

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 1:1—2:23

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

There is but one Gospel. It is the good news of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The historical documentation of this good news is, however, related by four different evangelists for people of different cultures and thought patterns, but for all times and every generation.

Matthew (sometimes called Levi) was a converted tax-collector. He was apparently a man of some material means but sacrificed it all to follow Jesus. Matthew wrote his account to be especially attractive to people interested in Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament. His genealogical account of Jesus' lineage traces his "roots" back to David and Abraham. Matthew is primarily interested in proving that Jesus is the Messiah (God's "Anointed") predicted in the Old Testament. Matthew made it a point to record a great deal of what Jesus said about true righteousness as contrasted with Jewish rabbinical dogma. He cites the fulfillment of some 40 OT passages in the life of Jesus in his Gospel. While it is Jewish in orientation, his gospel may be read and understood by any literate human being. Its veracity will be admitted by all honest and reasonable people. Its purpose is to make disciples of all the nations, i.e., obedient believers, saved and sanctified citizens of the kingdom of God.

The first four chapters in Matthew relate the *advent of the Messiah* into the world as his coming relates to the Old Testament predictions and preparations. In chapter one we will study the Messiah's predecessors and parents. In chapter two we will see his advent was preceded by numerous predictions about his supernatural birth and life.

QUESTIONS:

1. Is the genealogical record of Jesus of any value to the world today?
2. Joseph was not Jesus' father---why is Jesus' genealogy traced down to him?
3. How would the miraculous conception of Jesus fulfill (fill-up-full) what the prophet Isaiah predicted in Isa. 7:14?
4. Was Mary a perpetual virgin as one church teaches today?
5. Who were the wise men---where were they from--how did they know of the birth of the King of the Jews?
6. Jesus was born in a barn---how did the wise men find him in a house?
7. Is the tragedy of the Bethlehem infants all that is in Jeremiah's prophecy about Rachel's children (Matt. 2:16-19; see Jer. 31:15-40--the entire context)?
8. Where is the prophecy about the Nazarene in the OT?
9. Where, in the Scriptures, is there any indication that the first century Christians celebrated the birth of Jesus? Where did "Christmas" originate?

Levi is Matthew's Jewish name: it means "Companion"

"There are no instructions in the New Testament or the early writings of the Church Fathers to memorialize the birthday of Jesus Christ. Christmas marks the birth of an individual whose teachings, message and mission have proved to be the most influential of recorded time. When that birth is seen from the perspective of Christ's death, resurrection and coming again as scripture enjoins the celebration of Christmas can take on a startling significance. For bound up in that perception is the profound mystery of the Incarnation."

Morris Harris, columnist in the Joplin Globe, December 22, 1970

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 3:1--4:25

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

A world in rebellion was ripe for a spiritual invasion. The majority of civilization (the Gentiles) had taken up hostility toward its Creator in pagan licentiousness and idolatry. A small minority of mankind (the Jews) had rebelled against the law of God and had become inflexibly calcified in self-righteousness. But first, a spiritual beachhead must be established.

Suddenly bursting on the scene of history was a wild and woolly preacher, bellowing like a bull, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" The invasion had begun! The first wave was a singular individual who lived out in the uninhabited hills and river valleys and ate grasshoppers and wild honey. The austerity of his life and the unadulterated truth of his message electrified the Jewish populace. Thousands of people went out to the riverside to see and hear him. Many of them began to think spiritual thoughts. They confessed their sins, reordered their lives and were immersed in the waters of the river Jordan for the remission of their sins. This courageous soldier of righteousness was John the Immerser, a "voice" sent from God to declare the passing away of the old order and introduce the Prince of Peace to a world at war with God.

Next on the battlefield was that **Prince, Jesus Christ**. He met the enemy (Satan), in an initial, but extremely significant, skirmish and won a victory for rebellious humanity. Jesus Christ, fully human, faced every fiery dart (temptation) of the enemy and prevailed. Jesus overcame all temptation. He did not yield. He lived perfectly and absolutely in the will of God. By so doing he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

The temptations Jesus faced were no less real than yours! His were intensified beyond our comprehension because of his perfect sinlessness. He proved that human beings in fleshly bodies do not have to yield to the enemy---victory is possible—it is a matter of choosing God's word!

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did God send a person like John the Immerser to precede Christ? (see Isa. 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6; Matt. 11:1-19; 14:3-12; Lk. 1:5-80; 16:16)
2. Where did John get his ritual of immersion in water? Was it from the OT Law? from the Essenes? (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Jn. 1:6-8; 1:19-37)
3. If Jesus had no sins to confess, why did he need to be baptized? (Matt. 3:13-17)
4. What did John's ministry have to do with preparing the world for the Messiah?
5. What is temptation? Why does God permit it? (Matt. 18:7; Lk. 17:1-2; Jas. 1:12-15)
6. When nobody is watching are you tempted to behave contrary to God's Word? Jesus was! He resisted---do you? How?
7. When every nerve or urge of your body and soul cries out to do what is forbidden, how do you conquer the body? (Matt. 4:4,7,10)
8. Does Matt. 4:12-22 indicate Jesus had recently faced another test? What? Have you faced this temptation?
9. Does Matt. 4:23-25 describe anything that would be a temptation to Jesus? What? Have you faced this temptation?

Yo-ha-non is John's Jewish name; it means "Gift of God."

God commanded all Israel to be immersed according to John's message. Even a perfect Israelite, Jesus, could not please God without it. God has commanded all people everywhere *now* to be immersed into Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38). No human being can please God without it.

We must not expect God to work miracles to extricate us from the reality of temptation. Jesus didn't! He knew God's word and simply trusted it and obeyed it! We are promised that God will not let us be tempted beyond our strength and will, with the temptation also provide the way of escape so we may endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13). PTB

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 5:1-48

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' articulation of the essence of the kingdom of God. It has been called "The Constitution of The Kingdom." Wherever there is a person whose mentality, motives and actions are ruled by the word of God, there is where the kingdom of God is.

The *thrust* of this sermon has to do with **being!** It is not a code of ethics or a law the doing of which will justify us before God. It is a penetrating revelation into the very core of what a Christian should **be**. It goes beyond all deeds, to tell Christians what they ought to *think*, what should *motivate* them and what their *values* should be.

The Sermon on the Mount does *not* tell a person how to *become* a Christian. It tells everyone what a Christian is **like** in the **inner being**. No non-Christian can **be** like this because it requires being born anew; it requires a *God-point-of-view* of all of life rather than a few isolated acts of religious behavior. It is not primarily the expression of religious acts that please God (Isa. 1:10-20; Micah 6:6-8). God is pleased when a person's *mind, motives and values* are in harmony with God's revealed will in the Bible. Of course any person who is ruled by God will want to live out God's goodness that is within them. But God cannot be fooled with a pretended piety that has false motives and values.

Chapter 5 deals with the mind-set of the kingdom-citizen. It tells us what the Christian is to think about the essence of true *blessedness* (i.e. happiness). It tells us what Christian *character* is. It tells us what the Christian *attitude* toward God's law (i.e. word) must be.

Only the Christian can be happy! Happiness (i.e., blessedness) has to do with character, nor circumstances. That is what the Beatitudes teach. But a person cannot be like the Beatitudes without becoming a Christian!

QUESTIONS:

1. What is a hunger for righteousness? (see Psa. 51:1-19). How does it get *filled*? The Greek verb *chortasthesontai* is passive!
2. Why does a person have to become a Christian to be able to have these characteristics?
2. When does a Christian *become* the salt of the earth? What and where does salt? do its "thing"?
3. How do kingdom-citizens let their lights shine before men? What about practicing our piety before men to be seen by them (Matt. 6:1)? Is this a *contradiction* in the Bible?
4. If Jesus did not come to *abolish* the law and the prophets, what does Paul mean in Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14, et.al.?
5. What mind-set or *attitude* is Jesus teaching concerning God's Law in the 6 illustrations he cites in Matt. 5:21-48?
6. Is Jesus giving a *law* concerning divorce which the church is to *enforce* (Matt. 5:31-32), or is he urging that individual Christians must develop God's mind-set about it? (cf. Matt. 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:1-40)

Yeh-ho-shua (Joshua) is Jesus' name in Hebrew--it means "The Lord Saves."

"Happiness is not the end of life:
character is!"

Henry Ward Beecher, American editor and clergyman
(brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe).

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 6:1-34

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

What makes you tick? **Why** do you do the things you do? What is your **motivation** in life? This is the **all important** question you must deal with if you are a Christian!

If your motive is unworthy, *what* you do is of little significance. In fact, deeds that may appear very religious and benevolent are really *evil* if their motivation is ungodly. Even the most sincere are sometimes guilty of doing their religion to be seen of men.

Jesus demands that the citizen of the kingdom of God must be brutally honest with himself about his motives. Only the individual Christian (and God) knows what his motives are. No one else can really, ultimately, judge your motives. You alone have to do that.

The choice for each Christian is **always** the choice between pleasing self and pleasing God. The issue of **motives** is the most subtle issue in the Christian life. Very often our only reason for pleasing men is that we may please ourselves. What appears to be so selfless is too often just a very subtle form of selfishness. According to Jesus, man by nature desires the praise of man more than the praise of God. Human beings, without the mind of Christ, are really concerned about their good opinions of themselves.

The latter half of Matthew, chapter 6, reveals that in the final analysis our motives will be based on what we trust and where our values are centered. If your spiritual eye is single (wholly focused) toward heaven, your motivation will be to please God alone. Then everything you do will be rewarded by God.

The way to a revolution or revival of holiness in your life is to remember throughout each day that everything you do, say, attempt, think, and imagine is going to be done under the all seeing eye of God! He sees everything, everywhere---even that which is thought and done in secret. PTB

QUESTIONS:

1. Would you like other people to know you are giving your share to the church? Is that a wrong motive?
2. Is it possible to even make yourself overly aware of what you are giving? Matt. 6:3
3. Since Jesus' exhortation (and example) is to pray in secret what are we to think about making public prayers?
4. May we conclude that all our praying should consist in praying the 5 essential subjects in The Lord's Prayer? Matt. 6:9-13 Take a look at them---don't they cover just about everything?
5. If we are to try to hide the suffering we may do in fasting, shouldn't we try to hide any suffering we endure in any sacrifices we make for Christ?
6. Is it really possible to lay up treasure in heaven? How? (1 Cor. 15:58)
7. Why can't a person serve God and mammon both---lots of people are doing it?
8. Does Jesus really mean to prohibit anxiety altogether? Is there a difference between being anxious and taking out insurance policies or retirement plans?

(*meh-ream-nawo*) is the Greek word translated by English word "anxiety" which means, "to draw in different directions---to be distracted."

The English word "worry" comes from the old German word *wurgen* which means "to choke, to strangle." And what is worry if it isn't mental strangulation?

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 7:1-29

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Not only is a Christian to have a mentality and motives centered in the revealed will of God, he is to be characterized by a godly **morality**. In other words, every **judgment** a Christian makes about what is true and false, right and wrong, is to be under the direction of God's will.

Chapter 7 of Matthew speaks to this issue. Many people look at the first 5 verses of this chapter and conclude that Christians are to make no judgments at all. Actually, Jesus insists in this closing section of the "Constitution of the Kingdom" that the Christian **must make many extremely significant judgments**. Even 7:5 implies that after a Christian has cleansed out his own eye he will be able to see clearly **in order** to take the speck out of a brother's eye (see Jn. 7:24; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:10; 2 Jn. 9-10, et.al.).

It is not against *judging* that Jesus warns, but the *spirit* of the one doing the judging. Again, this Sermon focuses not on rules but on **character**. The Lord lists a number of character defects about which the Christian is to beware. Then he counters with the right kind of judgment the Christian is to cultivate. When the Coming Judge says to **beware** of certain attitudes and actions, citizens of his kingdom had better perk up their ears and get their minds in gear to find out every detail of his instructions.

What Jesus instructs us about in this chapter are **judgments** a Christian is going to have to make every day of his life---across the whole spectrum of living.

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding,
for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her."
Proverbs 3:13-15

QUESTIONS:

1. What log must we take out of our own "eye" before we can take the speck out of a brother's eye?
2. Who are the dogs and swine before whom we are not to cast holy bread and pearls?
3. What **connection** does the ask, seek, knock section have to do with this whole subject of judgments?
4. Are there *really* only **few** who find the way to life? How few? (see Luke. 13:22-30)
5. Why is it that we must judge who are false prophets by their *fruits* instead of their doctrines? (see 2 Pet. 2:1-22)
6. How could people who prophesy, cast out demons and do *many mighty works in Jesus name* be rejected by Jesus?
7. What is **wisdom**? Where does a person go to get wisdom?
8. What is wisdom according to the unbeliever? (check Luke 12:16-21; Rom1:22)

khakemah (ka-cay-mah) is the Hebrew word most often used for *wisdom* in the OT and is usually *personified*.

"Happy is the person who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently, who reflects in his heart on her ways and ponders her secrets, pursuing her like a hunter...who peers through her windows and listens at her doors...who pitches his tent near her, and occupies an excellent lodging place; who places his children under her shelter and lodges under her boughs..."
Sirach 14:20-26

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 8:1--9:38

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Ever since the fall of man creation has been subjected to futility and put in bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18-25). Both man and creation is groaning for a miraculous deliverance.

Human beings hope for a scientific "miracle" to do away with disease and death; for a political miracle to abolish war and bring abiding peace; or an economic miracle to eliminate poverty. Most of the world, ignorant of God's revealed will, persuades itself that miraculously changed circumstances will solve all problems. So, the world supplies itself with occasional placebos, sugar-coated pseudo-remedies of humanistic making and continues to wait for a circumstance-changing Messiah.

But what the world of sinful humanity needs is divine love put into its heart and lived out in its life. The gruffest father needs to be hugged. The most self-assured and independent woman you've ever met needs love and affection. Children thrive on hugs and kisses and touching. Not only do people need to be loved, they need to love others. Really, the measure of the greatness of a person is not the length of life, nor the breadth of influence, nor the height of successes, but the *depth* of love and compassion shown to others.

In these two chapters we will meet God in a human body, Jesus Christ, who (1) worked miracles, not primarily to change people's circumstances, but to create in them a life-changing faith and trust in the promises of eternal life from God; and (2) loved people sincerely, touching the untouchable, loving the unlovely, helping the helpless, proving that God cares with an all-consuming love.

Jesus always insisted on truth and honesty. His love was firm and uncompromising with evil. But he touched and healed and fed. He was compassion with a capital "C". The most important proof to the world that we are disciples of Jesus is our love for one another (Jn. 13:34-35).

Find someone today who needs a caring touch or a loving hug and give it to them. You shouldn't have to look far away. Tell them to pass it on!

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think God commanded that lepers be banished from the camp of Israel (Lev. 13:46)? Didn't Jesus break the law of Moses by touching a leper?
2. Why did Jesus marvel at finding faith in a Roman centurion? Didn't Jesus have to put his hands on a person to heal them--why didn't he go to the centurion's home?
3. One practitioner of alleged modern faith-healing wrote, "...all Christians should expect God to heal their bodies today, because Christ died to atone for our sickness as well as for our sins." Is this what Isaiah meant? (Matt. 8:14-17; Isa. 53:4).
4. How could Jesus allow the demons to go into the swine and kill them by drowning? Isn't that cruelty to animals? Isn't it destroying someone's property?
5. How did Jesus prove he had authority to forgive people's sins? Does that prove his authority to you? Why do some "priests" today think they have the authority to absolve people of their sins?
6. Tax-collectors were usually corrupt. Wouldn't it be right to assume that if Jesus ate with them he condoned their life-style?
7. Why did Jesus embarrass the hemorrhaging woman by singling her out (see Mk. 5:25-34; Luke. 8:43-48).
8. Wasn't it rather crass of Jesus to rebuke the mourners at Jairus' house? (see Mk. 5:39; Luke. 8:52)
9. What was Jesus' main concern for the crowds he saw as harassed and helpless?

"Compassion is not a snob gone slumming. Anybody can salve his conscience by an occasional foray to a homeless shelter. Did you ever take a *real* trip down inside the broken heart of a friend? To feel the sob of the soul--the raw, red crucible of emotional agony? To have this become almost as much yours as that of your soul-crushed neighbor? Then, to sit down with him--and silently weep? This is the beginning of compassion." —Jess Moody

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 10:1--11:30

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Galina Vilchinskaya, age 23, was arrested on November 19, 1982, less than 3 months after her release from a Russian Siberian concentration camp where she had served 3 years for teaching children about God. After 3 months on death row, she stood pale and exhausted as she was put on trial in February 1983 and sentenced to 3 years in a prison "where we hope you will rot," her judges told her.

Her new prison was a concentration camp, 7200 miles from her home. There, far away from her loved ones, her captors hoped to break her spirit or destroy her physically. Hunger, malnutrition, exhaustion and cold, and severe living conditions caused her hair and teeth to fall out and left her body covered with boils. Still she kept singing and witnessing. Transferred from one part of the prison to another, she continued to share her faith. "I didn't come here to sit silently with my hands folded in my lap," she wrote, "I came to speak about Christ." Camp authorities warned her that if she did not stop speaking about God, she would pay. She was beaten by two inmates until she lost consciousness, then they beat her some more. Whether she was released, or even survived, we do not know. God knows!

In our lesson for this week, Jesus verbally prepared his disciples for the stark realities of the rejection, betrayal, and persecution they would have to endure as he sent them into the sinful world to preach the gospel of salvation (Matt. 10:16-39). John the Immerser, locked up in a dungeon, was already experiencing a godless ruler's savagery (Matt. 11:2) against the kingdom of God. Americans---do not think that "it couldn't happen here!" It may be that some day even here Christians will have to die for Jesus. Would you? BE IN BIBLE SCHOOL...ABSORB THIS LESSON!

John Huss was burned at the stake in 1415 and his ashes were thrown into the Rhine River for preaching the Gospel. Just before he was slain, he fell to his knees and prayed, "Lord Jesus, forgive my enemies ...In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed."

QUESTIONS:

1. How much of the mechanics of evangelizing which Jesus gave the apostles applies to us? What principles may be applied today? 10:5-15
2. Are any of the dangers in evangelism cited for the apostles still facing disciples today? 10:16-22 Are you afraid to evangelize?
3. Find 3 reasons a disciple should not fear to evangelize in 10:26-31. Do you believe them?
4. Just how far are we to go in loyalty to Jesus in evangelism? 10:32-37
5. How could John the Immerser doubt who Jesus was---J.B. announced Jesus! (see Jn. 1:29), 11:1-3
6. How did men of violence take the kingdom by force? 11:12
7. What does Jesus mean, "Wisdom is justified by her deeds?" 11:19
8. Does God "hide" his good news from some people? How? Why? 11:25
9. What is Christ's yoke and how can a yoke be gentle? 11:28-30

During the years of the martyrs Christians fled into the underground caverns outside Rome in almost 600 miles of mole-like tunnels. Ten generations of Christians were subsequently buried in the catacombs during 300 years of persecution. No one knows the exact number, but archaeologists estimate between 2,000,000 and 4,000,000 Christians were interred in the dark tunnels. Inscriptions of Scripture can still be seen on the catacomb walls. One of the most frequent inscriptions is the sign of the fish. But the inscription which best describes their faith says: "The Word of God is not bound!"

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 12:1--13:58

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

“**Sabbath restrictions:** (1) No work is permitted...anything that causes exertion; (2) Writing or making permanent marks on anything is forbidden; (3) Business is forbidden...Jews may not touch money, buy, sell, talk business or arrange deals; (4) Lighting a fire is forbidden, and putting out a fire except where danger is involved...the use of electricity on the Sabbath is forbidden since a spark is produced...observant Jews will unscrew the light bulb in the refrigerator so that it will not light up when the door is opened; (5) Cooking and preparing cooked food is prohibited; (6) Tearing, cutting and altering the shape of anything is forbidden...letters and telegrams arriving on the Sabbath are left unopened until after sundown; (7) Travel is forbidden on any sort of vehicle or animal...the use of an elevator is forbidden; (8) Playing of musical instruments and games is forbidden; (9) Bathing is not forbidden, but not practiced by observant Jews on Sabbath...those who do bathe do not dry themselves with a towel, but allow the air to dry them; (10) Cutting is forbidden, with the exception of food; circumcision is obligatory on Sabbath; (11) Burying the dead is forbidden on Sabbath.”

“Words enough to fill hundreds of volumes have been written on the Sabbath...Jews consider that the Sabbath is one of the greatest of God's gifts to them...Jewish historians have stated that, ‘As much as Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel.’ Sabbath has been, without a doubt, one of the most powerful forces in preserving the Jews as a people over centuries of exile and persecution.” from, *Living Jewish*, by Michael Asheri, ppg. 99-106.

The Law of Moses does not give such extreme prohibitions for the Sabbath). The Pharisees considered Jesus' actions lawless and treasonable. Their evaluation of his actions was that he was trying to destroy the Jewish nation, the "kingdom of God." Their traditions had *become their law and their kingdom*.

Jesus explains in Matthew 12 and 13, that *he is their King* and that the *kingdom of God* is quite unlike their superfluous, nit-picking ostentation. He gave them to understand that *he was Lord of the*

Sabbath and the *kingdom of God* was a matter of God's word (the good, treasured, priceless seed).

QUESTIONS:

1. If it was unlawful to pluck grain on the Sabbath, why wasn't it unlawful for David to eat the Bread of Presence from the Tabernacle.? (Ex. 34:21; Deut. 23:24-25; Lev. 24:9).
2. State the 3 logical arguments Jesus used to prove his miracles were not by the power of the devil. 12:22-30).
3. What is the *sin against the Holy Spirit*? How does asking for a sign connect? Is this sin possible today? 12:31-32
4. What is the problem of kingdom-proclamation taught in the parable of the soils? 13:3-9; 13:18-23. How is this relevant for today?
5. How is the problem outlined in the parable of the growing seed applicable to your Christian life today? (Mark 4:26-29).
6. How are disciples to deal with the problem of tares (evil-doers) growing in God's field (the world) 13:24-30; 13:36-43; 13:47-50?
7. How is the kingdom to expand Matt. 13:31-33; does this clash with secular ideas about growth?
8. Who is the scribe trained for the kingdom? Could it be YOU? 13:51-52.

If the sower sows--and the seed (God's word) has life in it the ultimate responsibility for producing fruit lies with the soil. God calls upon the Christian disciple to sow the seed in the minds and hearts of the unredeemed; it is the **seed** that has the power—the sower is not responsible to make the seed produce. The question is, will we put the word into the “soil” and let **the seed and the soil** produce a harvest for Christ?

PTB

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 14:1--15:39

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

The most insidious opposition to converting people to Christ is not an absence of information about who he is and what he claims, but the inordinate wasting of time and energy on the mundane affairs of life that seem so *necessary* like entertainment, food, security, health, and our "traditional" ways of living.

Wouldn't Herod have been better off to have given heed to what John the Baptist said to him than giving himself a big birthday party? Couldn't the disciples have trusted Jesus to be able to take care of the hunger of all those people at the sea of Galilee? Shouldn't Peter have put his confidence in the Lord in the midst of the storm instead of in himself? And why couldn't the Pharisees see that their traditional ways of living (their opinions) were really irrelevant compared to obeying the word of One who had demonstrated he was the Son of God? And why was so many people's first priority in coming to Jesus the healing of their physical bodies?

Why do we let our physical circumstances dictate the way we prioritize our time and energy? Why do we keep forgetting that Jesus expects us to make his promises and his commandments our priority in *every mundane facet of life*? Does Jesus expect us to have faith in him all the time? Every hour of every day? Are we to extend our faith to him in every little detail of life, or are there some things so commonplace, so earthly, that they do not need to be trusted to Jesus?

The answer to that last question is: Jesus desires us to trust to him *every* circumstance, personal ambition, and experience in life, no matter how insignificant it may appear to us. This is really the fundamental issue of Christianity! Assimilating his word into your mind through our study in BIBLE SCHOOL will help produce this faith in your heart.

The Lord does not intend for every person to walk on water, but he does desire every person to trust his promise of spiritual power to become a new creation and to obtain eternal life. All the miracles he did were primarily to prove the trustworthiness of his promises! (see 2 Pet. 1:3-5). PTB

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Herodias have John the Baptist executed over such a non-threatening matter as his criticism of her marriage? 14:4
2. Why did Jesus tell the disciples to feed the crowd when he knew they did not have enough to do so? 14:16-17 (you should read John chapter 6 of another event just like this one)
3. Why did Peter become afraid after he had already miraculously walked on the water? 14:29-30
4. Why did Peter begin to sink? 14:30 To whom do you cry when you begin to sink.?
5. Why would the disciples eat with dirty hands--and why would Jesus defend their action? 15:1-3
6. Does any and all tradition or human opinion make void the word of God? 15:6
7. What are the implications for a Christian's life in "...it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man..."? 15:11-20
8. Why did Jesus call the Canaanite woman a dog. ? 15:26
9. How could the apostles forget so *soon* that Jesus could feed thousands of people from a few loaves and fish? 15:33

Millions of people who would never submit to bowing down to a statue, commit idolatry equally as blasphemous by exalting and practicing their feelings and rationalizations over the revealed will of God delineated ONLY in the Bible. PTB

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 16:1--17:27

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Just who is this person Jesus of Nazareth? Bertrand Russell wrote in his book, *Why I Am Not A Christian*, pg. 16, "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him..." Madalyn Murray said she doubted that Jesus Christ ever lived and no amount of evidence was going to convince her that he did. *Life Magazine*, December, 1962, devoted entirely to an analysis of the Bible, had one segment entitled, "Who Was the Man Jesus?" The writer of this article took the position that the Gospel records cannot be trusted because they contain too much that is "unauthentic." It quotes Dr. Albert Schweitzer, D. F. Strauss, and Ernest Renan, among others, all alleged to be scholars of the Bible. All of these "scholars" said the Jesus of the four Gospels was *not the real Jesus because of the miracles* surrounding his life and ministry. It remained for Rudolph Bultmann, another Biblical "scholar" to "demythologize" the Gospels (i.e., excise all the miracles) and come up with the statement, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus." Honest Bible scholars say, "Duh!" No miracles, no real Jesus!

Our lesson in Matthew, chapters 16 & 17, deals with this very issue. Jewish rulers asked Jesus to show them a sign to indicate who he was; Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" and, to the disciples he said, "But who do you say that I am?" **Then, Jesus took the disciples up a high mountain and showed them Who He Was!** There, Jesus was metamorphosed ("transfigured") back into the majestic glory he had in heaven before he took upon himself human flesh. The disciples fell on their faces and were filled with awe!

Simon Peter, a hard-nosed fisherman, was one of those who witnessed this divine spectacle. He wrote a few years later, "...we did **not** follow cleverly devised **myths** when we made known to you the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were **eyewitnesses** of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). Now, who is Jesus? Shall we accept the testimony of an eyewitness who gave his life in martyrdom testifying of what he had seen and heard? Or shall we be so naive and credulous

as to accept the speculations of "scholars" 2000 years removed from the event? BE IN BIBLE SCHOOL AND FIND OUT!

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of sign did the Pharisees & Sadducees want from Jesus? 16:1. Why didn't they know the signs of the times 16:3?
2. Did Jesus have an identity problem? Why did he insist that his apostles say who they thought he was? 16:15-16 Didn't he know who he was?
3. Why did Jesus tell Peter flesh and blood had not revealed Jesus to Peter? 16:17. Who *did* reveal who Jesus was to Peter? And how?
4. Upon whom is the church built, Peter or Jesus? 16:18
5. Was Jesus appointing Peter as the first Pope of the church by giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven? 16:18-19
6. How does one lose one's life for Jesus' sake? 16:24-28
7. What is a transfiguration? 17:2
8. Does this "transfiguration" have any connection to the teachings in Matthew 16? What?
9. What does the father of the epileptic son mean by, "I believe, help thou my unbelief?" (see Mk. 9:23-24)
10. The disciples had at least a little faith---why was this insufficient to cast the demon out of the boy? What is "little faith?" 17:20
11. Can believers really move literal mountains by faith? 17:20

"Doctor, I wish you to observe how real and beneficial the religion of Christ is to a man about to die--I am much consoled by reflecting that the religion of Christ has, from its first appearance in the world, been attacked in vain by all the wits, philosophers, and wise ones, aided by every power of man, and its triumphs have been complete."

--stated by Patrick Henry on his death bed. *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, William J. Federer, Fame Pub. Coppel, TX, 1994, p. 290.

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 18:1--19:30

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Oh, sure, Jesus Christ said a lot of things about the huge issues of existence such as God, life, death, resurrection, the kingdom of God, and demons. He said a lot about the ideal kind of life a person should live (in the Sermon on the Mount). He worked a lot of miracles to relieve some people of debilitating diseases and physical handicaps. **But did he ever address the mundane, person to person, issues of every-day living?** Philosophers and the *literati* have spent the 20th century anticipating that when the human race “comes of age” it will, by itself and without God, have solved all those mundane issues of every-day living. Science and humanism is supposed to have produced *utopia* by now. But the secret is out---*utopia* is not here!

Indeed, Jesus has given direction for the solution of these small but socially devastating problems. In our lesson for this Sunday he speaks to such every-day matters as **children, temptation, alienation, forgiveness, marriage, divorce, single-living, and even personal finances.** Yes, the One who came to provide for the “life more abundant” is intensely interested that we have the answers to these constant enigmas that rob us of that spiritual prosperity he made possible in his redemptive work.

Our heavenly Father is not an unloving tyrant. He will not force upon us a richly satisfying and happily secure life if we don't want it. He makes it possible, but we, his children, may avail ourselves of it only by whole-hearted, active faith in his guidance and graciousness. One thing is certain, in spite of a plethora of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, sociologists, scientists and “how-to” books which have come our way in the last 100 years, we are losing ground in our search for “the abundant life.” We may have abundance or affluence, but the majority of the human race is not at all satisfied or happily secure in their souls! GOD HAS THE ANSWER---HE HAS GIVEN IT TO THE WORLD IN THE BIBLE. WON'T YOU LEARN IT AND GIVE IT TO A FRUSTRATED, SPIRITUALLY-STARVING NEIGHBOR? Be in Bible School for this lesson!

QUESTIONS:

1. How can a grown adult *turn* and become like a child? How does one know when he has become “childlike?” 18:1-4
2. Why is it *necessary* that temptations come to the world? 18:7
3. How could anyone despise a child? 18:10
4. What does going to a brother who has sinned against you have to do with *greatness*? 18:15-20
5. What is the connection between *forgiveness* and *greatness*? 18:23- 25
6. Does “two becoming one” in marriage mean one spouse loses *individuality*? 19:1-5
7. Why did God permit *divorce* in the OT? Is there something worse than divorce? 19:7-9 (read 1 Cor. 7:1-40 along with Matt. 19)
8. Why is it so nearly *impossible* for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God? 19:23 (read 1 Tim. 6:6-10,17)
9. Have you received your *hundred-fold* for following Jesus? 19:27-30

“A man never stands so tall as when he stoops to help a child.”
--*Out of My Treasure*, by Willie White, College Press

“‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.’ Mercy is sympathetic loving-kindness. It includes not only pity, sympathy, and compassion, but forgiveness, willingness to suffer, and active concern. *The merciful regard the needy not as beggars but as brothers.* They are the Good Samaritans. Sometimes mercy calls for feelings, sometimes for kindly, understanding words--but many times for action, deeds of mercy.”
Out of My Treasure, Vol. 2, by Don Earl Boatman, College Press

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 20:1--21:46

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

It is a rather frightening analysis of Christian discipleship to realize how often Jesus had to repeat to the apostles his warning against personal, misdirected ambition. The Lord considered *the most* perfidious temptation to the human heart to be that of egotism, pride, a desire to usurp God's sovereignty over one's life and the desire to "lord it over others." Consider the following warnings of Jesus:

- a. against wanting to be the "greatest" Matt. 18:1ff; Lk. 22:24ff
- b. against expecting more rewards than others Matt. 19:23--20:16
- c. against the ambition to have "chief seats" Matt. 20:20-28
- d. against the pride and ambition of the Pharisees Matt. 23:11
- e. against forgetting to serve one another Jn. 13:1ff
- f. against forgetting about servant-hood Jn. 15:20
- g. against "taking over" God's house to use for profit Matt. 21:12-13
- h. against challenging Jesus' authority Matt. 21:23-27
- i. against lying about obeying the Father Matt. 21:28-32
- j. against trying to take over the Lord's "vineyard" Matt. 21:33-45

When Jesus entered "triumphantly" into the city of Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday" some 2000 years ago, he did so to lay claim to sovereignty over every human being's thoughts and deeds. He was **not** laying claim to rule over any city or any portion of land on earth. All that belongs to him already and is unavoidably subject to his providential control. The sovereignty Jesus sought was the rule ("arbitration") of every heart and soul of mankind (cf. Col. 3:15-17). Does he rule in our hearts? All the time? Completely?

If Jesus is not your King, he will not be your Savior. If he doesn't rule your life here, he has no plans to rule it in heaven. PTB

QUESTIONS:

1. How would you feel about the Lord rewarding someone who came late to the work of the "vineyard"? Matt. 20:1-14 Isn't that unfair?
2. What do you think Jesus is teaching about eternal rewards in this parable?
3. Will there be places for disciples at the right and left hand of Jesus? 20:23
4. Should the other disciples have been indignant? 20:24
5. Does Jesus really mean, "It shall not be so among you" for the church today? 20:25-28
6. What was Jesus signifying by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt? 21:1-11 (see also Zech. 9:9-10)
7. Was Jesus having a "pity-poor-me" fit of anger by cursing a fig tree for not having any fruit on it? 21:18-22
8. Why didn't Jesus tell the chief priests his authority for cleansing the temple? 21:23-27
9. What is the lesson of the Parable of the Two Sons? 21:28-32
10. Does the parable of the wicked husbandmen in 21:33-45 apply only to the unbelieving Jews? I'll give you a hint---see Rom. 11:17-22; Rev. 2:5

"Most people would succeed
in small things if they were
not troubled with great ambitions."
--Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 22:1--23:39

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

An outside balcony is considered such an important part of a house along the Italian Riviera that homes unable to afford one, *paint a substitute* on the front of their houses. And to make them appear even more realistic, some of these paint-on balconies include *a painted family wash* hanging there just like it would on real balconies!

Do you ever feel like you've never heard anyone really come to grips with *the fundamental issues of life*? After listening to hundreds of news-casts, reading scores of books, and watching an occasional "talk-show" on TV, most thinking people realize these only deal with the peripheral, at best, and the irrelevant most of the time.

A vast majority of human beings live in an illusory world of their own making. They are schizoids, hypocrites! They put on their masks each day and play like they know where they came from, why they are here, and where they are going. They pretend to be happy, fulfilled, and principled. Some even pretend to believe in God. But their lives are filled with "majoring in minors." They are truckling after trivialities. They are hoping the realities of the Bible, Jesus Christ, righteousness, death, and judgment will never catch up with them. They put on a good show, but God knows, the Bible knows, and they do too, that it is only an act!

In this week's lesson we will learn about people 2000 years ago, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who could very easily find their place in today's millennium. It might occur to us as we study that had we lived 2000 years ago we could have found ourselves, on occasion, among those piddling with the peripheral in 30 A.D.!

"No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true."

--Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) American author and poet...he wrote, *The Scarlet Letter*

QUESTIONS:

1. Who was the "guest" without the wedding garment and how did he get into the feast? Matt. 22:11-14
2. Jesus gave the Sadducees the only viable answer to the question, "Is there a life hereafter?" What is it? Matt. 22:29-33
3. There are 3 great fundamentals in the two commandments Jesus gave--why do all the law and the prophets "depend" on them? Matt. 22:37-40 (cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18)
4. Should the Jews have understood the Messiah was to be God in the flesh? Why didn't they? Is that a problem today? Matt. 22:41-46
5. Why would Jesus tell people to "practice" whatever these hypocrites (Pharisees) told them? Matt. 23:3
6. How did the Pharisees "shut the kingdom of heaven against men?" Matt. 23:13-15 (cf. Lk. 11:52)
7. How can we tell if the "inside of our plate" is clean? Matt. 23:25-28 (cf. Heb. 4:11-13; Jas. 1:22-25).
8. How would the Pharisees "fill up the measure of their fathers" and be guilty of all the righteous blood shed up to that time? 23:29-36 (cf. Lk. 11:47-51; Dan. 9:24)
9. When was the house of Judaism to be forsaken and desolate? Matt. 23:37-39 (cf. Matt. 24:1-35; 1 Thess. 2:13-16; Isa. 66:6-24; Jer. 3:15-16; Dan. 9:26)

"We had better appear what we are,
than affect to appear what we are not."

--Duc Francois de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) French writer

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 24:1--25:46

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Everywhere we look and listen, we are being told that the *present moment* is all that matters however exciting or ridiculous, and that *deliberate rejection* of the past and the future is the only alternative left to life today. Some are saying that Henry Ford was right when he said, "History is bunk," and that a study of history will be of no use to coming generations.

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus says it is just the opposite! History has a meaning--a divine meaning. The past is always prologue. Jesus teaches his disciples then and now in this text that *history is headed for a goal*. History is not a record of unintelligible accidents. Indeed, the Bible is God's editorial column analyzing the daily news. In the Bible we see history's **meaning** from a God-perspective.

The text of Matthew 24-25 (especially 24:1-35) has been mishandled, misinterpreted and misapplied by many religious factions. It is being severely abused by so-called prophecy preachers today who are confusing thousands of believers. Matthew 24:1-36 (and parallels, Mk. 13:1-32; Lk. 21:5-33) **ALL** predicted **only** the destruction of Jerusalem which took place A.D. 66-70. Matthew 24:37--25:46 (and parallels, Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 21:34-36) predicts Christ's second coming--the time of which **NO ONE KNOWS!** A harmony of these parallels must be studied to understand them.

I learned in 45 years of studying and teaching Biblical prophecy that it is usually *apocalyptic* (i.e., written for times of spiritual crises; therefore, hyperbolic symbolism is its main characteristic). Often, Biblical prophecy is characterized by what is called shortened perspective (i.e., the prophet speaks of contemporary things in one verse and suddenly skips over *centuries* of time to future events in the *very next verse*. Joel 2:27 and 2:28 is a classic example of this. One thing is certain--any "sign" Jesus gives in Matt. 24 is NOT about his 2nd coming because he reiterates about 8 or 9 times in Matt. 24:36-25:46 that **THERE WILL BE NO SIGNS, AND NO ONE WILL KNOW** when he is coming the 2nd time!

PERHAPS TODAY!

QUESTIONS:

1. What motivated the disciples to point out the buildings of the temple?
2. (See Matt. 23:37-39 & Jn. 12:27-33, which preceded this dissertation)
3. Could all the signs predicted by Jesus in Matt. 24:3-13 have occurred before A.D. 70? Most of them did, according to Josephus!
4. Could the gospel have been preached throughout the whole world before A.D. 70? (see Rom. 1:5,8; 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:6,23).
5. What is the *desolating sacrilege* (see Dan. 9:24-17; Lk. 21:20).
6. Matt. 24:29-31 is *apocalyptic* language about the end of Judaism and Jerusalem, do you know of other language in this style? (see Isa. 13:10; 14:12; 24:23; Jer. 4:23-28; 15:9; Ezek. 38-39; Dan. 7-12).
7. What is the lesson to be learned from the fig tree? (Matt. 24:32-35; Mk. 13:28-30; Lk. 21:29-32)
8. In what way is the 2nd coming of Christ to be like the days of Noah?
9. What would be an hour men do *not expect* Jesus to return?
10. Who is the faithful and wise servant?
11. If the parable of the virgins teaches alertness, what does the parable of the talents teach?
12. What does the parable of the sheep and goats teach about judgment?

We are all headed for the judgment day
60 minutes of each hour we live,
no matter who we are or where we are.
The questions is: **Are we ready?**

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 26:1--28:20

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

In Gethsemane we see Jesus struggle with his flesh. He knew the right thing, he wanted to do the right thing, but he still had to fight *self* to do it! I can relate to that, can't you? I always have to struggle to do the right thing! Sometimes I fail, miserably. But God be praised, one Man, Very Man, *did not fail!* And, by his grace, if you and I accept it through faith, committing ourselves to his way and his word in obedience, we can be forgiven and transformed into his likeness.

In his trials we behold truth despised and assaulted. It continues to be so in the halls of power today. So how do you "feel" about these "trials" of Jesus? There were at least 10 illegalities connected with the arrest and trials of Jesus of Nazareth (according to Jewish canonical and traditional laws). Do you know them? You should. Jesus was the embodiment of Truth. Honesty and justice is something that has to be cared about if people are going to know God's redemptive message!

The crucifixion of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. It is still so today. For God to predict that he would establish his government in the hearts of men on the basis of a cursed cross is something so horrifying, so unthinkable and so repulsive that the majority of humanity has *rejected the Bible which predicted it and recorded it!*

Rudolph Bultmann, theologian, says the reality of the resurrection for the church of the 1st century is not a bodily resurrection but that Jesus really only "arose" in the preaching of the church. He says that the resurrection took place in the "faith" (he means *feeling*) of the church, *only* "in their hearts." They believed in Jesus without any historical **facts** of a resurrection and even in spite of the fact that he *did not arise bodily*. Friend, if Jesus never arose bodily from the dead, Jesus is a liar and so are the writers of the New Testament. If Christ is arisen *only* in our hearts we are of all men most to be pitied--we are stupid fools! The NT is a historical record of 1000s of people who believed in Jesus **because of the FACT of his bodily resurrection from death. Learn about it in Bible School.**

QUESTIONS:

1. How could Jesus know he would be crucified at Passover when the Jews were definitely planning not to kill him at feast-time? Matt. 26:1-5
2. Why was the Lord's Supper instituted at the Passover feast? 26;26-39
3. In Gethsemane Jesus prayed that his cup pass from him; was he having doubts about carrying out God's will? 26:36-44
4. How many illegalities can you find in Jesus' Jewish trial? 26-46-68
5. How would you characterize Pilate? 27:1-26 (see Mk. 15:1-15; Lk. 23:1-25; Jn. 18:28B19:16) Are there any "Pilates" in modern jurisprudence?
6. To what extent did God forsake Jesus at the Cross? 27:45-46
7. Why would God want the veil in the temple rent right at Jesus' death? 27:51 (see Heb. 9:8; 10:19-20)
8. What is the point in the Gospels recording so much detail about Jesus' death and burial? 27:57-66
9. Could the women have gone to the wrong tomb? (see Lk. 23:54)
10. There are 12 recorded appearances of Jesus after his resurrection; can you find them in the NT?
11. Would the concocted story of Matt. 28:11-15 convince you that Jesus' body had been stolen by his disciples?
12. Is the Great Commission for the apostles only? OR IS IT FOR YOU AND ME, TOO? 28:18-20
- 13.

You ask me how I know he lives....
BECAUSE THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO