



KINGDOM PURSUIT

Part Two

Forty Daily Devotions
from the Book of Matthew 16-28
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

There are many things I admire about Matthew. One of the most admired things about him is that he was committed to introducing people to Jesus before he was ever called to be an apostle. Luke's Gospel records that Matthew (Levi) gave a banquet for Jesus in his home after his conversion for the purpose of introducing Jesus to his friends, family, and associates. This was prior to his being asked to be numbered among the 12 apostles. It is important to see that Christ selected his apostles from those who were already serving him. We have learned that the best way to get something done is to give it to a busy person! Matthew was a man who was already busy spreading the gospel and that made him a likely candidate for expanded opportunities.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	Matthew 16:5-17	10/20/23
2	Matthew 16:18-27	10/21/23
3	Matthew 16:28 – 17:13	10/22/23
4	Matthew 17:14-27	10/23/23
5	Matthew 18:1-14	10/24/23
6	Matthew 18:15-22	10/25/23
7	Matthew 18:23-35	10/26/23
8	Matthew 19:1-12	10/27/23
9	Matthew 19:13-26	10/28/23
10	Matthew 19:27-20:8	10/29/23
11	Matthew 20:9-19	10/30/23
12	Matthew 20:20-34	10/31/23
13	Matthew 21:1-11	11/01/23
14	Matthew 21:12-22	11/02/23
15	Matthew 21:23-32	11/03/23
16	Matthew 21:33-46	11/04/23
17	Matthew 22:1-14	11/05/23
18	Matthew 22:15-28	11/06/23
19	Matthew 22:29-40	11/07/23
20	Matthew 22:41-23:11	11/08/23

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	Matthew 23:12-22	11/09/23
22	Matthew 23:23-39	11/10/23
23	Matthew 24:1-14	11/11/23
24	Matthew 24:15-28	11/12/23
25	Matthew 24:29-42	11/13/23
26	Matthew 24:43 – 25:5	11/14/23
27	Matthew 25:6-19	11/15/23
28	Matthew 25:20-36	11/16/23
29	Matthew 25:37-46	11/17/23
30	Matthew 26:1-13	11/18/23
31	Matthew 26:14-25	11/19/23
32	Matthew 26:26-43	11/20/23
33	Matthew 26:44-56	11/21/23
34	Matthew 26:57-72	11/22/23
35	Matthew 26:73 – 27:10	11/23/23
36	Matthew 27:11-26	11/24/23
37	Matthew 27:27-44	11/25/23
38	Matthew 27:45-61	11/26/23
39	Matthew 27:62-28:8	11/27/23
40	Matthew 28:9-20	11/28/23

Day 1: Matthew 16:5-17

“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (Matthew 16:16)

When Jesus warned the disciples to be on guard against the teachings of the religious leaders, the disciples huddled up, put their heads together, and discussed among themselves exactly what the Lord meant by that command. Since yeast had something to do with bread, they concluded that He must be asking the question because they had not remembered to bring bread with them on this particular journey. When Jesus perceived their lack of understanding, He asked them why they would think He was worried about having enough bread on hand. He asked them if they remembered that He just fed over 5,000 men and their families with just five loaves of bread and then over 4,000 men, along with their families as well, with only seven loaves. Then He put the disciples to a test by asking them to recall how many baskets of leftovers they took up after those two meals. The Lord, who could feed so many with so little, was not asking them to be concerned over physical things like daily bread. He was asking them to process what they had seen and heard and come to some conclusions about who He really was. If they listened to the people, they might have many different opinions. If they listened to God, they would come to the conclusion that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

Prayer Emphasis: Who do *you* say that He is? Take some time to **recall** some of the wonderful things Jesus has done for you and **thank Him** for those things. If possible, **share** a testimony with someone today about what God has done or is now doing in your life.

Day 2: Matthew 16:18-27

“Then Jesus said unto His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’” (Matthew 16:24)

If these moments that we read about today were describing a modern-day worship service, then this part of the order of service would come under the heading, “Announcements.” Think about the things Jesus announced to His disciples, and ultimately to us, in these words. He announced His *purpose*: “I will build my church” (v. 18). Continuing, He also announced His *provision*: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19). By this He meant that His kingdom would not be built on or by earthly things and that He would supply their every need as they pursued the building of a spiritual kingdom for Him. In these same statements Jesus also announced the *price* for the building of the church: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (v. 24). Finally, He announced the *payment* for the workers: He stated, “The Son of Man...will reward each man according to his works” (v. 27). No follower of Christ should ever think that following Jesus will not *cost* them something. Discipleship is a call to sacrifice. This is far from what many people imagine when they set out to follow Jesus today. Today, discipleship has been limited to only that which is desirable and easily attainable. But, at the same time, no follower of Christ should ever think that following Jesus will not *earn* them something. You could replace the word “each” in verse 27 with your own name and not be doing the Word of God a bit of injustice!

Prayer Emphasis: Ask yourself some difficult questions today: “What has *my* walk with Christ cost *me*?” “What have I ever denied myself so I could put Him and His will first in my life?” “What *could* I do for the Lord today if only I *would* do it?” **Determine** the price that you are willing to pay to be His follower and then **compare** it to the price He paid to be your Savior.

Day 3: Matthew 16:28 – 17:13

“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28)

I am sure that the men who walked with Jesus at the time He spoke the words recorded in Matthew 16:28 did not understand them any better than many followers do today. I firmly believe that Jesus was referring to His transfiguration that was to soon follow when He said that some who were standing there with Him that day would not die until they saw the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom. Some think these words were a reference to the second coming of Christ. But obviously, that could not have been what He was saying since none of the men that stood listening to Jesus on that day are still living. Some conclude that He was speaking of John since one disciple would see Jesus as He was revealed to him in the Revelation while exiled on Patmos. I personally believe that Jesus was referring to Peter, James, and John and the things He was soon going to allow them to see on the Mount of Transfiguration. After seeing Jesus transformed before their very eyes, Peter “said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here’” (17:4). It is obvious that Peter did not desire to leave that “good” place – that precious moment – because he volunteered to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. As we have come to this place in our **Kingdom Pursuit**, let me take a moment to say, “It is good for us to be here!” It is good for us to put aside the things of this world and pursue the things of God’s Kingdom. I pray that we, like Peter, are so blessed by our time with God and His Word that we do not want to leave it!

Prayer Emphasis: Take a few minutes today and **evaluate** what these past days have meant to you and your family. **Share** your thoughts with another person who is also on the journey today. **Encourage** someone to remain faithful to the reading of God’s word.

Day 4: Matthew 17:14-27

“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely...he often falls into the fire and often into the water...I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.” (Matthew 17:15-16)

Part of today’s Scripture reading tells of a man whose child was suffering from terrible seizures. The man brought his young son to the disciples, but they were not able to help him. I am sure the disciples wanted desperately to help this man, and I am equally sure they did all they could to help him. Nevertheless, their efforts were to no avail. Jesus immediately assessed the need and provided the miraculous cure, and the boy was healed. Afterwards, the disciples came to Jesus privately and asked why they were not able to help the child. Jesus revealed an important secret to spiritual success to them when He said, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (v. 21). Some of you may have to look in the margin of your Bible to find these words because some translations go straight from verse 20 to verse 22, omitting verse 21 entirely. However, many translations do include these important words. Basically, what Jesus was doing was reminding the disciples that you do not get something for nothing! If you want to have the kind of spiritual authority and power that will allow you to help people, then you are going to have to pay a price for it! Prayer and fasting represent sacrifice. Both are practices that require discipline and dedicated effort. Both come at a high personal price. However, both help to provide us with the ability to do things that make an eternal difference in the world around us.

Prayer Emphasis: Are you willing to pay the price? Could you **sacrifice** the time that you would normally spend watching a television show or having a meal and spend that time with God? Would you take the price of a day’s supply of food and **give** it to someone with greater needs than your own?

Day 5: Matthew 18:1-14

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?” (Matthew 18:11-12)

If you have ever been a part of any organization, especially in a management position, you have probably been faced with the task of creating a purpose statement. There is a very important verse in our Scripture reading that succinctly states the purpose statement of Jesus Christ. Matthew 18:11 states, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.” Again, some of you may be reading from a translation that forces you to find these important words in the margin or at the bottom of the page of your Bible. How clever the enemy is to have the purpose statement of Christ relegated to some place where only those who diligently search for it will ever find it! Some of the newer versions of those translations have now omitted these words entirely and do not even include them in a margin or footnote but just go straight from verse 10 to verse 12. The statement, “the Son of Man has come”, denotes an act that has occurred in times past. However, the tense for the “to save” part does not denote the time of the action. It represents a “from that point forward” type of action. Hence, Jesus came (in time past) to save (in time past, present, and future) those who are lost. He always was in the soul-saving business, and He always will be!

Prayer Emphasis: Even though Christ does not walk in the flesh among us today, He is still in the business of saving the lost and He will continue to be in that business until the day His grace is no longer extended to men. Will you find a way to **partner** with Christ in His divine purpose to win the lost? Will you make an effort to **speak** to someone about him today?

Day 6: Matthew 18:15-22

“Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” (Matthew 18:15)

Since the Bible is the church’s Operations Manual, it makes sense that it would include a section on conflict resolution. There are some simple but extremely important things we are to remember when we have personal differences with other Christians. First, as much as possible, we are to handle these matters in a *private* way. I am to go to my fellow Christian and discuss this matter with that person alone. Second, I am to handle this in a very *personal* way. I am to go to the offending brother or sister, and I am to speak with them about the matter. It is not appropriate for me to send anyone else to deal with this issue for me. If it is important enough to require any attention at all, then it is important enough to require our private and personal attention. Third, conflict should be dealt with through a definite *process*. Only when the offending believer refuses to hear and resolve the issue privately can anyone else be included in the process. The progression from a very private, personal meeting to a meeting that would include others, should include only one or two fellow believers who can bear testimony to the offense. Last, if the offender still refuses to resolve the conflict, then, *and only then*, should the matter become *public*. These beautiful words of Matthew 18:19–20 are quoted in many prayer meetings, but in context, they are speaking about conflict resolution. Jesus says when believers meet privately to resolve their personal conflicts, He will be sure to attend!

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that, if we handle our personal conflicts Scripturally and *prayerfully*, then we can rest assured they will be handled *powerfully*. **Determine** to not speak to anyone about any offense until you have first discussed it with God and the offender!

Day 7: Matthew 18:23-35

“And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:34-35)

It is not surprising that the content of the verses immediately following the discussion on conflict resolution would contain strong teachings on forgiveness. The truth is, there would be no need for conflict resolution if we could truly learn to forgive all people for all offenses. Jesus told the story of a man who was forgiven for a very great debt. It was such a large amount of debt that it was clear to all who heard Jesus tell the story that the poor man would never be able to pay it. However, a settlement plan was provided. In that settlement plan, the poor man's debt was completely forgiven. Then, the forgiven man immediately went out and found someone who owed him a much smaller sum of money and demanded immediate and full payment. When the forgiven man's debtor begged for more time, the impatient lender took him into the courts and had him thrown into debtor's prison. The unforgiving man's master was made aware of these events and called the unforgiving man to meet with him. In that meeting the master reminded the unforgiving man of the large sum for which he had been forgiven and asked him a very pointed question: “Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” That was a very good question then, and it remains a very good question today.

Prayer Emphasis: Are you harboring ill feelings towards anyone? Have you been slow to **forgive** when you are personally offended? Take some time today and **recall** all that Christ has forgiven you and then make every effort to **show** that same kind of compassion and forgiveness to others.

Day 8: Matthew 19:1-12

“And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’” (Matthew 19:2-3)

The question asked of Christ by the Pharisees continues to be an often-asked question today. The issue of divorce is both prevalent and much debated in our society. The hard facts are that even believers sometimes wind up in divorce court. Current data reveals that the divorce rate is as high among Christian couples as non-Christian couples. Again, it is important to note that this discussion is being held in the very shadow of the previous stories where Jesus taught on the importance of conflict resolution and complete and full forgiveness when someone sins against us. Divorce is a painful experience for those who go through it, as well as for those who are innocently involved in the dissolution of a relationship that was once promised to be forever. We have many divorced people in our church. We do not consider divorced people to be “second-rate citizens” in the Kingdom of God. We do not prohibit divorced people from serving in our various ministries. We do, however, encourage couples to fight hard to build, strengthen, sustain, and therefore save their marriages. We do teach that divorce is not pleasing to God and it is certainly not God's best plan for anyone.

Prayer Emphasis: All of us have our own personal struggles and issues. Some struggles are simply more public than others. If you are married, spend some time today **thanking** God for your spouse. **List** the blessings that come with a healthy marriage. **Tell** your spouse that they are loved and that you thanked God for them today. If you know someone who is going through the divorce process, **let them know** that you **love** them and you are praying for them.

Day 9: Matthew 19:13-26

“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.” (Matthew 19:13)

Although the identity of those who brought the little children to Jesus is not revealed in our story, we can only assume that it might have been, at least on the most part, their parents. We are also not told any specific needs that these children may have had. It may have been that the parents simply wanted Jesus to touch and pray for their children. For some reason, the disciples began to rebuke these people who were trying to get their children before the Lord. It is clear that Jesus was willing to make time for the little children. He told the disciples to allow the children to be brought to Him and He placed His hands on them and, most likely, prayed for them at the same time. The phrase, “and He laid hands on them” (v. 15) clearly indicates that Jesus took the time to honor the requests of those who brought their children to Him and that He did pray for them. In our focus verse, we see some well-meaning disciples rebuking those who brought the little children to Jesus. But did you notice that later in this chapter, *no one* made any effort to block the access of a *rich*, young man when he tried to approach Jesus? Not only should we be careful to allow all people to come to the Lord, but we should also be especially careful that children are provided every means possible to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ at the earliest possible age.

Prayer Emphasis: We are always in need of more people to work with our children. There are many opportunities within our church to do this. Sometimes we simply need another adult present when others are teaching and ministering to the little ones. Would you prayerfully **consider** volunteering to serve the Lord in this capacity? Please **pray** for our children’s ministries and workers today.

Day 10: Matthew 19:27 – 20:8

“Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’ So Jesus said to them... ‘Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.’” (Matthew 19:27-29)

How many times have we been guilty of the same kind of thinking that Peter struggled with in our reading today? I am sure all the disciples witnessed the interaction between Jesus and the rich, young ruler and heard Jesus promise that man “treasure in Heaven” if he would only be willing to divest himself of earthly treasures and follow Him. Upon hearing the Lord’s promise to this newcomer, Peter immediately thought about all that he and his fellow disciples had forsaken to follow Jesus. Notice the statement in verse 27, “We have left *all* and followed you.” I could not help but notice that Jesus did not rebuke Peter or say anything to him to indicate that He disagreed with what Peter said about leaving “all” to follow Him. We also have to pay some attention to the questions that Peter asked of Jesus after he made that statement: “Therefore what shall *we* have?” Satan loves to plant seeds of doubt in our hearts and minds – especially the seed of selfishness. All of us have some small seed of selfishness in us that can grow to become what is perhaps one of the greatest distractions for believers in their **Kingdom Pursuit**. How wonderful would church-life be if our question could change from, “What about me?” to “What about Jesus?”

Prayer Emphasis: Find the time today to discipline yourself to **do something** totally unselfish. Be prepared to **share** your unselfish activity, and the blessings derived from it, with someone you encounter today.

Day 11: Matthew 20:9-19

“But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius (penny).” (Matthew 20:10)

We read the first half of this story yesterday and now we have read its conclusion in today’s assigned verses. The whole story was told in response to Peter’s question about what he and the other disciples would have in return for leaving all and following Jesus. The first part of the story finds a man who hires laborers early in the morning (6 a.m.) to go work in his vineyard at an agreed upon price of one penny for the day. This was the normal daily pay rate for a laborer in New Testament times. At about the third hour of the day (9 a.m.) the landowner meets some others and sends them out to work in the vineyard. He does not reach a monetary agreement with them, but only tells them that he will pay them what is “right” (v. 7). More laborers are sent into the field at the sixth hour (noon) and the ninth hour (3 p.m.) The landowner sends even more laborers into the field at the eleventh hour (5 p.m.) When the workday ended at the twelfth hour (6 p.m.) the landowner called and paid the workers who had been sent to the field last and they were paid their penny first. Seeing this, those who had gone out first assumed that they, then, would be paid far more than the agreed upon penny. However, a penny was exactly what they received! Verse 11 states that these first workers “complained against the landowner.” Despite their concerns, the landowner stated that he had done them no “wrong” by paying them at the agreed rate (v. 13).

Prayer Emphasis: Have you been guilty of looking at what God is doing for others more than at what God is doing for you? Take some time today to **recall** some of God’s most recent blessings. Try to find a way to **share** some of them with someone you encounter along your own **Kingdom Pursuit** today.

Day 12: Matthew 20:20-34

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” (Matthew 20:20)

We see a continuing theme here. Peter asked earlier, “What shall *we* have?” The laborers had been careful to notice that the workers who came to the fields at the last hour received the same wage as those who had come at the first. And here, on the heels of the story about those laborers, James and John come, with their mother, asking to be allowed to sit in seats of honor when His Kingdom was established. The story of the workers in the fields ended with Jesus saying, “So the last will be first, and the first last” (v. 16). In today’s reading, Jesus responds to the request of the two apostles by saying, “Whoever desires (or wills) to be first among you, let him be your slave” (v. 27). The Lord was certainly not teaching that ambition is a sinful thing. In fact, the Scriptures teach us to strive for excellence in everything we do. Selfish ambition, though, is a very dangerous thing for any believer. Selfish ambition is often based on pride, as it was in this case with James and John. They boastfully assured Jesus that they could indeed drink of the cup from which He would drink. Selfish ambition often creates controversy in the church, as it did on this day when the other 10 disciples became indignant against James and John. Notice that the closer Christ comes to the cross, the more He begins to teach on selflessness. As He came closer to the day He would give His life for *us*, He began to explain more about how He desires that we give our lives to *Him*.

Prayer Emphasis: **Do** something completely unselfish today. **Ask God** to show you a way to **do** something for someone who cannot possibly do something for you in return. **Serve** somebody today and thereby share in the greatness of Christ.

Day 13: Matthew 21:1-11

“And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, ‘Who is this?’ So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.’” (Matthew 21:10-11)

We can only imagine the stir that was created by the words and actions of the people as Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The Holy Spirit is very specific in His detailed description of the crowd that ran ahead of Jesus, spreading “their clothes on the road” by stating they were “a very great multitude” (v. 8). Then the Holy Spirit states that “all the city was moved” and was asking questions about Jesus. Others began to cut branches from the trees and spread them along the way, as well. It is clear that the crowd literally engulfed Jesus because we are told that some were running ahead of Him while others were following close behind, with all of them shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (v. 9)! Thus, the question arose, “Who is this?” This is a question that many people are still asking today! Many people see and hear the stir about Jesus. They observe us as we go about all our spiritual duties. They watch us go to church and as we do other good works. But do they learn from these things the answer to the question? Do they learn enough about Jesus by simply observing what we attempt to *do* for Him? Wouldn’t those who observe our works be helped to understand more about Jesus if our witness included some *words* with our *works*? This crowd did more than just follow Jesus and do good works. When the question was asked, they were prepared to answer. “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee” was their answer to the multitudes (v. 11). Note that they knew *who* Jesus was, *what* Jesus was (a prophet), and from *whence* Jesus had come. If we can answer these questions as clearly and boldly today, then we can win many people to Christ.

Prayer Emphasis: Do our actions cause people to ask the right questions? Can you **think** of something that you could **do** for someone today that might cause them to ask you about Jesus?

Day 14: Matthew 21:12-22

“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matthew 21:22)

Immediately after I became a Christian, I began to attend Sunday School and church. I remember seeing a large poster in our Sunday School classroom that bore these words, “Prayer Changes Things!” I also noticed these same words on bumper stickers and in other prominent places. Even though I rarely see posters like that today, I have an image of it embedded in my heart and written on my mind! We should ask ourselves these hard questions today: “Do we really believe Christ’s promises about prayer?” “Do we truly believe that prayer changes things?” We might even dare to ask: “Has prayer ever really changed anything for us?” Many Christians are in the habit of praying “safe prayers” today. By that, I mean that we seldom, and maybe never, really ask God for anything specific enough to know whether or not He has heard our prayers and moved on our behalf. We are often guilty of praying in generalities and repeating the same, usual Christian clichés to God over and over again. To truly pray requires that we become personal with God. We must open the door to our lives and reveal to Him our innermost thoughts and needs. Even though He already knows these things, He still desires that we speak to Him and share our needs with Him on a daily basis.

Prayer Emphasis: Dare to ask God for something specific today and make a note of your request in your devotional or prayer journal. Then, when God answers that prayer, add that information to your notes! Instead of praying in general – “Lord, save a lost soul today” – **pray** specifically for someone whom you desire to see come to Jesus. **Keep praying** – in faith – until God answers your prayer.

Day 15: Matthew 21:23-32

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father?” (Matthew 21:28-31a)

Jesus begins the parable of the two sons by asking the question, “What do you think?” In doing so, He implied that there might be a “quiz” after the conversation. He then went on to speak of a man who had two sons. The man went to the first son and commanded him to go and work in the vineyard. The son responded that he would not go. However, he later changed his mind and eventually followed the will of his father. The father then went to the second son and asked him to go work in the vineyard. This son responded in a most respectful way. However, he did not go and do the will of his father. We are not provided with any explanations for either son’s decisions or actions. It could be that the first son began to realize what his father meant to him and how much his father had done for him and then decided it best to do what pleased his father. It could be that the second son had every intention of doing his father’s will but became distracted by other things and soon found the day past and his father’s will left undone. It is not important for us to know the answers to these suppositions, but it is important for us to know the answer to the Lord’s question, “What do you think? Which of these two sons did the will of his father?” It is never too late to reconsider our place in our **Kingdom Pursuit**. Are we simply giving God lip service and saying the things that we think God wants to hear, or are we truly obeying him?

Prayer Emphasis: **Avoid** the “Second Son Syndrome!” **Think** of an area where you could be obedient, or maybe just *more* obedient. **Look** for an area of service through the church and **volunteer** today.

Day 16: Matthew 21:33-46

“Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.” (Matthew 21:45)

Parables were stories told to illustrate what was being taught. They were told to help the listeners better understand what was being said by helping them to visualize the stories in their minds. By incorporating stories in His teachings, Jesus helped people visualize what He was trying to get them to understand and do. This parable indicates just how that system works. In our reading today, we are told that after Jesus told these parables, the chief priests and the Pharisees perceived that He was talking about them! Have you ever had the same thing happen to you? Have you ever been reading the Word of God and had the Holy Spirit of God point His finger at you? Have you ever seen your own incorrect actions or inappropriate attitudes in the lives of those characters that Christ included in His parables? In these particular parables, we read about people who held their responsibilities toward God in complete and total disregard. Soon, disregard became disrespect and disrespect became blatant, willful disobedience. Is this same kind of disrespect evident in our lives? If so, shouldn’t we stop everything and take the time to address that problem? Are we taking our responsibilities toward God too lightly? And, in doing so, are we willfully disrespecting the will of our heavenly Father? Never forget that wrong *attitudes* usually, and almost always, lead to wrong *actions*!

Prayer Emphasis: Let’s all **take time** to **reconsider** some of the promises we have made to God and then **ask** ourselves if we have made good on those promises. Do we **give** God His share of the harvest? If you do not give to God on a regular basis, will you **begin** doing so now?

Day 17: Matthew 22:1-14

“And Jesus...spoke to them again by parables and said: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.’” (Matthew 22:1-3)

It is important to note that the story of the wedding banquet is a parable. Like the parables we read and discussed earlier, this was a fictitious story told by Christ to teach a spiritual truth. The phrase “a certain king” may imply that this was something that actually happened to a real individual, but the story is told in a way to protect the privacy of the person involved. The story tells of a king who prepared a wedding banquet in honor of his son. When he sent his servants to encourage those whom he had already invited to come now to the wedding, they refused to do so. When other servants were sent, they too were ignored. It seems that those invited had other priorities. One went “to his own farm” while “another to his business” (v. 5). Some of the invitees became angry and violent toward the poor messengers that the king sent to encourage their attendance. After dealing with the issue, the king then sent more servants out into the streets to bid as many people as possible to come to the banquet. Soon afterwards, the wedding hall was filled with guests! Our story mentions two types of busy people. Some were *too busy* to do the king’s bidding while others were *very busy* trying to help accomplish the king’s will. Where do we fit in this story?

Prayer Emphasis: How long has it been since you thought to **invite someone** to attend church with you? **Invite** someone to worship with you this Sunday or even to attend the Wednesday Bible Study with you.

Day 18: Matthew 22:15-28

“‘Tell us, therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’ But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” (Matthew 22:17-21)

There is much talk these days about the separation of church and state. The United States Constitution was never written to keep the church out of government, but to keep the government out of church. In fact, the phrase “separation of church and state” is not even found in the Constitution. However, this phrase has been used by the enemies of Christ and His church to try to thwart Christians from having any influence on matters of national or political concern. In fact, for Christians to take no part in governmental and political matters would be disobedient to the commands of Christ. He would never tell people to render what is due to Caesar *if nothing was due* to their governmental authorities. Jesus asked His questioners to show Him the coins that were used to pay their taxes. When they did, He then asked them to identify whose image and inscription was on those coins. Jesus then clearly commanded them (and us) to give to Caesar that which was (or is) due to Caesar. And more importantly, He then commanded them (and us) to give to God that which is due to God. We all have responsibilities as citizens of our great country. In like manner, we all have responsibilities as citizens of God’s Kingdom. Are we rendering all that God has asked of us when it comes to the financial things in our lives? We should ask ourselves, “If we paid our *taxes* as faithfully (or unfaithfully) as we pay our *tithes*, would the IRS soon be at our door?”

Prayer Emphasis: Consider becoming faithful to God in the matter of your tithes and offerings to Him. A close look at our check register can sometimes clearly reveal to us just where God stands in our lives.

Day 19: Matthew 22:29-40

“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’” (Matthew 22:35-36)

Yesterday’s reading ended with some religious leaders (the Sadducees) telling Jesus a story about a woman who had been married to seven different brothers and then asking Him which of them she would be wife to after the resurrection. I imagine that the question sounded just as dumb then as it does now! However, instead of rebuking them, Jesus answered their question and then told them that they would have known the answer if they had only paid attention to the Scriptures! The Pharisees followed the Sadducees with a question of their own when they asked Jesus, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” Now here was a question well worth answering. Jesus immediately stated, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (v. 37). He went on to say, “This is the first and great commandment” (v. 38). Jesus continued by stating that the second commandment was, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 39). He then concluded the conversation by stating that all the law and writings of the prophets stand on these two commandments. If we think about it, we can see that obedience to these two commands would naturally require obedience to all the commandments that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai. Note that the one motivating factor for the life of complete obedience to God is love. People who love God love people and treat them as if they do!

Prayer Emphasis: Do something good for someone today. **Seek** to find a way to **express** love to someone without speaking a word! **Realize** that it is sometimes our “silent sermons” that do the most good for God!

Day 20: Matthew 22:41 – 23:11

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’” (Matthew 22:41-42)

There are many things that I admire about Matthew – the tax collector turned preacher – who immediately followed Jesus from the first moment of his calling (9:9). The first thing we read about him after his commitment to Christ was that he invited Jesus into his home for dinner and he also invited many of his friends and fellow tax collectors to attend as well (9:10). Matthew was rather humble in his reporting of that event, but Luke tells us that this was “a great feast” that Matthew (Luke referred to him as Levi) gave for Jesus “in his own house” and that “a great number of tax collectors” were there (Luke 5:29). In Matthew’s effort to convince his fellow Jews that Jesus was the promised One, he often used terms and phrases that would clearly resonate with them. One of those phrases was, “the Son of David.” When Jesus asked the Pharisees who they expected the Christ to be, they answered, “The Son of David.” As a Jew, and knowing what Jews believed, Matthew stated in the first verse of his gospel that Jesus was “the Son of David” (1:1). In total, Matthew would write that phrase nine times before his biography of Christ was concluded. Mark only used that phrase three times and it is found only two times in Luke. John never once was led of the Holy Spirit to use that phrase in reference to Jesus. From immediately after his salvation, to the end of his life when he was killed for his faith in Ethiopia, Matthew worked very hard to connect with his countrymen and convince them to accept Christ as their Savior!

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that men like Matthew were *convinced* to the point of *conviction*. He was so convinced that Jesus was the Savior that he went to great extremes and travelled many miles to share what he believed with others. **Ask** God to give you a burden for the lost and to prepare you for your next opportunity to **share** what you believe about Christ with someone you meet.

Day 21: Matthew 23:12-22

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men...”
(Matthew 23:13)

If it were not for the hypocrites, who would the cold-hearted, apathetic, backslidden believers blame for their lack of involvement in the work of the church? We often hear *of*, or *from*, people who were once faithful, committed church workers who are now out of church and personal ministry altogether because of all the hypocrites in the church! It is worth noting that few people ever quit their jobs, sports leagues, fraternal associations, or any other thing in which they participate simply because there are hypocrites involved there. All believers need to remember that we will one day stand individually before our Lord and answer only for ourselves! I am certain that the Lord is not going to entertain any excuses about the hypocrites in the church on that day. Always remember that Jesus is the only person in the New Testament that ever called anyone a hypocrite – and then only on rare occasions. However, in today’s verses we see Jesus referring to the “scribes and Pharisees” as “hypocrites” no less than three times! In the New Testament, there are several warnings against *hypocrisy* made by Paul, Peter, and James, but none of those men ever actually called anyone a “hypocrite.” Perhaps the reason that Jesus was the only one who ever called anyone a hypocrite was because He was the only person who could call anyone a hypocrite without being hypocritical in doing so!

Prayer Emphasis: Ask God to help us keep our hearts and our motivations pure and holy in His sight. Let’s all **draw** an imaginary circle on the floor, **kneel** down in it, and then **ask God** to cleanse, purify and revive the person in that circle!

Day 22: Matthew 23:23-39

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” (Matthew 23:23)

Depending on which translation you are reading from, if you are counting the “woes” pronounced by Jesus on the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees during this confrontation with them, you will learn that the one found here in verse 23 is the fourth or fifth “woe” in this passage. In the NKJV, upon which these devotionals are based, this is the fifth “woe.” In some translations, it is only the fourth because the words of verse 14 are omitted entirely. Since I do not believe that the words of verse 14 should be omitted, I will deal with the “woe” found in verse 23 as the fifth one. It is interesting to note that the fifth woe has to do with the tenth, or tithe. The Pharisees were very meticulous about the law, including the law of the tithe. To make sure they were never short on their tithe, they tithed on all their possessions, carrying that practice down to the giving of 10 percent of even their spices! However, after being so *careful* to follow the law in this area (Leviticus 27:30) they were being *careless* about what Jesus considered to be some very important and weightier matters of the law. People often state that tithing is an “Old Testament” teaching. However, Jesus here endorses the practice of tithing by saying it was something that should be done and done precisely.

Prayer Emphasis In today’s church, someone who tithes is considered to be a very spiritual person. While I agree that tithing is a very spiritual thing, I understand that it is much easier to give money to the church than it is to give our lives in service to Christ. **Think** about this and make sure that you **bring** something more than an offering envelope to worship with you this Sunday!

Day 23: Matthew 24:1-14

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (Matthew 24:3)

One thing that strikes me about today’s Bible reading is that Jesus is obviously not impressed with big, beautiful buildings! We know that He honored the temple and cared very much that it remained true to its intended purpose. However, He, as the One who created the world in which we live today and the One who will create the world of tomorrow, was not oblivious to the fact that the temple was a temporal thing that would pass away with this world. Jesus earlier declared that there was coming a day when Jerusalem would be left desolate (23:38). This was a hard thing for even the disciples to receive. As they were leaving the temple with Jesus, the disciples called to His attention the massive, sturdy buildings that made up the temple complex. Jesus then told them that the day was coming when not one stone in that magnificent building would be left in its place. The obviously startled disciples followed that comment with what has become one of the most asked questions of those who are even somewhat familiar with the Bible or interested in end time events. That question is: “When will these things be?” Have you ever thought about how much could be done to reach the world for Christ if His church were as interested in what we should be doing as we are in the “when” of His coming? Perhaps we, like the disciples, are also placing too much emphasis on temporal things and not the eternal things that matter most to God.

Prayer Emphasis: Try to **think** of at least one thing that you could do this week to get the church *out* of the building and *into* the world. Perhaps you could **ask** someone to partner with you in this endeavor. **Realize** that it is a lack of *insight* that keeps most of what we do *inside* the walls of a building!

Day 24: Matthew 24:15-28

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” (Matthew 24:21-22)

I am convinced that the tragic events that will take place during the tribulation period could never be fully imagined or grasped by anyone. It will be a time of great destruction, poverty, disease, woes, and wars that will all transpire in a seven-year period between Christ’s rapture of the church and His second coming to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom. Jesus declares this time to be a time in which the distress will be, unequalled from “the beginning of the world until this time.” In other words, He was saying that the world, and all that live therein, will have never seen anything like this before. He continued by saying there shall never be a time in the future when living conditions and circumstances would ever be that horrendous. For those who believe in the rapture of the church, there is relief in knowing that the true believers in Christ will be taken out of this world prior to the events discussed in these verses. However, any person who comes to faith after the rapture will live through the tribulation or die because of its problems and persecutions.

Prayer Emphasis: As you go about your days, **take** some time to really look at those whose path you cross and **reflect** on the fact that they could very possibly be subjected to the torment of the tribulation discussed in today’s reading. **Ask God** to help you identify someone to whom you could **witness** or **minister** to in the name of Christ. **Look** for ways to creatively **reach** out to others. Spend some time thinking about things that we can do individually and as a church body to share the gospel today.

Day 25: Matthew 24:29-42

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matthew 24:37)

Jesus said the time of His second coming will be like the days of Noah. If we have paid any attention to the Bible at all, we know that in the days before the great flood, Noah was preaching righteousness and not very many people were listening. Jesus indicated that people were far too interested in material things and human relationships to pay attention to some old-fashioned preacher. But still, the flood came, just as Noah had been instructed to warn the people that it would. There is a statement in Noah’s story that makes it apparent that the people finally believed what Noah had been saying, but only *after* the flood came. It is clear that they understood what Noah said as the waters began to rise. Jesus said that those who lived in that time “Did not know *until the flood came* and took them all away” (v. 39). Those words seem to indicate that, as the waters began to rise and engulf them, the people of Noah’s day were suddenly ready to believe. But by that time, Noah and his family were already shut safely into the ark. Jesus warns all to be on watch and not be caught by surprise at His coming. We are told to be ready. To be ready means to live with anticipation. How different would our church be if we knew that Christ was going to return before next Sunday? Would we change the way we use our money, time, and energy? Whatever we might do if we had that kind of insight is what we really should be doing now.

Prayer Emphasis: Are we ready to have church 365 days a year? What are some things we could do to accomplish that goal? **Find** something that you can do through the church and **get busy doing it** while there is still time and opportunity!

Day 26: Matthew 24:43 – 25:5

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.” (Matthew 24:45-46)

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant?” The question that Jesus asked of His listeners must have penetrated their hearts and minds to their deepest levels! The question must have torn through the multitudes and the disciples like a bullet from a high-powered rifle, especially considering all that He had been saying to them! The question was not, “Who is a servant?” If we do not now understand that Jesus came to serve and to set an example for how we should also serve, then we are probably never going to get it. There is not one born again individual that God has not predetermined that they should be *conformed* to the image of His Son and *involved* in the work of His church. Since His Son came to serve, to seek, and to save, then those same things must become priorities to all Christians and to the church as a whole. Note that the blessed servant was the one who diligently performed his duties until the day that his master returned. On that day, the servant would learn how wisely he had served his master. Words that are used in various translations to describe unfaithful servants are “wicked” and “evil.” These are the same words used to describe the actions and attitudes of those who neglected to hear the teachings of Noah. There will come a day when men realize how foolish it was to live a life that was not given fully in service to Christ. How sad it is that, for many, that day will come one day too late!

Prayer Emphasis: Let’s **encourage** one another to be **watching** and **working** until the day our Master – the Lord Jesus – returns. **Move** something from your “one of these days” list to your “do it now” list today. **Find** a way to **contact** and **encourage** a fellow church member today!

Day 27: Matthew 25:6-19

“And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’” (Matthew 25:6-8)

Yesterday, we read the first part of the story of the ten virgins. What if the sounds of our alarm clocks had been drowned out by the midnight cry that was mentioned in the story this morning? Would we trim our lamps and be ready to face the Lord or would we sadly look to others who simply could not help us in this last moment of desperate need? In our last few readings, there has been a clear message that we all need to live in anticipation of the soon return of Christ. We all know that when God begins to repeat Himself, we really need to listen! Whether it is the story of the wise and foolish virgins or the story of the servants and the talents that follow, we have been warned that time is short! When the Lord comes, it will be too late to then decide to do those things that we know we should be doing right now. Like the servants in the final story, it may seem like it has been a long time since the Master told us to prepare for His coming, but I assure you we are one day closer today than we were yesterday.

Prayer Emphasis: Choose wisely and invest your time in the doing of the work that God has assigned to you. How wonderful would it be if every one of us thought of something we have been promising to do for the Lord and then found a way to do that “something” today? You will never regret the time and energy that you invest now, in the hereafter!

Day 28: Matthew 25:20-36

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’” (Matthew 25:21)

It is clear from our readings yesterday and today that it matters less what we are given than what we do with it for God and His glory. The Christian who wisely uses all that he has been given by God – even if it seems insignificant when compared to that which others have to offer to the Lord – is praised and rewarded in the same way as the servant who receives an even greater number of gifts, talents, or abilities. It must become clear to us that we are not responsible for what gifts and talents we possess. Those are given to us by our Master when we are spiritually born into His family. We are, however, clearly responsible for what we do with our gifts and talents. When it comes to the Christian life, it is not about how much we have *from* God. It is about how much of it we use *for* God. In His anticipation of our faithfulness, our Master has prepared a wonderful inheritance for all of us from the foundation, or creation, of the world. Since Christ is our Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, then can’t we safely conclude that the same One who took the time to provide for our salvation will also make every accommodation to empower our service? I learned a long time ago that if I focus on the *service*, the Lord will focus on the *supply*! Paul wrote to the church at Philippi to remind them that “God (would) supply all (their) need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). That came from the same preacher that proclaimed God to be “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Prayer Emphasis: Do you have a talent that you have buried? Do some “treasure hunting” today and then begin to use your spiritual gifts for the honor and glory of our Almighty God.

Day 29: Matthew 25:37-46

“For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.”
(Matthew 25:42-43)

It is important to understand that the words we read over the past few days were spoken to the Lord’s most dedicated followers in a private setting. You have to go all the way back to Matthew 24:3 to see that Jesus once again separated Himself from the crowds and gone up “on the Mount of Olives” where “the disciples came to Him privately” before the things that we have read from that verse through the end of today’s reading were spoken. It is in this closed session, with only His closest, most intimate followers, that Jesus explains the true nature of sin. He spoke of times that He had been hungry, and they had not fed Him. He went on to mention times when He was thirsty, and they had not given Him anything to drink. Beyond that, He stated there had been times when He was homeless and without decent clothing to wear and no one provided a place for Him to stay or clothing for Him to wear. He mentioned times that He was sick or in prison and they had not come to His aid. You cannot help but notice that, in this very frank conversation, Jesus only mentioned good things – things that should have been done – that were not done by His followers. He did not mention the typical sins of the flesh – things like drunkenness, idolatry, lying, stealing, or cheating – or any of the other terrible things that people often pride themselves for *not* doing. If we are to succeed as a church, then we must come to know now what Christ wanted His disciples to understand then. We must come to realize that the true nature of sin does not lie in the *bad* things we *do*, but in the *good* things we leave *undone*!

Prayer Emphasis: **Strive** to live a holy and pure life before God but **focus** on **doing** the good things that we should be doing and **refuse** to leave them undone.

Day 30: Matthew 26:1-13

“A woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, ‘Why this waste?’”
(Matthew 26:7-8)

The question the disciples asked after watching the woman pour her bottle of fragrant oil on our Lord’s head as He sat at the dinner table in the home of Simon, the leper, is quite appalling! Knowing the value of such oil, and watching it run down the head and face of Jesus and to the floor, they asked, “Why this waste?” When we read this story, we cannot help but notice that it was “His disciples” (plural) that asked this horrible question. Their question is especially appalling when we consider that this event comes on the heels of our Lord’s confiding to these same men that He had been hungry, thirsty, homeless, and without clothing and they had done nothing for Him! How pious they must have sounded as they explained that the money derived from the sale of that costly perfume could have been used to help the poor. How sad is it that on the one occasion that we read of someone doing something kind and generous for Jesus it is declared to be a “waste” by even Christ’s closest followers? Jesus responded to their pious comment by saying that they would all have many opportunities to do good works for the poor, but their opportunities to do things for Him were quickly passing. He commended this woman, and her loving gesture, and declared that this deed would be known and told throughout “the whole world” (v. 13).

Prayer Emphasis: **Consider** all that God has done for you and **do** something good for others when you have the opportunity. Let’s **ask** God to do something memorable through our lives and through our church!

Day 31: Matthew 26:14-25

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.” (Matthew 26:14-16)

No one knows when it first came into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. But now, just after the woman came and anointed Him with the expensive oil, Judas takes action. He went to the chief priests – sought them out – and asked what he might receive if he helped them capture Jesus. Few realize that the betrayal of Judas was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Psalm 41:9 foretold that the Lord’s betrayer would be a “familiar friend.” There is no doubt that Judas could be described by those words. So, on the night Jesus was anointed by the loving woman, the blessing of one follower’s love and affection was probably still on His mind while the betrayal of another was taking place. Judas went to those plotting to kill Jesus and offered to assist them in finding the right time and place to accomplish their evil objective. It is interesting that some of the last recorded words of Judas were formed in questions. In John 12:4, it is disclosed to us that it was Judas who, upon seeing the expensive oils poured on Jesus at the dinner, asked, “Why this waste?” And then, his next question was, “What will you give me?” We have read of many times and situations where Christ’s followers went to him with questions, but none match what we read in these past two days! Tomorrow we will read where Jesus announced that one of his disciples would betray him. Judas then asked his final question, “Lord is it me?” Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.” Pointed questions sometimes bring painful answers.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask yourself the hard questions today. Are you faithfully serving the Lord? Have you betrayed Him in any way?

Day 32: Matthew 26:26-43

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you.’” (Matthew 26:26-27)

It is possible that Judas took of the Passover meal with Jesus. When you compare the account as presented in all the gospels, it is fair to conclude that Judas was there when the bread and wine were served. It must then be true that Judas heard the explanation of what the elements represented and that he knew that the bread and wine represented the body and blood of Jesus. What Judas heard this final night, along with all the other teaching and preaching to which he had been exposed, leaves him with no excuse for missing salvation. But there in the upper room, Jesus extended one more invitation to Judas to be truly saved when He said, “Drink from it, *all* of you.” This final invitation to partake of the salvation so freely offered left Judas forever without excuse! There is no doubt in my mind that Judas knew that the “all” was meant to include him. It seems impossible for one to see and hear so much and still die without accepting God’s salvation! However, there are many who are exposed to the truth of the gospel repeatedly but still do not know Jesus as their personal Savior. Besides that, there are many who still lack the assurance of their salvation. Perhaps one of the best ways to determine if Christ is in our *hearts* is to evaluate our *lives*. Judas was a greedy and dishonest traitor who walked with Christ in the *public* places but dealt with the devil in the dark, *private* recesses of his heart and soul.

Prayer Emphasis: Thank God for your salvation and ask Him to strengthen your mind against the many temptations of the flesh. Determine to be faithful to Christ at all times and in every situation.

Day 33: Matthew 26:44-56

“So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” (Matthew 26:44)

If we take a moment to recall the events of the preceding verses, we know that Jesus announced His betrayal and death, Judas went his way to make his deal with the devil, Peter made a boast of his undying love and obedience, and Jesus took the 11 remaining disciples to the garden with Him and asked them to pray while He went a little farther into the garden to speak privately with His Father. He stationed His disciples in the garden and then went further into the garden to speak with his Father privately. Twice He returned to where His disciples were and found them not praying but sleeping. How would we have reacted to such slothfulness? What words might we have chosen to say to them at that moment? Verse 44 states, “So He left them...” If this were our story, how might that line have finished? Would it say, “And he left them and grumbled about their lack of devotion and commitment?” Or “And he left them, seething with anger at their lack of concern for all he had to face alone?” If this story had been about us, perhaps the line would have read, “And he left them and immediately told others of their disloyalty!” But that is not what is recorded of the Savior. We are told that *He* left them and *prayed*. We are being very much like Christ when we speak with God about people and our disappointments before speaking to anyone else!

Prayer Emphasis: As we continue our **Kingdom Pursuit**, let us **commit** to discussing our disappointments and hurts with the One who can comfort us as no other. Find the strength to **pray** for someone who has disappointed you in the past and then **forgive** them as Christ has forgiven you.

Day 34: Matthew 26:57-72

“And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.” (Matthew 26:57-58)

As the soldiers arrested Jesus and led Him away to the high priest and the assembly, Peter followed them. I am sure Peter would have loved for the story to read just like that – “Peter followed Him.” After all, isn’t that the kind of devotion that Peter earlier promised? But we all know that there is no period after the phrase, “But Peter followed.” Rather, the phrase truthfully reads, “But Peter followed *at a distance*.” Perhaps the saddest thing about this “distance” was that it was very intentional on Peter’s part. He earlier promised to follow Jesus even if others did not (26:33) and here he made good on his promise to follow, but he chose to follow on his own terms and at his own pace. This distance that he so carefully put between himself and Jesus resulted in disloyalties that Peter never imagined possible. Soon he would even disown Jesus entirely, swearing with an oath that he never even knew Him. Although, at least where this night is concerned, Peter seldom receives credit for it, but we owe Peter his due that he at least “followed.” However, we must learn the hard lessons that come from serving Jesus on our own terms and conditions. Situational Christianity is no answer to the needs of the world around us.

Prayer Emphasis: Have we followed in this same manner? Have we set the terms, conditions, and limits of our own devotion to Christ? Let’s all **take some time** today to **pray** for the kind of commitment that will keep us as close to Christ as possible.

Day 35: Matthew 26:73 – 27:10

“And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for your speech betrays you.’ Then he began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:73-75)

One would think that, after the first two denials, Peter would have sensed enough guilt and shame to lead him to repent and recommit to his earlier pledge of complete and total devotion, even to the point of death. However, a third opportunity to make a right response came his way, and he once again denied knowing Jesus. But, this time, the accusers were convinced that he was a follower of the Christ, for they could hear it in his accent. His speech was that of a man from Galilee. How ironic it is to see that the man who just betrayed Jesus with his speech now having his own speech betray him! After hearing the cock crow, I am sure that Peter believed he would never be given another chance to make good on his promises of loyalty. Does our speech convince others that we know Christ? Are we as guilty of denying Him before men as Peter was on this dark night? As we read the New Testament, we see Peter being given many other opportunities to speak for Jesus, and we never see him making this same, sad mistake again.

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that, as far as last chances go, none of us can live with complete assurance that we will live to serve the Lord on some eventual tomorrow. **Know** that it will serve us well to **follow** our **Kingdom Pursuit** with the understanding that every chance might be our last chance to **stand** for Christ.

Day 36: Matthew 27:11-26

“Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the king of the Jews?’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you say.’” (Matthew 27:11)

In the beginning verses of Chapter 27, we read of Jesus being bound and led into the courts of Pilate and of the traitorous Judas trying to undo his evil work by returning his 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. What Judas had done *then* brings us to the “*now*” that begins today’s focus verse. As Jesus stood before him, Pilate asked, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate had done his homework. He knew enough about the Jewish scriptures to know that they spoke of and promised a coming Messiah, and he knew enough about what he had heard about Jesus, that he thought this might very well be that Messiah standing before him. One day this situation will be reversed, and it will be Pilate standing before the Lord Jesus! Pilate, and all others, will one day bow before Jesus and confess (admit, declare) that He is Lord. On that day there will be no question in anyone’s mind as to exactly who Jesus is! Men like Pilate will remember the events we read about yesterday and today. But, on that fateful day, there will be no reason to question. Pilate will know who it was that stood before him, and he will know the answer to his question without it ever being asked. It would seem that all of us have heard and seen enough to be convinced about Jesus. But some still question who He really is, even today. Even if we do not verbalize our doubts before men, surely they are visualized before our Lord as He watches us fail to crown Him King every day of our lives.

Prayer Emphasis: As we draw closer to the end of our **Kingdom Pursuit**, let’s each **settle the question** once and for all. Is He *our* King or not?

Day 37: Matthew 27:27-44

“Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’” (Matthew 27:38-40)

It is enough to have our lives scrutinized privately by our closest friends and associates, but when our most excruciating trials are put on public display, we are in a most distressing situation. After much punishment and humiliation, Jesus was taken to Golgotha and crucified. Crucifixion was the most inhumane form of punishment imaginable to man. After nailing Christ to a cross, the men who hung Him there sat down to watch Him die. They were not the only ones to make up the gruesome audience that surrounded the cross that day. The place of His death was near a roadway leading to the city of Jerusalem. All who passed by could see Jesus hanging on the cross. The chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law who planned and schemed for this moment were there observing and mocking Him as He suffered for the sins of the world. One need only to review the story of His crucifixion to see that Jesus was as holy and righteous in His suffering and death as He was in His life. How do we fare in our daily trials? If others watch us as we experience adversity, will they be as equally convinced that we are all that we claim to be?

Prayer Emphasis: As we finish this part of our **Kingdom Pursuit**, we should all be constantly aware that *our* whole world *is* watching. **Pray** that those around us see the true Christ living in us. **Ask God** to help you respond to trials, afflictions, and adversities in ways that will glorify our Father in Heaven. **Pray** for and **encourage** a suffering believer today.

Day 38: Matthew 27:45-61

“So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54)

There were many remarkable events that took place at the moment Jesus died and paid the ultimate price for our sins. At the moment of His death, the veil in the temple was torn into two pieces. The Bible specifically states, “the veil of the temple was torn in two *from top to bottom*” (v. 51). This symbolized (and still symbolizes) the fact that the rite of passage into the Holy of Holies has now been purchased for all who will choose to enter in. It is important to note that the veil was torn from the *top down* and *not* from the *bottom up*. In doing it that way, God provided a clear illustration and indication that salvation is all about God reaching down to us and not our working our way up to Him. Besides the veil being torn, the Bible states there was a rock-splitting, earthquake and that many graves were opened (vs. 51-52). Today’s Scripture reading includes the names of several people who were at or near the cross either during or immediately after the crucifixion. Some of them were believers and some of them were unbelievers. At least a few of them became believers on that day – including some of the Roman soldiers and one of the thieves that died on a cross near that of our Lord’s. Most of us have heard of the centurion who boldly declared Jesus to be “the Son of God” on the day of His death. However, Matthew’s account is the only Gospel story that includes the fact that there was more than one Roman soldier acknowledging the Lordship of Christ on that day.

Prayer Emphasis: **Believe** that He *was* the Son of God then and He *is* the Son of God now. If we are not fully convinced in our own hearts, how will we convince others? **Settle** the matter today. Jesus is who He says He is. We should all **affirm** His Lordship over our lives today. He deserves to be more than a Savior. He deserves to be Lord!

Day 39: Matthew 27:62 – 28:8

“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.” (Matthew 28:1-2)

The impossible happened and no one knew about it until the next morning. After the Sabbath was over, early on a Sunday morning, the women approached the tomb where Jesus had been buried. As they neared the tomb, there was another great earthquake like the one that occurred just three days earlier at the moment Jesus died. The stone that sealed our Lord’s tomb was tossed away from the tomb’s entrance revealing forever that Christ had been resurrected from the dead and He was victorious over the grave! Do not be confused. Do not allow anyone to mislead you. The stone was *not* rolled away to allow Jesus to *escape* from the tomb. Jesus had already risen from the dead and the stone was rolled away simply to *reveal* it! An angel confronted the women and told them to go with a message to the Lord’s disciples telling them that Jesus was alive and He would soon meet with them in Galilee. The women departed quickly and ran to bring the wonderful news to the other disciples.

Prayer Emphasis: **Think** of someone within our congregation that could use some good news and contact them today. For some, a kind voice on the phone or a friendly face at their door could make all the difference in the world. Make sure to take some time to **celebrate** Jesus with them today! As we close out this portion of our **Kingdom Pursuit**, let’s all *quickly do* the things Jesus has commanded us to do. Time is short and the day of His coming is approaching. We are closer to the Kingdom than we might think.

Day 40: Matthew 28:9-20

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The women did as the Lord commanded and soon the disciples were standing in Galilee listening to Jesus as He left them with a final, farewell message. He reminded them that He had been empowered to send them to the uttermost parts of the world with His message of redemption because what had been *His* mission was now *theirs*. He had come to seek and to save that which was lost – and now their lives were to be committed to doing the same. They were to preach the gospel, baptize the believers, and then teach them how to do the same thing. The future of the world was now laid into the hands of a small group of very common men. What confidence God had in them! And even though they had some doubts of their own, they must have settled them completely for soon we see them living and dying for the cause of the cross. Whether or not the gospel is carried to our generation depends on us. This is no time for doubt or confusion. Let’s ask God to show us how we can fulfill the Great Commission together through our church ministries. Let’s become a 365-day church that serves Christ on a daily basis. Let’s work while we can!

Prayer Emphasis: Please **settle** the doubts in your own mind and **commit** yourself to a place of service in God’s church and Kingdom today. I will be happy to meet with you at any time to discuss opportunities to serve the Lord through our church ministry. Please **pray** for me as your pastor. **Contact us** at 850-562-8069 or gary@seminolebc.com if we can pray for you or minister to you or your family in any way.