Jesus in a limited sense before this incident.

^a 10 Deut. 6:13 ^b 16 Isaiah 9:1,2 ^c 25 That is, the Ten Cities

LINK (5:3–12) *Blessed are*
See Luke 6:20–23.

Why did Jesus turn our value system upside down? (5:3–12)

He wanted to dispute the conventional wisdom of the time that said the wealthy and influential enjoyed more of God's blessings than the poor and powerless. Jesus wanted his followers to see that material things are only temporary and certainly not the most important thing in life. He didn't want anyone to think of their current situation as a sign of God's blessing or his judgment. See the article *Is it better in God's eyes to be rich or poor?* (Dt 8:10–18; page 280).

How can anyone live up to such high standards? (5:3–12)

We won't see anyone other than Jesus reach this level of perfection. In fact, Jesus began this sermon with our inability in mind, saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit* (v. 3). Those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty are in the best position to experience God's blessing and enjoy his kingdom. Nevertheless, God's grace will produce positive, tangible change in our lives. See the article *Jesus said, Be perfect. How?* (5:48; page 1495).

Why rejoice and be glad about persecution? (5:11–12)

Because persecution reinforces our identity with Jesus and the prophets. We can also be glad because righteousness, though it has a price, has a reward. Persecution reminds us that we can anticipate something better in heaven. Our joy comes not from the physical suffering itself but from the reason for the suffering: Jesus the Messiah. See the article *How do I share my faith when everyone is against what I believe?* (Da 6:4; page 1361).

THE BEATITUDES

He said:

- ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
- ⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
- ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
- ⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
- ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
- ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
- ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who
were before you.

SALT AND LIGHT

- ¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its
saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer
good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled
underfoot.

BIG IDEA 13: SERVICE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

MATTHEW 5:6

In Jesus' time, *righteousness* was a word packed with meaning. When Jesus' listeners heard that word, they thought of a world set right: the hungry fed, the sick healed, the oppressed set free.

So when Jesus talked about those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, he was saying that he wants his followers to feel deep compassion for those who are hurting. But Jesus doesn't want us to just feel deeply; he's looking for people who are *starving* to make things better. He's looking for people who will take positive action to set the world right. These people will support organizations that fight world hunger, raise money to stop human trafficking, work in food pantries, and pray for peace and justice in the world.

These people will work to bring a little bit of God's kingdom to earth (6:10). They will point the world's hurting to the one true God, who will one day establish a kingdom where there will be no pain, no injustice, no sorrow (Rev 21:1–4). These people, Jesus promised, will truly be *filled*—filled with the satisfaction that comes from knowing him.

For the next article, go to page 1494

For the next article in Big Idea 13, go to page 1535

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

MURDER

²¹“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,’^a and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister^{b,c} will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’^d is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

ADULTERY

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’^e ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

^a21 Exodus 20:13 ^b22 The Greek word for *brother or sister* (*adelphos*) refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verse 23.

^c22 Some manuscripts *brother or sister without cause* ^d22 An Aramaic term of contempt ^e27 Exodus 20:14

How was the Law fulfilled? (5:17–18)

With his sin-free life and sacrificial death, Jesus perfectly kept both the letter and the spirit of the law. Other than Jesus, no one can perfectly obey God’s law. Jesus, with his perfect life, paid our penalty for breaking God’s law. Jesus’ righteousness is credited to believers as their own. See *Did Jesus abolish the Old Testament law or fulfill it?* (Eph 2:15; page 1829).

Why are some greater than others in the kingdom of heaven? (5:19)

There will be no elitism in heaven, though some may receive richer blessings. The terms *least* and *great* are used to show the things that are valued in God’s spiritual kingdom. In the kingdom of heaven, obedience and faithfulness to God’s ways are valued. Those who live according to God’s ways will be rewarded. See the article *Should I worry about earning special treasures in heaven?* (6:19–21; page 1496).

How can we be more righteous than the Pharisees? (5:20)

By openly and honestly checking the spiritual condition of our hearts. The Pharisees, who were proud of their zealous efforts to follow every detail of Jewish law, could never have admitted that they were *poor in spirit* (v. 3). Their outward religious legalism covered up their inner spiritual poverty. In the same way, we are unable through our own efforts to become more righteous. But when we confess our need and turn to Jesus for salvation, God makes us righteous, which our own efforts could not accomplish.

What does Raca mean? (5:22)

The Aramaic word *Raca*, derived from the Hebrew *rak* (meaning “to be empty”), refers to a vain, empty-headed, worthless person. This term was used to show contempt for a person. Viewing another person as utterly worthless is an attitude that leads to other sins, including abuse, discrimination and even murder. See the article *Why does it matter what I say?* (12:33–37; page 1508).

How did Jesus describe hell? (5:22)

The word translated *hell* here is derived from the Hebrew word *gehenna*, which refers to the Hinnom Valley (see *Map 10* at the back of this Bible). That valley was where human sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Molek. It subsequently became a dumping ground, a place of perpetually burning trash, as well as the place where corpses of criminals were discarded. Jesus described hell as a place of *torment* (Lk 16:23), *destruction* (Mt 10:28) and *eternal fire* (Mk 9:43), a place where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 13:50). See the article *What will hell be like?* (Isa 66:24; page 1154).

LINK (5:25–26) Settle matters quickly with your adversary
See Luke 12:58–59.

Does adultery require divorce? (5:32)

God *permits* divorce in the case of infidelity, but he doesn't *require* it. When God's grace and forgiveness bring healing into a relationship, a marriage can be restored rather than terminated. See the article *Is divorce ever okay?* (Mal 2:14–16; page 1478).

Is it wrong to swear an oath to tell the truth in court? (5:34–37)

No. Even God set an example of making oaths to prove his word trustworthy (see, for example, Ge 22:16; Jer 22:5; 49:13). The misuse of oaths was common at this time (the equivalent of someone today saying, "I swear to God"). Sometimes the person swearing the oath was not telling the truth and was using the oath to mislead. Jesus was making the point that we should always tell the truth.

Shouldn't we resist evil? (5:39)

Jesus' words here are best understood in context. To be struck on the cheek was symbolic of being insulted, not physically attacked. To turn the other cheek simply meant to ignore the insult. God's people must work for justice, but not take personal revenge. Jesus came to defeat Satan; he gave his followers authority to overcome all the power of the enemy (Lk 10:19) and the forces of evil in society (Eph 6:13), yet Jesus wants us to also conquer our desire to retaliate. See the article *What am I supposed to do when someone wrongs me?* (Lk 6:27–29; page 1598).

DIVORCE

³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'^a ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

OATHS

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.'³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.³⁷ All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.^b

EYE FOR EYE

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^d and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies

^a31 Deut. 24:1 ^b37 Or *from evil* ^c38 Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21 ^d43 Lev. 19:18

BIG IDEA 2: SEX AND DATING**DID JESUS REALLY MEAN FOR ME TO GOUGE OUT MY EYES IF I LUST?**

MATTHEW 5:29

The church has never taken this passage literally. Instead, Christians have taught that Jesus was using hyperbole (exaggeration) to make a point.

We use exaggeration all the time—sometimes to make a point more entertaining, other times to make it more forceful. Jesus was using hyperbole to make sure we would hear him. He wasn't just saying, "Don't lust." He was saying, "Listen up! This is critical! Don't mess around with lust. You'll get carried away pretty quickly, and before you know it, you'll have fallen into a deep hole that you can't get out of—a hole that hardens your heart and *separate[s] you from your God*" (Isa 59:2).

Jesus used hyperbole to make it clear he wasn't joking around. He wasn't suggesting that maybe people should consider not lusting. He knows how easy it is for us to ignore gentle reminders to stay away from sin. No, Jesus was saying, "Do not lust. Period."

The best way to deal with sin like lusting is to pray about your feelings, ask God to give you strength, and take practical steps to stay away from temptation.

For the next article, go to page 1495

For the next article in Big Idea 2, go to page 1522

and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

GIVING TO THE NEEDY

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

PRAYER

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

BIG IDEA 7: FEAR OF FAILURE

JESUS SAID, *BE PERFECT*. HOW?

MATTHEW 5:48

When Jesus said, *Be perfect*, he wasn't saying, “Don't ever make a mistake. Don't ever sin again.” Of course Jesus doesn't want us to sin, but that's not the point here. The Greek word translated *perfect* here also means “complete.”

Think about it like this: You've just had a “perfect” or “complete” night out with friends. It doesn't mean nothing went wrong. It doesn't mean everyone acted perfectly the whole time. It usually means it was an evening that had an amazing combination of laughter, fun, cool music, good food and some serious conversation. It was perfect in the sense that it was complete—in one evening, friendship was experienced to its fullest.

When Jesus said, *Be perfect*, he was saying we should seek to experience friendship with him to its fullest. If friendship with Jesus were just rules and regulations, well, that would be both oppressive and boring. Sure, we need to take the life of discipleship seriously. But ultimately, it's not about the rules. It's about an invitation to be complete through our relationship with God. When we express our love for God and others in everything we do, we are becoming perfect (22:37–39).

Who can be as perfect as God? (5:48)

No one is perfect except God (Ro 3:10–12). But Jesus does not call us to an exercise in futility. The Greek word translated *perfect* here implies completion or maturity—something other than sinless perfection. Later Jesus summarized the whole law with two basic principles: Love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:37–40). Here, in the same way, Jesus said that the law of love (5:43–44) represents the full and mature expression of the law. To live in a perfect way, God's love must flow through our lives to others—even to our enemies.

Are we to never let others see our good deeds? (6:1)

It depends on our motivation. Jesus encourages us to let our deeds be seen so that onlookers will glorify God (5:16), not be impressed with us.

Are some prayers wrong? (6:7)

When prayers are reduced to techniques or formulas as a means of manipulating God, they are wrong. See the article *What does real prayer look like?* (Lk 11:1–4; page 1611).

If God knows what we need before we ask, why ask? (6:8)

Prayer does not inform God of something he doesn't know. We should pray not to get what we want but to nurture our relationship, or union, with God. When we pray that way, prayer can change us, rather than the situation. Prayer can reinforce our confidence in God's sufficiency and realign our will with his. God invites us to involve ourselves in his work by praying. See the article *Why pray?* (1Th 5:17; page 1856).

For the next article, go to page 1496

For the next article in Big Idea 7, go to page 1550

LINK (6:9–13) How you should pray
See Luke 11:2–4.

Why pray for God's will to be done?
(6:10)

When we pray for God's will to be done, we yield to God's authority. We turn over control of our life to God. We tell God that we believe and trust that he knows what is right and best. We also let him know that we look forward to the day when his kingdom—where his will is always done—takes over the earth.

Does God lead us into temptation unless we ask him not to? (6:13)

No, God does not tempt us to sin—that's the specialty of the evil one (Satan). However, God may see fit to test us. This phrase basically means, "God, please do not allow me to go through trials so deep that I am tempted to be unfaithful to you." Jesus instructs us to pray this to show our complete dependence on God for the power to overcome evil. As we rely on God's help to win battles over temptation, we become more prepared to fulfill God's purpose for us.

Does God want us to fast? (6:18)

Fasting is an expression of our dependence on God and our submission to his will. Those who use fasting to try to twist God's arm or manipulate him into answering their prayers don't understand that fasting is an act of humility that trains us to release our immediate physical desires to seek our higher, spiritual desire for God. See *Should Christians fast?* (9:14–15; page 1501).

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,^a
but deliver us from the evil one.^b

¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

FASTING

¹⁶"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heav-

^a ¹³ The Greek for *temptation* can also mean *testing*. ^b ¹³ Or from *evil*; some late manuscripts *one, / for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

BIG IDEA 11: LIFE AND DEATH

SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT EARNING SPECIAL TREASURES IN HEAVEN?

MATTHEW 6:19–21

Let's first figure out what Jesus meant when he talked about storing up *treasures in heaven* (v. 20). Contrary to what some say, he didn't mean we should be out to earn "heaven points" or special status that will somehow make us better off than other people in heaven. After all, he corrected his disciples' less-than-humble thinking when they argued over who would be the greatest (Mk 9:33–37; Lk 9:46–48).

So what was he really talking about? Jesus was saying that the things we invest in here will prepare us to enjoy the kind of life we'll experience in heaven. Our actions here on earth that most reflect our relationship with Jesus will matter most to us when we get to heaven. When we share ourselves with others and meet people's needs in the name of Jesus, we store up treasures—memories and the satisfaction of helping others—that we will enjoy for eternity.

So, no, don't worry about earning special treasures to better yourself once you get to heaven. Instead, live a life right now that will prepare you to enjoy God when you see him face to face. After all, there could be no greater treasure than to forever bask in God's loving presence.

For the next article, go to page 1500

For the next article in Big Idea 11, go to page 1542

en, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^a your whole body will be full of light.²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy,^b your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

DO NOT WORRY

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

JUDGING OTHERS

7 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁶“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

LINK (6:22–23) *The eye is the lamp of the body*

See Luke 11:34–36.

How is the eye like a lamp? (6:22–23)

In Jesus’ day, the eye was thought to be like a window that carried light into the body. This illumination could be either good or bad. Because the surrounding verses focus on wealth, the meaning of the Greek word translated *healthy* here seems to imply “generous,” and the Greek word translated *unhealthy* here implies “stingy” (see the NIV text notes on verses 22–23). A generous eye brings moral health, and a greedy eye corrupts one’s entire perspective.

How can light be darkness? (6:23)

This is a figure of speech that is explained from the context of this verse. Jesus was speaking about the light we take into our minds. We can take in so-called light that is actually darkness—something false or evil masquerading as something true or good. If a person is open to that kind of light, soon the person will be filled with darkness.

Is it wrong to worry? (6:25)

Jesus was emphasizing that we no longer have to worry. This is an invitation to rest in the arms of a loving Father. As humans, we sometimes violate this principle when we allow ourselves to focus on ourselves instead of God. See the article **How can I stop worrying about the future?** (Isa 41:10; page 1110).

LINK (6:25–33) *Do not worry*

See Luke 12:22–31.

Did Jesus forbid us to judge others? (7:1–5)

In Matthew 5:20—7:6 Jesus warned his disciples not to act like the Pharisees, who judged others but thought they were above judgment. The Pharisees judged people by what the law said, not by the intent of the law. So what Jesus most likely meant was: “Do not judge at all if you are going to judge like the Pharisees. If you do, you will be judged with the same severity.” We do have a moral responsibility to judge the behavior of others—to be discerning and choose between good and bad people and things. This is a reminder that our ability to judge is limited, and we too are sinful people who will ourselves be judged one day.

LINK (7:3–5) *Speck of sawdust*

See Luke 6:41–42.

^a22 The Greek for *healthy* here implies *generous*. ^b23 The Greek for *unhealthy* here implies *stingy*. ^c27 Or *single cubit to your height*

Why would anyone give pearls to pigs? (7:6)

Jesus had just told his disciples to love their enemies (5:43–44) and not judge others (7:1–5). Now, he warned them to be discerning (to distinguish right from wrong and good from bad). Just as pigs do not and cannot appreciate the value of pearls, some people do not and cannot appreciate what is best for them or for people in general—especially when it comes to spiritual matters. As believers we need to be aware that we live in a world that is hostile to us; we must be wise about how we share the message of the kingdom with others so it isn't used against us.

What can we expect when we pray? (7:7–8)

Jesus was promising insight and direction through the work of the Spirit within us. Jesus was not promising that we will receive whatever we might think we need. Instead, as the Holy Spirit directs our hearts, we will desire the things that God desires. Seeing those things accomplished is the fulfillment of this promise. See the articles *Can I ask God for things I want?* (1Sa 1:1—2:11; page 406) and *Why hasn't God given me the desires of my heart?* (Ps 37:4; page 853).

Why is the right way so narrow? (7:13–14)

The narrow road and narrow gate symbolize the challenge of the way of the kingdom. It's a road of suffering and self-denial, not the easy path taken by the majority. See the article *Why do Christians believe Jesus is the only way to God?* (Jn 14:5–14; page 1674).

How do we guard against false prophets without judging? (7:15–16)

Jesus' command not to judge (v. 1) is a caution against condemning others. Guarding against false teaching (here) is not condemning others, but is merely discerning obvious error. Jesus urges us to be on the lookout for and to avoid those whose lifestyles and teachings stand as an indictment against them. See the article *How do I know if I'm being taken captive by faulty religious teaching?* (Col 2:8; page 1847).

How can evildoers do miracles in Jesus' name? (7:22–23)

A common understanding of this verse is that God works through those who are flawed—but calls them to account for their sins. In Numbers 20:7–12, Moses disobeyed God, yet the Lord performed a miracle through him. But God held Moses accountable for his disobedience. In such cases, God's work is accomplished in spite of, not because of, such people.

LINK (7:24–27) Wise man who built his house on the rock
See Luke 6:46–49.

⁹“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

TRUE AND FALSE DISCIPLES

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

8 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ²A man with leprosy^a came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

^a2 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

⁸The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

JESUS HEALS MANY

¹⁴When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.

¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

“He took up our infirmities
and bore our diseases.”^a

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

²⁰Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

²¹Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

²²But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

^a 17 Isaiah 53:4 (see Septuagint)

LINK (8:2–4) *Man with leprosy*
See Mark 1:40–44; Luke 5:12–14.

Why did Jesus touch the leper? (8:3)

Old Testament law said touching anything or anyone ceremonially unclean (such as a leper) was forbidden (Lev 5:2–3). Though Jesus upheld the spirit, or intent, of the law (to love others), he could have been accused by his critics of breaking the letter of the law. By touching an “untouchable,” Jesus showed that he cared more about people’s needs than about religious ritual. He showed that the law should serve people, not the other way around. He demonstrated his authority over the law.

Why didn’t Jesus want anyone to hear of his miracles? (8:4)

See **Why didn’t Jesus want anyone to know he was the Messiah?** (16:20; page 1517).

LINK (8:5–13) *Centurion*

See Luke 7:1–10.

Why was Jesus amazed? (8:10)

Jesus was amazed at the faith of this Gentile. The only other time Jesus was said to be amazed was when he was amazed by the lack of faith of the Jews in his hometown (Mk 6:6).

Who were these subjects of the kingdom? (8:12)

These subjects were Jews. Jesus explained that though they were God’s chosen people, they still needed faith. Faith is the prerequisite of eternal life, regardless of heritage.

What’s in store for those who turn from God? (8:12)

Jesus used the word *darkness* to illustrate an existence apart from the light of God’s presence. He expanded the illustration with other graphic words: *Weeping* implies suffering; *gnashing of teeth* signifies despair. See the article **What will hell be like?** (Isa 66:24; page 1154).

Was the servant’s healing dependent on the centurion’s faith? (8:13)

See **Did the people need faith for Jesus to do miracles?** (13:58; page 1512).

LINK (8:14–16) *Peter’s mother-in-law*

See Mark 1:29–34; Luke 4:38–41.

LINK (8:19–22) *No place to lay his head*

See Luke 9:57–60.

Why did Jesus discourage some people from following him? (8:20)

He wanted them to know from the beginning that it would be hard to travel with him. There would be hardships and difficult personal choices. He was ensuring that those who followed him were doing it for the right reasons and not because they were seeking power, status or some other selfish desire.

LINK (8:23–27) A furious storm

See Mark 4:36–41; Luke 8:22–25. Matthew described Jesus calming another storm in Matthew 14:22–33.

Does having faith mean we should never be afraid? (8:26)

No. Jesus meant that God is in control and is greater than whatever we are facing. Knowing that God is with us keeps fear from paralyzing us.

Why don't some details in this account agree with the accounts in Mark and Luke? (8:28; see Mk 5:2; Lk 8:27)

The accounts don't necessarily disagree. They simply stress different aspects of the story. For instance, there probably were two possessed men, but Mark and Luke focused on only one, possibly because he was the more notorious and feared of the two.

LINK (8:28–34) Two demon-possessed men

See Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–38.

Why would demons beg to go into a herd of pigs? (8:31)

The reason is unclear. However, the point of this story is to demonstrate Jesus' power over demons, not to explain demon possession. See the article **Can demons possess Christians?** (Mk 5:1–20; page 1552).

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

²³Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

JESUS RESTORES TWO DEMON-POSSESSED MEN

²⁸When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes,^a two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. ²⁹"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"

³⁰Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. ³¹The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs."

³²He said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. ³³Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

^a28 Some manuscripts *Gergesenes*; other manuscripts *Gerasenes*

BIG IDEA 9: COMMUNITY**DID JESUS SAY I SHOULDN'T HONOR MY PARENTS?**

MATTHEW 8:18–22

Jesus' response to the grieving man in Matthew 8:22 seems a bit extreme. Why didn't Jesus let the guy honor his father at the funeral and then rejoin Jesus in a few days? Would that have been so wrong? No, probably not. In fact, that's probably what happened. As he often did, Jesus was using hyperbole (exaggeration) to make a point. He wasn't putting down the fifth commandment: *Honor your father and your mother* (Ex 20:12). He wasn't saying not to mourn the dead.

Instead, Jesus was trying to make it clear that being a loving son or daughter isn't the point. It is a part of life but not *the point* of life. He was saying that sometimes duty to family conflicts with obedience to God.

The way God has ordered things, it's clear that the younger we are, the more we are to obey our parents. And, yes, that includes the teen years. Unless a parent is abusive or dangerous, honoring them means doing what they say. But as we get older, and especially when we're adults, we have to weigh obedience to anything or anybody—including our parents—against obedience to Jesus. He must come first.

For the next article, go to page 1504

For the next article in Big Idea 9, go to page 1620

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYZED MAN

9 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.² Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

³At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”

⁴Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’ ⁶But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” ⁷Then the man got up and went home. ⁸When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

⁹As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” ¹⁴For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

JESUS QUESTIONED ABOUT FASTING

¹⁴Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

¹⁵Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

¹⁶“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

JESUS RAISES A DEAD GIRL AND HEALS A SICK WOMAN

¹⁸While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

^a 13 Hosea 6:6

LINK (9:2–8) Your sins are forgiven
See Mark 2:3–12; Luke 5:18–26.

Why did the teachers of the law become upset? (9:3)

According to rabbinic teaching, the only one who can forgive sin is God himself. Therefore, Jesus’ statement, *Your sins are forgiven* (v. 2), was a way of claiming equality with God, which was blasphemy to the Jews.

Who were these tax collectors? (9:9–10)

They were a group of Jews despised by other Jews for collaborating with the Roman government that ruled over them. Tax collectors paid the authorities for the privilege of collecting taxes; then they overcharged people, skimming money off the top for themselves. As a result, Jews saw Jewish tax collectors as both traitors and thieves.

LINK (9:9–13) Matthew got up and followed him

See Mark 2:14–17; Luke 5:27–32.

Should Christians fast? (9:14–15)

Jesus compared his time with his disciples to a wedding feast: It was a time for joy, so fasting would have been inappropriate. But today, since he is no longer physically among us, it is appropriate to fast—not because it is commanded (as in the Old Testament), but because it is beneficial to our spiritual development.

LINK (9:14–17) Your disciples do not fast

See Mark 2:18–22; Luke 5:33–39.

How did wineskins work? (9:17)

Wineskins were flexible bags made of animal skins sewn in the shape of a bottle. At first they were soft and pliable, but with age they became dry and brittle. Since wine gives off gases as it undergoes the process of fermentation, a wineskin had to stretch to accommodate the expansion due to the gases. Non-elastic, old wineskins would burst during the fermentation process. Jesus used this as a metaphor: *Old wineskins* represented the rigid religious traditions of the Pharisees, which were unable to accommodate the *new wine* of the kingdom of God. Legalism is incompatible with the living faith Jesus taught. Jesus brings a newness that cannot be confined within the old forms of religion.

LINK (9:18–26) Your faith has healed you

See Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:41–56.

Does faith bring healing? (9:22)

Jesus never taught that faith automatically brings healing. In Jesus' 35 miracles recorded in the Gospels, no formula to guarantee healing can be found.

Why did Jesus say the dead girl was only asleep? (9:24)

People today use "passed away" as a euphemism for death; the Bible uses *asleep* in the same way (Jn 11:11; 1Co 11:30; 1Th 4:14; see 1Co 15:51). Jesus said she was *asleep* because he knew she would soon be alive again. To those belonging to Jesus, death is only a slumber until he raises them when he returns. See the article *What's the full picture of death in the Bible?* (1Co 15:26; page 1796).

Why did Jesus want to keep this miracle quiet? (9:30)

See *Why didn't Jesus want anyone to know he was the Messiah?* (16:20; page 1517).

Were the Pharisees connecting Jesus with demons? (9:34)

They were attempting to. Jesus was not only a mystery to the Pharisees but also a threat to their authority. They had to destroy his reputation. The fastest and most efficient way to do so was to cast doubt in the minds of the people. Jesus later (12:24–37) showed how ridiculous the Pharisees' statement was: Why would Satan try to destroy himself?

How were the crowds harassed and helpless? (9:35–38)

The crowds to which Jesus spoke were made up of common people, and they were burdened for multiple reasons: (1) They were prisoners in their own land because the Romans had conquered their nation. (2) They were overtaxed and needed to work overtime to pay what they owed. (3) Most of them were farmers and were worn out by hard work in the fields. (4) Most were poor. (5) They could never live up to the rules and regulations of the Pharisees, so they felt it was hopeless to become right with God. In short, they had wearied souls.

LINK (10:2–4) The names of the twelve apostles

See Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16.

Why were the disciples to withhold news of the kingdom from the Gentiles and Samaritans? (10:5)

Jesus' intent was not to exclude, but to prioritize. God's plan of salvation originated with the Jewish people, and Jesus, the Messiah, was a Jew. Later, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go to the entire world (28:19; Ac 1:4–8).

²⁰Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

²²Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

²³When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, ²⁴he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. ²⁵After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶News of this spread through all that region.

JESUS HEALS THE BLIND AND THE MUTE

²⁷As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

²⁸When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; ³⁰and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." ³¹But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

³²While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. ³³And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

³⁴But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."

THE WORKERS ARE FEW

³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town

of the Samaritans. ⁶Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^a drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

⁹“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— ¹⁰no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. ¹²As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

²¹“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²²You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

²⁶“So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.^b ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³²“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

^a 8 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin. ^b 29 *Or will; or knowledge*

Is it wrong to have belongings? (10:9–10)

No. That’s not the point of this passage. Jesus wanted the Twelve to be completely dependent on God for their provision. He wanted them to see that God would provide for them through the hospitality of others. In fact, the New Testament churches were repeatedly encouraged to support those who ministered to them (Php 4:14–19; 1Ti 5:17–18; 3Jn 5–8). A personal lack of funds or supplies should not prevent us from advancing the gospel.

Why shake the dust off [their] feet? (10:14)

Jews returning to Israel from a foreign land shook the dust from their sandals and clothing to avoid defiling the land they considered holy. The disciples were delivering a similar warning to the people of Israel. If they rejected the message of Jesus the Messiah, they were like unbelieving foreigners.

How are followers of Jesus like sheep among wolves? (10:16)

Some think this illustrates the danger to which Jesus’ disciples would be exposed. Others place the emphasis on the character qualities of the two animals: The sheeplike response of the disciples and the ferocious reactions of the religious and political leaders. See the article *How do I survive as a “lamb among wolves”?* (Lk 10:1–3; page 1609).

How shrewd are snakes? (10:16)

In the ancient Middle East, the serpent was a symbol of cunning whose wisdom was worth emulating. Most likely Jesus was quoting a saying familiar to his listeners.

What’s wrong with preparing a legal defense? (10:19)

Nothing. Jesus was saying that we don’t have to worry when we face legal battles because of our stand for him. Though we may have legal counsel and a prepared defense, our trust ultimately must be in God. This doesn’t mean, however, that courts and authorities will always rule in our favor.

LINK (10:19–22) You will be hated by everyone because of me

See Mark 13:11–13; Luke 21:12–17.

Who is Beelzebul? (10:25)

He is the *prince of demons* (12:24), that is, Satan. Baal was a Canaanite deity whose name was expanded to *Beelzebul* (meaning “Exalted” or “Prince Baal”).

LINK (10:26–33) You are worth more than many sparrows

See Luke 12:2–9.

Why would Jesus want to break up families? (10:35–37)

These verses illustrate one of the harsher truths of God's kingdom: Not everyone will respond to the gospel. The image of the sword here expresses the emotional pain that some disciples would experience when separated from family and friends. Hearts full of prejudice, hate and pride will resist Jesus' offer of peace. Because many will reject it, the message will divide people—both families and nations.

What little ones was Jesus talking about? (10:42)

The Greek word used here can mean "little" in size or "young" in age—but it can also mean "insignificant," "lowly" or "unimportant." Using this wide-ranging word, Jesus' words can include children, outcasts and the ostracized—all the "nobodies" of society.

LINK (11:2–19) Should we expect someone else
See Luke 7:18–25.

What role, if any, does doubt have in the Christian life? (11:3)

Even people with strong faith ask tough questions in stressful times. John was suffering unjustly, so it is not surprising that he sought answers from Jesus. And since Jesus' actions differed from what many Jews expected of the Messiah, reports of Jesus' activities must have puzzled John. Jesus' answer was intended to bring reassurance: The miracles Jesus performed gave evidence that he was indeed the one who was to come. See the article **Do my questions make God angry?** (Ecc 1:2; page 1019).

³⁴"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
³⁶a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."^a

³⁷"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴²And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.^b

²When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

^a36 Micah 7:6 ^b1 Greek in *their towns*

BIG IDEA 5: SUFFERING

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS CAME TO BRING A SWORD?

MATTHEW 10:34

We're told that Jesus is the *Prince of Peace* (Isa 9:6) and that he can give us peace that *transcends all understanding* (Php 4:7). But then we're told in Matthew 10:34 that Jesus *did not come to bring peace, but a sword*. So did Jesus come to make peace or to make trouble?

He actually came to do both.

A guy named Jordan realized this truth when he saw his friend Steven heading down a bad path. "It wasn't Jesus that divided us as much as Jesus' values. I felt pretty bad about ending the friendship because I liked Steven, but I also didn't like how our friendship dragged me into some bad behaviors that hurt my walk with God."

Despite the trouble Jesus' values caused in his friendship with Steve, Jordan said he eventually experienced a sense of peace because he'd made the right decision.

Jesus comes to bring peace *and* to cause trouble. He forgives us (nice!), but then he insists we follow him in his narrow way (hard!). In both cases, it's good to know we're in the center of his loving will. And if that doesn't bring peace that transcends understanding, nothing will.

For the next article, go to page 1508

For the next article in Big Idea 5, go to page 1597

⁴Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^a are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”^b

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence,^c and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵Whoever has ears, let them hear.

¹⁶“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷“We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.”

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

WOE ON UNREPENTANT TOWNS

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.^d For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell

^a5 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin. ^b10 Mal. 3:1 ^c12 Or *been forcefully advancing* ^d23 That is, the realm of the dead

How can those least in the kingdom of heaven be greater than John? (11:11)

John the Baptist belonged to the age of the old covenant. While Jesus affirmed John’s greatness, he also pointed out the greater privileges of those who are part of the New Testament covenant. Those under the new covenant are greater than John because they have received the salvation blessings available through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Under the new covenant, believers enjoy the benefits of salvation—including the presence of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38; Eph 1:13–14), redemption and eternal forgiveness of sins (Col 1:13–14), and direct access to the Father through the Son (Ro 8:9–17; Heb 4:16).

What does it mean that the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence? (11:12)

The *violent people* Jesus mentioned here may refer to corrupt people like the Pharisees and Herodians who tried to control the kingdom through violence or political force. Or Jesus may have meant that it takes courageous dedication to be part of his advancing kingdom (see the NIV text note). Christlike meekness includes bold, aggressive obedience (Lk 6:46; 9:57–62). See the article *Aren’t kindness and love signs of weakness?* (2Co 10:1; page 1811).

Why were Jesus and John so different? (11:18–19)

They were not really as different as their detractors made them appear. John’s simple lifestyle fit his message of repentance and self-denial, while Jesus’ public availability (at various social gatherings and celebrations) expressed his gracious willingness to mingle with those who needed him. John and Jesus were neither demon-possessed nor overindulgent, as their opponents charged.

Will judgment be less severe for some than for others? (11:22)

Some may deserve more severe punishment because greater knowledge implies greater accountability. According to Jesus, servants who knowingly disobey their masters deserve more punishment than those who disobey in ignorance (Lk 12:47–48). God’s judgment is completely just. In the past he extended special mercy to those who acted in ignorance, but now he calls everyone to repent (Ac 17:30; Ro 2:4–11).

LINK (11:25–27) I praise you, Father
See Luke 10:21–22.

Why did Jesus use the image of a burden to explain rest? (11:29–30)

A yoke is a wooden frame laid across the necks of two animals to bind them together for plowing and hauling heavy loads. It is often used in the Bible to represent labor, service, bondage, submission to authority, a heavy burden in life, a lack of freedom or political oppression. Captives were sometimes forced to actually wear a yoke. Yokes are oppressive when the ones in charge are harsh and cruel, but the Lord's commands are not burdensome (1Jn 5:3). In comparison to the yoke put on people by the Pharisees, Jesus' yoke was light because he helped carry it. Jesus' servants can find rest and refreshment in fellowship with him even when the work is difficult and stressful—because of Jesus' power, not their own.

LINK (12:1–8) The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath

See Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5.

Did Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, change the rules? (12:1–8)

No, but he helped people see the point of the rules. The Pharisees were so particular about nonessentials that they failed to see the deeper truths and intent of the law. Doing good on the Sabbath did not violate the spirit of the law. Ultimately, Jesus offered himself as the central, overriding principle: The Lord of the Sabbath was qualified to say what honored God and what did not.

What was so bad about getting food on the Sabbath? (12:2)

God's law forbade working on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees and Jewish tradition defined what was forbidden under that rule in suffocating and oppressive detail. The Pharisees considered it wrong to even pluck a bit of grain and rub it in one's hand before eating it. In their opinion, those actions constituted reaping and threshing. But God intended the Sabbath to be a blessing, not a burden (Mk 2:27).

LINK (12:9–14) Man with a shriveled hand

See Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11.

Why didn't Jesus want people to tell others who he was? (12:16)

See *Why didn't Jesus want anyone to know he was the Messiah?* (16:20; page 1517).

you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

THE FATHER REVEALED IN THE SON

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. ²When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

³He answered, “Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’^a you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

⁹Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

¹¹He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹²How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

¹³Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT

¹⁵Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. ¹⁶He warned them not to tell others about him. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

^a7 Hosea 6:6

- ¹⁸“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.
²⁰A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory.
²¹In his name the nations will put their hope.”^a

JESUS AND BEELZEBUL

²²Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ²³All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

²⁴But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

³⁰“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

THE SIGN OF JONAH

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

³⁹He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three

How did Jesus’ anonymity fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy? (12:17)

Isaiah described the coming Messiah as one who would *not quarrel or cry out* and as someone who was not heard in public (v. 19). Though Jesus often confronted the religious leaders, his first goal was to bring the kingdom of God to people in need. His ministry brought compassion, healing and forgiveness.

Were the Pharisees connecting Jesus with demons? (12:24)

See *Were the Pharisees connecting Jesus with demons?* (9:34; page 1502).

LINK (12:25–29) If Satan drives out Satan

See Mark 3:23–27; Luke 11:17–22.

Who could drive out demons besides Jesus and his disciples? (12:27)

Evidently there were Jewish exorcists who drove out demons—or at least claimed to do so. Acts 19:13 mentions a group of Jews who went around *driving out evil spirits*. In addition, there were some believers other than the apostles who also cast out demons in Jesus’ name (Lk 9:49–50).

What is blasphemy against the Spirit? (12:31–32)

This is not a one-time, unintentional offense. It is an ongoing and deliberate attitude of rebellion, a stubborn way of living life that resists, rejects and insults God’s Spirit. It is not something that was done unintentionally in the past, but is something being done purposely against God in the present. Mark connected this sin with the claim by the religious leaders that Jesus was casting out demons by Satan’s power (Mk 3:22,29–30). See the article *How do I know I haven’t committed the unforgivable sin?* (Mk 3:20–30; page 1550).

Can some sins be forgiven in the age to come? (12:32)

This does not imply there will be a “second chance” to receive forgiveness after death (compare Heb 9:27–28). The statement simply means that some sins will not be forgiven either now or in the future.

What’s wrong with wanting evidence? (12:39)

Nothing, but we must be willing to accept the evidence once it is presented. Jesus repeatedly performed miracles as evidence to substantiate his claims, but he refused to perform miracles just for show. Some Pharisees and teachers of the law chose not to believe despite all the evidence.

LINK (12:39–42) Sign of the prophet Jonah

See Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29–32. Jesus used the experience of Jonah as a metaphor for his own death: three-day entombment and resurrection. Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of a fish (Jnh 1:17).

^a 21 Isaiah 42:1–4

Why can't an impure spirit rest in arid places? (12:43)

Demons evidently prefer to live in bodies (8:31–32). Since few houses exist in a desert, Jesus used *arid places* to picture the restless discomfort of a disembodied demon unable to find a new body as a dwelling place.

Is loyalty to other believers more important than loyalty to one's family? (12:46–50)

Jesus emphasized that membership in God's spiritual family, not earthly family heritage, is what's important. He wasn't denying his love for his family, but he used their presence to contrast earthly loyalties with the more important allegiance to the eternal God. See the article **Does God want me to hate my family?** (Lk 14:25–35; page 1620).

LINK (12:46–50) Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?

See Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21.

LINK (13:1–15) He told them many things in parables

See Mark 4:1–12; Luke 8:4–10.

nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³"When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.

⁴⁷Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

⁴⁸He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things

BIG IDEA 18: THE POWER OF WORDS

WHY DOES IT MATTER WHAT I SAY?

MATTHEW 12:33–37

Jesus said that words aren't simply words: *The mouth speaks what the heart is full of* (v. 34). Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in them, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in them (vv. 34–35).

Words spoken are a reliable indication of what's happening inside. Good words hint at inside goodness. Bad words are a clue that something is wrong inside.

Words matter. They're a measure of who we are—a terrifyingly reliable measure. Our words have the power to condemn us. Jesus said we will have to *give account on the day of judgment for every empty word [we] have spoken* (v. 36).

There is someone we can turn to for help when our wrong words reveal our hearts are off the mark. We can turn to Jesus, who said these powerful words: *You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (Jn 8:32). When we experience the liberating truth of Jesus through a relationship with him, we are set free—free to use words that offer encouragement and healing and hope, free to use words that speak loudly and clearly about what's in our hearts.

For the next article, go to page 1509

For the next article in Big Idea 18, go to page 1831

in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’^a

^a ¹⁵ Isaiah 6:9,10 (see Septuagint)

What can we learn from soil? (13:3–23)

The parable of the sower teaches that the gospel won’t be equally received by everyone. At least three things can interfere: (1) sinful opposition, (2) outside persecution and (3) peer pressure and the attraction of the world’s pleasures. But if the Word does take root, it will produce a fruitful life.

Does the parable of the sower teach that some will lose their salvation? (13:3–23)

The parable of the sower describes levels of spiritual receptivity to the gospel, not states of salvation. Jesus explained the parable in verses 18–23. The different soils represent respectively unprepared, impulsive and distracted people whose hearts have not fully received the message of salvation. The last soil mentioned is the good, well-cultivated soil—the heart ready to be totally transformed by God.

Why did Jesus speak in parables? (13:11–13)

These simple, down-to-earth illustrations conveyed Jesus’ spiritual lessons to the farmers, merchants, fishermen and others in examples they understood. But the spiritual significance of Jesus’ parables was not clear to those who opposed him. In other words, those with ears to hear (those seriously seeking the truth) could find profound insight, but it was God’s intent to keep certain secrets of the kingdom somewhat hidden from Jesus’ many casual observers (vv. 11,16–17). Sometimes Jesus used more direct language in his teaching (compare 5:1—7:29).

BIG IDEA 12: SHARING FAITH

WHY SHOULD I SHARE MY FAITH WITH SOMEONE WHO’S A LOST CAUSE?

MATTHEW 13:1–23

For an answer to your question, consider Samantha’s story:

“By the way I looked and the people I hung out with, some Christians might have thought I was a lost cause. But not Amanda.

“Amanda accepted me. She believed I could have a relationship with God. Amanda’s friendliness drew me to her. I even started attending her church. Her unwillingness to give up on me showed me how important it is to reach out to people who seem to be lost causes.

“In Matthew 13:1–23 Jesus told a story about sowing seed. He said that seed sometimes falls on bad ground and is either eaten by birds or dies away. Other times, the seed falls on good ground and grows. The seed is the living, breathing word of God, which is really Jesus (Lk 8:11; Jn 1:14). Some people allow him to come in and change their lives. Others reject him.

“I need to be out there planting seed as much as I can. I know some people will reject what I say. That doesn’t matter. I need to keep planting seed because who knows how God will use the seed I plant? After all, where would I be if Amanda had treated me like a lost cause?”

For the next article, go to page 1512

For the next article in Big Idea 12, go to page 1512

LINK (13:16–17) *Blessed are your eyes ... and your ears*
See Luke 10:23–24.

What did the prophets and righteous people long to see and hear? (13:16–17)

The prophets of old spoke of a time when the Messiah would restore God's kingdom on earth. They longed for it, but did not see it or hear it. But now, Jesus fulfilled all their hopes, although Jesus' Messiahship was different from what first-century Jews envisioned. He was not the military ruler who would restore Israel's splendor, for his kingdom is *not of this world* (Jn 18:36).

LINK (13:18–23) *Parable of the sower*
Jesus explained the meaning of the parable of the sower in Mark 4:13–20 and Luke 8:11–15.

Why does Matthew use the phrase *kingdom of heaven*? (13:24–30)

This refers to the Lord's reign over his people—a present and future kingdom in which God's will is done. To describe this, the other Gospel writers used the phrase *kingdom of God* (for example, Mk 1:15; Lk 4:43; Jn 3:3), but Matthew used *kingdom of heaven* 31 times and *kingdom of God* only 4 times (each when quoting Jesus). This word choice was probably because his original audience was comprised of mostly Jews, who avoided writing the name of God. See **What is the kingdom of heaven?** (Mt 4:17; page 1491).

LINK (13:31–32) *The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed*
See Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19.

Why did Jesus tell this story about a *mustard seed*? (13:31–32)
Seeds grow quietly but persistently. Like seeds, the growth of God's kingdom is not the result of human effort. This parable illustrates the amazing growth of God's kingdom, which will reach across every conceivable barrier before its growth is complete.

Is the mustard seed really the *smallest of all seeds*? (13:32)
It is highly unlikely that Jesus was including all plant life on earth when he made this statement. He was likely referring to the black mustard seed, which was the smallest seed planted in that area.

LINK (13:33) *The kingdom of heaven is like yeast*
See Luke 13:20–21.

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²²The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

²⁴Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷“The owner's servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸“‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE YEAST

³¹He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³²Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds^a of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

³⁴Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.

³⁵So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

^a33 Or about 27 kilograms

"I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."^a

THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS EXPLAINED

³⁶Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

THE PARABLE OF THE NET

⁴⁷"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

⁵²He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. ⁵⁴Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. ⁵⁵"Isn't this the carpenter's son?

^a35 Psalm 78:2

Why does God allow his kingdom to be infiltrated by those who do evil? (13:41)

Because God loves us, he patiently delays his final judgment to allow more people the opportunity to repent and be forgiven (2Pe 3:9). However, in the process, evil has an opportunity to cause havoc within the kingdom.

Is hell literally a place of fire? (13:42,50)

Whether or not hell is a literal place of eternal fire, Jesus gave several details: (1) Hell is a real place. (2) It is a place of unbearable torment. (3) There is no way out. (4) It is the eternal destination of those who do not believe in Jesus the Messiah. (5) God does not reside there. See the article *What will hell be like?* (Isa 66:24; page 1154).

Must we give up everything we own for the kingdom? (13:44–46)

We do not need to renounce all our possessions to obtain life with God, but Jesus urges us to make the kingdom of God our highest priority (6:33). If an earthly possession or ambition is more important in someone's life than their commitment to Jesus, then Jesus cannot be Lord in that person's life. See the article *Is it wrong to love anything more than God?* (Ex 20:4; page 116).

What are these old and new treasures? (13:52)

Jesus was saying that people who have been instructed about the kingdom of heaven have in their hearts a storeroom of time-tested wisdom gained in the past and fresh, new wisdom gained through their latest study and experience.

LINK (13:54–58) Isn't this the carpenter's son?

See Mark 6:1–6; Luke 4:14–30.

Did the people need faith for Jesus to do miracles? (13:58)

Not necessarily. God has unlimited power, and it pleases him to exercise his power in response to our faith. But sometimes Jesus' miracles led those who had not believed to put their faith in him (Jn 11:45; 12:9–11; 14:11).

Who was this Herod? (14:1)

This was Herod Antipas. His father, Herod the Great, was ruling at the time of Jesus' birth. Like his father, Herod Antipas wanted to kill Jesus (Lk 13:31–32). Jesus later stood before Herod Antipas during part of his trial (Lk 23:6–12). Technically, the term *tetrarch* was used of someone who governed one-fourth of a region, but sometimes the title was used simply as a synonym for "prince" or "king." Herod Antipas reigned over the regions of Galilee and Perea (see the map **Setting of the Gospels** [Mt 1:1; page 1487]) from approximately 4 BC to AD 39.

LINK (14:1–12) John beheaded
See Mark 6:14–29.

Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home."

⁵⁸And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, ²and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

⁶On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much ⁷that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹²John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

BIG IDEA 12: SHARING FAITH

CAN I SHARE MY FAITH AND NOT MENTION THE SCARY JUDGMENT PART?

MATTHEW 13:47–50

Imagine that your friend unknowingly drinks poison. You know it's poison and you're holding the antidote. What do you do? Remain silent and pretend it wasn't poison so you don't upset and embarrass your friend? No. You know your friend will die, so you offer the cure.

When we tell people only that God loves them, we aren't telling the whole story if we leave out the judgment part. In Matthew 13 Jesus told a parable that includes a description of the judgment of God. This parable is important to understand because sometimes we're comfortable telling people only what they want to hear: that they're okay the way they are. But the Bible says sin has poisoned our souls and keeps us from the presence of our loving and holy God (Ro 3:23). We need an antidote. And that "antidote" is Jesus—he *suffered once for sins . . . to bring [us] to God* (1Pe 3:18).

We need to explain why we all need the antidote to sin, but we need to do so with words that are respectful and gentle (1Pe 3:15). God's love is a great way to start. After all, the famous "salvation verse" starts with *For God so loved the world* (Jn 3:16). But the verse doesn't stop there. It says we need to believe in Jesus so we won't *perish*. Telling others anything less is simply telling people what they want to hear—not what they *need* to hear.

For the next article, go to page 1520

For the next article in Big Idea 12, go to page 1609

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

¹⁶Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

¹⁷“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

¹⁸“Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

²⁸“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

³⁴When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

LINK (14:13–21) Five loaves of bread and two fish

See Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–13. Matthew described Jesus feeding 4,000 in Matthew 15:32–38.

How much food did Jesus produce? (14:19–21)

Verse 21 says 5,000 men plus women and children were present. It is safe to assume that there were about as many women as men and an average of two children per couple. Therefore, Jesus spoke to a crowd of at least 15,000 to 20,000 people. He produced enough food to satisfy everyone and had food left over.

LINK (14:22–32) Walking on the lake
See Mark 6:45–51; John 6:16–21.

Why did Jesus need to pray? (14:23)

Jesus is God, but he is not the Father, nor is he the Holy Spirit. While on earth, Jesus lived in complete dependence on the Father and the Holy Spirit for his strength and guidance (Heb 5:7–8). He did nothing on his own; he spoke only what the Father taught him (Jn 8:28) and performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 5:17). Because he lived in constant communication with his heavenly Father, Jesus provided a living example for his disciples—both then and now—of what it means to *pray continually* (1Th 5:17).

Why did Jesus walk on the water? (14:25)

This incident served to strengthen the disciples’ trust in Jesus at a time when they probably felt disappointed and confused by Jesus’ earlier refusal to be made king (Jn 6:14–15). Jesus’ authority over nature sent a clear message to his disciples: He was no ordinary man.

Why did Peter think he could walk on the water? (14:28)

Perhaps he wanted more confirmation of Jesus’ identity and power. Peter’s reckless faith led him to do things that were impulsive.

Why did people want to touch the edge of Jesus’ cloak? (14:36)

Many people of that time, both Jews and Gentiles, believed that the power of a holy man such as Jesus would transfer to whatever he touched. But Jesus made it clear in the case of the hemorrhaging woman who touched his cloak and was instantly healed that her faith had brought healing, not touching an object (9:20–22; Mk 5:25–34).

SPOTLIGHT
ON

Boy with five loaves and two fishes

A fake interview with a real Bible character not all that different from you and your friends.

I love catching up with former child stars. What can you tell me about playing a major role at a very young age?

That was a long time ago, and I don't know about playing a "major" role. I mean, I'm only known as "a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish." [Laughs] I'm called that in only one of the four tellings of the story. In the other three tellings, only the loaves and fish are mentioned.

What do you remember of that day?

I remember all the excitement. I mean, everyone had been talking about this guy Jesus for a while—the miracles he could do, the things he taught, the people he healed. So when the rumors started that he was nearby and headed for Bethsaida, the buzz was intense. It seemed like everyone was going to see him.

What's your first memory of Jesus?

This guy was trying to get away, have alone time with his disciples and get a breather. But yet, when we all found him, he welcomed us with compassion and started teaching and healing!

How did you become a part of the story?

Well, it was dinnertime and there weren't any fast-food places or hotdog vendors. I could tell the disciples were getting antsy. I mean, you don't want to have to deal with thousands of cranky, hungry people, right? I looked down at my sack lunch and thought, "I don't really need all this. I could give it to help feed the group. Maybe others will give too." Just then Andrew, one of the disciples,

noticed me. I said, "Excuse me, sir. You can have these if you'd like." I don't know what Andrew thought Jesus would do with my humble little lunch, but he took my offering to Jesus.

What happened?

The disciples had everyone sit on the grass. Jesus took my lunch, gave thanks to God for it, and they handed out the bread and fish—to everyone! And after everyone had eaten, they gathered 12 baskets of food that was left over. Crazy, huh? When the people there saw this miracle, everyone was amazed. People began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." After a while, I headed home. It was past my bedtime.

Now that you're older and have had time to think back, what do you think about that day?

Great question. I see my very simple offering as just one tiny action in a much, much bigger picture. I was willing to give what I had for the good of others—and Jesus used that willingness in a big way. It's like anything we have—our money, our talents, our time. If we're willing to hand it over to God, he'll use it in ways we can't begin to imagine. I mean, Jesus used my small gift to feed thousands, used it to help the disciples grow in faith, and he used it—along with his other miracles—to show the world who he really is.

For the full story, read Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15.

THAT WHICH DEFILES

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked,² “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

³Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’^a and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’^b ⁵But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”

¹⁰Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

¹²Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides.”^d If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

THE FAITH OF A CANAANITE WOMAN

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

Why was washing hands before meals so important? (15:2)

As a matter of religious custom, the Pharisees insisted on special hand-washing ceremonies to remove the contaminating effects of any possible contact with “unclean” persons or objects. This practice probably was derived from Old Testament teachings that prohibited contact with *unclean* things (Lev 5:2–3) and prescribed special washings for the priests (Ex 30:17–21). Jesus followed God’s law, but he felt no obligation to observe all the Jewish traditions and customs (Lk 11:37–39).

How can worship be in vain? (15:9)

God wants people to worship him *in the Spirit and in truth* (Jn 4:23–24). That means worship is in vain if it is (1) directed toward a false god or (2) only empty ritual. God doesn’t want worship that is just obeying human rules and teachings; he wants honest, thoughtful, heartfelt praise. See the article *Are there right and wrong ways to worship God?* (Jn 4:23; page 1651).

Did Jesus intentionally offend the Pharisees? (15:12–14)

Jesus’ intention was not to offend the Pharisees as much as to confront them with the truth and bring them to repentance. Hypocrites are offended by the truth. As a double-edged sword (Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16), truth can bring either life or death.

Why did Jesus go into Gentile territory? (15:21)

The reason is unclear. Jesus may have gone to Tyre and Sidon because he was interested in ministering to non-Jews. See the map *Jesus Visits Syrian Phoenicia* (Mk 7:24; page 1558). However, at this point in his ministry, the *lost sheep of Israel* (Mt 15:24) were clearly his main focus. Eventually he sent his disciples to the whole world (28:19–20).

LINK (15:21–28) Woman, you have great faith

See Mark 7:24–30.

Why did Jesus resist helping this Gentile woman? (15:23–26)

Jesus was not forcing this Gentile woman to beg, but may have been probing the depth of her faith in the God of Israel. Or, by responding to this woman’s persistence, Jesus may have been teaching his disciples a lesson about God’s responsive love. Also, Jesus’ use of *dogs*—a word commonly used by Jews to describe Gentiles—may have been sarcasm to show that demeaning others is alien to the heart of God.

^a4 Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16 ^b4 Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

^c9 Isaiah 29:13 ^d14 Some manuscripts *blind guides of the blind*

LINK (15:29–31) *Great crowds came to him*
See Mark 7:31–37.

LINK (15:32–39) *I do not want to send them away hungry*
See Mark 8:1–10.

Was this miracle different than the one of Jesus feeding 5,000? (15:32–39)
Yes. The feeding of 5,000 occurred in a Jewish setting, while the feeding of 4,000 happened in the Greco-Roman region of the Decapolis (a league of ten cities located in a region east of the Jordan River that had their own coinage, courts and army). Large crowds were ready to hear Jesus' message because a demon-possessed man healed by Jesus had eagerly spread word of him (Mk 5:20).

Why didn't the disciples remember how Jesus had fed the crowd of more than 5,000? (15:33)
No doubt they did remember Jesus' previous miracle of feeding more than 5,000 people. However, they probably asked this question because whenever problems arose, they asked Jesus for help.

LINK (16:1–12) *The Pharisees and Sadducees ... tested him*
See the parallel passage in Mark 8:11–21. This was not the first time they wanted proof. See *What's wrong with wanting evidence?* (12:39; page 1507).

²⁶He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁷"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

²⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

JESUS FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND

²⁹Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.³⁰Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.³¹The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

³²Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

³³His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

³⁴"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."

³⁵He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.³⁶Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.³⁷They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.³⁸The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children.³⁹After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

THE DEMAND FOR A SIGN

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

²He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,'³ and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

⁵When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.⁶"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

⁷They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."

^a2,3 Some early manuscripts do not have *When evening comes ... of the times*.

⁸Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹⁰Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹¹How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹²Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

PETER DECLARES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter,^a and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^b will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^c bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^c loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

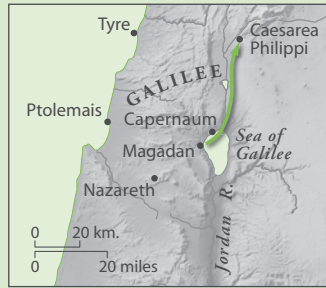
²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save their life^d will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is

^a 18 The Greek word for *Peter* means *rock*. ^b 18 That is, the realm of the dead ^c 19 Or *will have been* ^d 25 The Greek word means either *life* or *soul*; also in verse 26.

JESUS VISITS CAESAREA PHILIPPI (16:13)



LINK (16:13–16) *You are the Messiah*
See Mark 8:27–29; Luke 9:18–20.

On what rock did Jesus build his church? (16:18)

Some believe Jesus meant that he would build his church on the rock-solid truth of his identity as the Son of God, which Peter had just acknowledged (v. 16). However, the apostles played a crucial role in establishing the church’s foundation (Eph 2:20). In fact, Peter—whose name in Greek is *petros*, meaning “detached stone”—may have been the first person to grasp the true identity of Jesus (Mt 16:16–17).

What authority did Jesus give to Peter? (16:19)

Jesus gave Peter and the other apostles the authority to preach the gospel and thus open the door of his kingdom to both Jews and Gentiles (Ac 2:14–41; 10:22–48).

What does *bind* and *loose* mean? (16:19)

To *bind* means to “forbid, refuse or prohibit”; to *loose* means to “permit or allow.” The keys refer to the proclamation of the gospel, which opens the door to the kingdom to some (those who accept Jesus) and closes it to others (those who reject Jesus). The apostles were not determining who would enter the kingdom but were proclaiming the truth of the gospel, which itself prohibits (“binds”) or permits (“looses”) people’s entrance into the kingdom based on their acceptance or rejection of Jesus the Messiah.

Why didn’t Jesus want anyone to know he was the Messiah? (16:20)

It may have been a practical matter; the crowds were becoming large and unmanageable. At times, Jesus and the disciples needed to get away to rest (Mk 6:31–32). Jesus also needed more time with his disciples. It’s obvious they needed more training to understand his mission (Mk 9:30–31). Another factor could have been the additional scrutiny Jesus would have

received from religious authorities already opposed to his ministry. By hiding his identity until the intended time, Jesus was able to finish his work before going to the cross.

LINK (16:21–28) *Suffer many things*
See Mark 8:31—9:1; Luke 9:22–27.

Why did Jesus call Peter Satan? (16:23)
Peter's suggestion that Jesus should not fulfill his mission of death and resurrection was not unlike the temptations Satan himself had presented to Jesus in the wilderness (4:1–11).

What did a cross mean to the people of Jesus' day? (16:24)

This probably startled Jesus' listeners. Condemned criminals were killed on crosses and usually were forced to carry their own cross. But now Jesus was asking his believers to do that *voluntarily*—just as he would eventually do. Obviously, he wasn't telling them to carry an actual cross; he was asking them to give their lives away by serving God and serving others.

How did Jesus' disciples later see Jesus coming in his kingdom? (16:28)

Jesus may have been referring to the day of Pentecost, when believers received the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:1–47). Or perhaps Jesus was referring to his transfiguration as a glimpse of his heavenly glory (Mt 17:1–8).

LINK (17:1–8) *He was transfigured before them*
See Luke 9:28–36.

Why was Jesus transfigured? (17:2)
When Jesus was transfigured, the disciples received a glimpse of his heavenly splendor and majesty. Seeing Jesus in his glorified state (Jn 17:5, 2Pe 1:17) proved to the disciples Jesus' claim of his relationship with his Father; Jesus truly was the unique Son of God. And God's spoken words powerfully reinforced Jesus' identity as the Messiah sent by God (Mt 17:5).

Did God bring Moses and Elijah back from the dead? (17:3)

Yes, but only for a limited time. Before Jesus rose from the dead, both the righteous and unrighteous dead went to a place called “the grave” or “Sheol” (see Isa 5:14). For this occasion, Moses and Elijah were transported from Sheol to earth in order to testify about Jesus. This supernatural event connected Jesus to the religious heritage of the Jews. Moses represented the law and Elijah represented the prophets.

Why did the disciples ask about Elijah? (17:10)

Elijah's appearance with Jesus on the mountain may have reminded them of a familiar prophecy in Malachi 4:5, which

going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

THE TRANSFIGURATION

17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don't be afraid.”⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

¹⁰ The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

JESUS HEALS A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY

¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.¹⁵ “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷ “You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.”¹⁸ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn't we drive it out?”

²⁰ He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”^{[21]a}

^a 21 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 9:29.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A SECOND TIME

²²When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. ²³They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.

THE TEMPLE TAX

²⁴After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

²⁵“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

²⁶“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. ²⁷“But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

CAUSING TO STUMBLE

⁶“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

THE PARABLE OF THE WANDERING SHEEP

¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ^[11]^a

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the nine-

said that Elijah—who left the earth in a whirlwind (2Ki 2:11)—would return before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes (that is, before the coming of the Messiah). The teachers of the law evidently used the idea that *Elijah must come first* to argue that Jesus could not be the Messiah. Jesus told the disciples that this prophecy had already been fulfilled. Elijah had returned, but no one had recognized him because John the Baptist had fulfilled the role of Elijah (Mt 17:11–13).

LINK (17:11–13) *Elijah comes*
See Mark 9:2–13.

LINK (17:14–19) *Lord, have mercy on my son*
See Mark 9:14–28; Luke 9:37–42.

Why did Jesus use such harsh words? (17:17)

Jesus was expressing normal human emotions of disappointment and frustration. He was troubled by his disciples’ lack of faith (v. 20). They thought their ability to heal depended on Jesus’ bodily presence with them. They still did not understand who Jesus really was.

Why didn’t the disciples have enough faith? (17:20)

Faith was a struggle for them, just as it is for us today. Jesus urged his disciples not to become stuck in unbelief, but to recognize how God can use even a tiny amount of faith. Our faith may seem small (especially in times of hardship and testing), but as our faith grows, so does our potential to overcome obstacles.

What was this two-drachma temple tax? (17:24)

Jewish leaders collected taxes to pay for the upkeep of the temple and its services. Drachmas were Greek silver coins, each worth about a day’s wages.

LINK (18:1–5) *Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

See Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48.

What does it mean to be like little children? (18:3)

The kingdom of God is not earned by human effort; it is received in childlike trust as a gift from the merciful and gracious God. The qualities of humility, trust, openness and lack of self-sufficiency all characterize the person of faith.

Should we really amputate our body parts? (18:8)

No. Jesus had earlier made it clear that the root of our problem with sin is spiritual, not physical (Mt 5:21–22, 27–28). Here he was using hyperbole (acknowledged exaggeration to prove a point) to explain

^a11 Some manuscripts include here the words of Luke 19:10.

that we must get rid of anything that causes us to sin, even at the cost of painful sacrifice (5:29–30). See the article *Did Jesus really mean for me to gouge out my eyes if I lust?* (5:29; page 1494).

Do children have personal guardian angels? (18:10)

God may assign particular angels to watch over specific individuals (Heb 1:14), but the exact details of how this works are not clear. See the article *What is known about angels?* (Eze 1:4–28; page 1270). The point here is that every person matters to God but his kingdom gives special honor to the *little ones*—young children or perhaps new Christians (Mt 18:1–6). Even those considered insignificant on earth are noticed in heaven.

Why was there so little concern for the other 99 sheep? (18:12)

They were not left unattended. A shepherd would rarely go out alone with a large herd of sheep. If one sheep became lost, the head shepherd would leave the rest of the flock safe with the hired helpers and go to search for the lost sheep. God does not abandon his followers, but he zealously seeks the lost.

LINK (18:12–14) The one that wandered off

See Luke 15:4–7.

Do increased numbers make prayer more powerful? (18:19–20)

Whether we pray with others or alone, God promises to hear and answer requests made in line with his will (1Jn 5:14–15). But according to Jesus, there

ty-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH

¹⁵“If your brother or sister^a sins,^b go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’^c ¹⁷If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be^d bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^d loosed in heaven.

¹⁹“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

^a 15 The Greek word for *brother or sister* (*adelphos*) refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verses 21 and 35. ^b 15 Some manuscripts *sins against you* ^c 16 Deut. 19:15 ^d 18 Or *will have been*

BIG IDEA 16: HYPOCRISY

WHAT DO I DO IF I SEE CONSISTENT SIN IN MY PASTOR'S LIFE? MATTHEW 18:15–17

Here are four don'ts: (1) Don't stop attending your church without first talking to someone about the situation. (2) Don't act as if nothing is wrong, thinking that it will all go away. (3) Don't feel like you're powerless because the sin is not against you. If your pastor has consistent sin, it *does* affect you. (4) Don't feel like you have to confront the pastor yourself.

This fourth *don't* veers from what we're told to do in Matthew 18:15–17. But this passage—normally the model to follow when Christians sin—applies to a *brother or sister*, that is, a peer. In this situation, you and a church leader are not peers. So you need input from someone else. But don't talk to just anybody. It could easily turn into gossip. Instead, talk with your parents and then determine whom to speak with at the church (a deacon, elder or other leader). When you (and possibly your parents) meet with the church leader, explain what you've seen or heard and why it's bothering you (for instance, it might be making it hard for you to worship and accept the pastor's teaching). Maybe you've misunderstood what the pastor has done, and your church leader can help you understand what's going on. However, if the pastor is in error, this leader should know what to do. Keep praying that God will bring good out of this difficult situation, and keep the lines of communication open with those around you.

For the next article, go to page 1522

For the next article in Big Idea 16, go to page 1526

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”^a

²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^b was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’”²⁷The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.” He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’”

³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.”³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’”³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”³⁴In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

DIVORCE

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

⁴“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’^d ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”^e ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

⁷“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

⁸Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”⁹I tell you that anyone who

is a special sense of God’s presence and power during times of group prayer. This is especially reassuring when we must deal with problems of discipline and forgiveness, as the context suggests.

Is our salvation dependent on whether we forgive others? (18:35)

The issue here is not salvation, but personal relationships—about forgiving those who wrong us. To be right with God, we have to be right with other believers. We are not to hold grudges. We are to *forgive as the Lord forgave [us]* (Col 3:13). See the article *What does it mean to forgive someone?* (Eph 4:32; page 1832).

LINK (19:1–9) Divorce

See Mark 10:1–12.

Is divorce always wrong? (19:3–9)

Women in Jesus’ time had little legal protection. They could be divorced simply for displeasing their husbands, so Jesus wanted to make it clear that divorce is contrary to the will of God and his intention that marriage last a lifetime. Jesus acknowledged that in the case of adultery, divorce may be a necessity when a partner refuses to stop being unfaithful. This is not the Bible’s last word on divorce, however. Paul later suggested another scenario for divorce: When a believer is deserted by an unbelieving spouse (1Co 7:15). See the article *Is divorce ever okay?* (Mal 2:14–16; page 1478).

Are those who remarry committing adultery? (19:9)

Some argue that Jesus forbade remarriage under any circumstances (Mk 10:11–12). Others believe remarriage is allowed only after adultery or desertion (Mt 19:9; 1Co 7:10–17). The bottom line: Jesus reaffirmed God’s ideal for marriage as one man and one woman together for life (Mt 19:5–6). See the article *Is divorce ever okay?* (Mal 2:14–16; page 1478).

^a22 Or *seventy times seven* ^b24 Greek *ten thousand talents*; a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer’s wages. ^c28 Greek *a hundred denarii*; a denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer (see 20:2). ^d4 Gen. 1:27 ^e5 Gen. 2:24

Was celibacy intended only for a select few? (19:11–12)

Jesus recognized that in some situations it is better for a person to remain unmarried. Singleness can provide God-given opportunities for undistracted and fruitful Christian service (1Co 7:1,8,32,34–35,37). For others, it is better to marry (1Co 7:2–7,9,36). See the article *If God established marriage, why was Paul so down on it?* (1Co 7:1–2; page 1781).

How can people be eunuchs from birth? (19:12)

Some people cannot engage in sexual intercourse because of physical deformities they were born with. But this could also refer to people born with a special commission from God to remain unmarried without sexual sin. Jesus gave two other reasons for celibacy: They have been made eunuchs by others through castration (see Est 2:3; Ac 8:27) or they have chosen to *live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom*, that is, they have made a voluntary choice to not marry in order to serve in God's kingdom without the added challenges of married life (see 1Co 7:32–35).

LINK (19:13–15) People brought little children to Jesus

See Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17.

LINK (19:16–29) Sell your possessions and give to the poor

See Mark 10:17–30; Luke 18:18–30.

divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹⁰The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS

¹³Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” ¹⁵When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

THE RICH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

¹⁶Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother,’^a and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’^b”

^a19 Exodus 20:12–16; Deut. 5:16–20 ^b19 Lev. 19:18

BIG IDEA 2: SEX AND DATING

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT IS AND WHAT ISN'T SEXUAL SIN?

MATTHEW 19:3–6

Jesus said, *What God has joined together, let no one separate* (v. 6). Though that teaching is a statement against divorce, Jesus' words can also give us insight into God's view of marriage. Those words speak to us about the nature of sex and the importance of experiencing sex within marriage. Sex bonds two people together—they are *no longer two, but one flesh* (v. 6)—whether they intend it or not (1Co 6:16).

For either a husband or wife to have sex outside of marriage is clearly wrong and clearly sin. That's adultery, and God forbids it (Ex 20:14). It's also wrong to have sex with prostitutes, whether a person is married or not (1Co 6:15–16). The Bible advises single people who lack sexual self-control to marry, not simply practice safe sex (1Co 7:2,9). There aren't any other options. In the entire New Testament, there's not a single hint of an exception or loophole. In fact, Jesus said that to *look with lust* is as wrong as adultery (Mt 5:27–30).

Jesus' words about lust cover a lot of territory too—like pornography and any activity that leads a person to think lustful, impure thoughts. It all qualifies as sexual sin. It's all to be avoided by anyone who desires to practice sexual purity.

For the next article, go to page 1526

For the next article in Big Idea 2, go to page 1748

²⁰“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

²⁷Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

²⁸Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife^a or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius^b for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷“Because no one has hired us,” they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When

Are we saved by obeying God's commands? (19:17)

If this were the only thing Jesus said about salvation, we might assume that obeying the commandments could earn us a place in heaven. But Jesus said a lot to help explain this verse. For instance, he said that outward obedience is an indicator of the condition of a person's heart (Jn 14:15). The point: Our relationship with God must be our primary focus; sincere obedience grows out of authentic faith (Mt 22:37–40).

Do we have to give up everything to gain eternal life? (19:21)

Jesus was not saying that we have to become poor to gain eternal life. He was saying that attachment to any earthly thing can block a relationship with God. For some (like this young man), that attachment may be material possessions. But for others, it could be such things as fame, extraordinary talent, good looks or intellectualism. See the article *Is it wrong to love anything more than God?* (Ex 20:4; page 116).

Does God love the poor more than the rich? (19:23)

Jesus was not showing favoritism. He was simply stating that to follow him, people have to be ready to part with anything. It's hard for people who have many possessions to be willing to give them away.

How can a camel fit through the eye of a needle? (19:24)

It can't. Jesus' point was that some things on earth can prevent us from entering the kingdom of God. The disciples probably saw material wealth as a certain sign of God's favor, but Jesus recognized how the love of money creates temptations many cannot resist.

When will the renewal of all things occur? (19:28)

Some interpret this to mean the age of the church, which began after Jesus' resurrection. During that time, the apostles exercised spiritual authority and proclaimed the gospel that brings renewal, or new birth (Titus 3:5; 2Pe 3:2). Others believe this refers to the end of time, when heaven and earth will be renewed (Rev 21:1–5). According to the latter view, the apostles will receive special honor and responsibility when God's final judgment occurs (1Co 6:2).

^a29 Some manuscripts do not have *or wife*. ^b2 A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer.

LINK (20:17–19) *The Son of Man will be delivered over*

See Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–33.

What was this mother's ambition for her sons? (20:20–21)

She wanted them to occupy important positions of honor and influence as Jesus' closest advisers in his new kingdom, which she assumed would soon be established on the earth.

Was Jesus advocating slavery? (20:26–28)

No. Jesus wasn't endorsing the institution of slavery, but he used it as a lesson in humility. His own willingness to submit to the Father's will is an example of servant-hood lived out to its fullest. It is an example that he calls us to imitate. See the article *Does the Bible support slavery?* (Ex 21:2–11; page 118).

If ministers are servants, how can they be leaders? (20:26–28)

Jesus was not downplaying the importance of leadership; he was highlighting the proper motives for leadership. All of us must be servants, and some serve by leading. Following Jesus' example, godly leaders must choose to be humble. They should be driven not by selfish ambition, but by a desire to care for God's people and accomplish God's purposes (1Pe 5:2–3).

LINK (20:29–34) *Two blind men*

See Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43.

Why does Matthew mention two blind men, while Mark and Luke mention only one? (20:30; compare Mk 10:46; Lk 18:35)

We don't know, but it's not a contradiction. Neither Mark's account nor Luke's account says Jesus healed only one blind man at Jericho. The accounts also have other minor differences. Luke says Jesus was approaching Jericho when a blind man called out, but Matthew and Mark say Jesus was leaving the city when he was stopped by pleas. And only Mark's account gives the name of the blind man (Bartimaeus). But none of these differences detract from the fact that Jesus made the blind see.

Why did the blind men call Jesus the *Son of David*? (20:30)

The blind men recognized Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. God had promised King David that one of his descendants would reign forever on his throne (2Sa 7:11–16); therefore, "Son of David" became a title for the awaited Messiah (Isa 9:7). Some Jewish traditions portray this Son of David as a powerful healer and exorcist—this may be why the blind men used the title. It is ironic that men without physical sight were able to "see" things that others had missed.

they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

¹³"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' ¹⁴'Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

¹⁶"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME

¹⁷Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

A MOTHER'S REQUEST

²⁰Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²²"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

TWO BLIND MEN RECEIVE SIGHT

²⁹As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. ³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

³¹The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

³²Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³³"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

³⁴Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

JESUS COMES TO JERUSALEM AS KING

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

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

⁵“Say to Daughter Zion,
“See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”^a

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

“Hosanna^b to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^c

“Hosanna^b in the highest heaven!”

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

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

JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

¹²Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,^d but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’^e”

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

¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’^f?”

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

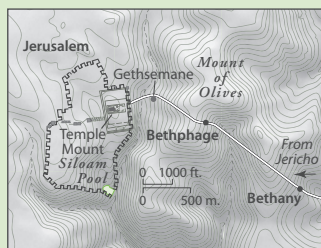
JESUS CURSES A FIG TREE

¹⁸Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, he

^a 5 Zech. 9:9 ^b 9 A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!” which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15 ^c 9 Psalm 118:25,26

^d 13 Isaiah 56:7 ^e 13 Jer. 7:11 ^f 16 Psalm 8:2 (see Septuagint)

JESUS COMES TO JERUSALEM AS KING (21:1)



LINK (21:1–10) Jesus entered Jerusalem
See Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–38.

Why did Jesus “borrow” without asking? (21:2–6)

We don’t know. It may have been prearranged, as it appears was the case with the upper room (26:17–18). Jesus undoubtedly knew the owner would gladly lend the animal when told the Lord needed it (21:3,6).

LINK (21:4–9) This ... was spoken through the prophet

See John 12:12–15. This prophecy was spoken by Zechariah (Zec 9:9).

Why did Jesus ride a donkey? (21:7)

Donkeys or mules were often associated with leaders (Jdg 10:4; 1Ki 1:33). By riding this young colt, however, Jesus demonstrated his humility and gentleness. He also fulfilled one of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (Zec 9:9).

Why did Jesus participate in this procession? (21:7–10)

Jesus, at the climax of his ministry, was making a statement about who he was: the Son of David, the King of kings, the conqueror of sin and sickness. The procession caused the people who were in the city for Passover to consider Jesus’ claims. See **Why carpet the road with cloaks?** (Lk 19:36; page 1630).

Why did Jesus resort to force? (21:12)

Though Jesus taught that we are to turn ... the other cheek (5:39), his example here showed that there are also times when righteous (or unselfish, just and moral) anger is the correct response (Mk 3:4–5). But notice that Jesus controlled his anger; this was not a temper tantrum. Nor is there any indication that he laid a hand on anyone. See the article **Is my anger sinful?** (Am 1:11; page 1402).

LINK (21:12–16) Jesus entered the temple courts

See Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–47.

How had the temple (God's house) become a den of robbers? (21:13)

Merchants were selling sacrificial animals and exchanging currency at exorbitant prices. By turning the court of the Gentiles into a shopping mall, they prevented Gentiles from using that part of the temple as God had intended—for prayer (Isa 56:6–7).

LINK (21:18–22) The tree withered
See Mark 11:12–14, 20–24.

What does this mountain refer to? (21:21)

When Jesus said *this mountain* here, he may have been talking about the temple mount. The meaning: The sacrificial system would no longer be valid after his resurrection. Faith would become the only way to become right with God.

Will we receive whatever [we] ask for in prayer? (21:21–22)

Jesus repeatedly encouraged his disciples to ask him for anything (7:7–12; 18:19). We can pray with the assurance that God is able to do anything (Eph 3:20; Jas 5:16). But it's important to remember that God answers our prayers according to his will. If it aligns with God's will, he will do it for us (Jn 15:7; 1Jn 5:14–15). This means that he may move our mountains in different ways than we expect. He will answer on his timetable, not ours. And sometimes he will simply say no to requests (2Co 12:8–9) because he has a better plan than we do (Isa 55:8–9; Php 4:6–7). See the article *Why does God answer some prayers and not others?* (Job 29:11–17; page 798).

LINK (21:23–27) Who gave you this authority?

See Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8.

went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

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

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

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

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

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

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

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

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

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

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

²⁹“I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

BIG IDEA 16: HYPOCRISY

WHY DID JESUS CURSE THIS TREE?

MATTHEW 21:18–19

When Jesus cursed the barren fig tree, he was actually teaching a powerful lesson about the disobedience of the Jews. Some background is necessary: The people of Israel were often compared to a fig tree. Why? The idea was that when the people of Israel obeyed God, they would produce fruit. But when the people of Israel disobeyed, they were like a fruitless fig tree—pretty useless. When Jesus cursed the barren fig tree, he was demonstrating that unless the Jews repented, they would never bear fruit, and they would be under God’s judgment.

God created each of us to bear fruit. If we say we’re Christians but don’t live according to God’s Word, we’re hypocrites, like fruitless fig trees—looking good, but good for nothing but judgment and destruction.

To make sure we, as Christians, are not living like hypocrites, we need to have (1) God’s Spirit at work in us, convicting us of sin and guiding us to live the right way (Jn 16:8); (2) a personal commitment to live the right way (Col 3:1–17); (3) an understanding of the consequences of living the wrong way. The difficult truth evidenced in the story should lead us to think long and hard about how we choose to live.

For the next article, go to page 1535

For the next article in Big Idea 16, go to page 1755

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

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

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

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

³⁵“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

⁴¹“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes”^a?

⁴³“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”^b

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

What do these stories tell us about the kingdom of God? (21:28–44)

Jesus used parables to illustrate truth in vivid, memorable ways. See *Why did Jesus speak in parables?* (13:11–13; page 1509). Each story provides insight into God’s kingdom. The parable of the two sons teaches that we enter the kingdom not by what we say but by how we respond to the Father. The parable of the tenants shows that those who reject the Son miss the kingdom.

LINK (21:33–46) Tenants

See Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19.

What is a cornerstone? (21:42)

This term is used to describe either the bottom corner of a building (the foundation stone that determines the design and orientation of the building) or the keystone of an archway (the piece at the crown of the arch that locks the other pieces together). In either case, the stone is essential for holding the building together. In addition it could—as a foundation stone—cause someone to stumble or—as part of the archway—fall on someone (v. 44).

Are the Jews no longer God’s chosen people? (21:43)

Jesus was speaking to the chief priests and Pharisees (v. 45). They thought of themselves as the wardens of God’s kingdom through Judaism. The use of the Greek word *ethnos* (translated a people here) does not mean that a new ethnic group would become the chosen people. Jesus was referring to his coming church, which would include both Jews and Gentiles.

Who would be broken to pieces by the cornerstone, and who would be crushed? (21:44)

Verse 45 shows that Jesus was referring to the chief priests and Pharisees.

LINK (22:2–14) Wedding banquet

A similar parable is recorded in Luke 14:16–24.

^a 42 Psalm 118:22, 23 ^b 44 Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

What does it mean that *many are invited, but few are chosen*? (22:14)

Many (perhaps all) are invited to enter the kingdom of God, but only a few will enter. God’s invitation must be accepted, which will then result in appropriate conduct. Proper behavior is evidence of being chosen.

LINK (22:15–22) *Is it right to pay the imperial tax*

See Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26.

Is disobedience to the governing authorities ever justified? (22:17–21)

In a sinful world where tyrants sometimes gain control and government officials become corrupt, there may be times when believers must disobey governing authorities because they answer to Jesus as their highest authority. However, as a general rule, people should obey the laws of the land. See the article ***Do people have to obey leaders who are clearly wrong?*** (Ro 13:5; page 1767).

What is *Caesar’s* and what is *God’s*? (22:21)

God is over all things and deserves our highest allegiance and our support, including financial support, but he entrusts some things to people. What Jesus was saying belonged to Caesar—and any governing authority—was the money for taxes to pay for maintaining civil order, punishing wrongdoers and protecting the helpless (Ro 13:1–7; 1Pe 2:13–17).

PAYING THE IMPERIAL TAX TO CAESAR

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^a to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹“Caesar’s,” they replied.

^a 17 A special tax levied on subject peoples, not on Roman citizens

5 REASONS PEOPLE FOLLOWED JESUS

1. Jesus loved people (Mt 19:13–15; Lk 19:1–10; Jn 8:1–11)
2. Jesus cared for the hurting (Mt 8:1–17; Mk 5:25–34)
3. Jesus made people think (Lk 4:32; Jn 4:4–30)
4. Jesus forgave again and again (Mk 2:5; Lk 23:34)
5. Jesus was God in the flesh (Jn 1:14; 14:9–10)

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

MARRIAGE AT THE RESURRECTION

²³That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ²⁴“Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

²⁹Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³²‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?” He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^b ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^c ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” they replied.

⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

⁴⁴“‘The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.””^d

⁴⁵If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?”

⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

LINK (22:25) *He left his wife to his brother*

By Jewish law, a man was supposed to marry his brother’s widow, provide for her and raise their firstborn son in his brother’s name (Dt 25:5–9).

Was Jesus saying there will be no marriage at the resurrection? (22:30)

Yes, Jesus said there will be no marriage at the resurrection. But that was not Jesus’ main point. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, existence of any kind after death, or angels. They believed both body and soul perish at death. They were attempting to show that the concept of resurrection was absurd by questioning which brother, with all of them resurrected, would claim the woman as his wife. Jesus’ response was that the Scriptures clearly teach the reality of the resurrection. Jesus also made it clear that our existence at the resurrection will not be the same as our current existence on earth, saying people will be *like the angels in heaven*. Paul referred to the resurrected body as a *spiritual body* (1Co 15:42–44,52).

How did this statement prove life after death? (22:31–33)

In our culture, we might read verse 32 like this: “I am the God of the guy who was called Abraham.” Reading it that way, it does not make an argument for life after death. However, most Jews didn’t think that way. To speak of “Yahweh (I AM), the God of Abraham” was to imply a current, living relationship. In other words, if God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—who all died—then they must now be alive. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or in life after death; they believed that both body and soul perish at death. They denied the existence of spirits as strongly as they denied the existence of angels. They believed in the finality of death. Because the Sadducees based their doctrine on only the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy), Jesus made his case from Exodus 3:6.

LINK (22:34–40) *The greatest commandment*

See Mark 12:28–31.

LINK (22:41–46) *What do you think about the Messiah?*

See Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44.

Why did Jesus’ question stump the Pharisees? (22:45–46)

By using David’s words, Jesus demonstrated that David himself anticipated that the Messiah would be more than a special human leader. He would be God in human flesh. Jesus quoted David (Ps 110:1) to show that David spoke of the Messiah as Lord—a title of profound respect and honor. Because the Pharisees knew a father would not call his son “Lord,” they were stumped. They had no answer.

^a32 Exodus 3:6 ^b37 Deut. 6:5 ^c39 Lev. 19:18

^d44 Psalm 110:1

LINK (23:1–7) Do not do what they do
See Mark 12:38–39; Luke 20:45–46.

What were phylacteries? (23:5)

They were small leather boxes containing portions of God's Word. They were worn by Jews who took literally the instruction to fasten God's Word on their hands and foreheads.

Did Jesus mean that we can't use the word father? (23:9)

No. Jesus was simply telling people not to misuse the term to inflate the egos of spiritual leaders seeking honor from special titles or positions. Jesus himself used the word *father* in its ordinary sense (21:31; Lk 15:12–32).

How did Pharisees turn someone into a child of hell? (23:15)

The phrase *child of hell* was likely a Hebrew expression that referred to a particularly wicked person, in contrast to *people of the kingdom* (13:38). Jesus bluntly accused the Pharisees—who bragged about being righteous—of being blatant sinners and hypocrites. Worse, their false teaching and legalistic ways led people further away from God's truth by taking them deeper into human tradition.

Why swear by the temple, the altar or heaven? (23:16–22)

The Pharisees thought their words carried more weight when they were backed by objects of value (such as the gold or the altar in the temple) or by persons of authority. By doing this, they thought they appeared more trustworthy.

Why are some matters of the law more important than others? (23:23)

Because some parts of the law are foundational principles that form the basis for the rest of the law. Though all of God's law is important (5:17–20; Jas 2:10), Jesus asserted that *all the Law and the Prophets hang on . . . two commandments*: Love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:37–40). Jesus accused the Pharisees of focusing on minor details—donating spices—while neglecting the main points of the law.

A WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

⁵"Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries^a wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

⁸"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

SEVEN WOES ON THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW AND THE PHARISEES

¹³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ^{14b}

¹⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

¹⁶"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.' ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.' ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

²³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

²⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind

^a 5 That is, boxes containing Scripture verses, worn on forehead and arm

^b 14 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47.

Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

²⁷“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

²⁹“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³²Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

³³“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

³⁷“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AND SIGNS OF THE END TIMES

24 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ²“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

⁴Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will

Why did Jesus call Pharisees white-washed tombs? (23:27)

Tombs were whitewashed (painted white) once a year—perhaps to show respect for the dead, but primarily to make the tombs easier to see to prevent accidental contact. The Jews believed that touching or walking over a grave caused a person to become ceremonially unclean for seven days (Nu 19:16). Though a whitewashed tomb may have had a clean outward appearance, it was hiding something unclean within. Jesus said the Pharisees were just like those tombs—appealing on the outside but rotting from within.

Why was Jesus so angry with these leaders? (23:33)

He was angry because of their hypocrisy; six times in this chapter Jesus called them *hypocrites*. The religious leaders had exchanged the holy for the hollow. They were concerned with appearance rather than substance. They made a show of obeying God’s law, but they consistently violated the spirit of the law. And they were leading other people to do the same. Jesus, by contrast, said God desires genuine spiritual commitment (22:37–39; Mk 7:14–23). See the article *How can I tell if someone’s a true believer or just faking it?* (Mic 3:11; page 1427).

If God is all-powerful, why did it matter if Jerusalem was willing or not? (23:37)

God could have overruled the desires of the people, but he wants people to accept his love because they want to, not because they have to. God seeks the allegiance and acceptance of willing hearts, and he desires all people to turn to him in faith (1Ti 2:3–4; 2Pe 3:9), but he makes our personal choice part of the equation. See the article *How can I have free will when God controls everything?* (Ge 45:8; page 75).

LINK (23:37–39) Jerusalem, Jerusalem

See Luke 13:34–35.

LINK (24:1–51) What will be the sign of your coming

Mark described the signs of the end of the age in Mark 13:1–37; see also Luke 21:5–36.

What are the events Jesus was speaking about? (24:4–14)

In answering questions from the disciples about the end of the age, Jesus prophesied about the destruction of the temple (vv. 1–2), which would occur 40 years later, in AD 70. Jesus also gave a detailed description of what would happen in the last days. (The “last days” started with Jesus’ birth and will end with his second coming.) See *How much of this passage is about the end times?* (24:15–28; page 1532) and *When is the end of the age?* (28:20; page 1543).

³⁹ Psalm 118:26

What does the abomination that causes desolation refer to? (24:15)

The defiling of the temple. It first happened in 168 BC when Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple with a pagan altar to Zeus. Some believe it happened again around AD 40 when Emperor Caligula tried to desecrate the temple and again in AD 70 when the Romans finally destroyed the temple. This warning may actually predict another similar desecration that is yet to come.

Why did Jesus say let the reader understand? (24:15)

Jesus probably was urging his listeners to read and understand Daniel's prophecy (Da 9:27).

How much of this passage is about the end times? (24:15–28)

These predictions accurately describe the terrible conditions leading to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Many also see a parallel to the dangerous conditions and spiritual decline to come in the last days (2Ti 3:1–5). Jesus apparently was talking about both events, underscoring the need for faithfulness, discernment and patience. See the article *How can I recognize signs of the end times?* (2Th 2:1–12; page 1861).

Does this describe the “great tribulation” of the end times? (24:21)

Maybe. Some think this describes a future time of unprecedented disaster—judgment to come on the world at the end of the age (Rev 6:15–17; 7:14). Others believe it refers to the terrible suffering that occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. People died at the hands of Roman troops or by starvation, fire and disease. To a certain extent, God's people can expect to face tribulation in every age (Jn 16:33).

Will the sun literally be darkened? (24:29)

We don't know the exact phenomenon being described here. Since Jesus' first coming was accompanied by unusual signs on earth and in the sky (2:2; 28:2; Lk 2:8–14; 23:44–45), it does not seem unreasonable to believe that these signs will literally occur when Jesus returns. Other passages also tell of dramatic events that will take place at the return of Jesus (1Th 4:16–17), including a worldwide holocaust (2Pe 3:10–13).

If we can't predict when Jesus will come, why did he say to look for signs that his return is near? (24:33,42–44) Because looking forward to something great builds hope and excitement. Knowing that Jesus could return at any moment helps keep us on track and strengthens our faith.

betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

¹⁵“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’^a spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house.¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

²²“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.²³ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

²⁶“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹“Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”³⁶

³⁰“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth^c will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.^{d 31} And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

³²“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it^e is near, right at the door.³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

THE DAY AND HOUR UNKNOWN

³⁶“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,^f but only the Father.³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the com-

^{a 15} Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 ^{b 29} Isaiah 13:10; 34:4 ^{c 30} Or the tribes of the land ^{d 30} See Daniel 7:13–14. ^{e 33} Or he ^{f 36} Some manuscripts do not have *nor the Son*.

ing of the Son of Man.³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴²“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

⁴⁵“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.⁴⁷ Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.² Five of them were foolish and five were wise.³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹²“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Did all these things happen while that generation was still alive? (24:34)

Some think so. They believe this verse means that the events in this chapter are limited to the time of one generation—that is, it all happened to those alive during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Others think *this generation* refers to the future generation that will learn the lesson of the fig tree (vv. 32–33) and actually see the signs of Jesus’ impending return. Still others say *generation* here means the Jewish race, which would mean this is a promise that Jews will survive until the end times.

LINK (24:37–39) The coming of the Son of Man

See Luke 17:26–27.

What will happen to those who are taken when Jesus comes? (24:40)

The first letter to the Thessalonians indicates that believers who have already died will rise and that those who are still alive will be caught up in the air with Jesus (1Th 4:16–17). See the article *What is known about Jesus’ return?* (Rev 22:7; page 1972).

Why would a master cut his servant to pieces? (24:51)

In ancient times, slave owners held complete mastery over their slaves. Slaves were considered property, and one who displeased his master could be severely punished, even killed. Such actions were within the master’s legal rights. Jesus used this particularly gruesome punishment to illustrate a spiritual truth: A hypocrite will be cut off from any life with God. See the article *Does the Bible support slavery?* (Ex 21:2–11; page 118).

What is this place with the hypocrites? (24:51)

Hell. It is frequently described by Jesus as a place *where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*—a phrase that is often connected with a place *outside, into the darkness* (8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and with a *blazing furnace* (13:42,50). See the article *What will hell be like?* (Isa 66:24; page 1154).

What does the kingdom of heaven signify? (25:1)

See *What is the kingdom of heaven?* (4:17; page 1491).

How is the kingdom like ten virgins? (25:1)

Jesus compared the arrival of God’s kingdom to ten virgin bridesmaids waiting for the groom to arrive. Some were prepared to meet him; others were not. Jesus was warning believers to be ready and to keep watch for his return.

Was it normal to start a wedding at midnight? (25:6)

Yes. This was a common custom, but we don't know why. Weddings, which typically lasted several days, often began with the groom and his friends having a feast at the groom's house, while the bride and her attendants waited at her house. Eventually, the groom and his friends came unannounced to claim the bride. Then the whole group formed a joyful procession back to the groom's house to celebrate.

What is the point of the parable of the bags of gold? (25:14–30)

While we can make a connection between this parable and earthly finances, Jesus' parables are almost always earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. This parable is about the kingdom of God—and what we do with it. We can share it with others and watch it multiply, or we can play it safe by hiding it in the ground. Jesus was emphasizing that he graciously calls each of us to join him in multiplying the kingdom.

LINK (25:14–30) He gave five bags of gold

Jesus told a similar parable in Luke 19:12–27.

What did this servant do wrong? (25:26–27)

By some standards, the third servant did well. He didn't steal, waste or lose the money; he guarded and preserved it. Nevertheless, he was judged as being unfaithful because he did nothing productive with it. We must make the most of our opportunities (Eph 5:15–16) and use our gifts productively (1Pe 4:10–11).

Why would sheep and goats be mixed together? (25:32)

First-century herders did not keep sheep and goats in the same pen at night, but they did sometimes let them graze in the same field. Several herds could mingle in one pasture and yet be easily separated when each shepherd called his own. The sheep recognized the voice of their own shepherd (Jn 10:3–4). Jesus used this well-known image to describe the separation of those destined for heaven from those who rejected God's Word (compare Mt 13:30, 48–50; 25:11–13, 29–30).

Are good works necessary for eternal life? (25:35–36)

The Bible is clear that eternal life results from what God does, not what we do. See the article *Why can't I be saved by doing good works?* (Titus 3:3–8; page 1880). We are saved by God's grace, not our works. Still, God's intention is that those who receive his grace do good works (Eph 2:8–10). We do these things not to earn salvation, but because a heart that truly loves God will be filled with compassion for others. See the article *What does it mean to accompany my faith with action?* (Jas 2:17; page 1909).

THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^a each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²²“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²⁴“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

²⁸“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to

^a 15 Greek *five talents . . . two talents . . . one talent*; also throughout this parable; a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer's wage.

eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸'When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹'When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

THE PLOT AGAINST JESUS

26 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ²"As you know, the Pass-over is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

LINK (26:1–5) The Son of Man will be handed over
See Mark 14:1–2; Luke 22:1–2.

BIG IDEA 13: SERVICE

WHO ARE THE LEAST OF THESE?

MATTHEW 25:40

We think you'll find an answer through the experience of a college student named Stephanie.

During a missions trip to Calcutta, India, Stephanie met a woman in a shelter for people who were dying. When asked to feed the woman, Stephanie cringed.

"She wore a soiled diaper and had only three teeth," Stephanie explained.

Still, Stephanie knew Jesus calls Christians to care for *the least of these*, so she began giving the woman bits of food and small drinks of water.

"As I held a cup to her lips," Stephanie said, "she pointed at her heart and then pointed at me."

Stephanie felt God's love in a powerful way. Tears were streaming down her face as she leaned in close and said, "I love you."

After the trip, Stephanie returned to college and to her job as a resident assistant in charge of a floor of freshman girls in a dorm. In the past, she often had resented how much time the girls demanded of her.

"Experiencing God's love through the lady in Calcutta changed my attitude toward the girls," she said. "It expanded my definition of *the least of these* to include anyone I had previously regarded as unimportant. I need to treat the girls—and everyone—the way Jesus would treat them."

For the next article, go to page 1542
For the next article in Big Idea 13, go to page 1701

LINK (26:6–13) *Very expensive perfume*

The Gospel of Mark describes the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in Mark 14:3–9. Luke and John give similar accounts (Lk 7:37–38; Jn 12:1–8).

Is the story of the anointing here the same story recorded in the other Gospels? (26:6–13; compare Mk 14:3–9; Jn 12:1–8)

This event is also recorded in Mark and John. Jesus was being prepared for his death by being anointed with perfume (a Jewish burial custom). A similar story in Luke 7:37–38 records an entirely different event.

Why were the disciples indignant? (26:8–9)

They thought the woman (Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Jn 12:3), who poured the perfume out on Jesus' feet, had been extravagant and wasteful. Because the perfume was so valuable, they thought it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. However, it seems that the major complainer was Judas, whose real motive was not concern for the poor but personal greed (Jn 12:4–6).

Why did Jesus endorse such extravagance? (26:10)

This was a special occasion. He knew that he would soon be crucified. In this impulsive act of sacrifice, the woman symbolically prepared Jesus' body for burial. It was a custom in those days to anoint the bodies of the dead with sweet-smelling oil or spices. Here Jesus affirmed an important principle: It is never a waste to give one's best to honor God.

LINK (26:14–16) *Judas Iscariot*
See Mark 14:10–11.**What prompted Judas to turn Jesus in? (26:14–16)**

Judas's greed may have been a factor in his accepting 30 silver coins to betray Jesus. Some speculate that Jesus' talk of his burial (v. 12) was a letdown for Judas, who may have been upset and confused by the idea that the real Messiah could die (16:21–25). Others think Judas was disappointed because Jesus was not going to establish the earthly kingdom many expected. Whatever the cause, Satan was behind Judas's act of betrayal (Jn 13:27). See *Was Judas or the devil responsible for betraying Jesus?* (Jn 13:2; page 1671).

LINK (26:17–19) *Passover*

See Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13.

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ⁵“But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

JESUS ANOINTED AT BETHANY

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹“This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹The poor you will always have with you,^a but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

THE LAST SUPPER

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹⁸He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’” ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

²²They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don't mean me, Lord?”

²³Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²⁵Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

^a 11 See Deut. 15:11.

²⁷Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.” ²⁸This is my blood of the^a covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

JESUS PREDICTS PETER’S DENIAL

³¹Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”^b

³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

³³Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

³⁴“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

³⁵But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

GETHSEMANE

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

JESUS ARRESTED

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the

How did the disciples prepare for the Passover? (26:19)

Jewish law required that a lamb be taken to the temple for slaughter (Dt 16:2,5–7). It was then to be roasted and eaten the same night (Ex 12:8–9). The disciples also had to purchase specific items required for the Passover meal, prepare the food and set the table.

LINK (26:26–29) This is my body

See Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:17–20.

Did the Last Supper change Passover forever? (26:26–29)

Rather than change Passover, Jesus fulfilled the meaning of Passover. He infused a time-honored practice with profound new meaning. For centuries, the unleavened bread had reminded God’s people of their hasty exit from Egypt (Ex 12:14–20,39). Now the bread would remind Jesus’ followers of his body, given as a sacrifice for their sins. The lamb eaten at Passover recalled the blood spread on the doorframes of the homes that spared the Israelites from death (Ex 12:3–13). Now the cup would remind Jesus’ followers of his blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. The Jewish observance of Passover didn’t change because of Jesus. However, Christians follow Jesus’ instructions to *do this in remembrance of me* (Lk 22:19) when we take communion (also called the Lord’s Supper).

Why did Jesus say he would not drink wine again? (26:29)

Because Jesus was going to die, he would eat no more Passover meals until the coming of the future kingdom (Lk 22:16). At that time, he will again feast with believers at what Revelation calls the *wedding supper of the Lamb* (Rev 19:9), the eternal union of Jesus and his bride, the church. Even now when Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper, they are not only remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection but also looking ahead to his second coming.

LINK (26:31–35) You will disown me

See Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:31–34.

LINK (26:36–46) Gethsemane

See Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46.

Did Jesus resist his sacrificial mission? (26:38–39)

No. Jesus was committed to his purpose to be the Savior of the world (Jn 12:27–28). However, the intense suffering he faced caused him to turn to his Father for help—just as we might pray when confronted with overwhelming emotional or physical pain. This vulnerable moment reminds us that while Jesus was fully God, he was also fully human.

^a28 Some manuscripts *the new* ^b31 Zech. 13:7

Why not provide another way for salvation? (26:39)

Scripture tells us that God's law demanded a sacrifice to atone for our sins, and the death of God's perfect Son was the sacrifice of atonement (Ro 3:25) made once for all (Heb 7:27). God used the law to help us grasp the enormity of our sin, his holiness and the utter hopelessness of our depravity. He also wanted us to recognize the extent of his amazing, gracious love. See the article *Why did Jesus have to die?* (1Pe 2:24; page 1918).

Why did Jesus ask the disciples to watch and pray? (26:41)

In the loneliness that came while awaiting death, Jesus longed for the presence of friends who would pray with him. In addition, the disciples needed to pray for themselves because Jesus knew they were about to face a dark time. Their boasts of allegiance (v. 35) appear pathetic in light of their behavior as the night wore on. Their failure to pray made them an easy mark for fear and temptation.

LINK (26:47–56) The men ... seized Jesus and arrested him

See Mark 14:43–50; Luke 22:47–53.

Why did Judas kiss Jesus? (26:49)

A kiss was a traditional greeting. A disciple would greet his teacher with a kiss on the cheek or beard to show honor and submission. Ironically, Judas used something meant to give honor to betray.

LINK (26:57–68) Sanhedrin

See Mark 14:53–65; John 18:12–13, 19–24.

Why did Jesus refuse to answer the false charges? (26:63)

These same men had both resisted and twisted Jesus' words before. Why should he speak to them now? This was a biased, hostile trial, not a fair hearing. The unfair and contradictory charges did not deserve a response. Jesus did answer when the high priest charged him under oath to tell them if he was the Messiah (vv. 63–64).

people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

⁵⁰Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."^a

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁵²"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

⁵⁵In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁸But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward ⁶¹and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶³But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

⁶⁴"You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."^b

⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

^a 50 Or "Why have you come, friend?" ^b 64 See Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13.

PETER DISOWNS JESUS

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said.

⁷⁰But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

⁷¹Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷²He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

⁷³After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”

⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ²So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴“I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

⁵So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

⁶The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.” ⁷So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, ¹⁰and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”^a

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

¹¹Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

¹²When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” ¹⁴But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

¹⁵Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to re-

LINK (26:69–75) *He denied it*

See Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:54–62; John 18:16–18,25–27.

What was distinctive about Peter’s accent? (26:73)

Because of the Roman occupation, many dialects and languages from various parts of the ancient Middle East were spoken in the region. This made Peter’s Galilean accent recognizable. Some say the Galileans pronounced words in a way that made them unintelligible to others.

Why did Peter weep? (26:75)

Because Peter suddenly realized Jesus’ prediction of his cowardice had come true. Though Peter had earlier vowed he would never disown Jesus (v. 35), the crowing rooster brought things back into perspective with a shocking realization: He had betrayed the one he loved, just as Jesus had foretold. See the article *What can I learn from Peter’s pride?* (Lk 22:31–34; page 1636).

Since Judas confessed, was he forgiven? (27:4)

It’s obvious that Judas deeply regretted his actions. Seeing Jesus condemned, Judas was seized with remorse (v. 3). He returned his ill-gotten gains and confessed his sin. However, remorse does not necessarily equal repentance or forgiveness. Sorrow over our actions can lead us to forgiveness, but not all remorse does. Paul elaborated on this topic when he wrote, *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death* (2Co 7:10). Since his remorse led Judas to take his own life, it is likely he did not receive the inner peace that comes with forgiveness. See the article *What’s the purpose of guilt?* (2Sa 12:1–14; page 473).

Is suicide a sin? (27:5)

See the article *Is suicide a sin?* (2Sa 17:23; page 484).

Why did the priests say the money was tainted? (27:6)

It is ironic that the same money the priests took from the temple treasury to trap Jesus was now too dirty for them to put back into the treasury. Why? Perhaps the priests wanted to distance themselves from the murder they had purchased with this money. They apparently failed to see the hypocrisy of following the law by not putting blood money into the treasury but totally ignoring the law that forbids murder.

What did the title *the king of the Jews* mean to Pilate? (27:11)

The Roman government was particularly sensitive to any person or group that could undermine its power. Anyone who claimed to be a leader or a king was a potential threat. Jesus had been accused of rebelling against Rome and opposing

^a 10 See Zech. 11:12,13; Jer. 19:1-13; 32:6-9.

payment of taxes to Caesar (Lk 23:1–2). See *Why wasn't Pilate bothered by Jesus' claim to be the king of the Jews?* (Lk 23:3–4; page 1638).

LINK (27:11–26) Jesus stood before the governor

See Mark 15:2–15; Luke 23:2–3, 18–25; John 18:29–19:16.

Who was most guilty for Jesus' death? (27:24–25)

Pilate was guilty of cowardice and the unjust use of his authority. However, the high priest Caiaphas also shared guilt: He should have understood how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah. Instead, his hatred and envy caused him to condemn Jesus (Jn 11:49–50). Still, Jesus had made it clear that he would willingly lay down his life (Jn 10:14–17).

How do we share the guilt for Jesus' death? (27:25)

Because we all have sinned, we all need the salvation that comes through the sacrifice Jesus made when he gave his life on the cross. Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins. See the article *Why did Jesus have to die?* (1Pe 2:24; page 1918).

How was Jesus flogged? (27:26)

Romans flogged prisoners using a leather whip with multiple ends and sharp bits of bone or metal embedded in the ends. A flogging could leave the back raw and bleeding, sometimes exposing bones and organs. Roman floggings were so brutal that they sometimes caused death.

Was Jesus singled out for special brutality? (27:26–31)

Flogging and crucifixion were common in the Roman Empire. Death on a cross, however, was usually reserved for criminals and slaves who were not Roman citizens. Soldiers commonly mocked their powerless prisoners, but they took special delight in taunting a man alleged to be a Jewish king.

LINK (27:27–31) They ... mocked him

See Mark 15:16–20.

LINK (27:33–44) They ... crucified him

See Mark 15:22–32; Luke 23:33–43; John 19:17–24.

Why did the soldiers offer Jesus a drink of wine that was mixed with gall? (27:34)

Sometimes *gall*, a term used for a variety of bitter-tasting plant substances, was mixed with wine and offered to those on the cross to dull the pain. But Jesus rejected this crude painkiller. This drink probably is the same one mentioned in Mark 15:23, although it mentions *myrrh* instead of *gall*.

lease a prisoner chosen by the crowd.¹⁶ At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus^a Barabbas.¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”¹⁸ For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

¹⁹While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

²⁰But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

²¹“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.

“Barabbas,” they answered.

²²“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

²³“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

²⁴When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

²⁵All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

²⁶Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS

²⁷Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said.³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

³²As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

³³They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”).³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at

^a 16 Many manuscripts do not have *Jesus*; also in verse 17.

him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴²“He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” ⁴³He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

⁴⁵From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, a lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). ⁴⁷

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵²and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and^c went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

⁵⁵Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph,^d and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

⁵⁷As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

⁶²The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³“Sir,” they said,

Didn’t one criminal repent? (27:44; see Lk 23:40–42)

According to Luke, one criminal did have a change of heart. The difference between the accounts of Matthew and Luke seems to be a difference in what each writer chose to include. Matthew recorded only the comments of both criminals as they hurled insults at Jesus. Luke recorded how one criminal, after Jesus forgave his executioners, had a change of heart and asked Jesus to remember him (Lk 23:40–42).

Did God actually forsake Jesus? (27:46)

Jesus was fully God and fully man. Even during the crucifixion, his divine and human natures were never separated. Still, difficult as it is to explain, it is clear that Jesus’ intimate fellowship with God the Father was temporarily broken as he took the sin of the entire world on himself. Jesus quoted the opening words of Psalm 22, which begins with despair (v. 1) but ends with renewed trust in God (v. 31). See the article **Why did Jesus have to die?** (1Pe 2:24; page 1918).

What should we do when we feel abandoned by God? (27:46)

With the sins of the world on him, Jesus felt the agony of separation from his Father. At times, we too may feel we are alone—abandoned or rejected. When emotional stress or difficult circumstances leave us uncertain about God’s presence, we should remember God’s promise: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5). See the articles **How can I feel God’s presence again?** (Ps 10:1; page 826) and **Will God ever just give up on me?** (Joel 1:1–20; page 1394).

Why did the curtain in the temple tear in two? (27:51)

This large blue, purple and scarlet curtain (Ex 26:31–33) separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was the inner room of the temple that had earlier housed the ark, where God met with his people (Ex 30:6; Lev 16:1–2). The curtain was, in effect, the barrier that separated people from God. When God supernaturally tore the curtain from the top down, he showed dramatically that Jesus’ death had given people access to God (Heb 9:1–15; 10:19–22). See the articles **Why was the tabernacle’s curtain such a huge deal?** (Lev 16:1–2; page 176) and **Why did the curtain rip in half?** (Mk 15:38; page 1578).

Why did God bring some dead people back to life at this time? (27:52–53)

The resurrection of these holy people gave additional evidence that death is not the final victor. It also foreshadowed a time when all the faithful will be raised to life (1Co 15:20,50–57; 1Th 4:13–18). See the article **Will my actual body be raised from the dead?** (Job 19:25–27; page 786).

^a46 Some manuscripts *Eloi, Eloi* ^b46 Psalm 22:1 ^c53 Or *tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they* ^d56 Greek *Joses*, a variant of *Joseph*

LINK (27:57–61) Joseph took the body
See Mark 15:42–47, Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42.

What kind of seal would have made the tomb secure? (27:66)

The stone covering the tomb's entrance probably had a rope or cord wrapped across it. The cord was then sealed in wax or clay at each end so that no one could move the stone without breaking the seal or cutting the cord. It is possible that the seal included the official imprint of the Roman Empire. Anyone who broke the seal would have been violating imperial law.

LINK (28:1–8) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb
See Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–10; John 20:1–8.

Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead? (28:6)

See the article *How did Jesus' resurrection change anything?* (1Co 15:14–15; page 1795).

“we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

⁶⁵“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

JESUS HAS RISEN

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

BIG IDEA 11: LIFE AND DEATH

WHERE WAS JESUS FOR THOSE THREE DAYS?

MATTHEW 27:63

Scripture doesn't say where Jesus was. The Apostle's Creed, an ancient statement of faith developed by early church leaders, says Jesus “descended into hell.” But this statement is controversial. Some say the creed's use of the word *hell* simply refers to the grave—or the “place” of death. The Hebrew word for grave is *Sheol*, and that might be what the creed writers meant by hell: Jesus was simply lifeless in the grave.

Adding to the confusion is 1 Peter 3:18–19, which says Jesus was *made alive in the Spirit*. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. Some believe this means Jesus was in hell preaching to Old Testament sinners (Ac 2:27,31; Rev 1:18). Others say there can be no salvation after death (Heb 9:27) and that the passage in 1 Peter indicates Jesus was announcing his victory to fallen angels.

Here's the important thing: Jesus had to die and be totally separated from God the Father. He had to go to some place of separation from God to experience total abandonment by his heavenly Father. Why? To take our place—so we wouldn't have to be separated from God for eternity (Gal 3:13–14).

For the next article, go to page 1543

For the next article in Big Idea 11, go to page 1722

THE GUARDS' REPORT

¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"¹⁴If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Why did some disciples doubt? (28:17)

The resurrection was so astounding that some of the disciples found it hard to believe at first. It is possible that some of the disciples were seeing the risen Jesus for the first time. For more than a month, therefore, Jesus supplied his disciples with many convincing proofs that he was alive (Ac 1:3; see Ac 10:40–41). See the article *What does faith really look like?* (Heb 11:1: page 1899).

Who should go and make disciples? (28:19)

All believers. Individuals may have different roles and abilities, but all of Jesus' disciples have a part in calling others to follow Jesus. See the article *Why tell people about Jesus?* (Eze 3:16–21; page 1273).

Is the method of baptism important? (28:19)

Throughout church history, Christians have been divided over this question. The Greek word translated *baptizing* means "dipping, immersing or washing," so some insist that actual immersion into water is required. Others think the word is used symbolically (see, for example, Lk 12:50; 1Co 10:2) and emphasizes the significance of one's commitment to Jesus rather than the method. See the article *Why do Christians need to be baptized?* (Ac 19:1–5; page 1728).

When is the end of the age? (28:20)

This phrase means "until Jesus returns again." At that point, a new era will begin when believers will be with Jesus and see him in his physical form. See the article *What is known about Jesus' return?* (Rev 22:7; page 1972).

BIG IDEA 1: CHRISTIAN BASICS

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE TRINITY?

MATTHEW 28:18–20

The concept of the Trinity is one of the great mysteries of the Bible. Romans 11:34 asks this rhetorical question: *Who has known the mind of the Lord?* With our limited, finite minds, we can't possibly begin to comprehend an infinite God.

The Bible is clear that God is three in one. Matthew 28:19 says believers are to be baptized *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Those three persons are each *fully God*. And yet together they form one being: God.

One analogy that some use to try to explain the Trinity is that of an egg. It has three parts—yolk, white and shell. Each has its own characteristics and purpose, and yet all three make up an egg. Take away one of the three parts, and it's no longer an egg.

But that illustration falls short of explaining the Trinity. We can't fully define or explain the triune God. He's so awesome, so powerful and so inexplicable that we can't define him. But we can spend the rest of our lives getting to know him. After all, it's his indescribable nature that leaves us looking to him with wonder, awe and reverence. And that's one thing that is so cool about God.

For the next article, go to page 1548

For the next article in Big Idea 1, go to page 1578