

LIFEPOINT CHURCH // WORD TO LIFE

# THE WAY



MATTHEW 20:17 - 21:11

WEEKS 9-12





**Word to Life** studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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WORD TO LIFE

— **WEEK 9** —

- MAR 02
- MAR 03
- MAR 04
- MAR 05
- MAR 06

— **WEEK 10** —

- MAR 09
- MAR 10
- MAR 11
- MAR 12
- MAR 13

— **WEEK 11** —

- MAR 16
- MAR 17
- MAR 18
- MAR 19
- MAR 20

— **WEEK 12** —

- MAR 23
- MAR 24
- MAR 25
- MAR 26
- MAR 27

## Week 9: Matthew 20:17-19

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 20:17-19

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 20:17-19 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you think that Jesus took the disciples aside at this point in this story to tell them about what was to come?

**Question:** Why do you think Jesus tells them three times about His pending death?

**Activity:** Find other places in Matthew where Jesus mentions His impending death and write down the context of those situations.

**Question:** Jerusalem is south of where Jesus and His disciples have been. What possible significance might there be behind Jesus saying, “we are going up to Jerusalem”?

**Question:** Why does Jesus refer to Himself as the Son of Man in this context and what does it mean that He is the Son of Man?

**Questions:** What does Jesus’ knowledge about what was to come tell us about His resolve and heart to actually go through with the suffering He was to face? How does it add to His love for those He was to suffer for?

**Activity:** Write down all the afflictions and trials that Christ had to go through while on earth and thank Him for going through them for you and the rest of His people.

## **Week 9: Matthew 20:17-19**

### **Day 2: The Willing Suffering Servant**

**READ: Matt 20:17-19; Matt 16:21-23; Matt 17:22-23; Rom 5:6-11**

#### **EXPLORE:**

My husband recently rediscovered an assignment from high school in which he amazingly predicted where we would meet, my hair and eye color, and even where I would go to college! It was such a sweet reminder of how the Lord knew our stories from the beginning. He is a God who knows what is to come and has divine control over all things!

In this week's passage, Jesus tells His twelve disciples about the specific details about how He would suffer and die. He is even more detailed than He was in Matthew 16 & 17. He described how the chief priests and scribes would condemn Him, and give Him to the Gentiles who would mock, flog, and crucify Him. Jesus, fully God and fully man, knew exactly what He was walking into as He made His way towards Jerusalem, and it was important to Him that His disciples knew it was in accordance with God's plan of redemption. To me, Jesus' foreknowledge and willful obedience ultimately show that He was in control of it all, even down to His horrific and painful death.

It is interesting to consider where Matthew places this prediction within his writings. Prior to this week's passage, Jesus revisits the "last shall be first" concept through the parable of the vineyard workers. Following this week's passage, Jesus again highlights "the last shall be first". He emphasizes that those who want to be great need to humble themselves and live as servants to others. He says, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus' prediction of His death in the context of these two passages reminds us that He willingly became the suffering servant predicted in Scripture to redeem us from our sins. In response to this, we should follow His

example of willful obedience to the LORD, desiring to know and follow God. This incredible gift should move us to joyfully seek to serve and be used by God for His glory!

Not only did Jesus know how He would die, He knew exactly who He would be dying to redeem and reconcile to God. In Romans 5, it says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Notice, Jesus told all 12 of His disciples what was to happen—that includes Judas, who later betrays Him. Jesus knew that Judas would commit the ultimate betrayal, yet He still includes him when revealing how the gospel would be accomplished through this betrayal! Jesus willingly went to the cross, taking on the wrath of God, not for righteous people, but for sinful people. He did this knowing it was to save us—the ones who have rebelled, the ones puffed up in pride, the ones who continually fall down, the ones who are bound by shame. He knew what we would do before we even took our first breath—and still He moved towards us and chose to reconcile us to Himself.

**BIG IDEA: When Jesus predicted His death, He displayed His divine control over and foreknowledge of His crucifixion. He willingly became the suffering servant to save our souls.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Why is it important for us to remember that Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing what would happen on the cross and who He would be dying for?
- **Challenge:** Take a few minutes to reflect on ways you have seen God's ultimate control over everything.

## **Week 9: Matthew 20:17-19**

### **Day 3: The City on a Hill**

**READ: Matthew 20:17-19**

#### **EXPLORE:**

If you read through the Bible, there is a city that pops up again and again.

Wars throughout history were fought over this sacred city, and God promised in the book of Revelation to restore the city in eternal glory. This city is where Jesus is headed. He is headed toward Jerusalem.

Throughout the Old and New Covenants, Jerusalem has been an important city. The people of God would gather and worship in the temple, and they would offer sacrifices there. It was the Israelites' capital, and even under Roman rule it was the center of their civilization. Zion, a synonym for Jerusalem, is also used to describe God's presence, specifically within the Psalms. God's presence would rest in the temple, and the Israelite people could come and worship.

This city is what Jesus is traveling up to; however, it is a place that is quite low on the map. If you are able to find a map of ancient Israel, you will see that it sits towards the southern side of Israel. So how could Jesus be going "up" to this city? The answer is twofold. Firstly, Jerusalem is pretty high above sea level, and due to the lack of satellite imaging they had in the Roman Empire, the journey was seen as going "up" despite actually being south on the map. Jerusalem was a city on a hill, overlooking large portions of land. The second part of the answer goes back to the meaning of Zion. Jesus is not just going up in elevation, but He is approaching God's presence. The location of the temple, where God dwells among His people, is what Jesus is approaching. He is getting ready to fulfill God's ultimate plan to redeem humanity.

Jerusalem is an incredibly important city, with a rich history in the Bible, but it does not overshadow what Jesus foretells. Jesus is going up to Zion so that God may be glorified mightily. Through Jesus, the presence of God that once dwelt in the temple, would be available to all the people of God. With what Jesus was about to do, it was not just Zion that was a city on a hill, but now it was all God's people. His sacrifice would allow the full power of God to dwell in every believer's heart.

**BIG IDEA: Jerusalem is a historied city with a close connection to ideas like God's presence and His power. However, through Jesus God's presence does not sit only in Jerusalem, but now in His believers.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What does your "Jerusalem" look like? Where do you go to be close with God?
- **Question:** Jerusalem was a concentrated place of God's power; how does it affect your walk with God knowing that same power is inside you?

## **Week 9: Matthew 20:17-19**

### **Day 4: The Cross We Celebrate and the Cross We Carry**

#### **READ: Matthew 20:17-19**

#### **EXPLORE:**

This passage is one of several where Jesus predicts His future suffering and death to His disciples. This passage reveals additional details as He mentions who He will be afflicted by and how they will mock and flog Him before killing Him. Jesus fully knew the torment He would endure but also fully knew the resurrection to follow and the life-changing, world-altering salvation to come as a result of His obedience to the point of death. Jesus was firm in His convictions to be obedient to the Father, and He obeyed with joy (Heb. 12:2) because He knew its worth. Isaiah 42:4 predicts Jesus' fortitude and resolve to endure the cross for the sake of our salvation, saying, "He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law." This is our God. Our God was not only willing to die to save His creation from themselves but did so with such power to resurrect in order to bring new life. Do not lose sight of the majesty, wonder, power, love, grace, holiness, and humility that our God possesses and demonstrated through the cross. Love Him for it!

So often we take our salvation for granted, as if we deserve such mysterious mercy. We do not. We have spat in God's face with our self-righteousness. We have mocked Him with our apathy. We have betrayed Him with our sin. Jesus was willing to be killed by the very people whom He came to save. Jesus suffered from the malice of Jews and Gentiles and, yet, He brought reconciliation to both through His death and resurrection (Eph. 2:16). Jesus, who certainly deserved to suffer the least, took on the most suffering imaginable in order that we who deserve to suffer the most may escape our suffering and that Christ could display the grace of

God through His suffering. What about our suffering, then? What is our response to be to our own afflictions?

So often, when suffering comes our way, we complain, we avoid it, and we grumble. But our salvation comes with a responsibility to suffer with Christ (Rom. 8:17). We are called to remain faithful in our hope of the glory to come as we endure our present sufferings. We must set our eyes on the things unseen so that we can view our current afflictions rightly as light and momentary. Not only are we to endure the sufferings of this life with joy and hope in Christ, but the Christian life requires us to willingly walk into uncomfortable, difficult, and self-denying situations. In our areas of temptation, we turn our world upside-down to give no opportunity to the flesh. We are called to challenging conversations with believers and unbelievers alike to point them to Christ. We are called to deny self, take up our cross, live in rebellion to the ways of the world, live set apart, and choose the narrow path! So, Christian-living is not just enduring suffering when it comes to us with godly joy but also, choosing the hard things, the things of God.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus willingly suffered with joy for our salvation, and in response, believers are called to embrace suffering with faithful hope as we follow Him.**

**APPLY:**

- **Questions:** In what specific ways are you resisting suffering or self-denial? What are you prioritizing instead (comfort, finances, routine, career, etc.)? Is Jesus worth it to you to surrender those idols and choose Him first?
- **Challenge:** Take time to meditate on Jesus' death on the cross for you and appreciate His sacrifice.

## Week 9: Matthew 20:17-19

### Day 5: The Way of the Lord

**READ: Matthew 20:17-19; Isaiah 40:1-5; Acts 9:2**

#### EXPLORE:

Matthew locates Jesus' (final) prediction of His death as occurring on 'the way' to Jerusalem. This is surely not a throwaway comment considering the skill with which Matthew constructs his book. It invites the attentive reader to reflect on several matters. Chief among them is that this is 'the way' that the Father has chosen to redeem a new covenant people – 'the way' of the suffering and death, 'the way' of the cross. Secondly, Matthew is, self-consciously bringing forward language that had its origin in Isaiah, that portion of Isaiah with which we are familiar words, *'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare has ended, her iniquity has been pardoned...'*. God is going to comfort his people and turn His face toward her and forgive her sins. And in verse 3 we read the following: *'A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain."*' (Is. 40:1-4). This quotation is the key interpretive framework for Matthew and the other Gospels all the way into Acts. Whereas the Isaiah quotation occurs at the beginning of an extended section in Isaiah that prophesies the coming of a new exodus whereby Israel will be delivered from bondage in Babylon, the writers of the Gospels quite transparently bring this notion of the new exodus forward to frame the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the God who will lead his people from exile and slavery (to sin) and he will do it by paying the price for their sin ('their iniquity has been pardoned') – the ransom price has been paid – the death of the first-born son, the Lamb of God. This is how God is going to comfort His people and pardon their sins and provide a way to the ultimate Promised Land. It is not by accident

that the 'original' name of the nascent Christian movement was *The Way*, identifying the church as God's true people. We are reminded of the repeated reference to the Christian movement as 'the way' in Acts, which most of the time occurs in contexts of persecution or opposition, most obviously in Acts 9:2 "*But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> ... so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*" (See also Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

Of course, the first hint of this trajectory occurs in Gen. 3, after the Fall where we read that God '*drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life*'. Jesus now comes *and* calls Himself, '*the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through*' Him (John 14:6). Jesus is on the way to Calvary to go under the flaming sword so that we can eat from the tree of life (Rev. 22:2-4). Early Christians were called followers of 'the Way' not simply because of the way they lived, but precisely because of who they followed. 'The Way' is not simply a set of behaviors but a person. It is only by trusting in and following the one who is the Way that we enter the life that is truly life and come to know the Father.

**BIG IDEA: Matthew reminds us that the Father was leading His son, Jesus (the greater son of Abraham) by the hand on the way to Jerusalem where He was going to suffer and die for our sins and He was going to raise Jesus for our justification.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you stop and think of how deep is the Father's love for us – that He would lead His Son by the hand on the way to Golgotha?
- **Challenge:** Reflect on what it meant for Jesus to travel on the way to Jerusalem, knowing what was ahead of Him.

## Week 10: Matthew 20:20-28

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 20:20-28

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 20:20-28 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Do you think that James and John asked their mother to talk to Jesus on their behalf or did she come on her own?

**Question:** Do you think that the mother should be looked at as a positive or negative example?

**Question:** What is the cup that Jesus is to drink?

**Questions:** Why do you think that it is not for Jesus to grant who sits at His right and left hand? What did He mean by that? Who will get to sit there?

**Activity:** Write down the qualities that you think make a good ruler according to Jesus.

**Question:** In what ways do rulers incorrectly exercise their authority?

**Questions:** What does it look like to be a servant to all? Can any of us really show that level of humility? Does that level of humility make you uncomfortable?

## **Week 10: Matthew 20:20-28**

### **Day 2: Authority on Heaven and Earth**

**READ: Matthew 20:20-28**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Today we will discuss the idea of servanthood and authority while examining what led the sons of Zebedee (James and John) to ask their mother to request roles of honor in Jesus' kingdom.

We often look back at the discourse between Jesus and the disciples and wonder how they could be so misguided in their application of His teaching. In today's passage, we may wonder how James and John could ask their mother to request places of honor in the kingdom and how they could misguidedly tell Jesus that they were ready to drink from the cup that He was to drink. I think we often fall into this same trap, forgetting that we too are guilty of applying false assumptions to the kingdom and requesting things we do not understand and are not ready for. In this case, Jesus uses the situation to draw a distinction between heavenly authority and earthly authority.

Jesus says, "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them." In seeking a position of power, the sons of Zebedee were seeking this type of authority. Jesus tells them, "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave." Earthly authority is disseminated among individuals because an earthly ruler cannot be everywhere at once and does not have the power necessary to carry out his plan across his entire domain. God, however, is omniscient and omnipotent. He puts people in authority but does not need them. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are servants and slaves. God does not need people to hold authority; our authority is only received to the extent that we are obedient to Him and point others to the Master.

We see echoes of this idea in Colossians 3:1–4: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” This passage models how to seek things that are above. We are hidden with Christ in God; our servanthood points to Christ, and Christ is our life.

This can also be seen in Ephesians 2:8–10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Salvation and good works are gifts from God. It is only through faith in Christ and submission to the will of God that we are able to do the good works He has prepared for us.

**BIG IDEA: We are all tasked with being servants of God. It is only through obedience to God’s will that we can put on the mantle of Christ and hide ourselves in God. This allows us to walk in the good works Christ has prepared for us and to point others to Him.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Are there any times that you can think of where you made a foolish or unwise request of God like the sons of Zebedee did in this passage?
- **Questions:** How can we incorporate the idea of servanthood into our prayer life? How are your prayers different when you seek to shift authority to God?

## **Week 10: Matthew 20:20-28**

### **Day 3: Be Careful What You Wish For**

**READ: Matt 20:20-28; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:26; James 4:3**

#### **EXPLORE:**

One of the classic Disney movies is Aladdin. There was a lot that made the movie enjoyable, but perhaps the greatest appeal was the genie. The genie brings that enticing question that enters into our minds. If I received three wishes, what would I wish for? One of the lessons to learn from Aladdin is that wishes don't turn out the way that we expect. This is because hearts don't know what will satisfy them. Hearts are fickle and ever-changing. What's fulfilling one minute will depress us in the next. If that statement is true, the question then becomes, is it worth wishing at all?

In our passage for this week, the mother of James and John falls down before Jesus and makes an unexpected request. She asks for her sons to be able to sit next to Jesus in His kingdom. As far as wishes go, that appears to be a very good one. However, the mother clearly did not know what she was asking. In her mind, as in the mind of everyone around Jesus, sitting on His right and left hand meant ruling the world through an earthly kingdom. It meant Jesus having a literal throne and having two literal seats filled by someone in His army. What a request for two fishermen! However, to reign with Jesus even in heaven means going through intense suffering on earth. The mother did not know what she was asking for, but she did go to the right person. Let's analyze where the mother went right and where she went wrong.

First, let's cover where she went right. She went to the correct person. She brought the desires of her heart to God. She asked in humility. All positives that we as Christians should emulate. We should bring all the desires of our heart to God, and we should bring them humbly. Great, but now we turn to what we can learn from where the woman went wrong. Paul and James give us two

important reminders when it comes to the manner in which we are to pray.

The first reminder from Paul is that we do not know what to pray for as we ought. This goes back to the wish problem. Some of us know what we want but none of us really know what we need. It's often a blessing to not get what we ask for because God has a better plan for our lives. Paul tells us that the Spirit intercedes for us with "groanings too deep for words". Praise God for the Spirit's intercession. We need to remind ourselves that it's helpful to spend time in prayer not looking to receive but looking to thank, ask for what to ask for, praise, confess, and be silent before the Lord.

The second reminder by James is that we can make requests to God "wrongly". Our mindset can be on what is earthly and not on what is heavenly. We need to be reminded that we might not be receiving what we ask for because we have secret impure motives that we have not properly examined.

These two reminders should not deter us from praying but should challenge us to pray differently. We should not pray for just what is earthly, but we should also pray for what is heavenly.

**BIG IDEA: God's not a genie and that's a good thing.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In what ways can you pray more like Christ wants you to?
- **Challenge:** Write down what you would be tempted to wish for and how it might actually be worse for you if you received it.

## **Week 10: Matthew 20:20-28**

### **Day 4: A Ransom for Many**

**READ: Matthew 20:20-28; Hebrews 10:1-4; Isaiah 53:10-12**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In our study of the Gospel according to Matthew, we are just weeks away from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem for His final week. Jesus is days away from succeeding in His rescue mission. In our passage this week, Jesus states His own understanding of His mission: "Not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." All creation has been longing for the payment of this ransom.

Jesus' use of the word "ransom" would have made a first-century audience think of the price paid to buy a slave's freedom. It also would have called to His Jewish audience's mind the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, who gives Himself up to death as an offering for our guilt and to bear the sin of many. Here it is used metaphorically for setting mankind free from sin and its penalty.

A question that may arise at this point is "for what reason does a ransom need to be paid?" I'm glad you asked. God is holy – He is utterly pure, morally perfect, unblemished, a blindingly bright light with no darkness at all. Standing in stark contrast to His holiness is our fallen nature which is corrupt and inclined toward evil. We express this corruption by sinning – transgressing God's righteous law – and we bring guilt upon ourselves. Our guilt demands God's justice and judgment. But because God loves us, He doesn't wish for anyone to perish under His judgment. So God devised a way for His people to deal with their sins through a system of animal sacrifice at the temple.

The temple sacrificial system given to Israel by God was an act of grace, but by design it was imperfect. Each individual had to sacrifice lambs and other animals repeatedly and endlessly. They

were a signpost pointing to the perfect sacrifice to come – Jesus’ once-for-all offering where One died but many benefited.

The Son of Man came as the perfect Lamb of God. All the animal sacrifices in the temple pointed to Him. Because He was fully God, His blood was a payment of infinite worth, able to cover every sin of every person. Because He was fully man, He was able to stand as our substitute. Therefore, the ransom Jesus paid is sufficient for all.

But this does not mean that everyone will inevitably be saved. That is an unbiblical idea called universalism. Those who believe this false doctrine imagine that Jesus’ death on the cross was universal in its effect, ultimately resulting in eternal salvation for every person. This contradicts Jesus’ teaching (John 3:16; John 14:6) and Paul’s teaching (Eph 2:8) that the benefit of Christ’s atoning death is only applied to those who believe. While it is sufficient to save every person, it actually saves only those who trust in Him. Another way to say it is that Jesus’ self-sacrifice is unlimited in its sufficiency but limited in its efficacy – faith is needed for its saving application.

**BIG IDEA: The ransom has been paid in full—but only those who trust in Christ receive the freedom He purchased.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** People stand condemned for their sin. Repentance and faith in Jesus is their only way to salvation. Spend time in prayer asking God to give you the compulsion that Paul felt when he said, “necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”

## **Week 10: Matthew 20:20-28**

### **Day 5: Family Servant Leadership**

**READ TOGETHER: Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; 2 Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 6:4**

#### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

There are many “wise sayings” that read like fortune cookies. “Less is more.” “What’s done cannot be undone.” “If at first, you don’t succeed, skydiving is not for you.” The last quote may not be what most people consider a wise saying. But the other two are very popular quotes that are meant to be thought about deeply, but they don’t really have a ton of substance. Less definitely can be more in some circumstances but it’s not a good piece of general wisdom. What’s done cannot be undone is just an obvious statement that intends the reader to really sit with the reality of finality. Jesus has statements that could appear to an outsider like these quotes, but Jesus’ words are infinitely more profound and have eternal significance.

“Whoever would be first among you must be your slave.” What a statement by Jesus. One that makes me wonder if the disciples even understood it. How could a slave be first? A slave is obviously last, everyone knows that. But Jesus is not identifying proper classifications, He is attacking the presuppositions of what everyone believes a leader should be. He says a true leader doesn’t focus on obedience to orders, they focus on the needs of their followers. It’s important to clarify that Jesus doesn’t intend to undermine God-given authorities but challenge them. Jesus’ challenge is repeated to specific authorities throughout the New Testament. This WTL will look at three examples.

Peter uses Christ’s teaching on leadership and applies it to the elders of the church when he says that they should not lead

others under compulsion, should not seek their own gain, or be domineering. Instead, he says elders should be examples.

Paul says to the Corinthians that his own authority as an apostle was given to him for building up and not for tearing up even though he had the right to be *severe* in order to bring necessary correction.

Paul says to the Ephesian fathers that they should not use their authority to unnecessarily anger their children but only wield it to provide proper discipline and instruction to them.

I want to focus on this last call of authority because it pertains to most families in the church. Fathers and mothers are given authority by God over their children. This is an absolute authority that many parents can abuse or neglect. In some ways all of us who are parents will not properly use authority, but that is why we must remember the words of Scripture. We need to be reminded constantly that as parents we have responsibilities to lead our children, but in a way that considers their needs above our own. We are to serve them by disciplining and instructing properly and not sinfully. Reminding ourselves that anyone can be in authority and abuse it, Christ calls us to be in authority and use it like He did.

**BIG IDEA: Christ calls us to lead by considering the needs of those to whom God has entrusted us.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Write down five ways in which you can better lead others like Christ.

## Week 11: Matthew 20:29-34

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 20:29-34

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 20:29-34 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you believe that Matthew mentions two blind men as opposed to just one?

**Question:** Why do you think that the men used the title "Son of David" to get Jesus' attention?

**Activity:** Write down all the titles that are given to Jesus that you can think of, then search for the rest of them in Scripture.

**Questions:** Why do you think that the crowd rebuked the blind men? What does that say about the crowds that surrounded Jesus?

**Question:** What can you learn from the blind men?

**Question:** Why do you think Jesus asked the blind men what they wanted instead of just healing them?

**Question:** What do you think it means that Jesus responded out of pity? Describe what pity means in this verse.

**Question:** How can you better appreciate the Lord's mercy?

**Activity:** Spend some time researching scriptural passages that talk about God revealing Himself to those who cannot see.

## **Week 11: Matthew 20:29-34**

### **Day 2: Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord**

**READ: Matthew 20:29-34**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Up until now Jesus has gone to great lengths to keep His identity as the Christ hidden. Interestingly enough, it was the blind or the outcast who *saw* exactly who Jesus was. In this passage, two blind men heard that Jesus was coming through and cried out to Him, “Son of David.” So far, the phrase “Son of David” has been used four times, three of them being from the mouths of individuals or crowds, (two of them from the blind), the first being from Matthew himself (Matthew 1:1-6). Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem for the last time, and it was now up to the people to see with not just their eyes, but their hearts, who this man really was. As He rides in on a donkey, the crowd had eyes to see, but they still got it wrong. They said He was a prophet, versus the two blind men, who were proclaiming rightly from faith that Jesus was the true Son of David, prophesied about from the Old Testament. We know that it was not only this crowd, but close disciples, that were blind to who He actually was. Judas was blinded by greed, some disciples were blinded by fear of the Jews, finally, Thomas was blinded by pride. He continued in his disbelief for 8 days until Jesus appeared to him, allowing him physical proof, though stating, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed” (John 20:29). The blind men asked for their physical eyes to be open, but so many witnesses and followers needed to ask for their hearts to be softened. This was Jesus’ desire as well, but as we know from Scripture, our default mode is hardness of heart. Which is why our prayer should be: “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. I want to see you.” We don’t need to see Jesus with our eyes, the proof has been laid out before us, it’s all around us. We have already crossed paths with it. Are your eyes open? Or is there something blinding you? Is it fear of man, because we see persecution of the

bold and outspoken, or isolation and unpopularity at school? Is it greed, seeing the most rich and successful around you quieting their faith so they can take whatever steps necessary to climb the corporate ladder? Or is it your own pride, refusing to go all in on something you can't see, touch, or altogether understand? The truth is we all fit into one of those categories, or more. The good news is, there is mercy for you. Jesus' prayer after being mocked and beaten, before going to the cross, was "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). But what will you do with the forgiveness that is ready for you? Will you, through faulty eyes see God clearly as the Son of David, the true and promised Savior? Or, out of fear, greed, or pride, reject Him as your own? Dwell on this reading, and when you're ready, read John 9 and John 12:37-43, then answer the following questions.

**BIG IDEA: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them" (John 12:40).**

**APPLY:**

- **Questions:** How many times do you see fear mentioned or referenced in your readings? What about pride or greed?
- **Question:** What other things do you think prevent blind people from believing and committing to Christ?
- **Question:** What distracts you the most from seeing God clearly, or what hardens your heart, preventing you from having closeness with God?

## **Week 11: Matthew 20:29-34**

### **Day 3: What's the Meaning of Son of David?**

**READ: Matthew 20:29-34**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In Matthew 20:31, two blind men cry out to Jesus saying, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” The New Testament refers to Jesus as the “Son of David” seventeen times, raising the question of how He could be related to David, who lived about 1,000 years earlier. First, let’s be clear that David was the second king of Israel and chosen by God and called “a man after God’s own heart.” The key to understanding the relationship between David and Jesus lies in the prophecy from 2 Samuel 7:12–13, which states that, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” This is called the Davidic covenant, the promise God made to David, that a King from his lineage would reign on the throne forever.

Matthew 1 is a genealogy showing that Jesus is a direct descendant of David through Joseph, His legal father. Luke 3 traces His lineage all the way back to Adam, and many scholars believe this lineage is through Mary, His biological mother, confirming Jesus as a descendant by blood. Thus, He is recognized as a descendant of David through both adoption and biological connection. Romans 1:3 affirms that Jesus was a “descendant of David” in His earthly life.

When the blind men call Jesus the “Son of David,” they are using a Messianic title, indicating that He is the long-awaited Deliverer prophesied in the Old Testament. Calling Him “Lord” expressed their sense of His deity, dominion, and power.

The Pharisees understood the implications of the title, but their pride blinded them to the truth. They resented Jesus for not honoring them, leading to their hostility and plotting against Him. Jesus challenged the Pharisees by asking how the Messiah could be both David's son and his Lord, based on Mark 12:35–37. Their inability to answer exposed their lack of understanding about the true nature of the Messiah.

Jesus reveals that He is more than just David's son; He is also his Lord. As stated in Revelation 22:16, He is "the Root and the Offspring of David," underscoring His dual role as both Creator and Descendant. Only the Son of God made flesh could embody such a profound identity.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus is the prophesied Son of David, who is both Savior and Lord.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** When the two blind men cried out to Jesus, they knew and understood that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. As a result, they cried out to Him for help and healing. What about you? Is there something going on in your life right now that you need to cry out to Jesus and ask Him to meet you in your time of need? Do so now.

## **Week 11: Matthew 20:29-34**

### **Day 4: A God Who Pities**

**READ: Matthew 20:29-34; 1 Corinthians 15:19**

#### **EXPLORE:**

“I’d rather have anybody’s hate than their pity.” That quote encompasses most people’s attitude when it comes to the word pity. We hate to be pitied because it means that someone else is looking in on our situation in a negative way. On rare occasions, it won’t affect our egos too much—like at the funeral of a loved one—but in most cases, it feels bad to be pitied. I think if the word pitied was substituted for compassion, then that would make it more palatable for people, but the Greek word found in Matthew 20:34 is translated both ways. In fact, many English definitions of the word compassion use the word pity and vice versa. This means that the connotations of the words are the main differences and it’s worth thinking about why the word pity became seen as a negative term.

The American dream is the idea that anyone, no matter their background, can become financially successful if they work hard enough. Whenever someone becomes successful, especially through a business that they created, there is an enormous sense of accomplishment. On the flip side though, if someone fails to be successful and does so after they put a lot of time and effort into their business, they are pitied.

Family is said to be the bedrock of civilization. Without the family, the human species could literally not survive. Family is the way in which a man or woman can pass on their genes, pass on their legacy, and pass on their values to the next generation. When someone cannot have a family, whether that’s due to not finding a spouse, losing a spouse, not being able to have kids, etc., they are pitied.

People knowing who you are and loving you that way provides a high amount of self-esteem. To be popular and well-liked for just being yourself sounds superficial and shallow, but it fulfills a deep longing within the human heart. Anyone who is lonely and hated by others is pitied.

There have been many depictions of God and gods throughout time that do not care about mankind. They are distant, self-absorbed, chaotic. Some think there is no God or gods, and truth, justice, and love are all words with no ultimate meaning. Those that believe in such things are truly to be pitied.

It does not feel good to be pitied and the worst kind of pity is self-pity. It doesn't feel good to believe that you are hopeless and there is nothing that can be done about it.

We are to be pitied unless God steps into our lives and changes everything. We are all blind men and women waiting on the road for someone to open our eyes. We need God to take pity on us, poor, lost souls who are hopeless and helpless on our own. If we have accepted Christ, we now serve a God who redeems all the ways in which we may have been pitied. We serve a God who redeems our work even in failure because we will work for His kingdom. We serve a God who provides us with an eternal family. We serve a God who truly knows us and yet truly loves us. We serve a God that isn't distant but close, enough to want a relationship with us that is never-ending. Without the eternal Christ, Paul says we are to be the most pitied people on earth, but with Him we get to await glory. We are not victims but victors.

**BIG IDEA: God had pity on us, and it makes all the difference.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Where would you be without God's pity?

## Week 11: Matthew 20:29-34

### Day 5: Open Our Eyes Lord

READ: Matthew 20:29-34

#### EXPLORE:

What is the worst thing that you can take from a person? Some might say their family. Others might say their income.

Possessions? Career? What would you say? I suggest it is their purpose. A person's purpose gives them reason to get up in the morning. It gives them reason to get through each day. It sustains them through the tough times of life. The greater that purpose is, the more it will make them zealous. If the purpose is everything to a person, then they will sacrifice everything for that purpose. The blind men on the road had a purpose worth everything to them.

Imagine being blind and forced to beg on the side of the road because you had no one willing to take you in. What would you do? What would your attitude be? Then imagine there was one person in the entire world who could heal you and they walked right next to you. What would your response be? **“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”** That's what the blind men shouted. The crowd tried to silence them. Think of what the crowd meant to those guys on the side of the road. Blind beggars who want to speak to their only hope in the world. The crowd meant nothing to them. There was no resistance that would even give them pause. They would push their entire bodies to the limits to get to Christ. Nothing would stop them.

The crowd tried to silence them, but they only cried out all the more. It's not that the resistance to them caused them to pause, the resistance led to them crying out all the more. A devoted husband would crawl through any amount of rocks, thorns, and/or fire to get to his wife. A mom would fight off wild animals to get to her children. These men would fight the Roman army blind if it meant they could get to Jesus.

How often do we cry out for Jesus like these men? What would you do for the mercy of God? What would you do because you have been shown mercy by God?

It's easy to coast in the Christian life. To not push ourselves towards holier living. To know that since we cannot earn our salvation, we don't need to try and please God in everything we do. This mindset is poison to our sanctification. We must look to the blind beggars every day. Look to those who were so desperate to get to Jesus, that no obstacles would stop them. The obstacles themselves can function as catalysts for drawing us closer to Christ. There are many things that try to keep us from Christ. The evil one, our sin, the trials of this world, but none of it has to keep us from Him. Those temptations can cause us to cling even harder to the one who delivers us from all evil.

What should we want from God? Just like the blind beggars we should want Christ to open our eyes so that we can clearly see what God wants from us and how we can better serve Him. Will you cry out from the road, despite those trying to stop you?

**BIG IDEA: God continually opens our eyes to things that we need to see, but we need to seek Him despite the resistance that we will face.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Ask God to open your eyes up to something that you are currently not seeing clearly. Write down possible answers that God brings to your mind.

## **Week 12: Matthew 21:1-11**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 21:1-11**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 21:1-11 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why did Jesus request both a donkey and a colt?

**Question:** Why does Jesus orchestrate this scene in the way that He does?

**Questions:** What is the significance of the crowd spreading their cloaks on the road? What about the branches?

**Question:** What do you believe the crowds thought about Jesus and what He was going to do in Jerusalem?

**Question:** What do you think it means that the whole city was stirred up because of the presence of Jesus?

**Question:** The “crowds” identified Jesus as both the Son of David and a prophet. Do you think it was the same crowd or two different crowds?

**Question:** What would have been the most appropriate way for the whole city to welcome Jesus?

**Activity:** Compare this account of the Triumphal Entry with the other accounts of it (Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19). Record the similarities and differences below.

## Week 12: Matthew 21:1-11

### Day 2: Hosanna in the Highest!

**READ: Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19**

#### EXPLORE:

As we look at the first “Palm Sunday” (aka “The Triumphal Entry”), let’s explore how Jesus was greeted into Jerusalem...and perhaps how we should greet Him as well!

*Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “**Hosanna** to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! **Hosanna** in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” –Matthew 21:8-11*

We know that Jesus has many names and many titles. He is the Messiah. He is the Christ. Son of God. Immanuel. The Word. Light of the World. The Good Shepherd. Lion of Judah. Lamb of God. Alpha and Omega. King of Kings. Savior. But Hosanna? Where did that one come from? Looking through your Bible, you’ll only see it used in the Gospels...and only at the beginning of the Passion week. Yet the crowds were all on the same page about what to call Jesus that day. They were sure of who He was, what He represented, and they shouted it together in unison! Hosanna comes from two Hebrew words *Yasha* (save) and *Anna* (beseech) used in Psalm 118:25, and means “Save us, we pray!” {Yash-anna = Hosanna}. Each year, when the Jewish people would return to Jerusalem for Passover, they would sing songs of hope, like Psalm 118. It was (and still is) a worship song. A worship battle cry. A statement of faith. Since the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...Since the reign of King David and King Solomon...God’s people were waiting for the Messiah. Waiting for their King to

come take His place on the throne. Waiting for signs. Waiting for THE sign. Waiting. Wishing. Hoping. Praying. And God answered their prayers! He showed up! Praise the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest. But by the end of the week, the joy, peace, and love had all but diminished. He wasn't the kind of king they had imagined. He was a servant king. And they killed him for not giving them what they thought they wanted. How are things different today? We wait for peace. We wait for joy. We wait for salvation. We can sing to Him:

*Heal my heart and make it clean  
Open up my eyes to the things unseen  
Show me how to love like You have loved me  
Break my heart for what breaks Yours  
Everything I am for Your Kingdom's cause  
As I walk from earth into eternity*

And, amazingly, when we pray to Him—when we beg and plead and leave the trappings of this world behind and say, “Save us, we pray!” Hosanna in the Highest!—He answers!

**BIG IDEA: Jesus Saves. Were it not for His sacrifice on the cross, we would be doomed to an eternity apart from God the Father. Thank you, Lord, for hearing our prayers to save us! Hosanna in the Highest!**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Why do many Christians cheer for their favorite football team on Saturday...but quietly, timidly sing praise songs at church on Sunday?
- **Question:** What name of Jesus is resonating with you today? Why?
- **Challenge:** Other than fanning palm branches in the street, how can you boldly profess and honor Jesus today?

## **Week 12: Matthew 21:1-11**

### **Day 3: Fulfilling Prophecy**

**READ: Matthew 21:1-11; Zechariah 9:9**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In many churches around the world, Palm Sunday is celebrated with children waving palm branches and shouting “hosanna” at some point during the service. This simple act reminds us of the events surrounding Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem as He began to make His way to the cross. However, the triumphal entry is more than waving palm branches or Jesus entering the city on a donkey—it is an event centered around the fulfillment of a specific prophecy in Zechariah 9:9.

Matthew 21:1-11 opens with Jesus and His disciples approaching Jerusalem. He then tells two disciples to go into the village where they would find a donkey and colt tied up. Jesus instructs them to bring the animals back to Him and tells the disciples if anyone asks why they are taking the animals to tell them the Lord needs them. In verses 4 and 5, Matthew points the readers to how Jesus’ entrance into the city is a direct fulfillment of prophecy. For us, it may seem odd that Matthew does not identify which prophet he is quoting from, but the original audience would have been familiar with the books of the Law and the Prophets and would have recognized this messianic prophecy as being from the prophet Zechariah.

The quote in this passage is from Zechariah 9:9 and tells of a humble king who will come to the people on a donkey. In the ancient world, the image of a king riding into a city on an animal would have been understood in the context of war as a king coming to free people from oppression. However, in Zechariah’s prophecy he changes this perspective. Instead of coming as a powerful king with an army, the coming Messiah would be humble and meek riding on a lowly donkey. By connecting Jesus’

entrance into Jerusalem to Zechariah's prophecy, Matthew shows that Jesus was declaring He was the promised Messiah who was coming to free His people. His humble entrance represented the kingdom of peace He was bringing would be established without violence, but in obedience and submission to the will of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1–11 demonstrates the important role Old Testament prophecy plays in understanding how God works throughout history. Zechariah's prophecy in the Old Testament illustrated how from the beginning God was orchestrating all of history towards the coming of Jesus. Matthew emphasizes that despite Jesus' humble entrance into Jerusalem He would still be received as a Messiah coming to free the people from oppression. However, this freedom would be different than expected. It would bring a kingdom of peace and would offer freedom from the bondage of sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. As Christians, we should seek to correctly understand and learn from Old Testament prophecy because it reveals God's plan for salvation from the beginning.

**BIG IDEA: Through Old Testament prophecy God pointed to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Which messianic prophecies in the Old Testament help you understand the significance of Jesus' coming?
- **Challenge:** Consider how correctly understanding prophecy reveals how God has been working throughout history.

## **Week 12: Matthew 21:1-11**

### **Day 4: A Donkey and a Colt**

**READ: Matthew 21:1-11**

#### **EXPLORE:**

I suppose that many of you can identify with me (Michael) in that you have a limited number of go-to movies that you love to watch over and over. Some you intentionally watch every year at the appropriate holiday like White Christmas or Groundhog Day. Others, you are incapable of just passing by when you are channel surfing like any entry in the original Star Wars trilogy or the Pitch Perfect trilogy. One of the coolest feelings is when I observe something in one of those comfort movies I have never noticed. But more importantly, how do you not notice something the first fifty times you watch a movie?

I have read this passage in Matthew many times during my life. How could I have never noticed that Jesus asked for the two disciples to bring Him both a colt and a female adult donkey versus just a single animal? Maybe I've never noticed the detail of the two animals because of my lack of attention to detail or maybe because all the historic paintings I've ever seen showed one animal, or that in the other three Gospels (Mark, Luke and John) the adult donkey is not mentioned. Should we be concerned about the reliability of Scripture when we come across a variance like this in the four Gospel accounts?

First of all, ask yourself, does this variation in Matthew's Gospel impact my understanding of the character of God or communicate some sort of variation in truth? In this instance whether this particular Gospel mentions the female adult donkey was retrieved or the other three do not, does not change the key parts of story, which every Gospel conveys the same. Jesus entered the city in a way that both displayed His humility and further proved that He was the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy.

Secondly, should the variation in Matthew's telling cause us to doubt the reliability of Scripture, specifically the Gospels? There is a reason we have four Gospel accounts and four perspectives. They are not just recounting their experiences from four different perspectives but also writing for different audiences and for different purposes, so they point out and highlight different things in the story. Matthew was focused on demonstrating to a predominantly Jewish audience that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Therefore he was focused on quoting and referencing prophecies about the Messiah from the Old Testament. He therefore quotes Zechariah 9:9, which mentions both a donkey and a colt, and so He takes care to make note that the adult donkey was there as well.

I don't love the amount of scrutiny the Bible and the Christian religion receives from people trying to disprove or discredit it. I want everyone to worship God and believe that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. That said, we can feel more confidence and faith in our beliefs because of the fact that it stands up to the weight of so much effort to disprove and discredit it.

**BIG IDEA: The nuances of each Gospel's account increase the credibility of Scripture.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** When you come across the little details in the Bible that you've never noticed or don't remember, use that to inspire your commitment to reading and spending time with Scripture. Use that to humble yourself that you don't know everything. There are always new things to learn about God no matter how many times you've read the Bible.

## Week 12: Matthew 21:1-11

### Day 5: Who is This?

READ: Matthew 21:6-11, Psalm 24

#### EXPLORE:

As Jesus enters Jerusalem to triumphant shouts of *“Hosanna in the highest!”* we’re told in Matthew 21:10 that *“the whole city was stirred up,”* asking, *“Who is this?”* It’s a simple question, but notably, it’s one that follows Jesus throughout his public life. After Jesus calms the storm in Mark 4, His disciples look at each other and ask, *“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* (Mark 4:41). In Luke 7, after Jesus forgives the sinful woman who anointed His feet, His fellow dinner guests start to whisper among themselves, *“Who is this, who even forgives sins?”* (Luke 7:49). And this question of Jesus’ identity is at the heart of His trial before Pilate as He is asked, *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (John 18:33) and *“Where are you from?”* (John 19:9). It seems the world desperately wants to know — who is this man?

For both the original 1<sup>st</sup> century audience and us today, our four Gospels are built around answering this question. Particularly so Matthew’s Gospel account. It’s why Matthew opens his book with a genealogy, the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of a résumé, establishing who Jesus is and where He’s from. It’s why Matthew deliberately ties the events surrounding Jesus’ birth and His ministry to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. And it’s why at critical points in the Gospel, answers to this question of identity keep cropping up. At the northernmost reaches of His Galilean ministry, for example, Jesus asks His disciples, *“who do you say that I am?”* (Matt 16:15). And Peter’s confession that *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matt 16:16) marks a critical turning point in Jesus’ redemptive mission. A shift in focus occurs and *“from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer...and be killed, and on the third day be raised”* (Matt 16:21). And it’s upon arriving at the cross, as Jesus

breathes His last in climactic conclusion of His earthly mission, that we hear the Roman guards overseeing His execution echo Peter's prior confession, likely without recognizing the magnitude of their declaration that, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"*

So who do you say Jesus is? Like Peter, do you knowingly confess Jesus as the Messiah? Do you perhaps say those words, but like the Roman soldiers not really know what they mean or how they should impact your life? Or are you still just asking the question, uncertain of the answer like the citizens of Jerusalem? Regardless, we must never stop asking who Jesus is. For confessing Christians, deeper reflection on this question sanctifies. It reveals where we have thought too little of God and grows our appreciation for all that He has done. It gives greater meaning to our identity as God's image bearers and the life we are called to live in submission to Jesus as both our Savior and Lord. Of course, for non-Christians the eternal consequences this question carries are even clearer. Jesus is the *"King of Glory"* described in Psalm 24, whose victory over sin and death has opened the gates of heaven for all those who place their faith in Him. Even on our best days we are far too sinful to ever approach our Holy God, but just as His disciples joined in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we are invited to declare Jesus as the Christ, the one who has come to save us from our sin, and then join the glorious parade into the heavenly New Jerusalem. *"Who is this King of Glory?"* May we never stop sharing the good news of our answer with a world in desperate need.

**BIG IDEA:** Let us mine the depths of Scripture to continue growing in our knowledge, love, and wonder of who Jesus is.

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does Jesus describe who He is throughout the Gospels? Identify some of His many answers and reflect on how each reveals His character and purpose.



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