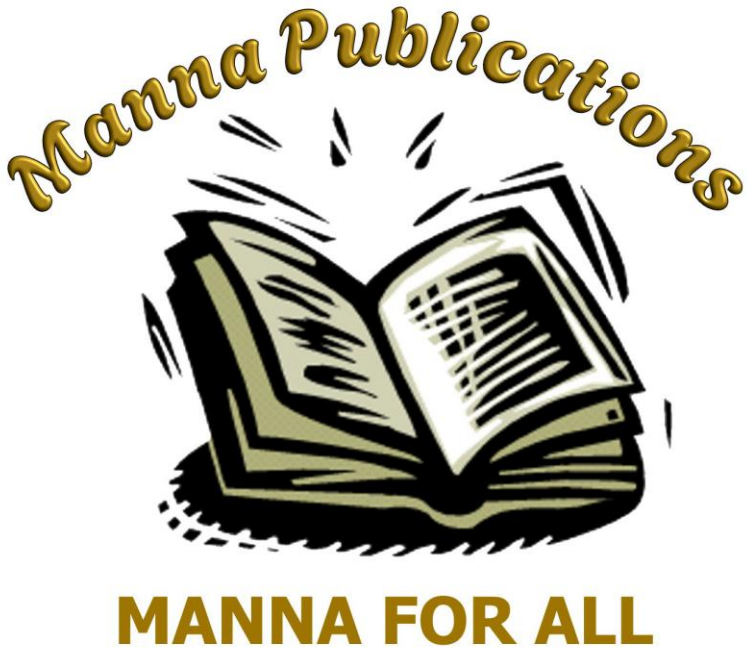
THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Part 1

A Bible Teaching Commentary for personal or group study

Written by Fred Morris



MATTHEW

Chapters 1 to 16

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
Part 1: Chapters 1 to 16

- **The birth of Jesus Christ to virgin Mary**
- **The baptism and temptation of Jesus**
- **The beginning of Christ's ministry**
- **Jesus calls and trains His disciples**
- **The Blessings and the Sermon on the Mount**
- **The Lord's Prayer and "Ask, Seek, Knock"**

IN THIS Bible teaching commentary, Matthew builds on the writings of Mark to record the early years of Jesus. He begins with the ancestry of Joseph who planned to marry the virgin Mary. However, God planted a seed in Mary through the Holy Spirit to grow up like a miracle son of man. Actually, He was the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah or Christ. Matthew describes what happened after the birth of Jesus when King Herod was told by wise men from the east that a new king was born. After escaping from Herod to Egypt, Joseph and Mary returned with Jesus to the town of Nazareth. He lived there until He was thirty, then moved to Capernaum. Matthew describes the early years of Christ's teaching ministry after His baptism, with the miracles, before entering Jerusalem.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS publish small Bible teaching commentaries written by the late Fred Morris to use on your own or to study in a group. Fred and his wife Lorna, originally from Australia, travelled round the world teaching and preaching before retiring to the USA. Their low-cost books are easy to read, understand and translate into other languages. The books explain basic New and Old Testament teaching of God's word and the new life found in Christ plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

THESE BOOKS will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven. These are important teachings for these last days before His return.

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return.

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To the Reader or Leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. You can use Fred's books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.

Bible reading: Where you see this heading, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible verses first before reading this book.

Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.

Additional text boxes: Where you see these, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible passage was written and helps to apply the teaching for today.

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THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Part 1: Chapters 1 to 16

INTRODUCTION

Matthew's Gospel gives the Good News of Jesus Christ: who He was and what He said and did for our salvation. Matthew shows how the promises God made to the people of Israel in the Old Testament came true. He uses the Hebrew Scriptures 93 times to prove that Jesus Christ was Israel's promised Messiah. Mark also used them 49 times in his writings. These promises were made hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Jesus Himself proved that what the Old Testament prophets wrote about Him was true. This commentary encourages readers to study the writings of Mark as well as Matthew to understand more about the full life story of Jesus and what was said in the Holy Scriptures. It also explains the purpose and provision of our Almighty God, known as Yahweh in the Hebrew language. It is also focused on our salvation through Jesus, Yeshua in the Hebrew language, the Son of God who was born as a human being (Son of Man) to the Virgin Mary.

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector before he met Jesus. He worked for the Romans at the time when Israel was part of the Roman Empire. Matthew was a well-educated man and able to write about the life of Jesus and His ministry. In his writings, he included much of the Gospel of Mark. He published it before the year AD 70. Mark also became a disciple and apostle of Jesus.

A few of the things that the Old Testament prophets said about Jesus

- Jesus is the promised Messiah (Christ), the Son of God, our Saviour (Isaiah 53:5,12; Jeremiah 23:5).
- Jesus would be born of a virgin and called "Immanuel" which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14).
- Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- A messenger would come to prepare the way for Jesus (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1).
- God promised He would send the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and make "everything right" for us (Isaiah 42:1).
- Jesus would be sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- "They pierced My hands and My feet. They divide up My clothes among them." (Psalm 22:16-18)

There are nearly 500 references fulfilled about Jesus in the New Testament from the Old Testament. The whole of the Bible from beginning to end reveals the plans of God and their fulfilment in Jesus the Christ as Israel's Messiah and Saviour of the world.

By that time, there were many Jewish followers of Jesus in Israel who believed He was their Messiah. Their prophets long ago said the Messiah would come to save Israel and set up His Kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:76-77). Therefore, some of the Jews thought He would set them free from the Romans who ruled their land. However, the divine purpose of Jesus was for us all to enter a full and holy life by keeping the commandments of God (Matthew 19:17). Jesus knew this was only possible if we believe He took the punishment on the cross for our sins. Then, through His Spirit at work within us, we can begin to fulfil all the Old Testament commandments of God. God accepted that the sacrifice of the innocent blood of Jesus fulfilled the need for the sacrifice of innocent animals on an altar. The Roman crucifixion of Jesus fulfilled God's new covenant relationship for all true believers. It was not possible for mankind to obey all the commandments of God under the old covenant.

When Matthew started making his notes for his Gospel of Jesus Christ, he knew that the early Jewish believers did not fully understand certain things:

- Their Messiah was born in a lowly stable and shepherds were the first to be told.
- Jesus was a poor carpenter brought up in Nazareth.
- Jesus said that God's Kingdom was not for the Jews only, but also for Gentiles.

We, too, must remember this is all part of God's purpose to reach every person and every need.

Matthew later updated his Gospel using many of the notes written by Mark. Matthew's final version was written in the Greek language for Jewish readers living mainly in other nations. This also enabled the Good News of Jesus Christ to be read and understood by the whole of the Greek-speaking world at that time.

Matthew shows again and again how the Old Testament prophecies about Israel's Messiah were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. His lowly birth and childhood, powerful ministry, terrible death and amazing resurrection were promised by God for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles who believe He is the Son of God Almighty.

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 1

AN ANGEL TELLS MARY AND JOSEPH ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Matthew wrote down the names of Joseph's ancestors in three groups. Each group covered fourteen generations: Group 1, from Abraham to King David. Group 2, from David to the exile in Babylon. Group 3, from the return of the exiles from Babylon to Joseph, the carpenter who planned to marry the Virgin Mary. The Jews kept careful records to prove that all their people descended

from Abraham. Joseph as a "son of David". Luke's record of Joseph's ancestors even goes back to Adam and Eve (Luke 3:23-38).

The birth of Jesus was a mystery and a miracle to many people. Matthew wrote down what were facts, not man's ideas. "This is how the birth of Jesus the Christ came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit." (1:18)

God created Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth. Every man since Adam has been born from the joining together of male and female. But Christ's birth was different. Mary was found to be "with child through the Holy Spirit." (1:18) Never before had a person been born in this way. This means that in birth of Christ, God produced a life without sin whereas all other babies are born with sin inherited down the years from the time of Adam and Eve.

Several barren women in Biblical history gave birth to a miracle son which God provided through their husbands. Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, gave birth to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus (Luke 1:13). Hannah gave birth to the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:20). Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the father of Jacob, later called Israel (Genesis 21:1-7).

Mary loved Joseph, but they were not married. Joseph had not taken Mary to be his wife. Mary was "pledged to be married". Young Jewish couples did not live together before they were married (Deuteronomy 20:7).

One day the angel, Gabriel, went to Mary and said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son." (Luke 1:30)

Mary asked the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin? "

The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you… So that the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38) Mary's baby would not be Joseph's baby. The Holy Spirit planted the 'seed' in Mary's womb. This was the 'seed' God had promised a long time before. That seed was Israel's Messiah (Galatians 3:16). This Son of God would bless all mankind.

Joseph was a righteous man. God's law guided his life. When he learned that Mary was going to have a baby, he was troubled. Joseph did not want to put her to shame in public. So, he planned to break his marriage pledge.

That night, God spoke to Joseph in a dream: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." (1:20-21) This was the same name Gabriel had given to Mary. "Jesus" means "the Lord saves".

JOSEPH TAKES MARY TO HIS HOME

Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife. But he did not make love to her until after she gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

"All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel which means, God with us." (Isaiah 7:14) God gave this promise 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

We praise God that Joseph, an unimportant carpenter from Nazareth, who was a descendant of King David, was given divine wisdom to care for Mary, first in Nazareth then in Bethlehem.

Talk about this:

1. Who and what was Jesus at His birth?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 2

WISE MEN VISIT 'THE KING OF THE JEWS' FROM THE EAST

Jesus was born when Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem during the reign of King Herod. Angels announced the birth of Israel's Messiah to humble shepherds nearby (Luke 2:8-20).

After that time, certain 'wise men' from the East came to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1). They studied the stars. They had seen a new star and followed it for many days until it stopped over Jerusalem. These 'wise men' knew the Hebrew Scriptures. They knew what God's prophets had said (Isaiah 9:6-7). When they saw a bright star that did not rise nor set, they went to find the Messiah King. They came looking for a special baby boy, born to be King of the Jews.

The star stayed ahead of them in the sky until they came to Jerusalem. There they asked, "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." (2:2)

When King Herod heard this, he was very angry. The Jews were his subjects. He was their Roman King. Herod did not call his own wise men, he called the Jewish "chief priests and teachers of the law" and asked them where their Messiah would be born (2:4).

They told the King, "In Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah… out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel'". (Micah 5:2)

Herod asked the men from the East what time the star appeared. Then he sent them off to Bethlehem with this order: "Make a careful search for the

child. When you find Him, report to me, so that I may go and worship Him." (Matthew 2:9)

After they had given their gifts to the baby Jesus, the men from the East were divinely instructed and warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went back to their own country by a different way (2:12). They had placed the baby Jesus at risk from Herod. Satan seeks to destroy ministries before they even begin! He even brings heartbreak to innocent people, for example the slaughter of innocent babes by Herod (2:16).

The wise men from the East visit Mary and Jesus

JOSEPH, MARY AND JESUS ESCAPE TO EGYPT

After the wise men left Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream. "Get up, " the angel said, "take the child and his mother and escape". Joseph obeyed God. He put Mary and Jesus on his donkey and hurried out of the city (2:14). The prophet's words would soon be fulfilled: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." (Hosea 11:1) Everything the prophets said and wrote about Jesus happened. Joseph, Mary and her baby Jesus were able to live in Egypt using the costly gifts of the wise men from the East.

The wise men did not go back to Herod and he was very angry. It was then that he ordered his soldiers to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER KING HEROD DIED

When Herod died, an angel came to Joseph in Egypt. He said to Joseph, "Get up! Take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." (Matthew 2:20)

Jesus may have been 5 or 6 years old when Joseph and Mary started the long walk north back to Israel. King Archelaus, Herod's son, reigned in southern Judea and Joseph felt afraid. On the way home to Israel, God warned him in a dream to go to Galilee in northern Israel (2:22). So, Joseph went through Judea round the eastern side of Lake Galilee and through Samaria until they came at last to his home town of Nazareth, a very isolated and poor place. This is why Jesus was often called a Nazarene (2:23). He and the place He came from were despised by many of the people at that time. Some of the prophets said that Israel's Messiah would be called a despised person from a poor town (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:3).

Talk about this:

1. How did Satan seek to hinder Jesus?
2. How did God seek to bless Jesus?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 3

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS
JOHN BAPTISES JESUS

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 1

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 4

GOD PREPARES JESUS FOR MINISTRY

God prepared the way for His Son to minister on Earth. He spoke about the first coming of Israel's Messiah many times in His Old Testament prophecies. Also, after His birth, God saved Him from slaughter by King Herod by living in Egypt. He was then brought up as the son of a carpenter in the lowly town of Nazareth. Joseph and Mary knew that God had a special purpose for Jesus. Before His ministry began, He was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem and the local synagogues to learn more about God's laws and prophecies and discuss their meaning with the rabis.

When He reached the age of 30, Jesus went to John the Baptist to be baptised. During His baptism a voice from Heaven confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Mark 1:1-13).

The start of the ministry of Jesus on Earth

Matthew records the start of the ministry of Jesus in this way:

- God allowed Satan to tempt Him to do wrong (Matthew 4:1-10).
- Angels cared for Him after 40 days without food in the desert (4:11).
- Jesus was given wisdom to move away to avoid being put in prison like John (4:12-13).
- He was given guidance to fulfil God's purpose for Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) (4:14-16).
- He was given power to preach God's message of salvation through repentance (4:17).
- He was given authority to demand support from others to follow Him (4:18-22).
- He performed signs and wonders in the power of the Holy Spirit (4:23-24).
- God anointed His ministry by bringing large crowds to listen to His teaching from nearby and far away (4:25).

It is important for all who are called into ministry to realise the importance of events in our life. God planned from before our birth how to protect us and then provide the experience and wisdom we needed to serve Him and others. But first we must reject the splendour and the glory and the power offered by this world (4:8). Instead, we must help those in need (4:23-24). Look back and see how God has provided for you and prepared you for ministry as a follower of Jesus and a friend of sinners.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

After the baptism of Jesus by John, He was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (4:1). Long ago, before God created Earth and the Universe, Satan was an angel in Heaven. He wanted to be equal with God and sit on God's throne. His pride made him rebel against God. Because God will not have sin near Him, He threw Satan out of Heaven.

Many angels followed Satan and lost their place in Heaven. These wicked angels still obey Satan. They are called demons or evil spirits. Satan and his evil spirits are God's enemies and your enemies, too.

From the beginning, Satan fought against God's plan to save man from sin. When God created Adam and Eve, Satan came into the Garden of Eden as a serpent to tempt Eve (Genesis 3:1-5). That is why Satan is called 'the tempter'.

Jesus was in the desert for forty days and nights. He had nothing to eat. When He was weak in His body, Satan came to tempt Him (4:1-2). We must never forget that for the 33 years Jesus was on Earth, He was human and was seriously hungry when tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. Satan

always comes to tempt us when we are weak! Before He began His work on Earth, Jesus met Satan face to face and defeated him. Satan knew Jesus was hungry, so he asked Him to make bread out of the stones. Yes, Jesus could make the stones into bread since Jesus is God. He can do anything, but He came to do the Father's will, not His own. Satan was tempting Him to prove that He was the Messiah. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (4:4)

The Spirit of God then led Jesus to Jerusalem. He stood on the highest part of the Temple and looked down on the city. Then Satan whispered, "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written, 'He will command His angels… to guard You carefully. They will lift You up… so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" (4:5-6; Psalm 91:11-12). Satan wanted Jesus to use His divine power for His own pleasure. But Jesus answered, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16).

Satan then took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world. Satan said: "All these kingdoms and their glory… I will give You, if You will bow down and worship me." (4:9) Satan does have a lot of power. Satan is like a roaring lion, but God allows him to go only so far. "Away from me, Satan!" Jesus said. "For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (4:10; Deuteronomy 6:13) We must command Satan to go AND uphold Scripture!

Then the devil left Jesus. Angels came and took care of Him (Matthew 4:11). Jesus was now fully prepared for ministry. Jesus had overcome every temptation at the beginning of His work. But Satan tried to destroy what He was doing all through His ministry. For example, through the evil plans of the Jewish leaders (26:1-5 and 48). Also through Judas Iscariot's betrayal and also in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:11). But Jesus knew that all these things had a divine purpose. And on the cross He knew He had successfully finished His Fathers plan of redemption for the world (John 19:28-30).

You, too, can have victory over Satan in the Name of Jesus. His Holy Spirit will help you stand against all temptations and attacks of the enemy, and win! We can have faith in the Holy Spirit being there for us to fulfil God's purpose in our lives. Ask for more faith in your life (Luke 11:13). Christians are not perfect. We will not be perfect until Jesus calls us to Heaven. But we have no excuse for not asking the Holy Spirit to fill us. We have no excuse for not walking in the light God has given us (1 John 1:7). We need to have God's word filling our hearts. Then, when Satan comes, we can use God's word against him. God can do this and even use Satan's evil plans for good, as He did with Jesus!

Jesus had authority to command Satan, and we too must use God's word against him. God's word is our 'sword' against the devil (Ephesians 6:17). Speak God's promises when you feel that evil is near. Call on the name of

Jesus. Claim the blood of Jesus is sprinkled over you and your family. David wrote, "I will fear no evil, for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4)

"When the devil had finished all his tempting, he left Jesus until another time." (Luke 4:13) That happened in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are" but He did not obey Satan (Hebrews 4:15). When we are tempted, Jesus is there to help us (Hebrews 2:18). He can feel as we do and He prays for us to stand strong against temptation (Hebrews 7:25). His sacrifice enables us to live and witness for Him.

Jesus was there when Satan tempted Peter. Jesus told him, "I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail." (Luke 22:32) We are not alone. Jesus is with us and He will show you a "way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Talk about this:

1. How did God prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus?

JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

During this time, John was put in prison. Then Jesus returned to Galilee. But He left His home in Nazareth and went to live in the city of Capernaum. It was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. In that way, what the prophet Isaiah had said came true (Matthew 4:12-14). Isaiah prophesied, "Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali! Galilee, where Gentiles live! And land along the Mediterranean Sea! And land east of the Jordan River! The people who are now living in darkness have seen a great light. They are now living in a very dark land. But a light has shined on them." (Matthew 4:15-16; Isaiah 9:1,2) These places received the Good News of salvation in Jesus later on through His apostles.

From that time onwards Jesus began to preach about God's coming Kingdom. "Turn away from your sins!" He said. "The Kingdom of Heaven is near!" (Matthew 4:17)

JESUS CALLS HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 1

JESUS CONTINUES HIS PREACHING AND HEALING MINISTRY

'Jesus walked all over the region of Galilee. There He taught in the synagogues. He preached the Good News of God's kingdom. He healed every illness and sickness the people had. News about Him spread all over Syria. People brought to Him all who were ill with different kinds of sicknesses. Some were suffering great pain. Others were controlled by demons. Some were shaking wildly.

Others could not move at all. And Jesus healed all of them. Large crowds followed Him. People came from Galilee and from Jerusalem and from Judea. Others came from the area east of the Jordan River.' (4:23-25)

Talk about this:

1. What did God allow Satan to do and why?
2. What were the main features of the ministry of Jesus?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 5

JESUS TEACHES THE BLESSINGS OF GOD ON THE MOUNTAIN

After Jesus had chosen His disciples, He taught them many things. A large crowd listened to His words. Chapters 5 to 7 are often called 'The Sermon on the Mount'. Their Jewish leaders said people must live by the Law of Moses. But they enslaved people with their own extra rules. Jesus came to set men free. Jesus said that entry into God's Kingdom is by faith, not by keeping rules or doing good works.

No person can keep God's Law without fault, so Jesus, the perfect man, came and fulfilled the Law for us in every way (John 8:29; 15:10) including the sacrifice of His blood as the precious Lamb of God. John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The sermon of Jesus reveals the very nature of Christ and we must learn to become more like Him. He was born as a Son of Man but lived as the Son of God for 33 years on Earth before returning to His Father in Heaven.

Church and Kingdom renewal today will come through studying and applying this sermon! Paul and the other apostles later helped the new believers to do this. The sermon teaches God's truth, holy living and the importance of witnessing. And the more we learn and apply these words of Jesus, the closer we come to God Himself, which was His purpose from the beginning of time. Our relationship with Christ and what He said on Earth will transform our relationship with God His Father and also with others we witness to. Read on!

God created men and women in His image with the ability to love as He loves. It was, and still is, His desire for all people to love Him, our Creator. We must not allow the sins and defects we have inherited from Adam and Eve to hinder our love for God. We must learn in our worship and prayers to say "I love You!" We must also remember that God has enabled us to overcome evil in our lives by seeking forgiveness through the sacrifice of God's own flesh and blood, Israel's Messiah. Jesus our Christ and Messiah gave His life for our salvation to bring us closer to our Creator. Paul calls this 'the mystery of Christ'

(Ephesians 3:4). This wonderful mystery is for Jews and Gentiles alike (Ephesians 3:6).

Jesus teaches the people of Israel to understand the word of God

Jesus began His teaching by showing what it meant to have God's Kingdom in our hearts. His Kingdom is not built on laws but on love and mercy (9:13; Deuteronomy 10:12; Hosea 11:4). God puts His law of love in the hearts of those who trust in Jesus and He helps them live by it (2 Corinthians 3:3). He described the qualities of His true believers and His blessings in these eight Beatitudes. 'Blessed' means 'honoured'.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 5:3) The proud cannot enter God's Kingdom (James 4:6-10). The 'poor in spirit' are the humble. They think little of themselves. They are happy to live like the poor in order to make others rich through Christ (2 Corinthians 6:10).
2. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4; Isaiah 61:2) People try to forget their sorrows and cry, "Entertain me!" want to be happy. They may laugh and dance and play loud music. Our sorrow over the sins of others, however, leads us to care about them. God seeks hearts that are full of compassion for others (2 Corinthians 5:14). Paul said he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing…

poor, yet making many rich." (2 Cor 6:10) We can enjoy all things as we serve God by caring for needy people.

3. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth." (Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:8) The world is hard, clever and ruthless. Jesus was meek which does not mean weak. He was gentle and humble (Matthew 11:29). Be meek before God! We must trust in His strength not our own. God takes the meek and teaches them. "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way." (Psalm 32:8; Exodus 33:13) They have God's power working in their lives and enjoy what He gives them in this life.
4. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6). God commands us to "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness." (6:33) Many seek His blessings, but not His righteousness! He promises to fill all who seek to live righteous lives with His blessings. Sadly, few hunger for this!
5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy." (5:7) We must show God's mercy to others because He has been merciful to us. We must move towards others in love and prayer, like holding out hands to a drowning man. Jesus Christ comes to us with that kind of mercy. God's mercy always wants to give the sinner another chance. So should we.
6. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8) Because God is holy, no unholy thing can come into His presence. Blessed are those who want to be holy. God said, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy." (Leviticus 11:44) Walk away from all that is unholy (Galatians 5:19-23).
7. "Blessed are the peacemakers… they will be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9) God's peace must first come to our own hearts (John 14:27). When we have God's peace, we can be at peace with our brothers and sisters and spread peace in our town and beyond.
8. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (5:10) Rejoice and be glad in all things! Jesus explained this last Beatitude further. "Blessed are you when people make fun of you and hurt you because of Me. You are also blessed when they tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of Me. Be joyful and glad. Your reward in Heaven is great. In the same way, people hurt the prophets who lived long ago." (5:11-12)

HOW TO LIVE AS 'SALT' AND 'LIGHT'

Jesus next taught the people how to live to please God. He taught about God's love and His Kingdom. He told His followers, "You are the salt… and the light." (5:13) Salt makes food taste better. Salt stops food from going bad. You are salt, Jesus said, you can make this world better. Salt was used in all the Old

Testament sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13). It was bought with public funds and stored at the Temple (Ezra 6:9).

If we want to be used by God, we must share our 'salt' and 'light' with our society. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14). In their houses they had little oil lamps. A city full of oil lamps, set on a hill would light the way forward for weary travellers. "In the same way, let your light shine so others can see it. Then they will see the good things you do. And that will bring glory to your Father who is in Heaven." (5:16)

The whole world lies in the darkness of sin. Sin puts out the light of God's Spirit. Yet when people turn to Christ, His eternal Spirit lives in their lives. They shine for Him in this dark world. There is nothing secret about loving Jesus Christ. When Christ's life and light come into a person's heart, you see it in their face. Eyes sparkle and faces shine!

"I HAVE COME TO FULFILL THE MEANING OF THE LAW OF GOD"

Jesus often used parables to tell of the blessings of God's Kingdom at work in our lives. These parables teach about a person's heart. Why? Because that is where God wants to be King. Jesus did not speak of Jewish laws, or Roman laws. His Kingdom is not about rules. God's Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom where He reigns as King. His Kingdom is in the hearts of His people (Luke 17:21).

However, Jesus told the people, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to do that. Instead, I have come to fulfil them" and to give full meaning to what is written (Matthew 5:17). He fulfilled every requirement of God's holy Law given to Moses and all that was promised through the prophets. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's Old Testament covenant given to Moses. "What I am about to tell you is true. Heaven and Earth will disappear before the smallest letter disappears from the Law. Not even the smallest stroke of a pen will disappear from the Law until everything is completed. Do not break even one of the least important commandments. And do not teach others to break them. If you do, you will be called the least important person in the Kingdom of Heaven. Instead, practise and teach these commands, then you will be called important in the Kingdom of Heaven." (5:18-19)

May we live as Jesus taught His disciples, to share and live in the love of God and in the truth of His word and the wisdom of His promised Spirit! Amen. This is God's renewed covenant in Jesus at work within mankind.

Jesus explained further, "Unless you are more godly than the Pharisees you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (5:20) The people thought the Pharisees were truly righteous, but the Pharisees put their own traditions and

rules above God's Law and used their own laws to control the lives of the people. Jesus upholds and fulfils in us only the Law of God given to Moses.

GOD'S COMMANDMENTS GIVEN TO MOSES

Jesus did not come to control the people as the religious leaders did, but to enable us to be free from wrong thoughts within. "It was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder'. Anyone who murders will surely be judged for it. But here is what I tell you. Do not be angry with your brother" (5:21-22). The Pharisees said this Law of Moses was only about killing a person. But Jesus helped them to see what leads up to murder. When a man is angry, he says unkind things. James says he "murders with his tongue" (James 3:6).

Jesus said "If you remember that your brother has something against you, do not bring your gift to God. First go and make peace with your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24)

Jesus wanted the people to know that the Holy Spirit will show you the things you do that hurt others. In this way, the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus to all who believe, enables us to fulfil the true meaning of God's Law. If we lack love and do not put things right with our brothers and sisters through the teachings of Christ, our thoughts and words will:

- come between us and the love of God (1 John 1:7);
- stop our prayers being answered (1 Peter 3:7);
- spoil our fellowship with others (Philippians 2:1-3).
- grow into a bigger disagreement (Hebrews 12:15);

Jesus said, "Settle your disputes quickly." (Matthew 5:25) God is our Judge in how we obey His commandments given to Moses and how we behave in love towards others.

Jesus then gives a further example of how to obey God's commandments given to Moses. "Do not commit adultery. Do not even look at a woman in the wrong way. Anyone who does has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (5:27-28). This Law is only fulfilled by not looking at another person with sinful desires. Paul said, fill your mind with good thoughts. Righteous thoughts will lead to a godly life. Wrong thoughts will lead us into sin (Philippians 4:8).

Jesus came to give victory over all sin. We must put evil things out of our lives. Do not read evil books or watch evil films. Do not visit places where you will be tempted.

God's plan is for marriage partners to be faithful to each other in a loving long-term commitment. Divorce is man's way out. Divorce makes more pain and more bitterness. Jesus said, "If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than unfaithfulness, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again; and the man who marries her commits adultery also." (Matthew

5:31-32) At the time of Jesus, some Pharisees would let husbands divorce their wives for any reason or no reason at all.

The Law given to Moses said, "Do not break your oath, but keep the oath you have made to the LORD" (5:33). Jesus said it is better not to make an oath at all. Simply "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes!' and your 'No' be 'No!' Anything more than this comes from the evil one, Satan." (5:36-37)

BE KIND AND LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!' (Exodus 21:24) But I tell you not to fight against an evil person. If a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also." (Matthew 5:38-39) Jesus gave other examples of loving unlovely people.

We must defend our families from evil, and our country from unholy leaders and invaders. Jesus faced evil men, yet He did no sin (Hebrews 4:15). No lie ever came from His lips. When He was insulted, He did not answer back with an insult (1 Peter 2:23). The Law said, "Love your neighbour." (Leviticus 19:18) Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He asked, "If you [only] love those who love you, what reward will you get?" (Matthew 5:43-46)

These teachings should be part of our aim to be perfect. "Be perfect (in loving others) as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (5:48) We are far from perfect, but "our love for others will show that we are children of the Father in Heaven." (5:45). We can love others without liking what they do.

Talk about this:

1. After describing the blessings of God, why does Jesus talk about salt and light?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 6

GIVING, PRAYING AND FASTING

The Pharisees tried to prove they were the only people who did things right!

- They put money into the box at the Temple and blew a trumpet to let others see how good they were.
- They stood in the synagogues and on street corners and said loud prayers.
- They put black marks on their faces when they were fasting.

Jesus said, "Do not be like those who only pretend to be holy." Be careful not to do your 'good works' in front of others, to be seen by them. "Give to others secretly. Your Father will reward you since He sees what you do secretly" (6:1-4).

"When you pray, do not be like those who pretend to be holy. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. What I am about to tell you is true. They have received their reward. When you pray, go into your room. Close the door and pray to your Father, who cannot be seen. Your Father will reward you, because He sees what you do secretly. When you pray, do not keep talking on and on. That is what ungodly people do. They think they will be heard because they talk a lot." (6:5-7). Jesus then told the people to pray behind a door in your room where you cannot be seen. "Your Father will reward you, because He sees what you do secretly." (6:6)

We do not need to talk to God loudly, nor do we need to talk a lot. He knows before we pray what is in our minds. Pause at times from your praying and listen to let the Holy Spirit prompt you how to pray and guide you how to respond.

How to pray and how not to pray to God

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Then Jesus taught us how we should speak to God in our prayers (6:9-13).

1. "Our Father in Heaven, may Your name be honoured."
2. "May Your Kingdom come."
3. "May what You want to happen be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven."
4. "Give us today our daily bread."
5. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."
6. "Lead us not into temptation, but save us from the evil one."

The prayer is set out in six parts. The first three parts point us to the Father, His Kingdom and His will. The second three parts point us to depend on God to supply our needs, forgive our sins and protect us from the evil one, Satan.

Notice that God allows us to get close to temptation and Satan's attacks. But we must not yield to temptation or Satan. This is the time we can grow in faith and strengthen our belief in the word of God. Amen!

This simple prayer of Jesus blesses God and blesses us. Some people have even been converted through its important teaching of Chrisitan beliefs.

Jesus continued with a warning. "Forgive other people when they sin against you. If you do, your Father who is in Heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive the sins of other people, your Father will not forgive your sins." (6:14-15)

His answer to the Pharisees about fasting was "your Father knows all things". We can fool men, but we cannot fool God. Fasting is similar to worship. Jesus said do it before God in secret. God will meet with you and reward you (6:16-18).

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy… But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven." (6:19). If your heart is set only on Earth's treasures, your eyes will be watching over them. You will never have enough! Money is the god many people serve. Jesus said, no-one can serve two masters. "You cannot serve both God and money at the same time." (6:24)

If you follow the money god of this world, you will walk in darkness. You will have a darkness in your mind (6:23) and a divided or anxious heart (6:25). To have money is not bad in itself. It is the love of money that leads us away from God. It is sad when we begin to worship money, luck, fate, fame or fortune (Isaiah 65:11). The love of money turns to greed and we begin to desire what others have for ourselves. Keep your eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). Follow Him and you will receive the "light of life".

DO NOT WORRY

Paul says, "Be anxious about nothing." (Philippians 4:6). Instead, we must fully trust God. Jesus confirms this by asking five questions:

"Is not life more important than food?" (Matthew 6:25) Life is much more than food and clothes. Life is about God and our relationship with Him. God sees us as persons of great value. He loves us more than we can ever know. God takes care of all His creatures, how much more will He take care of you! (6:33; Romans 8:32).

"Are you not more valuable than the birds?" God loved men and women enough to send His only Son to die for them. If every tiny bird is under His eye, do you not think He will take care of you?" (Matthew 6:26) That does not mean we will be free of trouble (Job 5:7).

"Who… by worrying can add a single hour to his life or add to their height?" (Matthew 6:27) You cannot change your height, your colour, or the way you look. These outward things are not the real person you are inside. The real person you are is your spirit. Take care of your body but also take care of your spirit.

"Why worry about clothes? See how the wild flowers grow!" (6:28) Trust God for your needs. Focus on God and He will put His righteous Spirit in you and give you His peace (John 14:27; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

"Do not worry and ask, 'What will we eat? Or 'What will we drink? Or 'What will we wear?' …Your Father in Heaven knows what you need." (Matthew 6:31-32) Each day has enough trouble of its own. Tomorrow's trouble may never come. So do not let tomorrow's trouble cast a shadow on today. Live every day by faith. Trust God and believe that no trouble will come to you except what God allows.

Talk about this:

1. Summarise the key points in the Lord's Prayer.

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 7

JUDGING, SEEKING, TESTING

Then Jesus said, "Do not judge others, or you will be judged in the same way." (7:1-2) We are not to look for a small "piece of sawdust" in our brother's eye. Instead, we must look at ourselves and think about our own sins. Our sins are like a big "piece of wood" in our own eye! So, do not be a hypocrite and pretend that you are without fault. We must come before God with a humble spirit and confess our sins. "We must first take the "piece of wood" out of our own eye." Then we can go to our brother and tell him about the wrong things he is doing. (7:3-5) This may mean praying with him to help him see the

problem in his life. First read what Paul says in Romans 2:1. And remember that God will judge you if you judge others.

"Do not give dogs what is sacred." (Matthew 7:6) We are not to give God's sacred truth to those who will trample it under foot. Beware of evil men. Jesus called them 'dogs'. Do not give them places in the church or let them teach.

ASK, SEEK AND KNOCK

God is more loving than any earthly father. And He knows what we need to help us live a godly Christian life (7:7; 2 Peter 1:3). He says to His children:

- **Ask** for your daily needs: "Give us this day our daily bread." Even though God knows your needs, He wants you to come to Him and ask for His help.
- **Seek** Him with all your heart. Seek His will. Make it first in your life. Seek Him in His Word. Seek Him on your knees in prayer. Seek Him early in the morning. Seek Him while you are young. He wants you to find Him and get to know Him.
- **Knock** and keep on knocking. God is waiting for you. Do not give up. "The door will be opened to the one who knocks."

These words of Jesus mean "Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking," until God answers. God may wait for your faith to grow before He answers your prayers. Or His answer may be "Not yet" or not in the way you expect. His silence does not mean He has not heard you.

These verses tell what happens when we ask, seek and knock. Jesus asked, "Which of you… knows how to give good gifts to his children?" (Matthew 7:9-11) Earthly fathers want their children to be cared for. Our heavenly Father knows exactly how to take care of us. He wants to give us the best gifts. Jesus replied, "How much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (7:11)

"In everything, do to others what you would want them do to you." (7:12) This is often called "the golden rule". It was well known to the Greeks and Romans, but is also a part of God's commandment to love your neighbour as yourself.

A NARROW PATH AND A WIDE PATH

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate." (7:13) There is a gate to Heaven and a gate to Hell. The gate to Heaven is narrow… not difficult to find, but difficult to enter (7:14). You cannot pass through the gate into Heaven if you are holding onto unconfessed sins!

Jesus said we do not have to look far to find the wide road. Everyone can see it. It is the road without God and many are rushing along it. They can easily draw you along with them.

The small gate to the narrow road leads to eternal life and Heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven.

Many start on the narrow path, but soon give up because they try to follow Jesus in their own strength. God promises to give them the Holy Spirit (and many other good gifts) but they do not ask, or seek or knock or wait on Him to be filled. They just try to be good in their own strength. Jesus spoke of two paths and two gates. We have to make a choice between following Jesus Christ or Satan and other religions.

Christ's teaching is not just to be admired, but obeyed. When we know the truth we must obey it and the truth will set us free.

WE MUST JUDGE FAIRLY

We must not judge our brothers and sisters unfairly, but we must make judgements. We must decide who is a 'false prophet' and who is telling the truth. We must judge what is of God and what is not. Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets… in sheep's clothing… They are ferocious wolves." (Matthew 7:15)

False prophets rise up in our churches and we must be aware of them (24:11; 1 John 4:1). The false prophets' words and works show who they are (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; 2 Timothy 4:3). They say things people want to hear. They may even say that all roads lead to Heaven. They teach that you can be saved and go to Heaven without the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:7,22). Paul wrote, "In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, which is the forgiveness of sins." (Ephesians 1:7) Luke wrote, "Salvation is found in no-one else." (Acts 4:12).

Jesus then spoke of hypocrites. They say all the right words, but they do not live right lives. Their actions are the 'fruit' of their lives. Watch them. You will know them by the unfruitful way they live.

Jesus then pointed to the Pharisees. They were careful to follow their own rules, but they had no love or mercy in their hearts. They were like fruit trees that did not bear good fruit. Jesus said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 7:19)

The Lord knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19). Many say they know God, but He does not know them if they have not accepted His plan of eternal salvation in Jesus. On Judgment Day He will say, "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

Jesus told a story or parable to explain about hearing God's word and obeying it. It is easy to build a house on sandy flat land. One man built his house there but a second man thought it would be safer to build on a rock. When we hear and obey God's word, we build our lives on Christ. He is our Rock.

In the parable, the wise man "builds his house on the rock. The rain comes down. The water rises. The winds blow and beat against the house. But it does not fall. It is built on the rock. But everyone who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man. He builds his house on sand. The rain comes down. The water rises. The winds blow and beat against that house. And it falls with a loud crash." (7:24-27)

The parable of the two houses

Peter claimed that Jesus was the Rock when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (16:16) There is no better Rock to build on. Jesus Christ is the only sure foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). Jesus calls us to put our faith in Him. We must build our lives on the truth. When we build on Jesus (the Rock), the winds and storms or troubles in life cannot defeat us.

'The crowds were amazed at his teaching. He taught like one who had authority. He did not speak like their teachers of the Law.' (7:28-29)

Talk about this:

1. What are the spiritual values of ask, seek and knock?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 8

THE WORDS OF JESUS HAVE POWER TO HEAL

The people who needed the most help from Jesus included a social outcast, an important army officer, and an officer's servant.

In the Bible, leprosy is sometimes a picture of sin. It separates us from true believers. The flesh of a person with leprosy rotted away and they often died. No doctor could cure leprosy. A person with leprosy had to leave their family and live outside the town. The leper was told to call out "Unclean! Unclean," so that everyone stayed away from them (Leviticus 13:9-17).

A man with leprosy came to Jesus. "Lord," he said, "if You are willing, you can make me clean" (Matthew 8:2) He believed Jesus could heal him.

Jesus said to him, "I am willing. Be clean!" The sick man was made well. Then Jesus said to him, "Do not tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest." (8:4) "Offer the gift that the Law requires."

He went and did what Jesus told him to do. His whole life was changed. Before, he was an outcast, separated from family and friends. Now, he belonged to his people. Now he would be welcomed into his family. Now he could go into the Temple and worship God.

Jesus still works miracles. He is willing to make you 'clean'!

A MAN'S FAITH IN JESUS FOR HIS SERVANT'S HEALING

Centurions were Roman officers in charge of 100 soldiers. They were often cruel, ruthless men. When a Centurion gave orders to his men they obeyed. In Capernaum, a certain centurion came to Jesus. He said, "Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." (8:6) This man even cared for his slave-servants! Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The Roman officer fully believed that Jesus only had to speak the word and his servant would be healed.

Jesus was amazed! He turned to the crowd and said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the East and the West. They will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. They will sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (8:10-11) This will include total strangers. Sadly, some believers will drift away (8:12).

'Then Jesus said to the Roman centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And the servant was healed at that very hour.' (8:13)

JESUS GOES TO SIMON PETER'S HOUSE

Jesus went to Simon Peter's house (8:14). The mother of Peter's wife lived with Peter. Jesus found her lying sick with fever. He touched her and the fever left her. She got up and began to serve Jesus and His disciples. That evening,

people brought their sick ones and demon-possessed people and laid them at the door. When Jesus spoke, the demons fled. That day all the sick were healed and evil spirits were driven out (8:14-16).

Matthew says this was to fulfil what was spoken about Israel's Messiah through Isaiah the prophet seven hundred years before: "He took up our infirmities and carried (away) our diseases. By His wounds we are healed." (8:17; Isaiah 53:4-6) Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by taking away both ours sins and our diseases. In His death on the cross, Jesus carried all the sin and suffering of the whole world. Jesus Christ is our High Priest. He understands our weaknesses and needs (Hebrews 4:15).

WHO WILL FOLLOW JESUS?

Jesus then withdrew from the crowds to the other side of the Lake of Galilee. A teacher of the Law came to Him and said, "I will follow You wherever You go." (Mattew 8:18-19) This man wanted to be a disciple of Jesus no matter what it cost him. Jesus pointed out that this would mean hardship. Jesus had no home of His own, no pillow for His head! Would this man truly want to live like Jesus did?

Another follower said to Him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." This man probably wanted to wait until his father died, so that he could inherit the family property. After that, he would follow Jesus. Jesus answered, "Follow me and let those who are dead bury their own dead." (8:21-22)

Following Jesus must come before all customs and culture. So let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead. To follow Jesus means giving up everything (Mark 8:34-35). Every true disciple has to make a choice between the way of Jesus or the popular local customs that others follow. Which will it be? Jesus or the other things in life?

JESUS CALMS THE STORM
JESUS DELIVERS A MAN FROM EVIL SPIRITS

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapters 4 and 5

Talk about this:

1. How did the ministry of Jesus grow?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 9

JESUS HEALS A MAN WHO COULD NOT WALK

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 2

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW TO FOLLOW HIM

Matthew then describes his own calling to follow Jesus. He was sitting at the tax collector's table. Jesus called Matthew to follow Him. He obeyed and

followed Jesus. Later, Jesus and His disciples went to Matthew's house for a meal. Other tax collectors came and ate with them (Matthew 9:9-10). This made the Jewish Pharisees angry. They asked the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (9:11)

Jesus heard them ask this. He answered them and said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Sinners were like sick people. Sick people need a doctor and sinners need Jesus. He is the only One who can forgive sins. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to follow Me." (9:12-13) This means to repent or turn away from sin and live for Jesus.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT TRADITIONS

Jesus advised his disciples not to follow the traditions of some religious leaders: the new life of a Christian does not mix well with old ways of religious obedience such as fasting. It is like trying to patch an old garment with new material or putting new wine into old wineskins. Old ways do not always mix well with new ways. Jesus was not condemning the old ways but warned believers of the need to change because of the new work of God in their midst (9:14-17). We must follow the teachings of God given to Moses as fulfilled by Jesus, and not yield to 'modern' ways of living invented by mankind. Paul saw many wrong traditions introduced in the early church meetings and condemned them.

THE FAITH OF A WOMAN AND A SYNAGOGUE LEADER

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 5

"HAVE MERCY ON US, SON OF DAVID"

Two blind men followed Jesus along the road. They knew He worked miracles and they shouted, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." (9:27)

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Jesus asked them.

"Yes, Lord," they replied. Jesus touched their eyes and said to them, "Because of your faith it will happen" (9:29). Then He warned them, "Make sure that no-one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about Jesus all over that region (9:26,31). Because of this, Jesus could not preach in the cities for a time, but only in the countryside.

They brought a man who was taken over by a demon spirit to Jesus (9:32). As soon as Jesus drove the demon out, the man was able to speak. The people said, "Nothing like this has been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees answered, "It is by the power of the prince of demons that He drives out demons." (9:34)

Jesus had shown that He was the Son of God, the Messiah, but the leaders did not want to hear about their sins or God's Kingdom. And the crowds wanted

signs and wonders. But Jesus showed them all the power of God. He proved His authority.

JESUS HAS COMPASSION FOR THE CROWDS

Jesus continued to take His disciples through the towns and villages. He taught in the synagogues and healed the sick. 'When He saw the crowds, He had a deep compassion for them. They were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' (9:36) Jesus saw people as they really were, wandering and lost. God spoke to Isaiah 740 years earlier about "sheep who had wandered away from God" and the Servant He would provide to take on "the sins of the world" (Isaiah 53:6). The people were unhappy with the Roman government at that time. They did not know what to think, say or do. They needed God's Shepherd or Saviour or Servant, Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah.

Jesus stopped talking about sheep and began to talk about a field of ripe wheat. He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (Matthew 9:37) The fields are the world of men and women. Jesus was training the twelve disciples to preach His Good News, the Gospel, and invite men and women into God's Kingdom. We, too, must have this same compassion of Christ and gather people into God's Kingdom.

Jesus told them, "The harvest is large but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field." (9:38) This was the command of Jesus. He wants us to ask the Father to send out evangelists and missionaries. God is Lord of the whole world and He does not want any of His harvest to be lost (Revelation 14:15).

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 10

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

Jesus had twelve disciples. He gave them the authority of His name and sent them out to teach others in that name. This gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness (10:1) and to reach the "lost people of Israel" (10:6). Jesus told the disciples: "As you go, preach this message that the Kingdom of Heaven is near." (10:7) This prepared His disciples to preach and to heal and to drive out evil spirits in His name (10:8). They would later train others to reach the rest of the world in the same way. This method works well for there are two billion believers today!

Jesus also called the twelve disciples 'apostles' (Luke 6:13). An apostle is a person sent with a special message or work to do. The Father gave Jesus all His power. Jesus gave the disciples the same power of the Holy Spirit as they went out in His name (Matthew 10:20). He told them after His resurrection, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded

you. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end." (28:18-20)

When they preached the Gospel, the Holy Spirit did many wonders and signs through them (Luke 10:17). God gave them the power to do miracles. This proved that they went in Christ's name. It also proved God's Kingdom of grace and mercy had come to mankind.

Jesus told the disciples not to take money or spare clothes with them. "Whatever town or village you enter, search for someone who is willing to welcome you. Stay at his house until you leave." (Matthew 10:10-11).

The apostles lived a simple life. God prepared homes ready to receive them. They looked to their hosts for food and shelter. Everywhere they stayed, that house was blessed because they brought God's peace with them. His peace stayed with the family after they left (10:13).

If they were unable to minister in a house, they left it and took the blessing and peace of God with them elsewhere. If a town did not welcome them, they must "shake the dust off their feet against that town… On Judgment Day it will be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town!" (10:14-15)

John the Baptist preached the same message. Jesus preached it. His disciples preached it. Paul and the other apostles preached it. Now we must preach it! God's Kingdom is open to all. Jesus said later, "He who welcomes you, also welcomes Me." (10:40)

Jesus showed them how to preach the gospel. The method may change with country and culture, but the message will be the same. On his missionary journeys, Paul changed his methods to suit each situation. He trusted the Holy Spirit to show him the best way to reach people for Christ. But he always preached "Christ and the resurrection".

TRIALS WILL COME TO PREACHERS OF THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus warned the disciples, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. So be as wise as snakes but as harmless as doves." (10:16) He also talked about the persecution that all believers will face as they teach about the Kingdom of God. Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. He told them that "the Spirit of your Father will speak through you." (10:20) Many people, including friends, family and relatives, will hate them but they must "stand firm to the end" (10:21-22).

It was not long before a great persecution came on Christ's servants. But God used it to bring men and women into His Kingdom. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." (10:28; 24:13-14). Not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing it… So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows!" (10:30-31)

Jesus then said, "Whoever speaks of Me to others, I will also speak of them to My Father in Heaven." (10:32) But Jesus also warned, "Anyone who loves

their father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever does not pick up their cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me." (10:37-38)

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (10:39) You will find all you need in Christ. And Jesus added, "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me. And anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the one who sent Me." (10:40)

Talk about this:

1. What ministry was passed on to the disciples?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 11

JOHN THE BAPTIST SENDS MEN TO JESUS

John the Baptist was in prison (11:2). Some of his disciples told John what Jesus was doing. John sent them to Jesus to ask, "Are you the One who is to come, or do we look for someone else?" (11:3)

John heard his mother's testimony about Jesus. He also heard his uncle's story (Luke 1:57-64). But now he was chained in Herod's prison, he began to doubt about who Jesus was. He wondered why Jesus did not move against the wicked king or the Romans and deliver Israel. And if Jesus had all power, why did He not come and rescue him?

However, Jesus did not offer to rescue John. Instead, He encouraged John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the Good News is preached to the poor." (Matthew 11:5-6) The miracles of Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophets (Isaiah 35:4-6). John knew these words by heart. He did not need any more proof. He believed that Jesus was and is Israel's promised Messiah.

As John's disciples were turning to leave, Jesus said: "Blessed are those who do not give up their faith because of Me." (Matthew 11:6) The events of life may be hard on God's servants. Jesus spoke highly of John the Baptist knowing that he had sacrificed much in preparing the way for Him (11:10-14). We are sad when our message is not heeded, but we must not be upset by persecution and disbelief. Jesus knew that "since the days of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of Heaven has advanced while under attack." (11:12)

Jesus said that people were like children who play in the streets, calling out to each other. "They say, 'We played the flute for you but you did not dance.' When John came, people said, 'He has a demon.' But when I, the Son of Man, came, people say, 'This fellow is eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners.'" So what must we do to get people to respond to the Good News? Jesus said, "By wise actions, wisdom is shown to be right." (11:16-19)

"HOW TERRIBLE IT WILL BE FOR KORAZIN AND BETHSAIDA!"

Jesus then began to speak against the cities where he had done most of His miracles. "The people there have not turned away from their sins." (11:20). There will always be times and places of unfruitfulness. He warned the people, "How terrible it will be for you Korazin! How terrible it will be for you Bethsaida! If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon [to the north of Galilee], they would have turned away from their sins long ago." (11:21) The Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming Messiah and His Kingdom in these cities. Now Christ had come to them in person. Since the days of John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, the Kingdom has been advancing with force. Many are eager to enter and are taking hold of it (11:12).

Some of the cities where Jesus had preached and done miracles would receive greater judgment because they had heard His words and seen His miracles (11:22). "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to Heaven? No! You will go down to the place of the dead! On Judgement Day, it will be easier for Sodom than for you!" (11:23-24)

REST FOR THE WEARY

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father. You are LORD of Heaven and Earth. You have hidden these things from wise and educated people. But you have shown them to little children. Yes, Father, this is what you wanted to do." (11:25-26)

Jesus continued, "My Father has given all things to Me. The Father is the only one who knows the Son. And the only ones who know the Father are the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to make Him known." (11:27)

Jesus came from Heaven to Earth. He left His majesty and glory to reach down, to invite us to Heaven. He laid aside His crown and come to Earth as the humble servant of mankind. Jesus was willing and ready to die for sinners. He gave them this great invitation: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (11:28) This is the call of the Gospel. It was a double invitation. A call to receive God's rest and be forgiven, and a call to follow Christ as one of His disciples.

Rest comes when we submit to God's authority. Then He directs our energies and gives us a new vision for our lives (Romans 12:1-2). We gladly accept His call when we understand what Jesus offers:

- Rest from our worries and struggles.
- Fellowship with God, now and forever.
- Service to Him through serving others.
- Holy Spirit power to overcome sin and perform miracles.

He says to all who follow Him, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." (Matthew 11:29-30) A yoke was made of wood and iron. It held two cattle together to share the load they were pulling and enable them to work as one. So, Jesus wants us to learn what it means to serve God and share the work with Him. Serve God joined to Jesus in love and enjoy what you do! He wants to share the load you have been called to carry. "Serving Me is easy, and My load is light." (11:30) This includes obeying the Laws given to Moses in the power of the Holy Spirit, but not the extra laws added later by the Jewish leaders.

Talk about this:

1. What was the judgement of Jesus on some of the towns in Galilee?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 12

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH
JESUS HEALS A MAN ON THE SABBATH
THE PHARISEES GET ANGRY WITH JESUS

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapters 2 and 3

THE SIGN OF JONAH

Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law came to Jesus. They said, "Teacher, show us a special sign from You." (Matthew 12:38). Jesus told them, "Evil and unfaithful people ask for a sign! But no sign will be given to you, except the sign of Jonah… For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be in the grave." (12:40).

Jesus spoke of His own death. He would be buried 'in the earth.' On the third day He would rise again. This would be the sign that God had fulfilled His mighty works through His Son, Jesus Christ.

When Jonah preached to the men of Nineveh, they repented. They had only a wandering prophet to tell them of God's justice and judgment. These Jewish leaders had Christ Himself, their Messiah. Jesus was calling them to repent, but many would not listen. "The men of Nineveh will stand up on Judgment Day with the people now living and prove they are guilty. The men of Nineveh turned away from their sins when Jonah preached to them. "And now a greater One than Jonah is here." (12:41)

SOMEONE GREATER THAN SOLOMON

The Queen of the South came to Jerusalem to hear Solomon's wisdom (2 Chronicles 9:1). Jesus said, "She will stand up on Judgment Day and will prove that they are guilty. She came from very far away to listen to Solomon's wisdom. And now a greater One than Solomon is here." (12:42) But they refused to believe His words so their judgment would be greater.

"What happens when an evil spirit comes out of a person? It goes through dry areas looking for a place to rest. But it does not find a place. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives there, it finds the house empty. The house has been swept clean. Then the evil spirit goes and takes with it seven other spirits, more evil than itself, and they go in and live there. That person is worse off than before. That is how it will be with the evil people of today." (12:43-45)

Jesus told this story about an evil spirit against the Pharisees. The empty house was their religion. They had the Law and the Prophets through which God had spoken over the years. Then God sent the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. Finally, Jesus Christ came to sweep away their false beliefs. Because they refused the Spirit of Christ, Satan came to live in them. Satan is quick to see an empty heart. If we do not have God's presence, wicked spirits always move in. The evil spirits that came into some of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders later cried "Kill Him! Crucify Him!" (27:22-23)

God speaks to men and women through the things that happen in this world. He does signs and wonders in every generation. He speaks all the time. Do not ask for signs or revelations, but listen to His words. Understand and believe the sign He has given us, the "sign of Jonah." Jesus said, no other sign will be given (12:39).

JESUS AND HIS MOTHER AND BROTHERS

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 3

Talk about this:

1. In what ways did the sign of Jonah refer to Jesus?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 13

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SEED AND OTHER PARABLES

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 4

Talk about this:

1. What do we learn from these parables of Jesus?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 14

HEROD KILLS JOHN THE BAPTIST
JESUS FEEDS 5,000 MEN
JESUS WALKS ON WATER

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 6

Talk about this:

1. Why should we discuss the miracles of Jesus with others?

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 15

JESUS AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE JEWISH LEADERS
JESUS VISITS TYRE AND SIDON

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 7

JESUS FEEDS 4,000 MEN

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 15

Bible Reading: Matthew Chapter 16

THE PHARISEES ASK FOR A MIRACLE

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 8

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 16

PETER BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST
JESUS TALKS ABOUT HIS COMING DEATH
JESUS DESCRIBES THE WAY OF THE CROSS

See Manna Publications Bible commentary Mark Chapter 8

Talk about this:

1. If Jesus already knew what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, how do you think it influenced His ministry?

CONCLUSIONS TO MATTHEW'S GOSPEL PART 1

This first part of the Gospel of Matthew records many facts about Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, before, during and after his birth and in the early stages of His ministry at the age of 30. It starts with the family line, important to Jewish believers, of Abraham to Jospeh. Jospeh was the humble husband of Mary who gave birth to Jesus while she was still a virgin.

Chapter 2 describes the birth of Jesus and His escape from King Herod after the visit of the Wise Men from the east, who told Herod about the promised birth of Israel's new King. After the death of Herod, Joseph took Mary and the child Jesus back to their lowly home in the town of Nazareth.

Chapter 3 covers the ministry of John the Baptist to prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus, as promised by Isaiah. This included John baptising Jesus in the River Jordan where God announced from Heaven, "This is My Son".

Before Jesus began to preach, the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert for 40 days of temptation by the devil, Chapter 4. He them moved to Capernaum where He called His first disciples to follow Him. After this, He extended His teaching ministry to include miracles of healing and casting out demons.

Chapters 5 to 7 provide us with the important teaching of the "Sermon on the Mount". After this He clarifies, "I have not come to get rid of what is written in the Law or in the Prophets. Instead, I have come to give full meaning to what is written." He gives several examples of what we now call New Testament teaching under God's covenant fulfilled in Christ.

Chapter 6 gives guidance on prayer and fasting and includes "The Lord's Prayer", recited today by a billion believers around the world! Chapters 7 to 16 provide further important teachings, including many examples using parables. Also, the amazing details of further miracles are recorded faithfully by Matthew (with help from Mark) for us to read and share with others.

These writings by Matthew, summarised by Fred Morris, provide an excellent introduction to the purpose and ministry of Jesus on Earth before He began His journey to Jerusalem. Part 2 gives further teaching and describes the suffering Jesus experienced on the Roman cross. This was God's plan for our salvation through the birth of the Son of God as a sinless Son of Man, to suffer and die for our punishment and eternal deliverance from sin. Hallelujah! Amazing grace! Such love!

Give thanks to God for His factual and prophetic writings in the Old and New Testaments. They are full of God's grace within His creation. Robert Louis Stevenson, the Scottish writer and inventor of the steam engine, said, "Everything is grace – we walk on it, we breath it and we live and die by it. It is the nails and axles of the Universe!"

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