1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Matthew
Theme: Old to New

Overview: In the new heaven and new earth, we will hear, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). But in Christ that future new has already invaded the current old. Students will learn how Easter brought that newness, how a paralytic and a tax collector received new leases on life, and how answered questions and pointed parables taught that newness.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

Early church tradition unanimously identifies the author as Matthew, also called Levi, a tax collector whom Jesus called to follow him and who became one of the twelve apostles (Matthew 9:9; 10:3; Mark 2:14). As a former tax collector, he was accustomed to keeping careful records, and his Gospel is carefully organized.

Audience

Matthew wrote primarily for Jewish Christians. He quotes the Old Testament frequently, often noting that events happened "to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet," and he traces Jesus' genealogy back to David and Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17). Yet his Gospel also reaches out to the nations, from the Magi to the Great Commission.

Date

Most scholars date Matthew's Gospel between AD 50 and 70, before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, which Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:1-2).

Setting

The lessons in this study move from Jesus' Galilean ministry in Capernaum, his "own town," where he healed a paralyzed man and called Matthew from his tax booth (Matthew 9:1-17), to his final journey up to Jerusalem (20:17-28), his debates with the religious leaders in the temple courts during the last week before the cross (22:15-33), and the empty tomb and the mountain in Galilee where the risen Lord commissioned his disciples (28:1-20).

Theme

In Jesus, God's promised new age has broken into the old. Jesus brings new wine that cannot be poured into old wineskins (Matthew 9:17). The resurrection gives his followers a new purpose, his forgiveness offers a new way forward, his teaching shapes a new state of mind, and his cross calls us to a new way of life—one of humble service, for "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28).

Why Study Matthew?

Matthew shows us how the risen Christ makes all things new. This study calls believers to let the resurrection lead them to make disciples, to find forgiveness through faith in Jesus, to let Christ mold how they view life and what they value, and to follow Jesus into a new way of living marked by sacrificial service.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

WEEK 2: Matthew 9:1-17

WEEK 3: Matthew 22:15-33

WEEK 4: Matthew 20:17-28

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Let the resurrection of Jesus lead you to make disciples.**

STUDY: Matthew

THEME: Old to New

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 1:8; Romans 6:3-4; 15:17-21

A NEW PURPOSE FOR LIFE

BY MARK SCOTT

Disciples are not born (though they are born again), but they are made—by Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the "helping spirit" (thank you, Carl Ketcherside) in assisting Jesus in making more disciples; obeying Jesus' commission gets the job done. But the reality of Easter is the main motivation to help Jesus make disciples. Seth Wilson (founding academic dean of Ozark Christian College) said, "The resurrection is not a matter of faith; it is a record of fact." Faith (or the lack thereof) does not change the reality of resurrection. Easter changed Jesus' stay in Joseph's tomb; it also gave the disciples a new purpose in living.

The Impetus of This New Purpose

Matthew 28:1-10

Pilate had told the guards to make the tomb "as secure as you can" (Matthew 27:65). But securing that particular tomb would be as effective as a spiderweb in stopping a steaming locomotive. Following the Passover Sabbath, at dawn (Luke 24:1 says—in a number of Bible versions—it was "early dawn," and John 20:1 says it was "still dark"), Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb (Mark 16:1 mentions Mary the mother of James and Salome, and Luke 24:10 mentions Joanna and "other women," as well).

Sometime in those predawn hours, a *violent earthquake* took place (this is the second earthquake mentioned by Matthew—the other was in 27:51). This was due to the direct power of heaven. An angel came and moved the stone in front of the tomb entrance. We are told four things about this angel: he sat on the stone, his appearance was brilliant (like lightning and white in color), he inspired fear, and he gave heaven's sermon.

The content of the angel's message was, in essence, Easter's song. First was the pastoral note—"Do not be afraid." Angels habitually say that. In fact, Jesus repeated it when he greeted the women (v. 10). Easter is scary. If he is alive, then we will deal with him someday. Second was the factual note—"You are looking for Jesus." But "he is not here; he has risen." Third was the apologetic note—"Come and see." God does not expect us to kiss our brains goodbye. He invites us to apply our minds to see if these eyewitnesses are credible. Finally was the missionary note—"Go and tell." Jesus also repeated this (v. 10).

The women became the first evangelists. The conflicting emotions of *fear* and *joy* propelled them to *hurry* and *run* to the disciples to tell them of the angel's message. The good news of Easter will cause one to run. En route, the women met Jesus *suddenly*. Jesus greeted them very matter-of-factly by saying, "Greetings." While desiring to hold on to him and worship him, Jesus redirected their zeal for mission. The women were to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. This northern area of Israel was the headquarters for much of Jesus' ministry. From a mountain in Galilee Jesus ultimately gave his final marching orders to the disciples.

The Commission of This New Purpose

Matthew 28:16-20

The soldiers, who "became like dead men" (Matthew 28:4)—in a cemetery no less—got bought off (Matthew 28:11-15). Matthew is the only Gospel that tells this part of the story. Disciple-making is the third major theme of Matthew's Gospel (the first being Jesus' kingship—"Son of David"—and the second being that of his kingdom—"Son of Abraham"). This passage is called the Great Commission because it is all-inclusive. It deals with *all* authority, *all* nations, *all* teachings of Jesus, and the *all*-encompassing presence of Jesus. Every Gospel, as well as Acts, has a commission statement (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:48-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:6-8).

Matthew's commission statement is filled with several important details. First the disciples were obedient to the angel's message—they went to a mountain in Galilee to meet up with Jesus. When they saw him, they *worshiped* him. This would be expected. But *some doubted*. That seems most odd until we realize that the word for *doubt* means "hesitate." Maybe they were still just awestruck.

The resurrection had enlarged Jesus' authority in heaven and earth (cf. John 5:22-23). While the *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching* all are participles, they share the force of a command to *make disciples*. So, none of the steps are optional. The going matters for geography, the nations matter for ethnicity, the baptizing matters for the Trinity, and the teaching matters for biblical literacy. Obeying this commission also contained a promise—namely, Jesus' presence. He lives out one of his names, Immanuel (Matthew 1:23), through the Holy Spirit (John 14:17). Our new purpose is joined to a new presence.

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WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

BY DAVID FAUST

Jane has lived through two pandemics. She was born in 1918, the year World War I ended and the great flu epidemic swept across the globe. Now approaching the age of 103, she is cheerful and content. She looks forward to spending eternity with the Lord, and jokingly exclaims, "I don't know why the Lord still has me here!" When all is said and done, Jane's soul is at peace because she trusts in the Lord.

After retiring from a long, respected career as the principal of a large elementary school, Mark served with me on the administrative staff of a Christian college. He was a leader in his church and a beloved father and grandfather. Mark seemed in good health when we met for a late-afternoon conversation. All of us who knew him were shocked when he died suddenly the next morning. After returning from the hospital that day, I sat at Mark's desk. Sticky Post-it notes listed the tasks he planned to fulfill that week. No one had realized his time on earth was almost over, but we took comfort in the assurance that when all was said and done, Mark was ready to be with the Lord.

Toward the Dawn

In the New Testament, James compares our lives to "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). No one ever impacted the world more than Jesus of Nazareth, yet his physical life on earth was short, spanning only 33 years. Life's brevity would be enormously depressing if not for the promise of resurrection and eternity to come.

At the Cairo Museum in Egypt, I viewed the contents of King Tut's tomb. The burial chamber of King Tutankhamen contained a treasure trove of dazzling jewelry, statues, weapons, clothing—even a chariot. Tut's mummified body was well-preserved in his solid gold coffin, yet all the glittering jewels and gold couldn't obscure the stark reality that the king himself was dead and gone.

Not so with King Jesus. His empty tomb contained treasures of a different kind—the glory of God, not the glitter of gold. Grieving visitors came to Jesus' tomb in the early morning; one translation says it was "toward the dawn" (Matthew 28:1, *English Standard Version*). When we belong to Christ, that's our vantage point. No matter how dark things get, we're moving toward the dawn.

Jesus spoke often about his own resurrection, but its full impact didn't dawn on the disciples until after it happened. He predicted it would take three days to rebuild the temple of his body (John 2:21), compared his resurrection to Jonah's startling return after a three-day burial at sea (Matthew 12:38-40; 16:1-4), and stated plainly that he would rise again on the third day (Luke 9:22). The visitors to Jesus' tomb found his graveclothes neatly arranged the way a carpenter would fold up his dustcloth after completing a project (John 20:5-7). Afterward he provided "many convincing proofs that he was alive" (Acts 1:3).

Death wins skirmishes every day, but in the end, the battle belongs to the Lord. We don't know whether our time on earth will end slowly or abruptly. But when all is said and done, on the day we die, nothing will matter more than what Jesus said and did.

Personal Challenge:

Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life," and he made it personal by asking her, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). What is your response to his question? Reflect on how Jesus' resurrection impacts your daily life and your view of the long-term future.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Last week we were encouraged to talk to someone about living God's way rather than the world's way. How did that go?

2. What challenge did you face last week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to retell (not interpret) the story from the passage in 60 seconds or less.

3. What do you notice in this passage that perhaps you've never really noticed before?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - Look at the sensory details, descriptive adjectives and verbs, and similes used in this passage. How do these elements help you picture the events more clearly?
   - What emotions do different people display throughout this account?
   - Take a few minutes to look at repeated words throughout the passage: *afraid*, *go*, *tell*, *worshiped*. What does this repetition reveal to you?
   - Matthew used words like *quickly*, *hurried*, *ran*, and *suddenly*. Why did Jesus' followers have (or need) a sense of urgency in the midst of these circumstances?
   - What role does worship have in these events?
   - How was Jesus' presence and his power involved in providing his people with their new purpose?

5. What do you learn about God from this passage?

6. What do you learn about people?

7. Note the various instances of Jesus' followers obeying directives throughout this passage (vv. 5-8, 10-11a, 16, 20). Why is obedience and not mere knowledge about Jesus' mission so critical?

8. All of us who follow Jesus—that is, all of us who believe in his death, burial, and resurrection and who have been "buried with him in baptism into death, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God"—have been given a new life (Colossians 2:12). This new life is one of purpose—God's purpose. As you go into the world this week, how will you carry out your purpose in making disciples?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What challenges will you face this week as you go?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Matthew 9:1-17** as we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew with the theme, "Old to New." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Like the paralyzed man and Matthew, find the new way to forgiveness through faith in Jesus.**

STUDY: Matthew

THEME: Old to New

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 9:1-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Leviticus 4:27-35; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Mark 1:4-15

A NEW WAY FORWARD

BY MARK SCOTT

Easter not only gives a new purpose (last week's lesson), but it also charts a course for a new way forward—especially with regard to forgiveness of sins. Matthew clustered together several stories of miracles in Matthew 8–9 (three sets of three miracles each). But interrupting those miracle stories are two sections dealing with discipleship. The interruption in Matthew 8 concerned the "would-be" followers (8:18-22). They only thought they could pay the price of discipleship. The interruption in Matthew 9 concerned the calling of the writer himself (Matthew/Levi) and the subsequent party he threw for Jesus and the ensuing controversy that resulted from that party.

New Freedom

Matthew 9:1-8

During the early days of his Galilean ministry, Jesus delivered his famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Sometime after that, he came to his *own town* (Capernaum). Jesus was preaching the Word to a packed house (Mark 2:2) when some men (four to be exact) brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Matthew made no mention of the roof demolition to get their friend to Jesus. For Matthew, the more important thing was the friends' faith in Jesus and the new freedom the paralyzed man could experience.

Jesus spoke words of encouragement and freedom to this man. What could be better than hearing, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (sent away)? While the man's companions no doubt wanted healing for their friend, there is no record of their disappointment about this forgiveness declaration. But the teachers of the law had different thoughts. They were convinced Jesus had *blasphemed*. Jesus saw through their evil thoughts.

To prove he had authority to forgive sins, Jesus performed a miracle on this man's paralyzed body. One of the many purposes of Jesus' miracles was to prove he was God's Son, and, as such, had authority to forgive sins. The man went home in his new freedom of body and soul, and the crowd could do nothing but be amazed and praise God.

New Occupation

Matthew 9:9-13

A local customs official sat near Capernaum collecting taxes for the Roman government. Perhaps he had even taxed the four fishermen who were now following Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22). Jesus came up to his tax booth and said, "Follow me." Matthew ("gift of Yahweh") left the tax booth (remembering to take his pen) and followed Jesus. Matthew found a new occupation.

But he did more than follow Jesus. Matthew threw a party for Jesus (Luke 5:29 says it was a "mega" feast). Of course, the only people who would be invited (or agree to come) to Matthew's party were fellow tax collectors and sinners. If Jesus had been guilty of blasphemy before, now he was guilty by association. Jesus was too intimate with society's ragamuffins.

Jesus gave a threefold defense to such criticism. First, he quoted a common proverb of the day: healthy people do not go to the doctor. Two things lie underneath his sarcastic humor—by implication Jesus is the doctor and the presumption of the scribes is that they are well. Second, he quoted a very significant prophetic text (Hosea 6:6—quoted also in Matthew 12:7). Since Matthew's account of his call is the only one to mention this passage, it probably meant he understood his call to this new occupation as nothing other than the overflow of the mercy (*chesed*) of God. Finally, Jesus tied the call of Matthew to his mission. He did not come to call the presumptuous righteous but sinners.

New Forms

Matthew 9:14-17

We do not know when John the Baptist's disciples came and asked Jesus this question, but it makes perfect sense in this context. It concerned the forms that religious practices take. Spiritual disciplines demand things like fasting. Jesus seemed to be into feasting. All religious practices will assume some form. But if those forms are not somewhat fluid, they will turn into rigid legalism.

Jesus' defense took the form of three parables (the bridegroom, the patch, and the wineskin). All three metaphors have eschatological significance (Revelation 21:9-10; 7:14; 19:6-10; Matthew 26:29). A wedding is hardly a place to fast; it is a time to feast. The groom (Jesus) will be *taken away* (the words indicate a violent taking—a reference to the arrest in Gethsemane?). A new patch on an old garment does not work, and an old wineskin (that has already been stretched because of fermentation) cannot be used a second time or it will burst. The new way forward by Jesus had continuity with past forms but would need new forms to thrive.

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THE DINNER PARTY

BY DAVID FAUST

It's dinnertime in Capernaum. During the day, the streets buzzed with merchants hawking their wares and caravans carrying goods from faraway lands. But the hot sun yielded to the cool air of evening. Children's voices echo through the streets as they finish playing and head home. Travelers settle into inns for the night. After cleaning and mending their nets, fishermen head to the docks and board their boats to spend the night fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

At Matthew's house a dinner party is underway. The downside of being a tax collector? Matthew's neighbors hate him. The upside? Because of his sizeable earnings, he owns a large house with a spacious courtyard, and on this particular evening guests are arriving for a festive banquet. The aroma of honey, fresh-baked bread, and roasted meat fills the air while trays of grapes, cheese, olives, and dates are passed around. A lot of food and drink will be needed because the word is out that the popular young rabbi from Nazareth will attend the party tonight.

Matthew's business associates—other wealthy tax collectors—show up dressed in fine clothes. One by one several prostitutes arrive as well, their once-alluring faces now shadowed by hardness and hurt.

The dinner companions come from different economic levels, but they share one thing in common: They're all social outcasts. As the guests walk toward Matthew's house, they try not to notice their neighbors' hateful glares, and they ignore the disapproving stares of the Pharisees who stand on Capernaum's street corners wearing long robes and praying long prayers. For this evening, at least, Matthew's house is a safe place to gather. Spirited conversation and laughter fill the air as dinner begins and Jesus and his disciples mingle with the crowd.

Not everyone is smiling, though. Scowling Pharisees pull Jesus' disciples aside and ask a question that sounds like an accusation. They demand to know, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Undaunted, Jesus points out, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:10-13).

Three Kinds of People

Where do you see yourself in this story? Would you have enjoyed mingling with the crowd at Matthew's dinner party? Would you have made some new friends? Would you have cringed and walked to the other side of the room when certain individuals walked in? Does any part of you sympathize with the Pharisees and wonder, "Is it really wise to hang around with a crowd like this?"

There are three kinds of people in the world.

The stubborn realize their souls are sick, but they decide to go it alone and suffer in silence rather than seek and accept the Lord's help.

The smug, like the self-righteous Pharisees, deny their spiritual weaknesses. They see no need for healing because they consider themselves healthy—at least in comparison with others. Instead of risking discomfort and swallowing their pride, they stand outside, criticizing the guests at the party.

The searching, like the tax collectors and sinners who gathered at Matthew's house, are willing to engage in the conversation and welcome the Great Physician's help.

Which kind of person are you?

Personal Challenge:

Do you socialize mainly with other believers, or are you cultivating relationships with non-Christians whose worldviews and lifestyles differ from your own? This week, share lunch or coffee with a neighbor or coworker outside your circle of church friends.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How were you able to live out your purpose in making disciples last week?

2. What was the biggest challenge you faced over the past week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Matthew 9:1-17** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to retell the story from this passage.

3. In each of the three sections of this Bible passage (vv. 1-8, 9-13, 14-17), what contrasts do you see between the different groups of people?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - What do you notice about how various people responded to Jesus?
   - What do you learn about Jesus' authority?
   - What does this passage demonstrate about who Jesus values?
   - What does this passage demonstrate about what God values most?
   - What do you learn about Jesus' purpose and mission?
   - What is the difference between being devoted to Jesus and being devoted to religious forms and practices?
   - How might legalistic attitudes (and a focus on our own self-righteousness) get in the way of loving God and carrying out his mission?

5. What do you learn about God from this passage?

6. What do you learn about yourself?

7. Who are the obedient people in each section of this passage and who are the disobedient?
   - What do you learn about living in obedience to Jesus?

8. A challenge for some of us is to cultivate relationships with non-Christians whose worldviews and lifestyles differ from our own rather than socializing only with other believers. This week, with whom from outside your circle of church friends will you spend some time, perhaps over lunch or coffee?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What challenge do you anticipate this week as you move forward in obedience to Christ?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Matthew 22:15-33**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Let Christ mold how you view life and what you value.**

STUDY: Matthew

THEME: Old to New

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 22:15-33

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:1-3; Matthew 6:19-33; Jeremiah 31:34

A NEW STATE OF MIND

BY MARK SCOTT

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "But in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes" (in his letter to Jean-Baptiste LeRoy, 1789). Jesus was asked questions about taxes and death by the Pharisees and Sadducees on Tuesday during his final week. We know more about this particular day in Christ's life than any other day. Three events preceded these questions (the triumphal entry, the cursing of the fig tree, and the cleansing of the temple).

These events prompted the religious leaders to ask, "By what authority are you doing these things?" (Matthew 21:23). Jesus eventually answered their question with three parables (Matthew 21:28–22:14). These parables were followed by three questions—one political, one doctrinal, and one hermeneutical (Matthew 22:15-40). In answering their questions about death and taxes, Jesus drew a bead on a new state of mind about those issues.

A Political Question Underlining Value

Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees' motives were clear. They tried to *trap him in his words*. Disciples of the Pharisees teamed up with the *Herodians* (strange bedfellows) to pose a political question to Jesus. It is unclear if their initial compliment was genuine or whether it was smoke and mirrors. Either way, their first assertions were true. Jesus was a man of integrity, taught the way of God, was not swayed by others, and paid no attention to who people were (literally, "did not regard the face of man").

For a Jew, the imperial tax question was loaded. The Jews obviously were being oppressed by Roman occupation. If Jesus sided with Caesar, he would pit himself against the Jews. If he sided with the Jews, he would look like a political rebel—a charge they would later trump up with success (Luke 23:2). Jesus saw through their ploy; he knew their evil intent. He called them out—"Hypocrites" (play actors)—and drew attention to their deceitful motives. But he answered them directly.

Jesus called for a coin. By producing a *denarius*, the Pharisees indicated they had accepted Roman rule to some extent. More than one-third of their income went to pay taxes. But that fact was not as offensive as the coin itself; it read, "Tiberius Caesar, son of divine Augustus" on one side, and "The most high priest" on the other (Mark Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ*, p. 517). Jesus drew attention to both the *image* and the *inscription*. They acknowledged that Caesar's image was on the coin.

Jesus' answer was "evasive, brilliant, and condemning" (Moore, p. 517). Give to Caesar and give to God. Jesus was not saying that these two competing governments were equal. In fact, John Ortberg (in *Who Is This Man?*) suggested that Jesus actually called for a limited government. But Christians pay taxes (normally on April 15) because citizens of the kingdom of God are the best citizens of the kingdom of men (Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:17).

A Doctrinal Question Underlining Life

Matthew 22:23-33

Having seen Jesus shut down the Pharisees, that same day the Sadducees stepped up to the plate. Even though they did not believe in the concept of resurrection (or angels or spirits—Acts 23:8), they posed a doctrinal question to Jesus. While the Pharisees' question championed Caesar, the Sadducees' question championed Moses. (The Sadducees, of course, accepted the books of Moses as authentic Scripture.)

Their question was clearly hypothetical. While having some basis in Deuteronomy 25:5 (which addressed raising up offspring for a deceased brother in the same household), their question was quite bizarre. A man died childless. The widow married through the family seven (literal or symbolic?) times. In the resurrection whose wife will she be?

Jesus called them out, offered a bit of insight into the resurrected life, and nailed their hide to the wall by using the texts they did accept as Scripture to prove them wrong. Their question showed their ignorance of Scripture and their lack of faith in the power of God. Resurrected life will be life lived at other levels. Marriage and intimacy will not be necessary in Heaven.

Our knowledge of Heaven is limited to what the Bible says. We should be careful about assuming this text teaches that husbands and wives will not know each other in Heaven. Finally, Jesus asserted that Heaven is filled with living people (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)—not dead people.

The crowd was *amazed* (marveled) at Jesus' answer to the Pharisees, and they were *astonished* at his answer to the Sadducees. Taxes and the future can cause us anxiety. But they can also display what we value and how we view life.

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BELIEVERS, NOT LUNATICS

BY DAVID FAUST

Is there water on the moon? Until recently the scientific answer was no. You would be crazy to believe there is water on the moon, right? When the first Apollo astronauts visited the earth's orbiting neighbor in 1969, they found it completely dry. But according to findings reported by NASA in October 2020, water may be distributed across the lunar surface, and not only in the moon's cold, shadowy places, but in areas lit by the sun. The discovery was made by NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA)—a modified Boeing 747 with a large telescope that provides enhanced views of outer space.

"We had indications that H2O—the familiar water we know—might be present on the sunlit side of the moon," said Paul Hertz, an astrophysicist at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. "Now we know it is there. This discovery challenges our understanding of the lunar surface and raises intriguing questions about resources relevant for deep space exploration."

To be clear, no one expects to splash around in freshwater lakes on the moon's surface. The Sahara Desert has 100 times more water than the amount detected in the lunar soil. But the presence of any lunar water is important as NASA considers sending explorers back to the moon later this decade.

Waters Above the Skies

Centuries before Christ, an inspired worshipper of God wrote, "Praise him, sun and moon; . . . Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies" (Psalm 148:3-4). What are these "waters above the skies"? This may simply be a poetic way of describing clouds that produce rain, but usually we think of clouds in the skies, not "above the skies." One commentator speculates that this verse refers to an ancient belief that there was a lofty ocean in the sky where planets floated like ships in the sea, but the biblical authors didn't have to borrow from unscientific pagan myths to make their points. To me, the discovery of lunar water fits naturally with the psalmist's mention of "waters above the skies."

Unfortunately, there are plenty of skeptics who consider it irrational to believe the Bible. TV personality Bill Maher scoffs, "I think religion is a neurological disorder." Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist who authored *The God Delusion*, considers faith in God "an insult to human dignity" that turns "untested belief into unshakable truth."

In Jesus' day, the powerful ruling class known as the Sadducees rejected the supernatural and considered resurrection impossible (Acts 23:8). Jesus told them, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). The Sadducees' two foundational errors—rejecting Scripture and denying God's power—remain with us today wherever skepticism leads to "a form of godliness" but denies its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

You're not a lunatic if you believe in God and accept the truth of the Bible. These are reasonable positions. I still have lots of questions, but after years of examination I find the evidence for faith far more compelling than the case for unbelief. I'm not shocked when science corroborates a biblical truth. The discovery of water on the moon provides another reason to "praise the name of the Lord," for "his splendor is above the earth and the heavens" (Psalm 148:13).

Personal Challenge:

Read a book or an article that presents the reasonable evidence supporting Christian faith. Suggestions: *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* by Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, or *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you live out your purpose of making disciples last week?

2. What was the biggest challenge you faced over the past week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Matthew 22:15-33** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to retell the story from this passage.

3. In both sections of this passage (vv. 15-22 and 23-33), what contrasts do you see between trickery and truth, between folly and wisdom?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - Make a list with two columns contrasting the character traits of Jesus with those of his opponents. What do you learn as you compare these two lists?
   - What motives do you see in those who are trying to scheme against Jesus?
   - What motives do you see in Jesus?
   - John 1:14 describes Jesus as being "full of grace and truth." How do you see that description played out in Jesus' responses?
   - How would you characterize people's reactions to Jesus' responses to his opponents?

5. What do you learn about God from this passage?

6. What do you learn about yourself?

7. In what specific way will you obey Jesus' maxim to "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"? (Hint: this may include much more than money.)

8. It's vital for us as Christ followers to know the Scriptures and the power of God. How can these two essentials help you this week as you share the Good News with neighbors, co-workers, or friends?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What new challenge or opportunity do you anticipate this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Matthew 20:17-28**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Follow Jesus into a new way of living.**

STUDY: Matthew

THEME: Old to New

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 20:17-28

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Daniel 6:4; Acts 6:1-7; 9:36-42; Romans 12:3-8

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

BY MARK SCOTT

Clarence Jordan, the author of the *Cotton Patch Translation*, was touring a beautiful church building. His guide was boasting about the building, giving special emphasis to the cost of things. The guide told Jordan the cross on top of the church steeple cost $10,000. Jordan responded, "You got gypped. There was a time when Christians could get those for free." Ouch! For believers, the cross is not only the means of salvation but also at the heart of the Christian experience. Christians are clearly called to follow the Lord in the cruciform life. Today's lesson—the third clear prediction of the cross followed by the request of James and John for chief seats—underlines this.

The New Way of Life Is Death

Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus previously made veiled comments about his death (John 2:19; 3:14; Matthew 9:15; 10:38-39; 12:39-40). But with this third comment (see Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23 for the previous ones), Jesus "clearly" predicted his death. This prediction followed the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in which all workers received the same pay even though they had worked varying lengths of time during the day. The kingdom of heaven operates totally on grace, but grace is shaped like a cross.

While Luke inserted a significant "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51–19:28) at this point in his biography of Christ, from Matthew's point of view, Jesus was already *going up to Jerusalem*. Within a few verses Jesus was riding a donkey into Jerusalem for the triumphal entry. Maybe the third time was the charm. Maybe the apostles would finally understand. With each clear prediction, Jesus' specificity of details became clearer. The new elements in this last clear prediction were that Gentiles would be involved. (In fact, three of Jesus' six trials ultimately were before Gentiles.) In addition to that, mocking and flogging would precede the actual crucifixion. This would all happen to the *Son of Man* (Jesus' favorite self-designation, occurring 81 times in the Gospels). Of course, it would seem that the *be raised to life* part went right over the disciples' heads. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was correct, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die" (*The Cost of Discipleship*; John 15:18; Galatians 2:20). The new way to life is death.

The New Way to Life Is Service

Matthew 20:20-28

Once death to self has taken place, disciples are liberated to serve without qualification. The immediate literary context to this request by James and John (and their mother) goes back to Matthew 19:28. Jesus watched the rich young ruler—who was possessed by his possessions—walk away sorrowfully. Jesus then taught how difficult it was for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Peter reminded Jesus that the disciples had left everything to follow him and wondered what they would get out of it. Jesus promised the apostles they would sit on 12 thrones judging Israel. Maybe that was all James and John and Salome (their mother) heard. Perhaps they did not even hear the parable about grace and the first being last (Matthew 20:1-16). Salome desired the seats of honor for her boys and sweetened the request with her posture (*kneeling down*). Keep in mind that where one sat in the ancient world (especially at banquets) really mattered. The request sounds rash to us, but to a culture built on shame and honor, it was the way to climb the ladder of social respectability.

Jesus did not rebuke James and John for their enthusiastic spiritual ambition, but he did redirect it. He asked if they could *drink his cup*. To drink the cup in this sense is to share in the fate of the person drinking it. Jesus talked about and prayed about his death in terms of drinking a cup (Matthew 26:27, 39). The two brothers seemed confident they could, though we do not know the inflection of their voices when they said, "We can." Jesus promised that they would drink his cup—if they only knew (Acts 12:2; Revelation 1:9)—and reminded them that God the Father takes care of the seating chart.

While the other ten were *indignant* (the word implies they voiced their anger), Jesus taught about servanthood. The apostles needed only to look to Rome for a different model of leadership. Transactional leadership was evident everywhere. To that Jesus said, "Not so with you." Transformational leadership changes the person one is leading by serving them. In Greek the words end with the same sound—if you want to be *megas* you must be *diakonos*, and if you want to be *protos* you must be *doulos*. The new way of life is that of lowly service and *ransom* (the word for the purchase of a slave). There is something wonderfully salvific when we serve.

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GIVING BACK TO OUR GRACIOUS GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

When I was a teenager, I heard someone say, "What you are is God's gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God." I wrote that quote on a piece of paper, stuck it in my wallet, and carried it around with me for years.

Life is a gift. David said his body was "fearfully and wonderfully made"—knit together in his mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16). In light of modern science, this is a striking illustration because DNA filaments are literally woven together in a spiral shape. Life isn't an accident of evolution. It's a profound mystery designed and engineered by the living God. Every human life bears the stamp of God's image and holds immeasurable value.

That's why it's stunning when Jesus talks about laying life down. Since life is God's gift, why would anyone choose to give it up? Jesus said he "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). In this verse, the Greek word translated "life" is *psyche*, which means soul, identity, or personality. At the cross Jesus sacrificed himself physiologically and psychologically—body and spirit—to rescue us from sin.

God's salvation plan begins and ends with grace.

- He graciously gave us life when he created us.
- We forfeited the gift of life by rebelling against him.
- Through Christ's death and resurrection, God made a way to restore us to life again.
- His grace motivates us to serve him in love.

How Are You Spending Your Life?

We all lay down our lives for one thing or another. Either we intentionally invest time, money, and effort on things we consider important, or we drift along with the tide. It's sad when lives are consumed by self-indulgence, like the prodigal son who "squandered his wealth in wild living" (Luke 15:13). It's equally sad when career successes, material possessions, or religious accomplishments lead to unhealthy pride and self-righteousness. Remember the prodigal's angry brother? He complained bitterly that his hard work wasn't properly recognized and rewarded (Luke 15:29). Unable to appreciate his father's grace, he served out of grudging obedience rather than love.

Ironically, we don't find personal fulfillment by making personal fulfillment our primary goal. Jesus pointed out the paradox: Life isn't meant to be spent on ourselves, but to be invested in Christ and the gospel (Mark 8:35), prioritizing God's kingdom above our own self-interests.

At 50 years old, the founder of the Navigators ministry, Dawson Trotman, was at a camp in upstate New York. One afternoon he was riding in a boat with campers on board when they hit some choppy water. Dawson and a female camper fell off the boat. To keep the girl from drowning, Dawson held her above the water and lifted her to safety, but he drowned in the process. At the funeral, Billy Graham described this act of heroism by saying Dawson "died the same way he lived—holding others up."

Jim Elliot died as a missionary martyr, but he insisted, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." In the hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," the songwriter Isaac Watts summed it up well: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!"

Personal Challenge:

Read Romans 12:1-2. Make a commitment (or renew your commitment) to view your life as a living sacrifice to God. In prayer, offer your body and spirit to the Lord as an act of worship and consecration.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you live out your purpose of making disciples last week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced over the past week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Matthew 20:17-28** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to retell the story in their own words.

3. How does this passage encourage you to live as a Christ follower?
4. Let's dig deeper:
   - What expectations did Jesus' disciples have?
   - What does this passage demonstrate about human desires?
   - What types of attitudes do you see in the various apostles?
   - How would negative (or unfavorable) attitudes of Jesus' followers impact his mission for them?
   - What values does this passage teach about Christian leadership (as opposed to worldly leadership)?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. How will you obey Jesus by living according to his example? (To dive deeper, read Philippians 2:1-8 aloud and continue discussing.)
8. Whom and how will you serve this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge do you anticipate this week as you serve others?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.