

APRIL 2014

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Whoever  
practices and  
teaches these  
commands will  
be called great  
in the kingdom  
of heaven.

Matthew 5:19



## The Gospel of Matthew: Kingdom Instructions from the King

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# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Gospel of Matthew: Jesus, the Jewish King



My family's genealogy traces back to Sweden. My dad is a Swede, and my mother is half Swedish. Although I grew up in the suburbs of Omaha, Nebraska, our family did enjoy some Swedish dishes.

My parents still make oyster stew for New Year's Eve (one of my favorites) with home-made potato bologna on the side. My Dad also enjoyed lutefisk, but the rest of us ran from it. Our Swedish heritage only influenced us so far!

This month's study of the Gospel of Matthew begins with "the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham," a heritage that has eternal significance (Matt. 1:1). Genealogies were important to the Jewish people because they demonstrated God's sovereign control over their personal and national destiny. Just as the genealogies found in the book of Genesis traced the path of God's people from Adam to Noah to Abraham, the genealogy that begins the book of Matthew demonstrates how key points in Israel's history led directly and prophetically to the birth of Christ.

As Matthew points out, Jesus Christ was unquestionably Jewish. Why is this important? Why is Jesus' genealogical history so necessary to Matthew's Gospel?

Matthew was writing to the Jewish people to address their questions and doubts about Jesus of Nazareth. After all, here was a man claiming to be their Messiah

and the Son of God, the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. Matthew's historical record attempts to address those claims.

This first book in the New Testament is one of four Gospel accounts of the life of Christ. The Gospel of Matthew was written in the middle of the A.D. 60s when the early church was still predominantly Jewish. The author was one of Jesus' twelve original disciples. Matthew was highly educated and a tax collector, a man intricately acquainted with Jewish law and beliefs (Mark 2:14).

In his Gospel, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' divine nature, portraying Him as the King and the fulfillment of Jewish Law. In chapter 5, Jesus elaborates, explaining that He is not eliminating the Law, but fulfilling it. "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (v. 17).

Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than any other Gospel, clearly pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophetic passages. In Matthew 12:23, we read: "All the crowds were amazed, and they were saying, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?'" It was true. What God had promised His people so long ago was at last being satisfied in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus would usher in God's eternal kingdom that would be extended to the Jews. Certainly, Jesus was the fulfillment of many hopes and dreams: "For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel" (2:6). Never before had history been so important to God's people.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



## The Nature of Prophecy

One important feature of Matthew's Gospel is its emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew points back to the prophets of the Old Testament when he describes events in Christ's life (see Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9, 35). This reflects a general emphasis on the Old Testament in his Gospel. Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than any of the other Gospel writers. Often the purpose of his Old Testament citations is to show that Jesus was Israel's Messiah.

The chief distinction of the biblical prophets was that they "spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). Prophecy is not a human invention. The prophets were under the control of the Holy Spirit when they spoke and wrote, so that their words were to be regarded as God's words. Many of the prophecies that Matthew mentions involve the direct fulfillment of a predicted event. For example, Matthew 1:22–23 points to Isaiah 7:14 and interprets it as a prediction of the virgin birth of Christ.

Other prophecies point to historical events that had a parallel in Jesus' experience. For example, Hosea 11:1 makes a historical reference to the Exodus, but Matthew quotes it when he tells how Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled

to Egypt (Matt. 2:14–15). Some of the prophecies that Matthew cites had an initial historical fulfillment in the prophet's time and then a later fulfillment in Christ. In these cases Matthew emphasizes the messianic significance of the Old Testament passage.

The Old Testament prophets did not always predict. They were preachers more often than they were predictors. When they did predict, they often predicted events that took place in their own lifetime. According to John F. Walvoord, at least half of the prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled. Some prophecies, like Jonah's warning that the city of Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days, were conditional and were not fulfilled (Jonah 3:4, 10).

This is not the case with the prophecies in the Gospel of Matthew, however. We can be confident about the reliability of the prophets quoted in the Gospel of Matthew because the prophets spoke as they "were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). We can be confident about the accuracy of Matthew's judgment when he states that an Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled by Christ. Like the prophets he cites, Matthew "spoke from God" when he wrote his Gospel.

## For Further Study

To learn more about biblical prophecy, read *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* by John F. Walvoord (Victor Publishing).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafter



## Beyond the Wardrobe

Jewish people have always had a lot of problems with Jesus of Nazareth—when He was on earth and still today. The biggest problem and an intriguing question: Is He indeed the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament? And if He is, where is the promised kingdom?

Matthew, the tax-collector-turned-Apostle, wrote his Gospel primarily to the Jews of first-century Israel to answer their questions about Jesus and His kingdom. This month, as we study the Gospel of Matthew, we'll see how it still speaks to readers in the twenty-first century. We'll look at how Jesus described the kingdom in His parables (Matthew 13) comparing it to the work of the farmer sowing seeds, to the mustard seed, the yeast, the hidden treasure, the pearl, and the net. We'll examine the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) from the kingdom perspective. We'll read the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and we'll be amazed at the paradoxes of the kingdom and how different it is from our world. There, happy are not the rich, the talented, the successful, the elegant, the spiritual, the intelligent, or the educated—but the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

So, how do we get to this mysterious kingdom? In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the four Pevensie children find themselves in the land of Narnia, where things are

completely different from their world of England during World War II. Created by the imagination of C. S. Lewis, Narnia is an allegory of the kingdom of God where the four children, "sons of Adam and daughters of Eve," become kings and queens. The way to Narnia was through the wardrobe in the old house. Once they found their way through the wardrobe, they've reached their destination.

One of the paradoxes of Christianity is that Christ is both the way and the destination. Emmanuel, God with us, ushered in the kingdom of God on earth in every heart that belongs to Him—"The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, KJV). And He is the way to the kingdom—"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The religious leaders in Jesus' days didn't understand the paradox, didn't recognize the King, and missed the kingdom. The powerful and the influential rejected Him. It took the "least of these," the universally despised tax collector, to tell them about the Messiah and His kingdom.

Dear readers, let us pore over the "kingdom living manual" this month from the King Himself. C. S. Lewis once said, "I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia." If we have Jesus, we already went through the wardrobe and we have the kingdom. Let us strive to live like its true inhabitants!

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**TODAY IN THE Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

**The Gospel of Matthew: Kingdom Instructions**

On July 22, 2013, Prince George of Cambridge was born, becoming third in line to the throne of the United Kingdom. This tiny baby was instantly an international celebrity, photographed by dozens if not hundreds of photographers on the day he left the hospital with his parents. No doubt Prince George will be trained, like his father and grandfather before him, in royal protocol and procedure. He will be expected to represent his family and country well when he takes the throne.

This month we'll be studying the Gospel of Matthew, and we'll see Matthew's argument for Jesus as King, beginning with the story of His royal birth—one that didn't follow any of the world's expectations. We'll learn more about His kingdom, including the invitation that each of us has to be part of the kingdom of God. And we'll study the expectations that the Lord has for us as followers of the King. This Gospel will instruct us in how to represent the family of God as we go through our daily lives.

We are grateful at *Today in the Word* for all of you who journey with us through Scripture each month. We appreciate your prayers and your financial support to make this ministry possible so that thousands of people around the world can study God's Word and grow as followers of Jesus. This month, may we all take comfort from our relationship with the King, and may we resolve to follow His instructions as we continue toward our heavenly home.

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## Jesus' Family Tree

Many people decorate their homes by displaying family pictures. These photos might reveal facial features shared by many generations or the kinds of activities and vacations that the family has enjoyed. We can learn something about a person from the family photos she chooses to display.

We are beginning a study of the Gospel of Matthew this month, and in the opening chapter we are presented with an extended picture of Jesus' family tree. Some people might think a list of names makes for boring reading, but the people in this list provide a type of family photo that conveys a powerful message about Jesus.

From Abraham through David and other kings, this genealogy proclaims that Jesus is Jewish and can claim royal descent. In fact, this genealogy briefly recounts the history of Israel; and Jesus, we are told, is the ultimate fulfillment of what God had begun. In a way, Scripture is tell-

ing us (here and as the Gospel continues) that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God's promises.

Notice, however, that Jesus is not just the promised Jewish Messiah. The genealogy gives hints that God has a purpose for the whole world as well. He uses outcasts and sinful individuals to bring about His plan. Prostitutes, adulterers, foreigners, and disobedient kings all make the list. Yet in God's grace, He has used such broken, sinful people to accomplish His will. As the angel tells Joseph, "He [Jesus] will save His people from their sins" (v. 21). That is why He has come.

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:23

The Incarnation—God becoming human and coming to earth—is the whole point of this genealogy. A real baby was born in real time—to a mother by miracle, to a father by obedience. Jesus was born into this family in order to be our Immanuel, our "God with us" (v. 23).

## Apply the Word

This passage provides truth and encouragement about a God who does extraordinary things with ordinary people. No matter who you are or what you have done, no matter what family you were born into, God can forgive you and use your life for His glory. He welcomes you into His family—simply trust in the salvation for sins offered through His Son, Jesus.

## Pray with Us

We'd like to start the month by praying for the Custodial Services department staff who take care of our Chicago campus. Today you can encourage David Applington, Gulmira Baibos-nova, Do Tran, David Boskovic, Ernest Brown, and Ramon Diaz.

## The Chaos of Christmas

Most of us imagine Christmas with tranquil nights, Christmas trees, and happy families around warm fires. According to our reading, however, the world into which Jesus was born was full of chaos, danger, and strange visitors from faraway places. But out of that swirl of confusion, three distinct pictures emerge.

First, there was Herod, the ruthless king in Jerusalem. Grasping for power, Herod was relentless in his desire to destroy Jesus. When his initial plan with the Magi failed, he resorted to a brutal, violent slaughter of any who might stand in his way. And so Scripture gives us a picture of those who resist God and try to destroy His plan. Such a life leads only to rage and the destruction of those around us.

Second, there were the Magi. They were not observant Jews but rather pagan foreigners and astrologers. Yet they were diligently seeking for Jesus.

They saw the child  
with his mother  
Mary, and they  
bowed down and  
worshiped him.

Matthew 2:11

The religiously educated in Herod's court had the right data about God's Messiah, but they missed the point. Not so these pagans; they kept after God, traveling great distances and refusing to give up. In the end, these pagan foreigners were the ones kneeling in worship at the feet of Jesus, offering Him their gifts. What a picture of a persevering quest for God that ends in worship of the true King.

Finally, we see a picture of Jesus Himself. Never referred to by name, He is eight times called only "the child." With chaos and danger everywhere, here was "the child"—silent, vulnerable, and dependent on others. Sought after for destruction, displaced from home twice, and finally settled in the backwater village of Nazareth, Jesus shows us the extent to which God's love has taken Him. Even in our darkest, most fragile moments, God is there "with us."

### Apply the Word

Scripture calls us today to consider our own response to the coming of Christ into the world and into our lives. Will we be like Herod, defiant and resistant to God's claim of kingship? Or will we follow the Magi and diligently seek after God? Let today's picture of the vulnerable child Jesus draw you to Him in submission and worship.

### Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the custodians on our Chicago campus, please add Dean Gentry, Paul Henle, Danny Hutcherson, Jessica Manning, and John Williams to your prayer list. We are grateful for their commitment to keeping clean all the facilities entrusted to Moody.

## Jesus' Public Ministry Begins

In ancient times, the arrival of a king meant great excitement. It also meant great preparation, and in many cases it included building or repairing a road that would lead the king to the city.

The same was true with the coming ministry of King Jesus, and John the Baptist's message of spiritual preparation: "Repent" (3:2)!

That message still holds today. We prepare ourselves for the coming of God through confession and an intention to give our lives to the King. It was not enough for the Pharisees simply to claim Jewish ancestry, and it is not enough for us to claim Christian lineage. Repentance, the path that prepares us for the presence of God, must be made personally and individually as well.

Notice also that even Jesus responded to John's call to baptismal repentance. On one level, this was the inauguration of His ministry and the public declaration of His identity as the beloved Son

of God (3:17). But why did the sinless Jesus (see Heb. 4:15) undergo a baptism of *repentance*? Jesus needed no personal repentance. But in His full humanity, Jesus fully identified with us by symbolically taking on our sins and entering the waters of baptism with us. In this way, Jesus fulfilled "all righteousness" (3:15).

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

Matthew 3:2

Right after the experience of God's affirmation of His identity and calling, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (3:17–4:1). Notice that all three temptations are an attack on trusting

in God. Satan tempted Jesus to wonder about God's provision of food, to doubt God's care for Him, and to question the promise of the kingdom through the cross. Can we really trust God's Word? Adam and Israel had failed the test to trust and obey God, but Jesus succeeded by affirming His identity in God and by drawing on Scripture. Publicly declared and personally tested, Jesus was ready to embark on His ministry.

### Apply the Word

The dual themes of sin and identity play prominently in today's reading. Satan wants us to rebel against God and forego repentance, but Christ calls us to faithful obedience, remembering God's Word and our identity as His children. Pay attention to the ways Satan may tempt you today. Resist firmly. But if you fail, remember the fastest way back to God: confession and repentance.

### Pray with Us

As we keep our prayers focused on the Facilities department, please include these employees in your prayers: William Bielawski, Andrew Franklin, John Pettett, Thomas Pizano, Oakley Smith, and Cathy Sywulka. May God bless their dedicated service!

## Kingdom Living for Kingdom People

At a musical concert, often the main attraction is preceded by smaller acts of entertainment. As these preparatory productions end, anticipation has grown as the audience is ready for the main event.

After the events of chapters 1 through 4, today's reading now brings us to the main event—the ministry of Jesus. Having called His first disciples, Jesus' ministry now begins with healing and preaching about the kingdom. It is no coincidence that one of Jesus' most famous sermons—the Beatitudes—comes first, for here Jesus laid out a succinct summary of kingdom living for kingdom people. Rather than a list of requirements for entering the kingdom, Jesus' sermon identified the characteristics of His followers, those in the kingdom.

Notice first how Jesus prefaced each of the kingdom characteristics as "blessed" (literally, "happy"). Being a member of Christ's kingdom and embracing those kingdom characteristics (so different from

the values of the world) should produce satisfying happiness—true blessedness as we know God's comfort, mercy, and presence.

This list of Beatitudes includes a progression. Being poor, mournful, and meek highlight our spiritual attitude toward God. We

You are the light  
of the world. . . .  
let your light shine  
before others.

Matthew 5:14, 16

trust in God, not ourselves; we grieve over sin; and we approach God in all humility. These dispositions create deep "hunger and thirst" for God's righteousness, which produces in us mercy toward others, purity of heart, and a desire for peace with others and God. Even when

persecution comes, Jesus promised us happiness in the kingdom.

Finally, these characteristics will influence the world. Jesus called us "salt" as we bring flavor and preservation to a world pushed toward evil. Likewise, Jesus called us "light" as our kingdom lives provide guidance in a dark world and bring glory to our Father.

### Apply the Word

Christ calls us to a radical life in the kingdom, but He also promises deep blessing in such a life. As you consider Jesus' sermon, what kingdom qualities are lacking in your life? Write those characteristics on separate notecards and place them in noticeable locations. As you see them throughout the week, pause and ask God to bring those characteristics to fruition in your life.

### Pray with Us

As you pray today, please mention our Information Systems department headed by vice president Frank Leber. We thank the Lord for their expertise in computer technology and for using it for God's glory.

## Jesus, the New Moses

In ancient Israel, God delivered the law to His people through Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–20). Now Jesus, the new Moses, delivered His teaching on the law from another mountainside, this time near Galilee (v. 1).

Jesus made clear His stance toward the law: He came not to abolish it, but to fulfill it. In fact, Jesus intensified and internalized what many Jews “obeyed” through mere formal legalism. God seeks righteous obedience “that surpasses that of the Pharisees” (v. 20) by transcending external obedience and considering the inner disposition. So what does that look like?

Jesus challenged His audience to internalize the application of the commandments about murder and adultery. These commands, said Jesus, are also about inner dispositions, not only external actions. Animosity toward others are the equivalent of murder. Looking lustfully at someone was

the same as committing adultery. Jesus also intensified the laws about marriage and divorce. Rather than grant easy and frequent divorce (as was common in the ancient world and today!) Jesus focused on God’s intention for marriage as a monogamous union until death.

Be perfect,  
therefore, as your  
heavenly Father  
is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Jesus also addressed laws about oaths and serving justice. Where many Jews created a loophole to make oaths nonbinding if sworn on things other than God, Jesus urged kingdom people to let our words always be honest and trustworthy. And rather than seek personal retribution for the wrongs we suffer, Jesus called us to forgiveness and generosity, even to those who hurt us.

What stands behind it all? Love, not just for those who love us but even for our enemies. By embodying such love, we will be imitating our heavenly Father who has “perfect,” or “complete,” love for all—sinners and righteous alike.

### Apply the Word

Do you “obey” God outwardly but inwardly seethe with hatred and jealousy and grudges against others? Today we are called to cultivate “perfect” obedience, which links outward action with an inner disposition of love. Such “perfect” or “complete” obedience comes only from God. In preparation for the Easter season, ask Him to help you grow into that perfection.

### Pray with Us

Today, we invite you to pray for the Network and System Support, one of the departments headed by Frank Leber. Please uphold in prayer Andrew Carlson, Joseph Kessinger, and Paul Walker as they make sure our computer systems work without glitches.

## Kingdom Habits

Fifth-century Christian Peter Chrysologus summarized the connection between habits Christians practiced in preparation for Easter: “*Fasting is the soul of prayer; giving is the lifeblood of fasting.*” Jesus highlighted those three habits today. Continuing His earlier emphasis on the inner, hidden quality of obedience, He warned His disciples not to exercise obedience in order to attract attention and praise from others. God knows our hearts and sees even our hidden actions; obedience should be for His sake, not for the praise of others.

Be careful not  
to practice your  
righteousness in  
front of others to be  
seen by them.

Matthew 6:1

The structure of the prayer is important. Jesus begins with the glory of God and His kingdom. Our stance toward God should be one of honor and praise. Only then does the prayer move towards petitions for daily sustenance, forgiveness, and protection. We come to God with our requests only after acknowledging His glory. Notice, too, that our forgiveness from God is linked to our forgiveness of others. A hard heart, closed to the idea of forgiving those who have wronged us, will produce a heart that is closed to the forgiveness available from God.

First, our giving to the needy should be done quietly and faithfully without fanfare. Those who give in order to gain the praise of others, Jesus said, “have received their reward in full” (v. 2). Likewise, our prayers should be done with a spirit of quiet humility, not as a way to publicly exalt ourselves. Jesus even gave us a model prayer.

Finally, Jesus expected His disciples to fast, but not in a way that was attention-seeking. Instead, Jesus encouraged them to look normal outwardly, knowing that God “who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (v. 18). It should not be the world’s approval we desire, but our Father’s pleasure.

### Apply the Word

This season leading up to Easter is the perfect time to cultivate the habits of prayer, fasting, and giving. Fasting in particular is often neglected these days, even among serious Christians. Consider committing yourself to regular times of fasting this month, recognizing that the good things we give up for a time are so that we might turn ourselves—soul and body—to the best thing of all: God.

### Pray with Us

Colin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, oversees the operation of more than 35 Moody Radio stations. He welcomes your prayers for this life-changing ministry of Moody Bible Institute and thanks Moody Radio listeners for their support.

## Earthly Worries, Eternal Values

We all know the saying that money cannot buy happiness, yet many people live as if it can. One motivational plaque pictures a luxury car in a posh neighborhood with the caption: “Money: It can’t buy you happiness, but it will let you shop for it in another neighborhood!”

That perennial quest for earthly happiness is the concern of today’s passage in which Jesus warned His disciples about the fading satisfaction from material possessions. We may think that earthly goods like a new house, a sporty car, fancy jewelry, or the latest technology will bring us happiness. But Scripture reminds us that the things of this world do not last; the things of God do. As Scripture tells us, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (v. 21). We give our heart to the things we really value, and Jesus also warned that our heart cannot serve two masters (money and God). We must choose our allegiance wisely.

The flip side to the love of worldly goods is the worry they produce. Considerations for what we will eat, drink, and wear are legitimate concerns (as bodily creatures, they are necessities for life). But Jesus warned that we can spend so much time worrying about these things that our focus becomes consumed with earthly goods.

Where your  
treasure is, there  
your heart  
will be also.

Matthew 6:21

Jesus offered a corrective that derived its force from the character of God. If God cares about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, does He not care much more about us? Ultimately, our heavenly

Father knows what we need, and He will provide. Anxious worry adds nothing to the needs of tomorrow.

In the end, we are called to focus on the Father’s “kingdom . . . and His righteousness” (v. 33). Our loving Father will take care of the rest.

### Apply the Word

Perhaps you struggle with worry about the needs of life. Today’s passage gives us an opportunity to confront that struggle and to reorient ourselves toward a God who cares and provides. Spend this week observing God’s creation (birds, insects, plants, and trees) as a tangible reminder that if God cares for these things, He cares even more so for us.

### Pray with Us

Join us in mentioning the Moody Radio Program Production staff—Joseph Carlson, William Davis, Jon Hemmer, Chris Papendick, and Lee Rugen—in prayer today. Praise God for all the work they do in sustaining Moody Radio’s ministry on the air each day.

## Building a Life that Stands

In recent years, Americans have experienced a number of severe storms, like Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Superstorm Sandy (2012). Combined damages are estimated near \$150 billion; these storms decimated thousands of homes and industries, and many families are still recovering.

Jesus Himself warned that a life not built around obedience to His words will end metaphorically in a similar fashion. When the storms of life come, those who built their lives on the rock of Christ will stand; those who built on the sands of self-obedience will fall. What, then, does a rock-built life look like?

Scripture begins with Jesus' call to humility. Where we are tempted to be judgmental, Christ called us to rethink our stance towards the sin of others. Notice that Jesus did not forbid moral judgment but called us to do so in the right spirit. Be-

fore we identify sin in others we must first be aware of our own sin. Then, when we do take action to "remove the speck" (v. 5) from someone else, we will do so with a spirit of humility that seeks to restore the other person to right relationship with God rather than promote our own self-righteousness. This way, we obey Jesus' command to "do to others what you would have them do to you" (v. 12).

Second, a life built on Jesus requires careful decision-making. Jesus made this point clear through a series of contrasts. Will we choose the wide or narrow gate? Will

our lives bear good fruit or bad? Will our Christian profession be phony or authentic? In short, will our lives be built on the rock of Christ through humility and obedience, or will we be like the fool who "hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice" (v. 26)?

Everyone who hears these words . . . and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 7:24

### Apply the Word

You can create a visual reminder of Christ's teaching by creating two miniature scenes to display in your home or office. For the first, choose a hard, smooth rock; for the second, place some shifting sand in a box or glass. As you see those scenes in the weeks to come, be reminded that Christ calls us to build our lives on the rock of obedience to His words.

### Pray with Us

Would you continue to remember in prayer the Moody Radio producers—Christopher Segard, Deb Solomon, Joel Swan, and Steven Tabor? The radio programs they help create bring glory to the Lord through the ministry of Moody Radio.

## The Power and Presence of Jesus

No condition was more lonely in ancient Israel than having leprosy. Declared ceremonially unclean, lepers were required to isolate themselves from their families and communities and to remain at a distance from all passersby. No one could touch them physically. Alone and untouched, they lived out their days with only other lepers for company.

Given this background, Jesus' action was all the more remarkable. He actually spoke to an approaching leper and powerfully healed him, but He also touched him! And that theme of Jesus' healing presence and power runs throughout the chapter. He spoke a word and the centurion's servant was healed. He touched Peter's mother-in-law, and her fever was gone. He healed the multitudes and exorcised the two demoniacs "with a word" (v.16). He rebuked the winds and waves and they were calm.

In His power and presence, Jesus is both "God-with-us" (Matt. 1:23) and the

He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.

Matthew 8:17

promised suffering servant who "took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" (v. 17; Isa. 53:4). Notice that Jesus healed not just faithful Jews, but the servant of a Gentile centurion and two demoniacs in the pagan region of the Gadarenes. This Messiah was not just for Jews but for the world, and in Jesus, God identified with all human suffering, bore it upon Himself, and removed its ultimate power.

Observe the variety of responses to Jesus' power and presence. Some wanted to follow Him, and Jesus cautioned them about the cost of true discipleship. Following Jesus is not just about healing—it may also take sacrifice. Peter's mother-in-law responded with an act of service. His disciples were simply amazed and wondered about His identity. But sadly, some "pleaded with him to leave their region" (v. 34). Not everyone welcomes the power and presence of Christ in their lives.

### Apply the Word

Christ's call to discipleship includes both healing and sacrifice. The first step is to recognize His deep love in coming to be "God with us" in our suffering, and then to respond with faith. If you have never opened your heart to the God who moves into our lives with His power and presence, make today that day. Allow Him to heal you so that you can serve Him with your life.

### Pray with Us

Please join us in prayer for Moody president, Dr. Paul Nyquist. We ask that the Lord refresh him through His Spirit and guide him in all the decisions he makes daily in his leadership role.

## Responding to Our Compassionate God

Jesus' contemporaries believed that sickness and sin were linked. As an ancient Jewish rabbi once said, "No sick person is cured . . . until all his sins have been forgiven."

It would have been shocking, then, for the Pharisees to witness Jesus not only physically heal the paralytic but also make the pronouncement: "your sins are forgiven" (v. 2). Such action and declaration could mean only one thing: Jesus had claimed for Himself divine authority over sin! Once again, some responded with accusation and others with amazement. But the next episode illustrates the best response of obedience and celebration.

When Jesus called the tax collector Matthew, this sinner immediately followed Jesus and then threw a party with his friends! When questioned about Jesus' choice of companions, Christ responded by underscoring the

whole point of His coming: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v. 13). God has come to offer mercy to those who see their need. Matthew's celebratory response was appropriate, for Jesus was like a "bridegroom" (v. 15) who brought mercy and forgiveness worth celebrating.

He had compassion on them, because they were . . . like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36

Responding with faith was another important reaction to Jesus' coming, as we see in the healing accounts in today's reading. The paralytic's friends, the synagogue leader, the bleeding woman, and the two blind men all displayed faith in Jesus' power and

willingness to heal. It may not have been perfect faith, but it was placed in Jesus, and Jesus responded with astonishing grace and healing. Scripture makes the reason clear: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, . . . because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 36). This compassionate God calls us to faith as well.

### Apply the Word

What are your needs today? Will you come before our compassionate, merciful, and generous God seeking His healing, provision, and restoration? Today's reading urges us to take that step of faith in Christ as the only One who can respond. Your faith may not be great, but our God is. Bring your needs to Christ and let Him take care of the rest.

### Pray with Us

Patrick Friedline heads the Career Development ministry among our students and alumni. We invite you to lift up to the Lord this important ministry and support Patrick through your prayers in his day-to-day work with our students.

## Kingdom Mission

The so-called “health-and-wealth” gospel of today promises faithful Christians a life of health, comfort, and prosperity. Those who have enough faith only need to ask, and God will bless with an abundance of material possessions.

No picture of the Christian life could be further away from the portrait we are given in today’s reading. Jesus gathered His disciples and sent them out on a mission to carry on His ministry of preaching and healing. But what reward would they receive for their faithfulness to that kingdom mission? Certainly not financial profit or earthly comforts! No, Jesus promised social rejection, division, and controversy among family members. But Jesus went further. His disciples would be “like sheep among wolves” (v. 16). He promised overt persecution, floggings, being hauled into court, and hatred. In short, Jesus told them that the students will be

like the teacher, and the servants like the master. What the world did to Jesus, it will do to Jesus’ followers as well.

So why would anyone sign up to be a follower of Jesus? Because Christ also promised them something else. In the midst of persecution, they would know the presence of God as “the Spirit of your Father . . . speaking through you” (v. 20). Likewise, Christ reminded them that bodily harm paled in comparison to God’s care for and preservation of the human soul. In the end, those who stand firm “will be saved” (v. 22).

**Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.**

Matthew 10:39

Jesus understood the radical call of discipleship He laid upon His followers. But He also made it abundantly clear that following the extreme call of Jesus has a profound eternal reward. As Jesus said, “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (v. 39).

### Apply the Word

How often do we shy away from telling others about Christ because we fear social embarrassment or rejection? Today, Christ calls us to reorient our priorities around eternal things and to embrace His call to mission in the world. Ask God for the strength this week to speak boldly about Christ to whomever God may put in your path.

### Pray with Us

Day One, an introduction to Moody for future students, is under way today on our Chicago campus. Student Programs department—Joe Gonzales, Nok Prukpitikul, and Cherie Carson—plan and oversee this even. They will appreciate your prayers today.

## Just Who Is Jesus?

Expectations play a great role in our experience of life. Setting expectations too low can result in a failure to achieve. Setting them too high leads to frustration, disappointment, and confusion.

John the Baptist also seemed to need an adjustment of expectations about Jesus. Faced with imprisonment and the apparent rejection of his message of the kingdom, John's earlier confidence about Jesus seemed to have waned. "Are you really who I thought you were?" he seemed to ask.

If Jesus really was the Messiah, why was he suffering and about to be killed by a corrupt king?

Jesus' first answer was to point to His miraculous deeds. The blind, lame, deaf, and sick are healed; the dead are raised to life. All of this, Jesus implied, was a fulfillment of the messianic promises of Isaiah 35 and 61 as Jesus inaugurated the kingdom. Second,

Jesus spoke to His own disciples about John: he was the great prophet who prepared the way for God. John's preparatory work testified to the identity of Jesus as the Messiah as well.

Other people also had problematic expectations. Our reading makes it clear that many rejected Jesus because He did not act as they expected, as Jesus explains metaphorically: "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance" (v. 17)! Their lack of repentance would be met with judgment. In the end, the kingdom was not for the

so-called "wise and learned" (v. 25), but for those who would simply come to Jesus with their burdens and find rest in the one "gentle and humble in heart" (v. 29). Our expectations about Jesus may need to be adjusted (pain and rejection may continue in our lives for a time), but ultimately He remains the promised Messiah who cares for the lowly and draws them into relationship with the Father.

Come to me, all you  
who are weary and  
burdened, and I will  
give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

### Apply the Word

Perhaps one wrong expectation about Jesus is that we can only come to Him once we are virtuous enough, smart enough, or put together enough to earn His love. Jesus' words challenge that idea. He invites us to set aside our pride and come with our broken, sinful, damaged selves, and find rest in Him. Give your burdens to Him this week.

### Pray with Us

Steven Mogck, executive vice president and chief operating officer, coordinates the work of Stewardship, Operations, and Media branches. Please include his service at Moody in your prayers today.

## Resistance to Jesus

In John Milton's classic epic poem *Paradise Lost*, Satan and his host are cast from heaven for their rebellion. Yet even in the face of such conditions, Satan remains resistant to God, declaring: "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n."

Even in Jesus' day some, like Milton's Satan, refused to bow to the lordship of Christ. Three times in our chapter, the Pharisees resisted Jesus and rejected His claims. In verses 1 to 14, they applied a legalistic attitude to Scripture and resisted Jesus' actions of eating and healing on the Sabbath.

They would rather follow their own rules than yield to the "Lord of the Sabbath" Himself (v. 8). Jesus was none other than the servant figure promised in Isaiah, but because of their resistance, Jesus "withdrew from that place" (v. 15).

Later, in verses 22 to 32, they attributed to Satan what God's Spirit was accomplishing through Jesus. Rather than

recognize the work of God's in-breaking kingdom, they blasphemed against God and rejected the work of Christ. Finally, in verses 38 to 42 the Pharisees disguised their opposition to Jesus by demanding miraculous signs. One greater than Jonah or Solomon had arrived, but they remained incredulous.

For out of  
the overflow of the  
heart the mouth  
speaks.

Matthew 12:34

Why did the Pharisees so vehemently resist Jesus? Scripture explains: their outward resistance reflected the inner condition of their hearts, "for the mouth speaks . . . what the heart is full of" (v. 34). More concerned

with their own legalism and ideas about what God's Messiah should look like, they outwardly appeared "swept clean and put in order" (v. 44). But in reality they had rejected Christ and His Spirit, opening themselves to future spiritual attack and blindness. Jesus' final words about His true family teach us that it is possible to be externally religious yet remain outside God's kingdom.

### Apply the Word

Today's reading is a sober warning about the danger of resisting the claims of Christ in our life. We can be tempted to set our own rules above God's grace and mercy. We can prefer to present an external appearance that is tidy and religious rather than undergo heart renovation. If God's Spirit convicts you on any of these points, repent and accept His forgiveness.

### Pray with Us

With the growing ministries and increasing number of students, the tasks of our Facilities Management become more challenging. Please pray for Konrad Finck, Erik Hultquist, James Miedema, and their teams as they efficiently maintain the Chicago campus.

## Parables of the Kingdom

Everyone knows that children love a good story. Open a picture book in a room full of children, and you will soon have a crowd of listeners ready to give you their full attention.

Jesus knew that it wasn't just children who respond to stories. Adults do as well, and in today's reading Jesus taught the crowds through a series of stories and word pictures. His parables were intended to reveal something about the kingdom or to encourage a right response to it. Jesus quoted Psalm 78:2 to make clear this purpose of revelation:

"I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world" (v. 35).

Several parables teach us about the far-reaching and wide-spreading nature of the kingdom in the world (vv. 31–33). Others instruct us about the coming judgment at the end (vv. 24–30; 47–50). Still others call for a considered response to the kingdom. The

parable of the sower and the seeds (vv. 3–9) encourages a sincere and deep acceptance of Christ's kingdom in our lives rather than a shallow or distracted approval. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl (vv. 44–46) call us to see the overwhelming value of the kingdom, encouraging us to give up much in response. And Jesus' final words (v. 57) warn us against a tepid response to Jesus.

Whoever has ears,  
let them hear.

Matthew 13:9

ed as a kind of judgment that revealed the spiritual state of the listener. They challenged people to think! They encouraged the spiritually hungry to seek answers! The disciples did just that and were rewarded with further insight. But by quoting Isaiah 6, Jesus also indicated that many had grown spiritually dull of heart, hard of hearing, and blind.

### Apply the Word

Today's parable on the sower and seeds best illustrates the need for an honest inspection of our soul's condition. Where might your response to Christ need help? Whether it's struggling with a shallow faith, the worries of life, or a lack of understanding, Scripture calls us to turn to God for help, "and I will heal them" (v. 15). Thank God for His promise of help when we are struggling!

### Pray with Us

Today, please mention while you pray the Engineering Systems staff on Moody's Chicago campus—Paul Siebold, Roger Vinlasaca, and Alfredo Rios—who maintain our campus infrastructure in excellent condition.

# Question and Answer

By Dr. David Rim, Professor of Theology

**Q What does Matthew mean by the phrase, “blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven” (Matt. 12:31)? Does this mean that there are some sins that cannot be forgiven? Can a believer ever commit this sin?**

**A** The discussion concerning the precise nature of this unforgivable sin is both extensive and controversial. Some in the early church thought that this sin was the denial of prophetic inspiration in general; others thought it was a form of post-conversion apostasy. Perhaps the most popular view is to equate the unforgivable sin with the rejection of the gospel. Those who refuse to embrace the forgiveness of sins offered through the cross have no other recourse for the atonement of their transgressions. In this interpretation, the unforgivable sin is the sin of unbelief, which John seems to affirm in 3:18 and 16:9 and also 1 John 5:16.

While this is a possible interpretation, it does not seem to fit within the context of Matthew 12. In this passage, the Pharisees have attributed the energizing force behind Jesus' miraculous healing to the prince of demons, Satan. They are not persuaded by the testimony and work of Jesus. They want to be a stumbling block to anyone else who might consider becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. Right after the miraculous healing, verse 23 says that all the people were astonished and wondered if Jesus was indeed the Son of David. At this point the Pharisees,

in an attempt to dissuade them, say that Jesus is a pawn of Satan.

The “blasphemy of the Spirit” describes a heart that is so hardened that it not only refuses to see the divine in the work of Christ, but it also actively prevents others from coming to Him. This interpretation fits the context. Those who oppose Jesus seek to scatter the Jews rather than gather them up into the kingdom of God (v. 30). Even in the presence of one of the great miracles in the Gospels—the healing of a demon-possessed, blind, and mute man—the hearts of the Pharisees were unmoved. These religious leaders had closed their hearts to any testimony of the Spirit that affirms Jesus as the Great One sent from God. This is the unforgivable sin.

Other passages within the Bible affirm this interpretation. Deuteronomy speaks of the worship of idols (which may persuade others to do so) as a sin that will not be forgiven (29:18–20). Those who have caused a little one to stumble will have a millstone hung around their neck and thrown into the sea (Matt 18:6). And the book of Hebrews speaks of those who have experienced the testimony of the Spirit to some degree and then rejected it; how can they be brought back to repentance (6:6)?

Finally, can a believer commit this sin? Personally, I do not believe an individual who has genuinely confessed Jesus as Lord can publicly oppose the work of God in the world by attributing it to something evil. Pastorally, anyone who

*Continued on next page*

**The hour of glory in the life of Christ is the hour of His suffering on the cross for our sake.**

*Continued from previous page*

fears having committed this sin should not worry; an apostate would not even consider worrying about having committed this sin.



### **What does the divine name "I AM" in Exodus 3:14 mean?**

**A** If the Bible is a story, then the major character is obviously God. An important question you can ask of God is what Moses asked, "What is his name?" (Ex. 3:13). A name is a window to the soul of the person. In Exodus 3 we get an answer to this question, but there are many interpretations of what this name means. It is not an exaggeration to say that these three Hebrew words that are translated "I AM WHO I AM" have been discussed more than any other phrase in the entire Old Testament. Let me list three possibilities.

The first option is to see in this name God's absolute self-sufficiency. God is the self-existent One. He has life within Himself. In the language of Isaiah, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the self-sustaining one. It is impossible for God not to exist. And this God does not depend on anyone or anything. Nothing outside of God can affect Him in any sense; He is utterly unconditioned.

The second option translates the name of God as, "I make to be whatever comes to be." God is the one who causes all things into being. If the first option references the eternality of God, the second option speaks of His creative power. He is

the one who has created all things; He is the one who sustains all things. In the language of Isaiah, God does not grow weary or tired, for He is the creator of the ends of the earth (Isa. 40:28).

The third option sees the emphasis within the name of God as His active presence. He is Immanuel, the one who is with us. Or, to put it another way, He is the one who was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the language of Isaiah, He is the God who lives in the high and lofty place, but dwells among the contrite and lowly in spirit. If the first possibility references the eternality of God, the second His power, then the third speaks of the God's desire for relationship with humanity.

While all three interpretations are obviously true of God, and all three have strong support, the third possibility seems best. It fits the context quite well. The Israelites had been suffering in Egypt as slaves for many generations, and Exodus 3 notes that God sees their pain, hears their cry, and is concerned with their misery. When Moses arrives to deliver them, and they ask him what is God's name, the name "I AM" answers that very question: I have been with you in the midst of your suffering.

Such an interpretation also aligns perfectly with the life of Jesus, who is God with us, to suffer together with us and for us. The hour of glory in the life of Christ is the hour of His suffering on the cross for our sake. The cross is the window to the divine soul because in the cross His name shines the brightest.

## Jesus' Provision for Our Deep Need

Foreshadowing is a literary device that hints at or warns the reader about a coming plot development. The fate of John the Baptist and Herod's opposition to the proclamation of the kingdom was also a subtle foreshadowing of Jesus' own coming death. In fact, Matthew 14 marks a turning point in the Gospel, when opposition to Jesus will increase, ultimately leading to the cross.

Yet notice that Jesus did not shy away from His ministry. Surrounded again by crowds of people, Jesus "had compassion on them . . . and healed their sick" (v. 14). He also met their physical needs in providing

food for over five thousand people. Scripture reports that the masses "were satisfied" and "the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over" (v. 20). Jesus provided abundantly for His needy people.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Matthew 14:14

But Jesus' actions also show us His deeper identity as both the new Moses and God incarnate. Just as Moses provided manna in the wilderness for God's people, so now Jesus (the new Moses) provided bread for His people. Yet where God instructed Moses about how to obtain manna, here Jesus performed the miracle Himself, underscoring His divine power as king over all, even bread and fish. That divine power over nature continued in the next episode where He walked on water and calmed the stormy sea.

Peter's response was right. Recognizing Christ's identity, Peter proclaimed Jesus

"the Son of God" (v. 33), and also stepped out of the boat to walk on the water. With faith in Jesus, who is there with us, we too can walk in the storms of life. It's only when we take our eyes off Him and focus on the storm that we begin to sink.

### Apply the Word

These episodes of feeding the multitude and walking on water have captured the attention of artists throughout Christian history. See if you can find an artistic rendering of one of these episodes online. Print it out and use it as a visual reminder that because Jesus cares for our needs and has the power to provide, we can cry out to Him in faith.

### Pray with Us

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, oversees all the financial operations at Moody. Your prayers are vital for him and his teams as they strive to honor God with the work they do at Moody.

## Jesus Is the Controversial Messiah

Many first-century Jewish people anticipated a Messiah who would bring God's salvation. But that expectation often envisioned a Messiah who would be strictly faithful to the traditions of the elders and strictly for the Jewish people. Jesus' actions challenged both of these assumptions.

In the first episode in our reading, Jesus challenged the Pharisees who valued human traditions more than God's Word. According to "korban" traditions, someone who had devoted their money to the temple was exempt from using those resources to care for their parents (violating the fifth commandment)! Likewise,

the Pharisees were more focused on outward cleanliness than inward purity of heart. Citing Isaiah 29:13, Jesus condemned their attitude and even challenged their misunderstanding about levitical cleanliness laws. Relationship with God was not about keeping external rules; it was about an inward love for God.

For my eyes have  
seen your salvation,  
... a light for  
revelation to the  
Gentiles.

Luke 2:30-32

In the next scene, Jesus moved north into the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon where He met a Canaanite woman. The common Jewish assumption was that associating with Gentiles made one unclean. But Jesus challenged that notion as well. He not only talked with the Gentile woman but also commended her faith and healed her daughter. In doing so, Jesus countered the narrow idea that God's Messiah was just for the Jews. Instead, Jesus demonstrated that His coming was for the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike.

That point is made clear in our final episode where Jesus fed the four thousand.

Whereas in Matthew 14, Jesus healed the sick and fed the Jewish five thousand, now Jesus offered that same blessing of healing and provision to Gentiles in the northern regions. Once again, Jesus challenged their narrow view of the Messiah's work, and He proclaimed His global purpose to the whole world.

### Apply the Word

Perhaps you have come to think of Christ's saving work in too narrow a way as well. What family members, neighbors, political leaders, or media figures have you dismissed as beyond the reach of God's saving work? Think of some of those people by name today, and then pray for them specifically, asking the Messiah of the world to bring His salvation even to them.

### Pray with Us

Join us as we bring the men and women of Moody Radio Northwest in Spokane, Washington, before the Lord in prayer. May God use the service of Joe Gonzalez, Chris Wright, Dee Marie, Gordon Canaday and Jodi Murphy to accomplish His goals for this station.

## Jesus Is the Suffering Messiah

In recent years, a movement known as "New Atheism" has produced a stream of literature rejecting (and mocking) the idea of the existence of God. Many of these authors turn a blind eye to the evidence around them and claim that there is absolutely no proof for God's existence.

In today's passage, the Jewish leaders were equally blind to the evidence around them. Despite Jesus' teaching and numerous miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees continued their resistance and demanded a "sign from heaven" (v. 1). Jesus not only rejected their spiritually

blind request but also warned His disciples about their teaching. Beware! A willful resistance to the work of God is like yeast that infects and taints the whole lump.

That challenge from the Jewish leaders, however, did lead Jesus to ask an important question: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (v. 13). His disciples re-

ported a variety of responses. But Peter, speaking on behalf of the disciples, articulated the correct answer: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (v. 16). That proclamation, said Jesus, would be the "rock" or foundation of Christ's church.

Yet even the disciples needed to have their understanding developed. Jesus explained that being Messiah meant rejection, suffering, and crucifixion—not what the disciples expected! When Peter objected, Jesus condemned any perspective that tried to prevent Him from fulfilling His purpose on the cross.

Whoever wants to  
be my disciple must  
deny themselves  
and take up their  
cross and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

That identity as *suffering* Messiah has implications for Christian discipleship as well, as we can see in our key verse today. Christ's death and resurrection brings life. And following Christ means walking in the way of the cross and giving up our selfish agendas. Only then will we find life in Him.

### Apply the Word

The Book of Common Prayer summarizes this lesson about following Jesus; make it your prayer today: "Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

### Pray with Us

Our Public Safety officers ensure the safe environment on Moody's Chicago campus every day. Today, Thomas Jackson, Justin Jansma, Ryan Jenkins, and Timothy Kirkpatrick would welcome the prayers of the Moody family.

## Jesus Is the Glorious Messiah

How many of us have experienced the surprise of a beautiful rainbow? The sun suddenly breaks through a sky of dark rainclouds, and a brilliant and glorious arc of color emerges!

Jesus' transfiguration must have seemed similar for His disciples. Having just given the dark announcement of His coming death, Jesus was revealed on the mountain in all His divine glory and splendor. The presence of Moses and Elijah underscored the point that Christ was the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Then, as the law and prophets gave way to Jesus, the Father's voice proclaimed His full identity:

"This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. . . Listen to Him!" (v. 5). Matthew's Gospel is moving us toward the cross, and Christ reaffirmed that with His disciples—but first we are given a foretaste of Christ's true resurrection glory.

This is my Son,  
whom I love; with  
him I am well  
pleased. . . Listen  
to him!

Matthew 17:5

From that great moment of glory, Jesus returned from the mountain to a blunt reminder of the "unbelieving and perverse generation" (v. 17) He was called to serve. What a letdown! We sense Christ's frustration, but instead of Jesus abandoning His followers, He remained with them and encouraged true faith in His disciples. Even small faith can be the occasion for a great work of God.

If an unbelieving crowd wasn't disappointing enough, the next scene becomes seemingly even more mundane: the paying of the temple tax. Even though Jesus, as the true Son of the Father of the

temple, should be exempt, He paid it. This small act was another demonstration of His willing submission to the cross. The very establishment He was paying would eventually help bring about His death. Christ remained obedient to the way of the cross, but the Transfiguration reminds us of His true glory.

### Apply the Word

This Friday before Easter, as we reflect on the darkness of Christ's passion and death, recall also the promised glory of Christ's resurrection. The ancient hymn "O Wondrous Sight! O Vision Fair!" captures well the message of the Transfiguration. Locate the hymn and sing it today, or listen to it online.

### Pray with Us

Continuing to lift up our Public Safety personnel in prayer, please mention Jerry Zeldnerust, Brian Stoffer, Beau Pieniak, and Jacob Muscat during your time with God. Pray for their safety and security as they protect others.

## Kingdom Qualities

By the world's standards, the possession of material goods, the accumulation of degrees, and the prestige of recognition in our communities are the measurements of success. But what does Jesus say? In response to the question about "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (v. 1), Jesus used a small child as an object lesson. "Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 4). That is, contrary to the world's values, humility is a chief characteristic of kingdom people.

That emphasis on humility relates to sin in our life as well. Speaking hyperbolically, Jesus declared that it may be necessary to gouge out our eye and cut off our hand in order to avoid sin in ourselves or causing it in others. Kingdom obedience to Christ will require sacrifice of selfish attachments. But Jesus also illustrated the

value God places on repentance. Like the shepherd who rejoices over one lost sheep, so God rejoices over humility that brings repentance.

That foundation of humility becomes the basis, then, for our dealing with others who might sin against us. If we see a brother or sister in Christ sinning, our goal is not to score points or condemn; rather, Christ called us to humble and gentle correction. Stern discipline may be required of the church, but the goal is to win the erring member back to God.

Whoever takes  
the lowly position  
of this child is the  
greatest in the  
kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4

Likewise, Jesus' final parable teaches us the value of mercy in dealing with others. Only when we realize the great forgiveness God has already granted us will we be able to extend such mercy to others who have wronged us. True humility, Scripture teaches, leads to the proper treatment of sin in our own lives and in the lives of others.

### Apply the Word

Is there someone in your life who has wronged? Suppress the urge to retaliate or deal harshly with that person. Instead, spend time repenting of your own sins and praying for that person. Then, in the spirit of Matthew 18, seek out that person with humility and gentleness in order to restore your broken relationship and draw them back to God's forgiveness.

### Pray with Us

Lloyd Dodson, Moody's vice president of Human Resources, has been serving the Moody community for many years in his leadership role. Our prayer is that God will guide and sustain Lloyd in the years to come.

## Marriage and Money in the Kingdom

Ancient Jewish schools of thought agreed that Moses allowed for divorce, but disagreed about what conditions made divorce permissible. When asked to weigh in on the debate, however, Jesus focused less on justifying divorce and more on highlighting the purpose of marriage itself.

Marriage, said Jesus, was created by God as a permanent and exclusive union between a man and woman. God's purpose was a "one flesh" union between husband and wife, so "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (v. 6). God's original institution of marriage did not include

divorce, but through Moses, He allowed divorce "because your hearts were hard" (v. 8). Jesus' disciples thought this was a hard teaching, and Jesus reminded them that marriage was a gift that not everyone was called to. It takes God's grace to live out His intentions for marriage,

and faithful marriage can be one of the greatest Christian witnesses to our world (see Eph. 5:22–32).

A second challenge from today's reading confronts our understanding of obedience and eternal life. Like the man who approached Jesus, we often focus on law-keeping, rules, and regulations. And at first it seemed that this man was faithful and obedient to God's law. But then Jesus struck at the heart: internally this man was not loving toward his neighbor. His riches had become a wall between him and God. He had not given his whole self over to God. Jesus urged him: "Go,

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:26

sell your possessions and give to the poor. . . . Then come, follow me" (v. 21). Once again, the disciples found this a difficult teaching. Jesus admitted that it is impossible to save ourselves, but with God it is possible. True life is giving your whole self to Christ who saves.

### Apply the Word

Easter Sunday is the greatest Christian celebration of the life that Christ brings through His resurrection. As you focus today on Christ's ultimate defeat of sin and death, offer Him your heartfelt praise and thanksgiving that whatever your struggles in life—whether they be in marriage, money, or something else—Christ offers forgiveness and life. Give yourself to Him!

### Pray with Us

This Easter Sunday let's bow our heads before the sacrifice of God's Son on the cross and let's rejoice in His Resurrection. Let us thank God in prayer for His victory over sin and death and for making us the citizens of His kingdom.

## Priorities and Values in the Kingdom

"The early bird gets the worm." "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps." "Hard work is the best reward." For generations people have relied on these sayings to encourage a robust work ethic with the expectation of success.

While such principles of merit and reward may apply to human industry, today's reading teaches us that God's kingdom contains different values and priorities. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus demonstrated that the underlying principle of God's kingdom is not merit but generosity. The parable's real shock comes at

the end when those who worked all day received the same wages as those who worked only one hour. We can relate to the complaint: that's not fair! But Scripture teaches that the landowner (God) is not being unfair to the first workers; He is being generous to the others. And that's the point. God's kingdom is not about reward

and merit, but about His generosity extended to all who are invited.

Such generosity should produce humility, and Jesus highlighted that kingdom value in His response to the mother's request to have her sons honored in the kingdom. Greatness in God's kingdom does not follow the world's principles, because "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (vv. 26–27). Jesus even applied that principle to Himself, reminding His disciples that He had to endure the humility of the cross before the resurrection.

**Whoever wants  
to become great  
among you must be  
your servant, and  
whoever wants to  
be first must be  
your slave.**

Matthew 20:26-27

Finally, the kingdom value of simple trust was illustrated by two blind men. With great persistence and great confidence in Christ, they cried out: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" (vv. 30–31). Without self-promotion or self-justification, they modeled the basic, simple faith that Christ looks for in us all.

### Apply the Word

The blind men's prayer, sometimes called "The Jesus Prayer," is a great gospel summary of our ultimate need for mercy from our Lord and King. Use those short, powerful words today as your prayer throughout the day. In moments where you become tempted toward self-promotion, arrogance, or any other sin, simply lift up to God that humble prayer: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

### Pray with Us

Christine Gorz, VP of Marketing Communications, oversees several departments that are instrumental for connecting Moody's ministries with our friends across the globe. Pray that God would grant Christine strength, creativity, wisdom, and efficiency in her leadership role.

## Jerusalem and the Temple

Throughout the world, rulers have been welcomed into their capital with fanfare and parades. Arriving in triumphant procession, kings, rulers, and presidents have been hailed and celebrated as heroes and saviors.

In today's reading, the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into their city with similar fanfare and excited shouts of anticipation ("Hosanna!" means "Save!"). Unfortunately, the people missed the point. Jesus came riding humbly on a donkey, not a warhorse. He came to die, not to conquer the Roman enemy. And he came in judgment upon the corruption of the religious leadership, not to celebrate it. The theme of judgment pervades the chapter, along with a mounting tension and resistance from the Jewish leadership. Indignant about Jesus' miracles and warm welcome by the children, the priests and rulers confronted Jesus. Later they questioned His authority to perform His works.

Jesus responded with two actions and two parables of judgment. Seeing God's temple made into a "den of robbers" (v.13), Jesus displayed His righteous anger over the misuse of worship space. The Lord of the temple had arrived in judgment upon its corruption (see Mal. 3:1–2). The next day, Jesus' action with the fig tree stood as an enacted parable of judgment against the spiritually barren people of God—all leaves and no fruit.

The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Matthew 21:31

Both of Jesus' parables underscored this theme of judgment. Like the better of the two sons in the parable, tax collectors and prostitutes—who had

actually responded to God's call—were entering the kingdom of God ahead of the religious leadership. In the second parable, the tenants who mistreated the servants and son of the vineyard owner represented the priests and Pharisees. The end result of such resistance was clear: the kingdom of God would not belong to them.

### Apply the Word

Today's reading is both a warning and welcome. Resisting God's call separates us from His kingdom. But if we turn in repentance, no matter how great or many our sins, Jesus welcomes you into the kingdom. If you have not asked Jesus into your life as true King and Son of God, make today that day. He calls you to Himself.

### Pray with Us

Your prayers are important for Moody's radio and publishing ministries headed by Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media. Praise God for powerfully using Moody's media ministries to bring His Word to countless readers and listeners worldwide.

## Parables and Controversies

This past Sunday, many Christians feasted together in celebration of the resurrection of Christ. Imagine the implication if invited guests refused to join in that celebration! Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet was similar. With all the preparations made, the king sent word to join the feast. Those who were invited, however, refused to come and even mistreated the king's servants! Later, one guest tried to appear in his own clothes rather than the wedding garments typically provided by ancient banquet-givers. The meaning of the parable is clear: the kingdom of God is only for those who respond to God's call and do not try to gain entrance on their own terms.

An air of self-justification and reliance continued as Jesus encountered a series of questioners who tried to trap Him. First Jesus was asked about paying taxes. Either answer risked losing popular support: would He side with Rome, or be arrested as politically seditious?

Instead, Jesus pointed out that we give earthly things to earthly rulers, but we give ourselves (as bearers of God's image) to the true King.

Second, the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection) offered a hypothetical case to try to make belief in the resurrection look foolish. Jesus simply rebuked them as ignorant of both Scripture and the power of God. Finally, an "expert in the law" (v. 35) asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment. Jesus, however, pointed us away from rule-keeping and turned us toward love of God and neighbor as the centrality of God's law.

All the Law and  
the Prophets hang  
on these two  
commandments.

Matthew 22:40

### Apply the Word

Jesus summarized the entirety of God's law as love for God and love for neighbor, and the two go hand in hand. Whether by helping a neighbor in need, washing the dishes for your spouse, or giving your time to really listen to someone's problems, our love and care for others demonstrate our love for God. Determine today to love God by tangibly loving someone.

### Pray with Us

Every employee at Moody Publishers contributes to making it "The name you can trust." Today, our prayers go to God on behalf of Moody Publishers' Editorial department: James Vincent, Pamela Pugh, and Elizabeth Newenhuyse.

## Judgment on the Religion of the Pharisees

"She doesn't mince words"; "He cuts to the chase"; "She really gets to the point!" The English language has a number of idioms that refer to someone who says what they mean rather bluntly. We might say that Jesus didn't "mince words" when He spoke about the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Today's chapter is full of explicit judgment upon their faults, calling them hypocrites, blind, snakes, and a brood of vipers! Why?

These religious leaders occupied positions of authority but failing to practice what they preached. Their teachings were burdensome to others, but they themselves refused to help. They only sought recognition for themselves through places and titles of honor. Their goal was selfish glory, not true service.

Jesus pronounced seven woes upon these leaders. In their own religiosity they rejected God's kingdom and prevented others from entering.

People look at  
the outward  
appearance, but  
the Lord looks at  
the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

Their evangelistic efforts were entirely self-seeking. They created loopholes to safeguard their own integrity. They focused on minor religious observance while ignoring more important matters. They cared more about outward religious appearance than inward purity—looking externally clean while inwardly rotting away. They claimed to honor the prophets but were preparing to kill the Son of God. All of these indictments summarized Jesus' two repeated accusations: blindness and hypocrisy. They had missed the point about being God's people, and were merely acting a part rather than living into a relationship.

In some of the most tender words in the gospel, Jesus looked at the faithless people and declared, "I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (v. 37). Only such compassion would take the time to correct the faults of those He loved!

### Apply the Word

Jesus' words about the religious leadership of His day apply as a warning to us as well. We must be wary of a tendency toward outward religiosity without an inward heart-attitude that cares about people and God. May we guard against a religiosity that tries to make ourselves look better than others. Pray that God would reveal any of our blind spots and give us His vision for how we can please Him.

### Pray with Us

Today, please keep in your prayers Moody Publishers' Production employees: Ryan Lloyd, Carolyn McDaniel, and Randy Westerlund. They support the operation of all the teams at Moody Publishers and their faithful service is greatly appreciated.

## Teachings on the Coming End

Throughout history, countless men and women along with religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses and "Moonies" have offered bold and foolish predictions about the exact timing of Christ's return. So far, none of them have been right.

Scripture does promise the return of Christ, but Jesus Himself said that only the Father knows the day or hour. The point of Jesus' prophetic words was not to give us a specific date but to provide us a clear sense of warning and expectation about what is to come. So what does Jesus want us to know?

First, the overwhelming focus of today's reading is on Christ Himself. He will return personally and with "power and great glory" (v. 30). Unlike His first coming in lowliness and suffering, His Second Coming will usher in the final consummation of the kingdom of God, triumphantly announced by angels.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Matthew 24:42

Second, although His coming will be sudden (v. 27), there will also be warning signs. Wars, famines, earthquakes, the persecution of the faithful, and false prophets claiming to be the Messiah—all of these indicate that, even now, we live near the coming end. Jesus also linked the fall and desolation of Jerusalem with the coming end. This event foreshadows the theme of final judgment at Christ's return.

All of these images of prophetic warning call us to an important task: watchfulness. Jesus does not want us to be like those in the days of Noah, surprised by the sudden

flood. We should not be like a wicked servant, surprised by the return of his master. Christ's return is certain; the signs indicate its imminence. Now, let us heed Christ's words: "keep watch" (v. 42)!

### Apply the Word

Today's reading offers a sobering warning: are you ready for Christ's return? Scripture promises that when He comes He will set things right, but He will also demand an account of your life and your relationship with Him. If you have never turned to Christ in faith and given your life to Him, take that opportunity today, for no one knows when His return may come.

### Pray with Us

For Bruce Everhart, vice president of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, connection with our donors is a vital part of his ministry. He invites you to thank God for the Moody community whose financial and prayer support enables all our ministries.

## Parables on the Coming Judgment

In our relativist and pluralist world, it is popular to assert that a loving God would never condemn anyone to hell. Today's reading challenges that view, for while God certainly is love, we are reminded that He is just in judgment as well.

Christ offered three parables to underscore that theme of judgment at His return. In the parable of the ten virgins, we learn the importance of being personally prepared for Christ's return. It is possible to live our lives within the church, looking like one awaiting Christ, but in the end never be truly ready to receive

Christ when He comes. There is a time when Christ may shut the door and say, "I don't know you" (v. 12). So we are admonished: Take stock, and be prepared!

The second parable, about the servants entrusted with bags of gold, represents

the responsibilities God has given us in this life. One day, the master will return and demand an accounting of that life. We are called to exercise our faith for God's glory, not to hide it away. Just as muscles that are exercised grow stronger and do more, and atrophied muscles lose even the strength they had, so too an active faith grows stronger and an unexercised faith disappears.

Truly I tell you,  
whatever you did  
for one of the least  
of these brothers  
and sisters of mine,  
you did for me.

Matthew 25:40

Finally the parable of the sheep and goats emphasized Christ's final judgment upon all. But notice: the heart of judgment is our relationship with the King. When He returns, will He find us engaged in

serving ourselves, or will we be expressing our love for Him by serving those in need? In some mysterious way, Jesus identified Himself with "the least of these" (vv. 40, 45). How we treat them demonstrates our true relationship with the Christ who called us to love them.

### Apply the Word

If we take Jesus' final parable seriously, then our love for Him must be expressed tangibly in loving those in need. Do some research to find local Christian organizations that serve the poor in your community. Then make a point to volunteer your time this month to show your love for Christ in serving "the least of these." Serving them is serving Christ.

### Pray with Us

Today is Moody's annual Junior-Senior Banquet, a formal dinner that's part of our undergraduate students' graduation celebration. Please uphold in prayer this festive Chicago event, as well as its participants and organizers.

## Jesus Prepares for Death

Imagine Lois Lane and Lex Luther teaming up against Superman, or the Joker joining with Robin to take down Batman. As unlikely a pairing as these may seem, that is just what we see in today's reading as Jesus' enemies join forces with Judas, one of His closest followers. And with that partnership, Jesus' death drew near.

Notice, however, that sandwiched between the hatred and scheming against Jesus we are given a beautiful picture of love and devotion to Jesus. In a home in Bethany, a woman literally poured out her affection for Christ from a jar of expensive perfume. Despite the objections raised by His disciples, Jesus affirmed such acts of love for Him. Christians should always be concerned for the poor, but Jesus called generous acts of devotion to Him like this, "a beautiful thing" (v. 10).

Above all, that "beautiful thing" was a symbolic pointer to Jesus' coming

death, and Matthew's story moves us deeper in that direction. Joining His disciples together for Passover, Jesus knew He would be betrayed and took the occasion to explain the meaning of His imminent death. Every Jew celebrated Passover annually; it was the great reminder of God's redemption in the past and a powerful anticipation of God's future redemption.

Consider, then, how shocking to hear Jesus redefine the meaning of that meal around His own death. The typical Passover bread and cup of redemption became "my body" and

"my blood" (vv. 26, 28). That redemption promised by God in the Passover meal, Jesus now proclaimed as located in His own death on the cross. Christians have called it different things, but from the time of the Apostles until today we continue to celebrate this new meal of redemption in remembrance and participation in Christ's salvation.

**Take and eat;  
this is my body.**

Matthew 26:26

### Apply the Word

This Sunday or the next time you partake of the Lord's Supper, take time to prepare yourself by meditating on Jesus' words. In the breaking of His body and shedding of blood, Jesus provided "the forgiveness of sins" (v. 28). As you partake of Communion, give humble thanks to our God who not only brought us salvation but also gave us a tangible reminder of His redemptive work.

### Pray with Us

For the next two days, please support in prayer the faculty of our Pastoral Studies department. Today we pray that the Lord would encourage Kirk Baker, Michael Boyle, John Koessler, and Pamela MacRae as they prepare their students to serve Him in ministry.

## Jesus' Arrest and Trial Begins

When the movie *The Passion of the Christ* came out in 2004, the reactions were varied. Some hailed it as powerful and moving; some derided it as a “primitive and pornographic bloodbath”; and still others avoided it altogether. In today’s reading, we likewise see different reactions to the reality of Jesus’ coming passion and death. On the one hand, we observe several examples of human frailty and faithlessness. On the other hand, we see Christ’s own obedience to the will of the Father, despite the pain and suffering it would bring.

As Jesus’ arrest drew near, He gathered with His disciples in Gethsemane to pray. In their weakness, the disciples repeatedly failed to stay awake, let alone pray. Jesus, however, displayed perfect obedience in His prayer to the Father: “may your will be done” (v. 42). Christ’s natural aversion to His own death did not prevent Him from remaining obedient to the Father’s will.

With the arrival of the crowd to arrest Jesus, we again see human faithlessness in Judas’s betrayal and in disciples who took desperate measures to avoid Christ’s arrest—then deserted Christ and fled. Christ, however, remained obedient to the purpose of His coming and understood that “this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled” (v. 56). He displayed perfect obedience.

This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Matthew 26:56

Finally, at the trial itself, we see human faithlessness and cowardice again in the calling of false witnesses, the proceedings of an unjust Sanhedrin, and Peter’s repeated denial of Jesus. Yet in the face of abandonment, lies, and physical abuse, Christ remained silent, only affirming His identity as the Son of Man who will come on the clouds in judgment. Despite numerous opportunities to escape death, Jesus remained obedient to the will of the Father.

### Apply the Word

Today’s passage reminds us of two important truths: our sinful frailty and Christ’s perfect obedience. This Easter season, create time to reflect on your own personal failings before God; then thank God that your salvation is determined by Christ’s faithfulness, not yours. Offer heartfelt gratitude that Christ did not flinch in the face of death but remained true to His sacrificial, saving purpose.

### Pray with Us

As we continue to focus our prayers on the Pastoral Studies faculty, please add Winfred Neely, Laurie Norris, and William Torgesen to your list. May the Lord’s love strengthen them and His Spirit guide them in their ministry to the students!

## The Crucifixion

When ancient Romans took control of Judea, the Jewish Sanhedrin was stripped of its legal right to execute convicted people. If the Jewish leaders wanted someone dead, they needed the help of Roman authorities.

Today's passage demonstrates what Roman collaboration looked like. The chief priests and elders enacted their plan by handing Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor. From there, the wheels were set in motion. Notice, however, the one man who expressed remorse: Judas. Struck with the horror and despair of what he had done, Judas tried to return the money and then hanged himself. Yet even in the midst of this chaos and injustice, Scripture reminds us that God is still in control; His word was being fulfilled.

As the scenes unfold, we are met with a tragic picture of irony. The true King

will be mocked, beaten, and killed like a common criminal. Standing before Pilate, Jesus gave silent witness to his place as "king of the Jews" (v. 11). Then, despite the pleas of Pilate's wife and Pilate's own failed maneuvering, Jesus was sentenced to death on a cross. The silent, peaceful, and true King would die on a cross built for the seditious prisoner Barabbas.

This is Jesus, the  
King of the Jews.

Matthew 27:37

Having been handed over, the soldiers stripped Jesus naked, then mocked, beat, and spat upon Him. Kneeling before Him and hailing Him in mockery as "king of the Jews" (v.

29), the soldiers missed what was right in front of them. Then once on the cross, Christ hung dying between two rebels as passersby continued to hurl insults at Him. And again, the great irony was that the truth about Christ stood staring them in the face on their mocking placard: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (v. 37). Behold what love our King had for us!

### Apply the Word

In what ways do you, like those in today's passage, treat Jesus with cruelty and selfishness rather than with honor, respect, and love? Ask God to help you identify two areas in your life which need given over to Him. As His Spirit brings things to your mind, commit to live out your love and reverence for the King who would die for you.

### Pray with Us

Moody endeavors to equip our students for ministry across the globe, cultures, and generations. Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, requests your prayers for the development of Moody's Education branch in our changing world.

## Death, Resurrection, and Final Instructions

In 1789 Benjamin Franklin famously quipped: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." In Matthew 22, Jesus paid His taxes. Now in the final pages of the Gospel, it seems that even death would conquer Christ.

Hung on a Roman cross like a criminal, Jesus endured the pain, humiliation, and apparent forsakenness of crucifixion. Here was the great Immanuel, born of a virgin to save God's people from their sins, now dead. The earth itself shuddered in response to humanity's cruelty against its Maker: temple curtains tore, "the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open" (27:51). For a moment, it seemed that death had defeated even Christ.

Think of the deep grief Christ's followers must have felt as they took down His body, prepared it for burial, and placed it in the tomb. But thankfully

the story did not end there. Despite the Jewish leadership's grasping attempts to secure the tomb, Christ's ultimate power over death could not be stopped. With another earthquake and the brilliant appearance of the angel of the Lord, the message is proclaimed to those humble, faithful women: "He has risen!" (28:6). Death had no hold over Life itself.

**Go and make  
disciples of all  
nations . . . And  
surely I am with  
you always.**

Matthew 28:19–20

Remarkably, not all believed. Scripture tells us that some doubted the message. Others, like the chief priests and elders, remained opposed to Christ to the very end, inventing stories to deny the truth. Nevertheless, the truth could not be hidden. For not only had Christ conquered sin and death, He left His followers with a simple command: Go into the world and proclaim the resurrection to all. And just as Christ's birth proclaimed Him as "God with us" (Matt. 1:23), so now Christ's final word promised His everlasting presence: "I am with you always" (28:20).

### Apply the Word

This month's drama of redemption, from cradle to cross, tells how this Jewish Messiah's death and resurrection has brought salvation to the whole world. As His follower you are called to proclaim that message. Whom do you know—in your family, at work, in your neighborhood—who needs to hear the greatest news ever told? Go forth, knowing that Christ is with you.

### Pray with Us

Concluding our study of the Gospel of Matthew this month, let us ask God to help us by His Spirit to follow steadfastly His kingdom principles and to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt.6:33).

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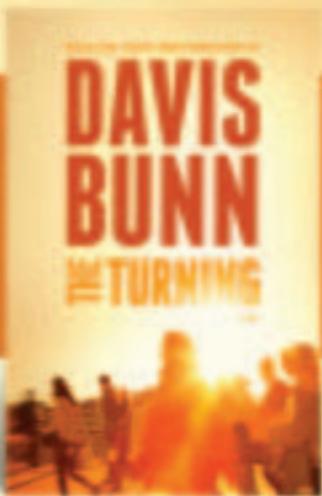


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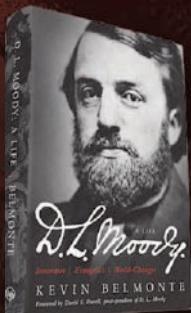
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