

Matthew chs 22 – 25

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: The Church Handbook studies in Matthew 22-25 by Kerry Nagel, the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker, the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew by Michael Green, Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 and Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright, Matthew for Everyone Bible Study Guide by Tom Wright with Dale & Sandy Larsen, Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright, 666 and all that by John Dickson and Greg Clarke, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, Postcard from Palestine by Andrew Reid, the Bible Brief on Matthew 17-25 by Rob Dawson and Andrew Prince from The Briefing magazine # 336, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet News of the Hour (Mark's Gospel) by Peter Bolt and Tony Payne, the St Faith's Bible Study booklet The King who must Die (Matt chs 17-26) by Kerry Nagel, 9 studies on Luke chs 9 to 12 by Ed O'Connor, John's Gospel (John chs 1-6) by Roger Green, Preliminary Theological Certificate (PTC), Moore College, Doctrine II, The New Bible Dictionary (3rd edition), The Lion Handbook to the Bible and sermons by Mike Paget, St Barnabas, Broadway 7/8/2011 and 21/8/2011.

Ed O'Connor July 2013

Study 1, Matt 22:1-22, The Great Invitation (Parable of the Wedding Feast and paying taxes to Caesar)

Introduction

"Under David and Solomon, Israel had been a safe and prosperous nation. According to his promises to Abraham, God had planted them in the Promised Land, subdued their enemies, and blessed them with prosperity. This was the historical high point of Israel as a nation.

From that point on, things went downhill. Israel was destroyed because of its chronic apostasy and rebellion against God. By the time of the Exile to Babylon in 587 BC, the everlasting kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 was in ruins (see Ps 89).

But all was not lost. God's promise to Abraham still stood. As Israel's fortunes declined, the prophets emphatically declared that God would restore his kingdom. . . .

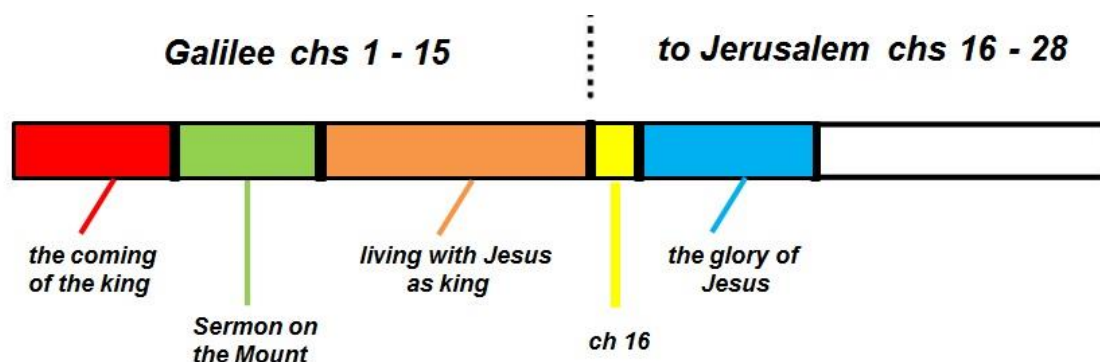
The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand."

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) pp 9-11 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. We see the glory of Jesus in chapters 17 to 20 and then Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in chapter 21. The Jews celebrate because their king has come but for others he's not welcome – there is a power struggle between Jesus and the religious heavies.



Getting started

1. Think of a time when you were invited to something but you didn't want to go. What did you do?
 - (a) went there even though you didn't want to.
 - (b) made up an excuse and didn't go.
 - (c) ignored the invitation.
 - (d) something else (please specify).

Why did you take the action you did?

Bible

2. Read Matt 22:1-14 – The Parable of the Wedding Feast. What do you think is the main point of the parable?

Matthew normally has Jesus speak of the '**kingdom of heaven**'; the other gospels normally use the phrase 'kingdom of God'. Saying 'heaven' instead of 'God' was a regular Jewish way of avoiding the word 'God' out of reverence and respect. [Jews didn't want to take the Lord's name in vain (Ex 20:7), not even accidentally.] We must clear out of our minds any thought that 'kingdom of heaven' means a place, namely 'heaven', seen as the place where God's people go after their death.

Heaven is God's dimension of the created order (Gen 1:1, Ps 115:16, Matt 6:9), whereas 'earth' is the world of space, time and matter that we know. . . . Normally hidden from human sight, heaven is occasionally revealed or unveiled so that people can see God's dimension of ordinary life (e.g. 2 Ki 6:17, Rev 1, 4-5). Heaven in the New Testament is thus not usually seen as the place where God's people go after death; at the end, the New Jerusalem descends *from* heaven *to* earth, joining the two dimensions for ever. 'Entering the kingdom of heaven' does not mean 'going to heaven after death', but belonging to the people who steer their earthly course by the standards and purposes of heaven and who are assured of membership in the age to come.

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 pp 28 and 212-213 by Tom Wright.

3. Why does this parable make readers uncomfortable?
4. Many features of this parable are symbolic for things or people well known in first century Palestine.
 - (a) The king is symbolic for whom?
 - (b) The son (v2) is symbolic for whom?
 - (c) Who are those, symbolically speaking, who are first invited but would not come?
 - (d) Who are the servants, symbolically speaking, who get killed (v6)?
 - (e) Who are those, symbolically speaking, who are invited off the road (vv 9-10)?
 - (f) What is the wedding symbolic of?

5. How does the king demonstrate both generosity and judgement?

6. (a) How did the Pharisees react to this parable (see Matt 22:15)?

(b) Why did they react that way?

To finish

7. What are the right “wedding clothes” for us?

There are 2 quite different answers to this in the commentaries:

1. The man who scorned his host’s provision of wedding clothes insulted the host and showed personal complacency. His best was good enough for God! And God says that it is not. The king in the story has the man thrown out. God will do the same to anyone who relies on his own fancied goodness to gain entry into the kingdom.

From The Message of Matthew p 232 by Michael Green.

2. The point of the story is that Jesus is telling the truth, the truth that political and religious leaders like to hide: the truth that God’s kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered. They are the clothes you need to wear for the wedding. And if you refuse to put them on, you are saying you don’t want to stay at the party.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 85 by Tom Wright.

If you have time look at the passage on “Paying taxes to Caesar” Matt 22:15-22.

8. Read Matt 22:15.

The **Pharisees** were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD. Largely lay-led, though including some priests, their aim was to purify Israel through intensified observance of the Jewish law (Torah), developing their own traditions about the precise meaning and application of scripture, their own patterns of prayer and other devotion, and their own calculations of the national hope.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 221 by Tom Wright.

From what you know about Jesus and from the paragraph above, how did Jesus disturb the goals of the Pharisees?

9. Read Matt 22:15-22.

Herodians. Their association with the Pharisees in the question regarding the paying of tribute to Caesar suggests agreement with them in the issue at stake, that is, nationalism versus submission to a foreign yoke. This fact and the formation of the word seem to prove that they were a Jewish party who favoured the Herodian dynasty.

Herod the Great ruled Judaea from 37 to 4 BC; after his death his territory was divided between his sons Archelaus, Herod Antipas (the Herod of the gospels), and Philip. The Herodians supported the claims of Antipas to be the true king of the Jews. Though the Pharisees would normally oppose such a claim, they could make common cause with the Herodians when facing a common threat.

From The New Bible Dictionary (3rd edition) p 472 and Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 308.

Money from three sources circulated in Palestine in New Testament times. There was Roman money e.g. the denarius which was a day's wage for the ordinary working man, Greek money e.g. the mina (= 100 denarii) and the talent (= 60 minas) and Jewish money e.g. the lepton and the shekel (= 4 denarii). The two very small copper coins which the widow put in the temple treasury in Luke 21:2 were 2 lepta (128 lepta = 1 denarius).

From The Lion Handbook to the Bible p 108-109.

The tribute penny was the coin that was shown to Jesus when he made his famous speech "Render unto Caesar..." The phrase comes from the King James Version of the gospel account: Jesus is asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:14) and he replies, "bring me a penny, that I may see it" (Mark 12:15). The Greek text uses the word *dēnaron*, and it is usually thought that the coin was a Roman denarius with the head of Tiberius. The inscription reads "Ti[berivs] Caesar Divi Avg[vsti] F[ilivs] Avgvstvs" ("Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus"), claiming that Augustus was a god. The reverse shows a seated female, usually identified as Livia depicted as Pax [the Roman goddess of peace. Livia was the mother of the emperor Tiberius, paternal grandmother of the emperor Claudius. She was deified by Claudius who acknowledged her title of Augusta.]

From Wikipedia, "Tribute Penny".

The trap. The Romans were very good conquerors. They conquered you then introduced a taxation system to keep you conquered. So you were paying for the Roman soldiers at the end of your street. Palestine was known as the most rebellious province so you had to pay extra tax for extra soldiers. Needless to say the Roman tax was very unpopular. If Jesus said anything in support of this tax then the crowds would leave him. If Jesus didn't support the tax then someone would tell the Romans and he would be in trouble with them. This is probably what the Pharisees were hoping for.

From a sermon by Mike Paget, St Barnabas, Broadway 7/8/2011.

One of the most famous Jewish leaders when Jesus was a boy, a man called Judas had led a revolt precisely on this issue. The Romans had crushed it mercilessly, leaving crosses around the countryside, with dead and dying revolutionaries on them, as a warning that paying the tax was compulsory, not optional.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 86-87 by Tom Wright.

10. How does v16 set things up for the trap in v17?

11. Why are the Pharisees and Herodians hypocrites (v18)?
(2 answers: one concerning v16 and one concerning "The tribute penny" above and Ex 20:4).

12. Even Jesus' opponents are impressed with his answer (v22).
(a) Why is Jesus' answer so clever?

(b) Has he answered their question (v17)? Why/why not?

Study 2, Matt 22:23-46, The Question of Life after Death (the Sadducees and the Resurrection)

Getting started

1. What are the different sorts of power we need in our lives?

Bible

2. Read Matt 22:23-33.

By Jesus' day, the **Sadducees** were the aristocracy of Judaism, possibly tracing their origins to the family of Zadok, David's high priest. Based in Jerusalem, and including most of the leading priestly families, they had their own traditions and attempted to resist the pressure of the Pharisees to conform to theirs. They claimed to rely only on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), and denied any doctrine of a future life, particularly of the resurrection and other ideas associated with it, presumably because of the encouragement such beliefs gave to revolutionary movements.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 223-224 by Tom Wright.

The **Sadducees** weren't religious like the Pharisees. They were more pragmatic and were looking for a return to the Hasmonean dynasty which was in power before Herod – anyone was better than having a Gentile on the throne.

From a sermon by Mike Paget on Matt 22:15-46, St Barnabas, Broadway 7/8/2011.

Levirate marriage. Men often died young in 1st Century Palestine. If a woman's husband died and she had no children then she was destitute but the Law provided a way out (Gen 38:8-10, Deut 25:5-10) – the husband's brother would marry the widow even if he had an existing wife. If he had children by the widow they wouldn't be his children but the children of his dead brother to carry on his name.

From a sermon by Mike Paget on Matt 22:15-46, St Barnabas, Broadway 7/8/2011.

How important is the Sadducees' question (vv 24-28)?

3. (a) What do you understand about the resurrection?

(b) How is the resurrection connected to heaven?

4. (a) What point is Jesus making (v32) about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

(b) What are the implications of this?

5. In v29 why didn't the Sadducees understand (a) the Scriptures?

(b) the power of God?

According to Jewish tradition, when someone spoke of the God **of** someone they were talking about God as their saviour, protector and deliverer. So, from v32, God had saved, protected and delivered Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from death. God will conquer death forever. Jesus was not what the Sadducees hoped for but he is so much better, a much bigger king.

From a sermon by Mike Paget on Matt 22:15-46, St Barnabas, Broadway 7/8/2011.

6. How do you think the Sadducees would have felt about Jesus after their discussion (vv23-33)?

To finish

7. How does God's power fit in with your life?

(N.B. The title for this study was "The Question of Life after Death" but the study has been about the resurrection. Most people would think of life after death as going to heaven *before* the resurrection comes. This wasn't addressed in this study so I've included an appendix on p 23 exploring that issue.)

If you have time look at the following passages from Matt 22:34-46.

Experts/teachers of the law = scribes

"In a world where many could not write, or not very well, a trained class of writers ('scribes' [= teachers of the law]) performed the important function of drawing up contracts for business, marriage, etc. Many scribes would thus be legal experts, and quite possibly Pharisees, though being a scribe was compatible with various political and religious standpoints. They believed that Israel's law, the Torah, should be applied to every area of life, and so combined in themselves the modern roles of 'lawyer' and 'religious teacher', and much besides. It is small wonder that such people took offence at what Jesus was saying. If he was right, their entire programme was based on a huge mistake. If they were right, the mistake was his. The fierce opposition between them continues on and off right through to the final showdown in Jerusalem."

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 146 & 316.

Bible

8. Read Matt 22:34-40.

Many Jewish teachers posed the question as to which was the greatest out of all the 613 commandments in the law of Moses.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 94 by Tom Wright.

The question put to Jesus by one of these Pharisees was a **test** question because, it would seem, they hoped that Jesus in His reply would say something unorthodox and startling which would render Him liable to a charge of blasphemy.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker p 212.

9. (a) How is love of God and others different from following laws?

(b) How is love of God and others fulfilling of the Law?

10. Read Matt 22:41-46 and Ps 110.

The Hebrew word *Yahweh* [YHWH] is in English versions usually translated '**the LORD**' (note the capitals) and sometimes 'Jehovah'.

From The New Bible Dictionary (3rd edition) p 420.

Lord (Greek, *kurios*) was used in the Greek of New Testament times in the wide sense of *possessor* or *owner* (Mark 13:35), or as a title of honour by subordinates to their superiors, or as a courteous appellation applied to near relatives.

From PTC, Doctrine II, study 13.

So from Ps 110:1 and Matt 22:44 the first 'LORD' refers to YHWH i.e. God, and 'my Lord' is a title of honour.

(a) Why didn't the Pharisees answer Jesus' question in vv 43-45?

(b) Why didn't they dare ask Jesus any more questions?

(c) What *is* the answer to Jesus' question in vv 43-45?

(d) How is Jesus David's son (see Matt 1:6-16)?

(e) How is Jesus David's lord?

To finish

11. How does Jesus fulfil the 2 commandments he mentions?

12. How do we fulfil the 2 commandments Jesus mentions?

(f) If the Pharisees (and we) couldn't live up to certain standards and yet expected others to live up to those standards (vv 3-4) what is the solution to this problem between what we practise and what we preach?

5. Read Matt 23:4.

(a) What are some religious practises that Christians are involved in?

(b) Do you find them burdensome? Why/why not?

(c) What burdens do you think the Pharisees and scribes might have been putting on the people?

(d) How do we get relief from our burdens (see Matt 11:28-30)?

6. Read Matt 23:5-7.

Large prayer-cases (known as '**phylacteries**', leather bands and cases containing prayers, worn on the arm and the head) could easily be seen by others, and noted as a sign of piety. Long prayer-**tassels** at the four corners of the outer garment showed again, how scrupulous the wearer wanted to be thought.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 99 by Tom Wright.

"A congregation's greatest temptation is to want to put their minister on a pedestal and the minister's greatest temptation is to want to be there." Discuss.

7. Read Matt 23:8-12.

(a) What advice does Jesus give to avoid the problems of question 5?

(b) What can we learn from Jesus' life and death that answers those problems (see Matt 20:25-28)?

8. Read Matt 23:16-22.

'Cross my heart and hope to die.' 'I swear on the Holy Bible.' 'Upon my honour.' I used to hear these all the time when I was younger. 'I swear on the heads of my children.' 'By my mother's grave.' I've heard those quite often, more recently. No doubt everybody could add their own. Why do we do it?

Is it just insecurity? If we're not sure that our words will carry sufficient weight by themselves, why do we add these pointless extras? Is it an attempt to stiffen the backbone of our sentences? If so, it's self-defeating. You might as well try to prop up a sagging tree with a wet towel. What begins as a sign of insecurity, or an attempt to make our speech a bit more colourful without the effort of actual thought, continues as a habit, and eventually becomes mere noise that we're hardly aware of. Jesus' saying about being judged by our careless words comes home to roost (Matt 12:36).

It is interesting to note that Jesus warns, among other things, against swearing by heaven. In Western culture at least, and within Western churches, saying 'Heavens!' or some equivalent has long been acceptable in polite society, whereas saying 'Hell!' has not. It's a measure of how far we've allowed social customs to dominate us, rather than Jesus' commands: he prohibits swearing by heaven but never mentions swearing by hell.

Presumably he would rather we did neither, and that is of course the point of the passage in the Sermon on the Mount about swearing (Matt 5:33-37). In fact, the present passage goes deeper than that question, and addresses the question of the attitudes to the Temple that show up in the scribes' and Pharisees' decisions about which oaths will count and which won't.

Basically, he accuses them of getting things the wrong way round. They are valuing the gold above the Temple, and the gift above the altar. They are placing higher worth on the objects that human beings have brought into God's presence than on God's presence itself. But if the gold and the gifts mean anything, it's because the Temple and the altar mean something. And they mean what they mean because of God's promise to be present there. In other words, the teachers are taking God's name in vain. They are guilty of breaking the third commandment. And they are covering it up with slick arguments about what counts and what doesn't.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 101-102 by Tom Wright.

To finish

9. Most of us would understand swearing as being the use of "four-letter" words (though some of them have more than four letters, but you know what I mean).

(a) Do Tom Wright's arguments (above) about insecurity and taking God's name in vain still hold for this type of swearing? Why/why not?

(b) Is this type of swearing wrong? Why/why not?

Study 4, Matt 23:23-39, Turned Inside Out (Woes)

Getting started

1. (a) Name one thing that you see other people doing that is wrong?

(b) How do you feel about the people doing those things?

Bible

2. Read Matt 23:23-24.

Mint, dill and cumin were common garden herbs. A gnat was a tiny insect that appeared during the process of fermentation and was strained out of the wine along with other impurities.

(a) What point is Jesus making about the scribes and Pharisees?

(b) Do you ever get so caught up in the details that you lose sight of the big picture?
What can we do to keep things in their proper proportion?

3. Read Matt 23:25-28.

Ritual or ceremonial cleanliness was especially important a week before the Passover in Jerusalem. If you were unclean that could rule you out of the celebrations for seven days. The Pharisees used to debate about the ritual cleanliness of cups and bowls i.e. to make a bowl clean do you have to just clean the outside? Tombs were painted white so that, especially at night, people would see the tomb and avoid it so that they would not become ceremonially unclean.

(a) Like the Pharisees, do you present an “image” to the outside world?
What ‘image’ do you present?

(b) What are you really like?

(c) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor 5:17).

“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 6:6-11).

Considering the two quotations above, what are you really like?

4. Read Matt 23:29-36.

The prophets were greatly respected in Judaism, and the Pharisees had taken upon themselves the task of building ornate tombs for them, out of respect. They wanted to give the impression that if they had lived in the days when that prophet was hounded to death, they would have been on his side and would have had nothing to do with his persecution and murder. They saw themselves as heirs to the prophets.

From Abel to Zechariah (v35) means from A to Z . . . Zechariah was killed between the altar and the Holy Place (2 Chr 24:20-21) . . . and Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament, so it fits in very well with this 'A to Z' scope of Jesus' words.

From The Message of Matthew by Michael Green pp 244, 245 and 247.

The scribes and Pharisees were claiming they would not have been involved in the murdering of prophets yet how are they talking about *the* prophet, Jesus (see Matt 12:14, 21:46, 22:15)?

5. Who do you think Jesus is talking about in v34?

To finish

6. (a) Read Matt 23:37-39. How do you think Jesus feels about the woes of Matt ch 23?

(b) Compare how Jesus feels with how you felt about people doing the wrong thing in 1(b).

Study 5, Matt 24:1-28, Warnings for our time

Getting started

1. Briefly, what are your plans for the future?

Bible

2. Read Matt 24:1-13.

The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. It was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC and rebuilt by the returning exiles. Desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC. Rebuilding and beautification began by Herod the Great in 19 BC and completed in 63 AD. The Court of the Gentiles contained the thriving markets in sacrificial animals and sacred money for the temple offerings. Here too men would gather in the shaded porticos to listen to any teacher who cared to set up his stand. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice, it was believed to be the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth, the place heaven and earth met. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 318 and The Lion Handbook to the Bible article by Richard France p 494.

What could be the connection between the destruction of the Temple (vv 1-2) and the disciples' question in v3?

3. Some of these things are happening now e.g. vv 6-7. Are we experiencing the end of the world?

4. Matt 24 is set at about 33 AD and the destruction of the Temple was in 70 AD so Jesus' words were to encourage his disciples to stand firm in the faith and endure the terrible things that would happen leading up to 70 AD.

(a) What dangers does Jesus warn his disciples about (vv 10-12)?

(b) What words or phrases are used in this passage (vv 1-13) to encourage the disciples?

5. Read Matt 24:14-28.

Son of Man [vv 27 and 30] is a form of Aramaic speech that could be no more than a periphrasis for 'I'. But it could equally allude to the Son of Man to whom is given the everlasting kingdom and power and glory [Dan 7:13-14]. The ambiguity of the title matched the ambiguity of the person of Jesus. That is why he liked it. It could mean nothing – or everything. 'Messiah' (or **Christ**, the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew term, meaning 'anointed one') was soon so firmly associated with Jesus as to become almost a surname. In Judaism it meant the one who would come and fulfil the hopes of the nation. Traditionally, three sorts of people had been anointed with oil: prophets, priests and kings. [Jesus fulfilled all three roles perfectly.]

From the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew p 178 by Michael Green.

(a) What are the warnings in this passage?

(b) What is Jesus trying to tell us when he talks about lightning (v27)?

Abomination of desolation (v15) – see Dan 9:20-12:13.

Daniel was an extremely popular book in the first century. Jesus drew on it freely as did many of his contemporaries. It describes, in a series of stories and dreams, how God's kingdom will triumph over the kingdoms of the world.. Daniel 2 is about the stone which smashes the great statue. Chapters 3 and 6 are about how God delivers his faithful ones from suffering. Chapter 7, at the centre of the book, is about the monsters that wage war on the humans, and about how God vindicates the human figure ('one like a son of man') and destroys the monsters – which any first century Jew would recognise as code for Israel being vindicated over the pagan nations. . . . Daniel 12 predicts the eventual resurrection of all God's people. And chapter 9 speaks of something blasphemous, sacrilegious, some abominable object, which will be placed in the Temple itself. . . . In AD 40, the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula tried to place a huge statue of himself in the Temple. He deliberately wanted to do this to snub and offend the Jews. In the end he was assassinated before it happened . . . In fact, it was another 30 years before Roman legions surrounded the Temple and eventually placed their blasphemous standards there. That was indeed the beginning of the end for Jerusalem, the end of the world order that Jesus and his followers, and their ancestors for many generations, had known.

What should Jesus' followers do when all this happens? They should get out and run. Think about it: their natural tendency, as loyal Jews, might well have been to stay and fight, to join a new resistance movement and, yes, to sign up to fight for a new Messiah. They had, after all, come to Jerusalem with Jesus in the hope that there might be some kind of battle for the kingdom. . . . But this isn't at all what Jesus has in mind. This is not how the kingdom of God will come. This is not how he will be vindicated both as a true prophet and as Messiah.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 117-119 by Tom Wright.

To finish

6. How do your plans for the future fit in with Jesus' plans for the future?

Study 6, Matt 24:29-51, Waiting Well

Getting started

1. Think of an important event that you needed to prepare for.
What did you do in order to be ready for it?

The story so far . . .

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem (Matt ch 21) brings a great celebration because the people saw it as God's King coming to bring in God's Kingdom. But Jesus' arrival also arouses great opposition. Jesus tells three parables which carry some biting criticism for his opponents – the Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32), the Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33-46) and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1-14 which we looked at in Study 1). His enemies try to trap Jesus with questions about taxes (Study 1), the resurrection and the Law (Study 2). Jesus warns his disciples about the Pharisees and is grieved by their continual rejection of him (Studies 3 & 4). The warnings continue with Jesus looking to the future of the world (Study 5 and this study).

Bible

2. Read Matt 24:29-31.
 - (a) What kind of language is this? Is it literal? Why/why not?
3. We will divide verse 29 into 3 parts:
 - a "Immediately after the distress of those days"
 - b "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;"
 - c "the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."
 In verse 29 a what does Jesus mean by "distress"?

So Jesus is about to tell us what will happen straight after this distress.

Verse 29 b quotes from Isaiah 13:10. This comes from a section in Isaiah about God's judgement on the nations around Israel. Ch 13 is specifically about God's judgement on Babylon which happened in 539 BC when the Medes (Is 13:17) and Persians led by Cyrus defeated Babylon. Last term we studied Nehemiah which was set in a time after the Persians had defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to Israel if they wanted to.

Matt 24:29 b and Is 13:10 is a type of writing called apocalyptic and people in Jesus' time were familiar with it though we might find it difficult. We studied some passages of this type of writing in Zechariah (in 2011), Revelation (in 2008) and Daniel (in 2007).

[Apocalyptic literature] was almost always composed in times of trial or crisis and was intended as a kind of private comfort for believers. Because of this, it developed doctrines and used forms of expression that sounded somewhat strange, if not bizarre, in more ordinary times.

Biblical apocalyptic writing saw itself as the child of prophecy. This can be seen in its reliance upon the prophetic writings as a source of thought, language, imagery and symbolism. Apocalyptic writers take the promises of the prophets and reassert them for their own time.

There are two basic ideas within apocalyptic thinking:

- the struggle between good and evil
- the belief in two ages (the present evil age and the age to come).

From Postcard from Palestine pp 46-47 by Andrew Reid.

Verse 29 c quotes from Is 34:4. This is also about God's judgement, in particular, Edom is the object of God's judgement but it is also about God's judgement on all the nations. Again, the language is apocalyptic. This stuff about stars falling is typical of apocalyptic language, read Rev 6:12-13.

Read Matt 24:30 and Dan 7:13-14. In Matt 24:30 Jesus is quoting from Daniel and again the language is apocalyptic. "Cloud riding" is not literal but apocalyptic. In Dan 7 it is about the Father handing absolute rule over to Jesus, the Son of Man.

- (b) Read Matt 24:29-31 again. In your own words, what is Jesus saying?

3. Read Matt 24:32-35.
What is Jesus trying to tell us when he talks about the fig tree (vv 32-33)?

They [vv 29-31] are normally applied — uneasily — to the return of Christ at the end of history, but this accords ill with Matthew's phrase *Immediately after the distress of those days* (29), which seems to point to an event connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. But what if we look at it a different way? What if the language about *the sun being darkened, the moon withholding its light, the stars falling from the sky* and the *heavenly bodies being shaken* is poetic and refers to the universal panic, distress and imminent collapse of the world in the cataclysmic 'year of the four emperors', AD 69. . . It was an apocalyptic time. Not till the year of the four emperors, not till the year of the fall of Jerusalem, would the world recognize the fact that the Son of Man had ascended to the right hand of God, and was even now in control of the world that seemed so volatile. When the old order ended, when Jerusalem fell, the new order could be heard like a trumpet throughout the world (31). If so, *the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory*, will refer not to the parousia [i.e. the return of Jesus] at all, but to the 'coming' of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days which in Daniel 7:13-14 is certainly an ascension, not a descent. In other words, the climactic time of AD 69-70 would show to a shaken pagan world and a devastated Jewish nation that world power did not lie with the big battalions or with fanatical religion, but with the Christ, who had returned to his heavenly Father and was even now reigning. . . . [T]he gathering of *his elect from the four winds* would mean the winning of people to the gospel all over the world as his emissaries go out with the good news.

Nobody can prove that this is the right interpretation of these difficult verses, but it is more than possible. It yields good sense. . . . And it would make excellent sense of verse 34. There were indeed some present in AD 30 who would not die until they had seen all these things come to pass. They would see Jerusalem destroyed, a worldwide Gentile mission, a spiritual harvest reaped, the evidence of the spiritual sovereignty of the Son of Man, and the gathering of the elect through all the world to his allegiance.

From The Message of Matthew by Michael Green pp 255-256.

4. Read Matt 24:36-44.
(a) What connection is made with Noah?

(b) If someone is going to "be taken", is that a good thing or a bad thing, as opposed to being "left" (see Gen 7:23 & Matt 24:38-41)? Give a reason for your answer.

(c) So, are Christians going to be taken or left?

In Matthew 24:37-42 Jesus is not talking about Christians disappearing while non-Christians carry on their lives as before. He is talking about the last day when he returns in glory to judge the world. His point is that on Judgment Day God will accept some and reject others. This will occur at an unexpected moment, right in the middle of normal business, just as in the days of Noah. . . The 'taken' and 'left' language has nothing to do with people being secretly beamed up to heaven while the world carries on as before. This is an apocalyptic reference to the judgment that will separate the world when the Son of Man appears: some will escape (like Noah and his family) while others will be condemned (as when "the flood came and took them all away"). And this will all happen while men and women go about their daily business.

666 and all that by John Dickson and Greg Clarke p 40.

(d) What do we know about "that day and hour" (vv 36,42,44)?

5. Read Matt 24:45-51.
What has wisdom got to do with it?

To finish

6. What are we to do in order to be ready for the return of Jesus?
Compare this with your answer to question 1.

Study 7, Matt 25:1-30, On Being Prepared (Parables: the 10 Virgins and the Parable of the Talents)

Getting started

1. (Around-the-room) name one thing you are good at.

Bible

2. Read Matt 25:1-13.

Normally, in the time of Jesus, there were three stages in **matrimonial procedure**. First came *the engagement*, when a formal settlement was made by the respective fathers of the bride and bridegroom. This was followed by *the betrothal*, a ceremony held in the house of the bride's parents, when mutual promises were made by the contracting parties before witnesses and presents were given by the bridegroom to his betrothed. . . . Finally, after the lapse of about a year there was *the marriage*, when the bridegroom accompanied by his friends went to fetch the bride from her father's house and brought her back in procession to his own home where the marriage feast was held. It is most probable that it is *this* procession that the ten girls in the story are pictured as going to meet.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker p 232.

What is the significance of . . .

(a) the bridegroom being delayed (v5)?

(b) the 5 foolish virgins not having enough oil (vv 3, 8)?

(c) the 5 wise virgins not sharing what oil they have (v9)?

(d) the door being shut (v10)?

(e) not knowing the 5 foolish virgins (v12)?

(f) a wedding feast?

Matt 25:14-30, Parable of the Talents

3. Read Matt 25:14-30.

The ***talent***, of which the parable speaks, was not a coin but a measure or weight of money, which was sometimes paid in minted coins and sometimes in bars of gold or bullion. The weight of a talent was 59kgs which, in gold in today's values, would be worth about \$2.2million. In the ancient world capital was not readily available so with the amounts mentioned in this parable it would be easy to make more money with it.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker p 235 and a sermon by Mike Paget, St Barnabas, Broadway 21/8/2011.

What do you think the "it" refers to in Matt 25:14?

4. In the parable who does the master (v14 and v19) represent?

5. Who do the servants represent?

6. (a) In Jesus day who do you think would have been the target audience for this parable?

(b) What would the talents have meant for this audience?

(c) What do the talents represent for us?

7. Is the master unfair towards the one talent servant, after all, he only did what was asked of him (vv 14, 24-25)? Why/why not?
8. In Jesus day who might have been represented by the one talent servant (see Matt 23:1-4, 21:12-13)?
9. What do you think of the one talent servant's assessment of the master (v24)?
10. In v29b how do you understand something being taken away when you "have not" that thing in the first place?
11. (a) Is this parable about working hard to get to heaven?

(b) If not, what is the parable about?

To finish

12. Is there any "carry over" between this world and the next (i.e. when Jesus brings in the new heaven and the new earth) (see Matt 25:19, 21, 23, 24:47)?
13. How would you put the message of this parable into practise especially considering your answer to Q1 "name one thing you are good at?".

Study 8, Matt 25:31-46, Judgement

Getting started

1. How do you feel about the idea of God judging people?
Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

Bible

2. Read Matt 25:31-46.
 - (a) What sort of scene is pictured in vv 31-33?

 - (b) Who is meant by the "Son of Man"?

 - (c) What is the role of the Son of Man here?

3. Who are "these brothers of mine" (v 40)?
(See also Matt 10:40, 12:48-49, 18:6, 10, 14, 28:10 and Isaiah 58:7.)

4. Who are the sheep and who are the goats?

5.
 - (a) What do the sheep get (vv 34, 46)?

 - (b) Why do they get that (vv 35-36, 40)?

6.
 - (a) What do the goats get (vv 41, 46)?

 - (b) Why?

7.
 - (a) Does this story mean that to inherit the kingdom you have to feed the hungry and thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the needy, look after the sick and visit those in prison? Why/why not?

 - (b) How does this fit in with the idea of salvation by grace?

This parable (actually, it is not really a parable) has been endlessly discussed. People who reduce the gospel to social action love it, because it seems to have no theology in it and a great deal of care for the poor and needy. It gives the impression that to serve the poor is necessarily to serve Christ in them. People with a

strong Reformed theology have problems with it. It looks dangerously like justification by works, the very antithesis of Paul, Augustine and Luther.

From The Message of Matthew by Michael Green pp 262-263.

8. Is this story about whether or not we care for Christians or for humanity in general (note v 40 “these brothers of mine”)? Give a reason for your answer.

9. Perhaps a better way to understand the passage is to look at it in its original first century context. The likely meaning of the scene, then, is that those who have not followed Jesus the Messiah will be judged in terms of how they have treated the people whom he counts as his family.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 142 by Tom Wright.

In first century Palestine

(a) who have treated Jesus’ family badly?

(b) who have treated Jesus’ family well?

(c) what will happen to these different groups of people?

10. If your answer to 9. is the right way to understand the passage what is the correct application for 21st century us?

To finish

11. What would you say to someone who said there is no heaven or hell?

12. What questions does Jesus’ teaching on Judgement raise for you?

