



Summary of the Gospel of Matthew

Introduction

Matthew was one of the original 12 apostles, along with his brother James, son of Alphæus, who followed Jesus faithfully during his earthly ministry, giving up a lucrative profession as a tax collector for King Herod Antipas and therefore with Roman authority.

There is much debate why this Gospel appears first in the NT canon. Some say that of the three synoptic Gospels it is the only one written by an eye-witness to the work, although it is generally accepted that Mark wrote on behalf of the apostle Peter. Others believe that, at the time the Bible structure was finally authorised then it was believed that Matthew was written first, although it is now known to have followed on to Mark, using that account to form the basis on which his own work is structured. A third reason is that it starts with a genealogical account that shows that Jesus fulfilled God's promises that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

Whatever the reasons, the Gospel is a compelling reflection of the story of Jesus' life and teaching. It has the fullest accounts of Jesus' teaching ministry, given in five major discourses, including those known as 'The Sermon on the Mount' and the 'Olivet Discourse'. These are interspersed with much of the miraculous healing work of Jesus and the disputes he had with the authorities who opposed his work.

As with the other two synoptic Gospels, Mark and Luke, Matthew focuses much of his writing on the three years of Jesus' work in region of Galilee, followed by the final week in Jerusalem. Like Luke, Matthew includes a snapshot of the birth narrative and some of Jesus' childhood years, using different material to Luke and helping to build up a picture of what those times were like.

The post resurrection account is briefer than Luke and John but the account does end with what has become known as 'The Great Commission', a divine instruction that has been the motivating call for so many disciples over the generations since.

Chapter One

Matthew commences his account of the Good News of Jesus' life, teaching, miraculous works, substitutionary death and powerful resurrection, with a genealogical record showing the biological line from Abraham via King David to Jesus, thus indicating to those who were aware of the promises of God for a Messiah that there was legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the long awaited Christ.

The account then turns to the pre-birth record, showing that a very young and still virtuous Mary was found to be pregnant. Her betrothed husband Joseph intended to quietly divorce Mary in order to spare her some of the shame and recriminations that would fall upon her for this supposed adultery, but an angel of God appeared to him in a dream, confirming that she was indeed pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that she would bear a son who was to be called Jesus. Joseph complied with the command from God but had no sexual relationship with Mary until after the child was born.

Chapter Two

The first half of this chapter relates an account that is played out in nativity scenes around the world every Christmas. What should not be lost in the account is that these were pagans, representing an earthly king, being divinely guided by God to pay homage to the child Messiah, while the people of God looked on, mainly with apathy.

The land was ruled by King Herod the Great at the time and he viewed this news as a threat to his power base, and so he had requested the visiting wise men to reveal the location of Christ to him so that he could have him executed. When they failed to do so, due to instruction from God, Herod had all the male children in the vicinity of Bethlehem killed.

Jesus, however, escaped the massacre as Joseph had been forewarned and instructed to take his family to safety in Egypt, where they stayed until an angel told them to return. Arriving in Judæa, they found that King Herod Archelaus was now the ruler and he still posed a threat to Jesus, so under divine guidance they relocated to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up and remained until it was time for his ministry to begin.

This brief glimpse at the Saviour's early years helps the reader to see that Jesus was persecuted and called to suffer from the outset, and that in him the word of righteousness was fulfilled, before he himself began to fulfil all righteousness.

Chapter Three

Matthew now turns his attention to the point in history that was to mark the start of Jesus' earthly ministry. Before Jesus could start to teach, his presence had to be re-announced for more than thirty years had passed since God had ordained the birth of his Son in human form.

Shortly before the birth of Jesus, God had presented the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth with a son, who subsequently was raised in the wilderness,

probably by priestly members of his own family, in order to prepare for his historic role in announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, the Messiah; a role that had been previously announced through the prophets.

Despite his wild appearance, John was clearly a well educated man and a great teacher of the Scriptures. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and anointed to bring a specific message by preaching the Word of God and calling all Israel to repentance, baptising them with water as an outward sign of their acceptance of his message. Many people, including religious leaders, flocked to John.

One day, when John was baptising people in the River Jordan, Jesus came to him. John immediately recognised that this was the Messiah and proclaimed that he should be baptised by the Christ, but Jesus corrected him, saying that he must be baptised by John to fulfil all righteousness.

The baptism was as much spiritual as physical, for the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and he was proclaimed to be anointed for his role by His heavenly Father, who announced it in an audible voice.

Chapter Four

Following his baptism by John, God's public affirmation of him, and the anointing with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is then led by the Spirit deeper into the wilderness for 40 days of testing by Satan, a trial in which Jesus showed his complete faith and trust in God, along with his loyal obedience to the Father's call on his human life.

After the devil had left him, Jesus travelled back to Galilee and settled in the town of Capernaum. This was to fulfil prophecy and marked the start of his earthly ministry of teaching and healing.

Jesus then chose four local Galilæan fishermen to serve as his first disciples. These men would form the core group, who would be taught the necessary Kingdom principles so that, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, they could begin the work of spreading the Gospel and building the church.

After this, Jesus started to travel around the region, teaching, healing and driving out evil spirits. His work immediately started to draw large crowds to him, not only from Galilee but from the surrounding areas as well.

Chapter Five

This is the great manifesto of the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the disciples, not to the crowds that he had drawn. It is not intended to be a social Gospel or to bring an end to suffering and wars. It is not for the future for it concerns the Kingdom age that Jesus introduced and will continue until his Second Coming.

Jesus was teaching his group of close followers some key Kingdom principles and correcting some of the main misinterpretations of the law, so that the Gospel could be properly explained by these men when it came time for them to take it out to the world.

Jesus started with a number of short statements that have become popularly known as The Beatitudes for each one starts with 'blessed are'. They show just how God bestows his favour on those that society often overlooks, revealing the type of heart characteristics he wants to see displayed in his people.

By stating that disciples are salt and light, Jesus informed them of the fundamental role they would have in proclaiming the Gospel and demonstrating its principles through their own lifestyles. All Jews, and today all disciples of Jesus, understand the power of God's grace. They are called to show that same grace to all other people they encounter, for grace is transforming as well as forgiving.

Jesus also wanted to make it clear that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, for the law was given by God and was therefore perfect. Jesus was the primary focus of all that had been written about in Scripture.

Jesus then went on to teach in short statements about various aspects of life that had become distorted through the misunderstanding of Scripture. These were matters of the heart, including the unacceptable consequences of anger, adultery, divorce, swearing falsely in God's name and retaliating to situations where reconciliation should be sought.

Jesus concludes the chapter by showing that love for neighbour, a key commandment in the Law of Moses, also means love for an enemy, for they too are neighbours, created in God's image.

Chapter Six

The Sermon on the Mount continues and Jesus begins this part of his teaching with a thesis statement summarising his point: do your righteousness for God to see you, not others (v.1). Jesus then illustrates his point with the examples of secret giving (vv.2-4), prayer (vv.5-15), and fasting (vv.16-18). The middle section on prayer is the longest; following accepted practices of arrangement in his day, Matthew may have inserted the Lord's Prayer from a different context.

The righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven works out in the details of one's personal life. Jesus calls his followers to choose their master, either God or wealth, i.e. not to value possessions enough to seek them above more important aspects of life (vv.19-24), and to choose their outlook on life, either faith or worry, especially not to value possessions enough to worry about them (vv.25-34), a fault shared by many believers who rightly reject the prosperity teaching but then fail to adhere to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' words strike at the core of human selfishness, challenging both the well-to-do, who have possessions to guard, and the poor, who wish they could acquire them. His words are so uncomfortable that even those who profess to love him and fight to defend Scripture's authority find themselves looking for ways to get around what he says.

Chapter Seven

The Sermon on the Mount discourse continues and concludes as Jesus moves

from personal temptations to interpersonal temptations. He warns against inappropriate judging (vv.1-5), and commands appropriate evaluation (v.6). He then looks at God's guidance as the source of the believer's stability in relationship to others (vv.7-12).

Jesus provides a stark warning that few will enter God's Kingdom (vv.13-14), making observation that one's behaviour reveals one's character (vv.15-20), and cautions that the whole life of a disciple and not just their lips must acknowledge Christ as their sovereign Lord (vv.21-23). These all lead to the climax in his final warning that only those who obey his teaching will endure the final act of judgment (vv.24-27).

Chapter Eight

This chapter focuses primarily on Jesus as the healer, interspersed with instructions on discipleship.

The first healing is that of a leper, an affliction that was deemed probably the worst in their culture as it resulted in social isolation. This was a very personal occasion for the man, who recognised that Jesus had the power and authority to heal but all the man could do was to place his trust in Jesus that he would be willing to free him from his affliction.

Jesus followed this first miracle with another when he healed the servant of a Roman centurion without even coming near to the sick man. The importance of this event is more to do with the faith of the Gentile compared with that of God's chosen people and what Jesus indicates by it on the important issues of class, cultural and ethnic acceptance.

Jesus spent some time in Peter's Capernaum home, first healing the apostle's mother-in-law who had a fever and later curing many sick and demon possessed people who were brought to him.

After this, Matthew records Jesus' expectation of the required commitment that a person would need to show in order to be a true disciple. It would require giving up personal comforts and even family responsibilities.

As Jesus sailed across the Sea of Galilee a great storm arose, causing fear among his disciples in the boat, but Jesus demonstrated that he had the power to overcome even nature itself.

On his arrival at the other side Jesus cured two people of demon possession, with the demons choosing to be released from the people in order to go into a nearby herd of pigs, which subsequently charged into the lake and drowned. This proved very upsetting for the local townspeople who, instead of inviting Jesus into their lives, requested that he leave their region immediately.

Chapter Nine

The chapter commences with the conclusion of the healing of the two demon possessed people in the Gaderenes, showing that Jesus complied with the local inhabitants wish and sailed back to the western shore of Lake Galilee.

A key theme to the many and varied instances of healing in this chapter is that Jesus is the ultimate physician, and it leaves the reader in no doubt of Jesus' ability and willingness to provide both healing and forgiveness to all who would return to God through him. It shows that what was such a great loss to those in the Gaderenes who had rejected him, was to the great gain of those in Capernaum who did accept him, although it was far from all of them!

Once he was back in Capernaum, some people brought a paralysed man to Jesus, who surprised and disturbed some of the onlookers by immediately forgiving the man's sins, something that is the exclusive right of God. To show that he had the authority to do so, Jesus also instantaneously and publically healed the man of his disability.

Jesus encountered a tax collector called Matthew working at a local tax booth, called him into service, a call with which Matthew immediately complied. He would go on to become an apostle, evangelist and the author of this Gospel.

Some disciples of John the Baptist enquired of Jesus as to why his disciples did not fast as the others did. Jesus' response was to indicate that fasting was not necessary by anyone who is in the presence of the Christ.

A local synagogue ruler came to Jesus to plead with him to heal his recently deceased daughter. Jesus agreed to accompany him to see the child and, while they were on their way, a woman with constant menstrual bleeding had the faith to be healed by Jesus and she did so simply by touching his cloak. Jesus confirmed that her faith to be healed physically would ensure her spiritual salvation too. At the synagogue ruler's home, Jesus found that mourners had gathered for the girl's burial, but Jesus restored her back to life.

Other healings then followed as Jesus first restores the sight to two blind men and then the speech to a demon possessed man, where the evil spirit had robbed him of that ability. Jesus drove the spirit out with a word.

The chapter concludes with a call for evangelism. Jesus indicates that God's harvest field is full of ripened crops and all that is needed is for workers to step out into the field and to spread the Gospel.

Chapter Ten

Jesus called twelve of his disciples into apostleship, giving them the authority to drive out evil spirits and to cure people of the same sicknesses and physical impairments that he had been demonstrating during his ministry so far.

Once chosen, Jesus instructed them for their mission to the local Jewish population, telling them where they should visit, how they should conduct themselves, what they should take and what they were required to achieve.

Jesus revealed that all disciples will face severe persecution and testing during their earthly life. This is to be expected and they are called to withstand whatever the world may put up against them, to the point of death.

They are told that they need not fear those who persecute them or indeed anyone else for the worst a human can do is to physically abuse and kill a

person in this life. All of mankind should fear God for he has the power over everyone's soul, their eternal future, which is ultimately what life is about.

In fact, Jesus went so far as to say that it is his First Coming that was the root cause of so much strife and trouble in life, with strong opposition to be faced as polar groups form from those who choose to follow Jesus and those who reject him and the Gospel message he came to proclaim.

Those who do hold fast and do act appropriately towards all others under Kingdom guidelines and principles will be rewarded when the appropriate time comes. The ultimate prize is eternal life with Christ.

Chapter Eleven

Having dispatched the twelve apostles on their first solo mission, Jesus now continues with his other work. It commences with the arrival of some disciples from the imprisoned John the Baptist, who asked if Jesus really is the Messiah. Jesus does not answer yes or no but leaves no room for doubt with the evidence and its relationship to prophecy he presents to them to examine and analyse for themselves.

Once the disciples had departed, Jesus went on to tell the crowd about John, praising his work and acknowledging him as the last great OT prophet to God's people, admonishing those people for their failure to accept him and his message of the coming Messiah.

Having reproached the crowd for their failure to accept John, Jesus then turned his attention to three Galilæan cities in which he had taught the Gospel, supported with mighty demonstrations of Kingdom power, and yet had been rejected by most of the inhabitants. He warned them of the judgement that would come upon them for that rejection.

Jesus then gave thanks to God for the revelation of the Kingdom that he had delivered through the sending of his Son, announcing that all authority had been given to him as the Christ of God. Jesus offered to take on all the wearisome burdens of people who would accept the Gospel proclamation and would turn back to God through him.

This chapter provides both the terror of the Gospel woes as a warning and also the great joy of the Gospel of grace that is so freely on offer to all.

Chapter Twelve

One Sabbath day the disciples were seen picking and eating grains of corn. The Pharisees were upset that the disciples were violating the Sabbath as this was considered work. However, Jesus demonstrated from an account in Scripture that God created the law, in this case the Sabbath law, for the benefit of mankind and that he was Lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath controversy continues when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in a synagogue in full view of the religious leaders. They first asked the question whether it was right to cure sickness on a Sabbath so Jesus used the analogy that these men would rescue a trapped sheep on the Sabbath so they

should be prepared to do even more for a person.

By using the longest direct quotation from Isaiah in the Gospel, Jesus indicates that he was the 'suffering servant' of God, sent to his people in order to bear their afflictions and turn them back to God.

When called upon to cure a demon possessed man that could not see or speak, Jesus did so but was then criticised by the Pharisees, who claimed he was using demonic power in order to perform such signs. Jesus used reasoned argument to show that if he were an agent of Satan and was casting out demons, then the kingdom of Satan would be working against itself and would therefore collapse. Thus his actions could only have been in accordance with the will of God.

Jesus uses the analogy that it takes a good tree to bear good fruit and that a bad tree can only bear bad fruit to describe how a person's true character can be judged. Therefore, no matter what a person may appear to be outwardly or what they may say, they can only produce Kingdom fruit, their good works to match their language, if they are genuine.

Despite all the miracles that Jesus had performed in their presence, the religious leaders asked him for a sign from heaven to show that he was the Messiah. Jesus judged that they were simply trying to trick him so he offered no specific sign other than that of the prophet Jonah. That is, that he must spend three days in the bowels of the earth, just as Jonah had done in the great fish, as a sign that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus warned people that evil spirits can return to dwell within a person who has been cleansed unless they guard their hearts and live a Kingdom life in order to prevent this from happening. When such an evil spirit does return it will dominate the person with even greater power than it did previously.

While Jesus was saying these things, his mother and brothers came to where he was but remained outside. When this was made known to Jesus he stated that his true family were those who would do the will of God.

Chapter Thirteen

Jesus embarked on teaching, initially the crowd and then just his own disciples, using seven parables to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. To the crowds he told the Parable of the Sower, i.e. various types of recipients in the church; the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds concerning the saved and the lost in the world, who will coexist until final judgement; the Parable of the Mustard Seed that speaks of how the Kingdom starts from small beginnings to extend to become the worldwide church; and finally the Parable of the Yeast, which shows how the Kingdom permeates within the individual believer but still spreads throughout the world silently through more and more individuals.

During this part of his discourse, Jesus explained that he taught in parables so that those who are called will be equipped by the Holy Spirit to comprehend his teaching will understand it, while it will remain a mystery to those who are not destined to understand and thereby come to saving faith. Jesus also explained the first parable to his disciples.

After this, Jesus went into a house to teach just his disciples but continued using parables. He first explained to them about the Parable of the Wheat, to ensure they fully comprehended what was going on around them in the world. He then gave three brief but important lessons in the Parable of the Lost Treasure to show that anyone could stumble into the Kingdom by God's grace, then the Parable of the Pearl, to show that seekers will recognise the Kingdom when they see it. In both cases, those who find treasure or a pearl will give up everything they have to be part of the Kingdom.

Since his disciples were drawn from fishing communities, the final Parable of the Net uses a familiar fishing analogy to show that God trawls in all sorts of fish, good and bad. These will be sorted at the final judgement; the good will go to eternal salvation and the bad to everlasting damnation.

Jesus concluded this passage of teaching by indicating that there will be new revelations about the Kingdom, as well as clarification of the known revelations that were given throughout the OT covenant period.

Jesus then left that place and travelled back to Nazareth, the town where he grew up, to teach in their synagogue and proclaim the Kingdom to those who thought they knew him. Since he was so well known to them as the carpenter's son they would not accept him and indeed took offence at his messianic claims.

Chapter Fourteen

Herod Antipas heard about the ministry of Jesus and feared that he is a resurrected John the Baptist, who Antipas had executed some time previously. Matthew will use this occasion to provide some of the details that occurred which led to John's death.

Jesus went out to seek solitude in the wilderness on the eastern shore of Galilee in order to continue teaching his disciples. However, a great crowd followed him so he healed their sick and taught them. When it became clear that it was too late for them to return home or to seek a source of food from elsewhere, Jesus miraculously fed them all from just five small loaves and two fish, collecting up twelve baskets full of leftover crumbs.

Afterwards, Jesus wanted some time alone with his Father so he instructed his disciples to sail back across the lake without him. They did so but encountered a storm and were struggling to complete their voyage. During the early hours of the morning, Jesus walked across the surface of the water to join them. Initially, they were afraid and thought he was a ghost, but when they realised it was Jesus, Peter asked to join him on the water, which he briefly did before starting to sink. Jesus saved him, got into the boat and the disciples all worshipped Jesus, acknowledging that he is the Son of God.

They then continued their voyage across the lake to arrive in the region of Gennesaret, a place that Jesus may not have visited previously but he was still recognised and all their sick people were brought out to Jesus in order for them to be healed, even by simply touching his clothing.

Chapter Fifteen

Jesus was once again in dispute with the religious leaders. On this occasion some of the senior figures had travelled up from Jerusalem and had noted that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating. They saw this as a transgression of their traditions, which for them had become the law, and because of this, Jesus countered their claims from Scripture to show they had become erroneous teachers of the true law of God, breaking the law by upholding their traditions.

Jesus then taught the people that everything God has not instituted will be removed. He also indicated that it was not personal hygiene or what a person ate that would make them clean or unclean; God wanted them to have pure hearts, thoughts, words and actions.

Jesus then travelled to the region of Tyre and Sidon, where he had an encounter with a Canaanite woman, who showed remarkable faith and persistence in seeking Jesus' help to heal her spirit possessed daughter. Due to her remarkable faith and humility Jesus complied with her request.

On his return to Galilee, Jesus was once again met by a crowd as he settled down on a mountain to teach. The crowd had brought many sick and disabled people with them, whom Jesus healed due to his compassion for them all.

After three days the crowd had no food remaining and, fearing for their welfare if they tried to travel home in such a condition, Jesus produced another food multiplication miracle, this time feeding four thousand from seven loaves and a few fish. He then sailed to the region of Magadan, possibly Magdala.

Chapter Sixteen

From the outset of his earthly ministry, Jesus had been supporting his Gospel proclamation with amazing miracles yet there were many, especially among the religious leaders who rejected him. That both Pharisees and Sadducees should come to Jesus to ask for a further heavenly sign to support his claims was clearly an attempt on their part to trap him in some way to provide support for their case against Jesus. He refused to comply with their request except to say that a sign of Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of a great fish, would be the sign to that generation of who Jesus was when he would spend three days buried in the earth before being resurrected to new life.

Having previously taught that the Kingdom of Heaven was like yeast in the way that it permeates secretly through people's lives to bring about a positive change, Jesus now uses an analogy of yeast in a negative sense, with regard to the false teaching of the religious leaders, which was so often accepted as true but silently deceived the hearts of those who accepted it instead of the Gospel message of truth.

Jesus asked his disciples what the crowds were saying about him, which was that he was a prophet, perhaps one from of old brought back to teach them the ways of God. When asked who the disciples thought he was, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, acknowledged that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Jesus warned

them not to make this publically known at that time.

Jesus then went on to prophesy for the first time that, as the Messiah, he had to suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders but would be resurrected. Peter objected to this statement for which Jesus severely rebuked him, saying that he was still thinking in human terms.

The chapter concludes with a stark call to discipleship that involves those who would answer the call to be prepared to bear their own cross, whatever that might be for them as an individual, but certainly a requirement to die to self.

Chapter Seventeen

Jesus took three of his closest disciples with him up a mountain where Jesus was transfigured into a state of glorification before them. Elijah and Moses appeared with Jesus to talk with him and then God the Father spoke from within a cloud, affirming the work of his Son and instructing the disciples to heed his teaching. After this, Jesus provided further insight to these three disciples as to what this occasion represented and that they must reveal it to no one until after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

On their arrival back in Cæsarea Philippi, Jesus and the disciples found a man who had brought his demon possessed son to the other disciples for healing but they had not been able to achieve it. Jesus rebuked those present for their lack of faith and then healed the child by driving out the demon from him.

Jesus then revealed for a second time that he was to be executed but would rise from death after three days. This revelation built on the first by adding that Jesus was to be betrayed.

On their arrival back in Capernaum, Peter was challenged by some officials who thought that Jesus was avoiding paying the temple tax. Although Peter stated that Jesus did in fact pay his taxes, when he came back to Jesus a conversation ensued that showed Jesus and his disciples were exempted from such taxes as they were children of God. However, Peter was instructed to go to the lake to catch a fish, in the mouth of which he would find the exact amount required to pay both his and Jesus' tax.

Chapter Eighteen

The disciples, perhaps feeling elevated by sharing in Jesus' ministry, asked their Lord who would be the greatest in heaven. Jesus responded by saying that it would be the one who showed the innocence and humility of a child.

Jesus then taught of the dire consequences that anyone would face if they were the cause of another person to sin or fall away from the faith. Jesus provided an example of the extreme measures that such a person should consider in order to avoid becoming such a perpetrator, demonstrating just how evil all sin really is.

Jesus also tells a short parable of a lost sheep to show just how important each individual is to God and how much effort should be made to restore that one back into the flock, which is the church of Jesus Christ.

If a person is sinned against by another believer, the aggrieved person should do all they can to be reconciled privately to the other person. If the latter refuses to listen, then the process should be repeated in the presence of two or three reliable and impartial witnesses. If that cannot resolve the issue then the matter should be brought before the church; if even that fails then the perpetrator faces exclusion from the church.

Jesus teaches that forgiveness knows no bounds and that a person should not keep count of the number of times they are required to forgive someone who seeks their pardon.

The chapter concludes with another parable which illustrates just how great the debt is that God has erased from an individual. He then expands on the dire consequences that any person will face if they in turn fail to display the same attitude of grace, love, compassion and mercy towards others who may be indebted to them.

Chapter Nineteen

Continuing this discourse, Jesus teaches extensively that divorce, except in cases of adultery, went against God's original intention for marriage, something that was intended to last for the lifetime of one of the spouses. Jesus taught that any subsequent remarriage following a divorce that was not due to sexual immorality would begin in adultery, although after that it should be seen as a legally binding marriage for life.

Contrary to the social norm and even the natural reaction of his own disciples, Jesus blessed the children that were brought to him, reiterating his previous teaching that the Kingdom belonged to such as these.

A rich young man approaches Jesus to ask how he can inherit eternal life. After agreeing that he had kept God's law, he was then told by Jesus that, if he wanted to be perfect, he should give his wealth away to the poor. This was something that was beyond him and he went away grieved. Jesus went on to teach his disciples how hard it is for those who rely on worldly wealth to enter the Kingdom and how great the rewards are for those who do.

Chapter Twenty

Jesus discourse continues with another Kingdom parable, this time using an illustration of a vineyard owner who was not only trustworthy and true, but was compassionate and generous, showing the same grace to all who came to work in his vineyard, irrespective of the time that they served, or what they had achieved.

Following this, Jesus took a third opportunity to inform his closest disciples that he would face betrayal, suffering and death in Jerusalem, but that he would be raised back to life on the third day.

The mother of James and John made a personal request that her sons be afforded special privileges when they came into Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus taught that such positions would require suffering and even death; even so, only the

Father could allocate such rewards.

The chapter ends towards the final leg of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, when he healed two blind men in Jericho. The men had recognised Jesus' messianic claim and thus he rewarded them by restoring their sight, leading them into discipleship and eternal life.

Chapter Twenty One

The Triumphal Entry. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the final time before his crucifixion to a rapturous reception from the ordinary people, who perceived that their Messiah had come to restore the Kingdom to Israel. Although he was a king, Jesus rode into the city on the colt of a donkey in order to fulfil the Scripture that had foretold he would do so.

Jesus visited his Father's house, the temple in Jerusalem, and was angered to find it being used as a market place. He immediately cleared the whole area, driving out those engaged in commerce, who were exchanging money, selling livestock and various other items required for the temple sacrificial system.

On his way into the city the next morning, Jesus cursed a fig tree which was in full leaf but bore no fruit. The purpose of this was to illustrate to his disciples the need for them to bear Kingdom fruit no matter what the season.

While he was healing and teaching in the temple complex, the chief priests and scribes challenged Jesus as to what authority he had. He replied with a question over the authority of John the Baptist - was it human or divine? They refused to answer as either response would cause them problems with the people, so Jesus also refused to answer their question.

Jesus then told the Parable of the Two Sons. One is instructed to do some work for his father. Initially he refuses but then complies with the instruction. The second agreed to do his father's will but subsequently did not do it. Jesus' point is that what is important is doing the Father's will, even if his instructions are not obeyed immediately.

The chapter concludes with the Parable of the Tenants, relating to the Jewish leadership, who were charged with working the landowner's vineyard, paying him his due from the crop that was produced. When the landowner, God the Father, sent his representatives the prophets, to the tenants, they refused to pay their dues, abusing and even killing the servants sent to collect the owner's payment. As a final resort the owner sent his only Son, his Christ, but he too was not accepted, was expelled from the vineyard and killed, so that the tenants could claim the vineyard for themselves. Jesus warned that their action would result in the loss of the vineyard that would then be given to other tenants, the Gentiles, who would bear fruit for the landowner.

Chapter Twenty Two

It was still Tuesday of Passion Week and Jesus continued his teaching in the temple. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet concludes three consecutive illustrations of how the Jews in general and the religious leadership in

particular were failing to enter into the Kingdom of God. Here, Jesus recounted a tale of a king who invited all his subjects to the wedding banquet of his son but most of those initially invited failed to attend at the last moment. Therefore, the king had to send out his servants to others who would attend, and would do so in the right manner.

Some Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question on the legitimacy of paying the imperial taxes. Had Jesus advocated paying the unpopular taxes he would have distanced himself from his messianic claims, for it would be seen as going against God. Had he opposed paying the taxes he could have been arrested by the Romans for opposing Cæsar, a capital crime. Jesus was able to see through their trap and came up with an answer that would both fulfil the will of God and bring honour to him, without any political fallout.

Next, a group of Sadducees tried to trap Jesus over his theology and teaching on the resurrection, something the Sadducees denied. Their account of a woman who had been widowed seven times would seem to refute teaching on the resurrection of the dead, but Jesus was able to demonstrate it was their flawed understanding of Scripture and God's power that was the cause of their erroneous perception.

A further trap was then set when a Pharisaic lawyer asked Jesus to state which law was the greatest. Jesus combined two laws that would encompass all the teachings of Moses and the prophets - to love God above all else and to demonstrate a genuine love of one's neighbour.

Jesus concluded the chapter with a delightful rendering of one of David's messianic psalms to show that the Christ was both the son and Lord of David, with the emphasis being on the latter role. This teaching astounded the other leaders, leaving them speechless.

Chapter Twenty Three

Jesus warned the crowd not to live their lives in the way that the scribes and Pharisees did for, although they had the authority and knowledge to teach Scripture, they were so full of hypocrisy, pride and self-importance, that they failed to live in the way they should. The disciples were not to be called teacher, Jesus was their teacher; nor should anyone on earth be called their Father; God was their true Father.

Jesus then turned to the scribes and Pharisees directly, pronouncing seven woes in judgement on their misguided attitudes in many different aspects of their teaching and lifestyle choices. They would receive the judgement that their misdemeanours, corruption of the law and indeed treachery before both God and man deserved.

The chapter concludes with Jesus lament over Jerusalem the city and indeed the whole Jewish nation for their failure to know that their Messiah had come as their saviour, the persecution of him and those who were faithful to his call. He provided a warning that the city faced destruction, then left his Father's house for the very last time.

Chapter Twenty Four

Until now most of Jesus' teaching has been practical but here he will turn to the prophetic, a prediction of things that were yet to come. Yet he still accompanied his prophecies with practical advice as to how disciples should be prepared for what was to come and how they should act when it does occur.

As Jesus left his Father's house for the last recorded time, he responded to a comment about the beauty of Herod's temple by foretelling its pending destruction, a momentous occasion that came at the hands of the Roman army in AD70.

When he arrived on the Mount of Olives, he taught his disciples about the signs that would announce his Second Coming that would lead to a period of great suffering for those who had not chosen to come to God through him.

Jesus told them that they faced a period of persecution and warned them that false prophets and teachers would try to draw them away from the truth, something many disciples would do. They are called to stand firm, for it is those who endure to the end that will be saved. They need to ensure that the Gospel is taken to the entire world, something that must happen before Jesus shall return.

Jesus then provided a graphic account of the tribulation and the suffering it would cause that will include the long prophesied appearance of the abomination that causes desolation standing in God's temple. During that time false teachers would claim that the Messiah had already returned, which Jesus warns his disciples not to heed, for his true return will be seen by all - a truly unmissable event.

Jesus then went on to describe the cosmic signs that would announce his return. It is to be a global event, announced by the great trumpet of God and highly visible like flashes of lightning in a dark night sky.

Jesus uses an analogy in his teaching to state that, just as when a fig tree starts to blossom which indicates that summer is near, so too the signs that he had just spoken of will indicate his return is approaching.

Jesus then went on to teach on the need for all disciples to remain watchful, being prepared for his return, for no one knows when it will be other than God alone. He gives examples of how it will come suddenly and the impact that it will have on the saved and unsaved during their daily routine of life, citing the example of what happened to the unrepentant people at the time of Noah's flood, who had not heeded the warnings or signs.

In the parable of the Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave, Jesus spoke of the judgement that would come upon the unfaithful or false church leader who was caught out by the return of Christ, while the faithful leader would receive the reward of eternal life.

Chapter Twenty Five

Jesus concluded this final discourse with three parables, each of which is intended to prepare disciples for the return of their Lord and Saviour.

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids is about the mixed church, containing those that are prepared for Jesus' return and those that will be caught out. However, it also provides a warning to all that the church will be spiritually asleep when the final announcement of the Second Coming is made. Even those who are prepared will find that they are only sufficiently prepared for themselves and have made no provision to help others in that final time. Those who are prepared will go into the great Wedding Banquet; those who are not will be locked out, signifying either that they were never really saved or more likely that they have eternal salvation but will not receive their rewards.

The Parable of the Talents is an illustration of the gifts that God gives to each according to their ability. It shows that some will put their gifts to good use while the Lord is away, producing a good Kingdom return and being rewarded when they come before Christ in judgement. The one that does nothing with the gift, other than to preserve it, will be severely rebuked at the time of judgement and will face eternal punishment or loss of reward.

The Judgement of the Nations shows that all people will stand before Christ when he comes. First they will be segregated into those who have accepted the Gospel by faith and thus have received eternal salvation, and those who rejected the message. The first group will be led away into the eternal presence of God, while the latter will be cast into hell. The overriding rationale is that it is about how people receive the agents of Christ who bring the Gospel. Each will be rewarded according to their response for the way the agent is treated, for it represents the way that they have received Jesus.

Chapter Twenty Six

As the time for Passover drew near, Jesus warned his disciples for one last time that his time had come, for the religious leaders were plotting to kill him. However, they would not arrest him openly as they feared an adverse response from the crowds that had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover.

With his public ministry now concluded, Jesus spent the Wednesday of Passion Week with friends at Bethany. He had a meal at the house of Simon the Leper, where Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed his head with very expensive perfume. The disciples objected to what they saw as a waste of money that could have been used to help the poor but Jesus said that what she had done was to anoint him for burial; a beautiful thing for which she would be remembered forever.

One of Jesus' apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and offered to betray his master for thirty pieces of silver. They gladly accepted his offer.

On the Thursday, Jesus sent two of his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare a place for them to share in the Passover meal. Jesus and the rest of the Twelve joined them in the evening for the Last Supper, during which Jesus announced

that one of those present, Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, was about to betray him to the Jewish authorities.

Towards the end of the meal Jesus broke bread, representing his own body that would be given for them, and gave it to the disciples to eat. Likewise, they drank from the same cup of wine, symbolising his blood that would be shed and the outpouring of God's wrath that he would bear on behalf of all. This marked the institution of the Lord's Supper or Communion, an ordinance to be continued in remembrance of the Lord until he returns.

Before the meal had concluded, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny even knowing his master and that all the disciples would be scattered. Peter protested vehemently that he would rather go to prison or even die than do such a thing; it would come to pass just as Jesus had said.

Later in the evening they went out of the city, across the Kidron brook and onto the Mount of Olives, to a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus then took his inner core of disciples a little further, asking them to keep watch with him. He then prayed to his Father asking that the cup of suffering might pass, yet accepting to do the will of God whatever that might be. He returned from praying on three occasions, each time finding the disciples had fallen asleep, unable to watch with him for one last hour.

Judas then led an armed group of guards to Jesus, identifying him with a kiss. After brief resistance by the apostles to oppose the guards, Jesus intervened and was arrested. His disciples then deserted him.

Jesus was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, to face a hastily gathered group from the Sanhedrin. He was charged with blasphemy and a number of false witnesses were produced. In answer to a direct question about being the Messiah, Jesus answered that he was indeed the Son of Man, thus the high priest and those with him concluded wrongly that he was a blasphemer and a threat to national security, thus deserving of death.

Peter had been waiting in the outer courtyard and was challenged on three separate occasions that he was with Jesus. Just as Jesus had predicted, he denied it on each of the three occasions. When the cock crowed immediately after the third denial, Peter remembered the words of Jesus, was filled with remorse and wept bitterly.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Following his trial before the Sanhedrin during the night, Jesus was brought once more before a fuller meeting to have their decision ratified before he was led off to face the Roman governor for his verdict.

Filled with remorse, Judas went back to the chief priests and elders who had hired him to confess his sins but they would show no interest in his desolate state. He threw his fee back at them, went away and hanged himself.

Jesus was questioned by Pilate but mostly remained silent, not answering the false accusations that were made against him, something that made Pilate

marvel, for both men knew what the outcome would be.

Pilate always believed Jesus to be the innocent victim of the priest's jealousy and so he invoked a tradition that he thought would secure the release of Jesus. He offered the people a choice of a prisoner that he would release to them at the Passover. The choice was between a convicted murderer and insurrectionist named Barabbas and Jesus. To the dismay of Pilate, and clearly prompted by the chief priests, the people called for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.

In an attempt to remove himself from any blame for this innocent man's death, Pilate publicly washed his hands of Jesus' blood and the crowd subsequently accepted responsibility upon themselves and their future generations, so intent were they on seeing Jesus die that day. Pilate then had Jesus scourged.

The Roman soldiers took Jesus inside the Roman headquarters, calling many other soldiers to join in the mockery and abuse of Jesus, dressing him as a king in a scarlet robe, placing a crown of thorns on his head and bowing before him, only to hit him and spit in his face. They then led him out to be crucified.

Jesus was crucified outside the city walls at a place called Golgotha. Having been stripped naked, the Roman soldiers cast lots for his clothing. Two criminals were crucified with Jesus, one on either side. The chief priests, passersby and even the criminals continued to mock Jesus on the Cross. All of this fulfilled the Scriptures about the death of the Messiah.

After about six hours on the Cross, three of them in utter darkness in the middle of the day, Jesus cried out one final time, apparently forsaken by God, yet his was not a cry of forsakenness but a cry of victory, for he had completed the Father's will. A great earthquake shook the whole region, tearing the rocks apart and causing the dead saints to rise from their graves. At the same time the temple curtain was torn in two, signifying a way to reconciliation between God and his creation. The Roman centurion guarding Jesus came to realise that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

A rich disciple called Joseph, a member of the ruling council, went to Pilate to request Jesus' body to be released to him for burial. This was granted and the body prepared for the grave, then it was placed in Joseph's own new rock-cut tomb nearby, and a rock rolled in front of it. The women, who had come with Jesus from Galilee, witnessed both the crucifixion and the burial.

The following day, which was the Sabbath, the chief priests and elders went to Pilate to ask for a Roman guard for the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing Jesus' body and pretending that he had risen from death as he had foretold. Pilate agreed they could use soldiers drawn from the Roman temple guard for the task and instructed them to do all they could to have the tomb well guarded. The chief priests went with the soldiers to the tomb and sealed the stone in place.

Chapter Twenty Eight

The Gospel concludes with the resurrection of Jesus and the commissioning of the disciples. The Gospel is good news because it does not end with the Cross. Being a disciple demands everything that one is and has, but it offers a new and eternal life in return.

The narrative of the resurrection paves the way for the commissioning: the witness of the women contrasts starkly with the fearful falsehood of the guards and provides a positive model for the witness of the church.

On the Sunday morning, the women travelled to the tomb to tend to Jesus' body but they became frightened when they encountered an angel at the empty tomb. However, he allayed their fears and confirmed that Jesus is now the Risen Lord. The angel then instructed the women to return to the male disciples in order to inform them that they needed to go to Galilee to meet with Jesus, just as they had been instructed. The women then encountered Jesus himself who confirmed this message.

In an attempt to distort the reality of Jesus' resurrection, and therefore the proof that he is who he said he is, the priests and the elders conspired together as to how to handle the situation. They bribed the guards to lie about what had happened, giving a story that the disciples had come in the night to steal the body while the guards were sleeping. The priests promised to ensure that the guards would not face disciplinary action for their alleged sleeping on duty, which was a capital crime for Roman soldiers.

Jesus met with the disciples in Galilee on a mountainside, probably the same location where he gave the Sermon on the Mount. On this occasion, Jesus informed them that he now had all authority over God's Kingdom and that the disciples were to go out to evangelise all the nations, with Jesus issuing a command that has become known as the Great Commission.