

9th Lesson from the Synoptic Gospels

The Rich and Hidden Meaning behind Jesus' Words, Sayings and Parables in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 3:11 I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire

This is the statement of John the Baptist about Jesus Christ's baptism by the Holy Spirit. After Jesus had risen from the dead, He instructed His apostles to wait for the Promise of the Father which you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5). This promise was first fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and the baptism of the Spirit joined every believer to the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). But what about the baptism with fire? The baptism of fire refers to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3).

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill

During Jesus' time, religious leaders had turned the laws into a confusing mass of rules. When Jesus talked about a new way to understand God's law, he was actually trying to bring people back to its original purpose. He did not speak against the law itself but against the abuses of the law. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill the Law. Until John the Baptist, The Law and the prophets were relevant but in Jesus, they were fulfilled. Jesus did not come to this earth as an opponent to the law. He came to fulfill it. How? He revered it, loved it, obeyed it, and brought it to fruition. He fulfilled the law's prophetic utterances regarding Himself (Luke 24:44). Jesus fulfilled the law. John 1:17 says, "while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"

Are we subject to the OT laws if Jesus did not come to abolish the laws namely the ceremonial law related to worship, the civil law related to daily living and the moral law referred to the 10 commandments? The Pharisees were scrupulous in following the OT laws outwardly and forcing the people to follow the same without allowing God to change their hearts. They looked pious but they were far from the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:21-22 But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna

Anger is a terrible sin because it violates God's commandment to love. Anger can brood bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion, leading to violence and emotional hurt and increased mental stress and spiritual damage. What is *Raqa*? The word *raqa* generally is

thought to be of Hebrew origin meaning “empty.” It is understood by the scholars that this word is an insult telling someone that he/she is *empty-headed or foolish*. Jesus makes it clear that if someone uses this word *Raqa*, he is answerable to the Sanhedrin because of the violation of this law. In Greek, this word (μωρός-moros) means “foolish”. This insult seems to be a violation of the law leading to Gehenna or hell.

Matthew 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.

The word *Gehenna* is the Greek word, meaning “Valley, south of Jerusalem was where some of the ancient Israelites “passed children through the fire” (sacrificed their children) to the Canaanite god Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:2–6). Gehenna continued to be an unclean place used for burning trash from the city of Jerusalem. Jesus used Gehenna as an illustration of hell: a place of eternal torment and constant uncleanness, where the fires never ceased burning and the worms never stopped crawling (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:47–48).

Matthew 7:6 Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces

Swine were unclean animals according to God’s law (Deuteronomy 14:8). Anyone who touched an unclean animal became ceremonially unclean and could not go to the temple to worship until the uncleanness was removed. Jesus says that we should not entrust holy things to unholy or unclean people. It is futile to try to teach holy concepts to people who don’t want to listen and will only tear apart what we say. We should not stop giving God’s word to unbelievers but we should be wise and discerning in what we teach to whom, so that we will not be wasting our time.

Matthew 8:22 Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”

Here Jesus does not speak about the people who are dead physically. How can dead people bury other dead people? That makes no sense. Instead He was speaking of those who were spiritually dead—those who were alive physically but dead toward God in their souls. Jesus’ words to this man might sound harsh to us but there is something deeper than what they appear. When someone in Jesus’ day said they wanted to go bury their father, it didn’t necessarily mean he was already dead. Instead they really were saying that they wanted to stay with their father until he died. Because it was the duty of the oldest son to bury the father, to be near the father in order to obtain an inheritance, or to remain near the body of his father for up to one year to rebury the bones, a practice of some Jews at the time. In any event, Jesus’ answer makes clear that this request would have involved putting tradition or the disciple’s own desires ahead of serving Jesus. This man was simply looking for an excuse to avoid becoming Jesus’ disciple. What keeps us from following Jesus? “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Matthew 9:14-17 Then the disciples of John approached him and said, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast [much], but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one

patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.

It is a very tricky and difficult passage to understand the rich meaning. The Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting for the arrival of Messiah. The twice-weekly fast was a tradition adopted by the legalistic Pharisees at the time, even though the Mosaic Law prescribed only one fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29,31). Some people came to Jesus and asked Him why His disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and those of John’s disciples who had remained loyal to the Pharisaic traditions. Jesus’ response is given in three short parables.

The first one is a parable of a bridegroom with his groomsmen at a wedding feast. Jesus’ point is that fasting during the wedding feast is pointless. In this story Jesus is the Bridegroom, and while He is present in this world, it is a time of celebration because He is the fulfillment of their Messianic prophecies. Jesus Himself said that He came to fulfill the law. Fasting while Jesus was present is like fasting and being mournful during a wedding celebration in which the groom is present. Wedding is a time of celebration and not a time to mourn.

The other two parables make the same point. The first one says you don’t put a new patch on an old garment, and the second says you don’t put new wine into an old wineskin. In the first parable, if you put a new patch on an old garment, when the new patch shrinks due to washing, it will tear away from the older garment, making the tear worse. Similarly, new wine needs a new wineskin because as the new wine expands during the fermentation process, it stretches the wineskin. An old wineskin will burst under the pressure of new wine.

These two parables illustrate the fact that we can’t mix old religious rituals with new faith in Jesus. Jesus’ disciples were not fasting along with the Pharisees and John’s disciples because they were now under the new covenant of grace and faith in Christ and anymore under the OT law. As mentioned earlier, Jesus fulfilled the law; therefore, there is no longer any need to continue with the old rituals. Jesus cannot be added to a works-based religion. (Read Ecclesiastes 3 about times and seasons)

Matthew 10:1 The list of the 12 apostles and their whereabouts

Name	Other names	Native place	Occupation	Symbol
Simon	Peter, Cephas	Bethsaida	Fisherman	keys
Andrew	-----	Bethsaida	Fisherman	Cross shaped *
James	Boanerges	Bethsaida	Fisherman	Pilgrim’s staff
John	Boanerges	Bethsaida	Fisherman	Chalice with serpent
James	Son of Alphaeus	-----	-----	Carpenter’s saw

Jude	Thaddeus, Lebbaeus	-----	-----	Carpenter's square
Philip	-----	Bethsaida	-----	Two loaves
Bartholomew	Nathanael	Cana, Galilee	-----	Knife on book
Matthew	Levi	Capernaum	Tax collector	Money bags
Thomas	Didymus	Galilee	-----	Spear and square
Simon	Zealot	Galilee	-----	Fish on Hook
Judas	Iscaiot	Kerioth Judaeu	-----	Yellow shield

Mathias was chosen in Jerusalem in the place of Judas Iscaiot Acts 1: 26. His symbol was a book and axe

Matthew 10: 10. "Don't go among the gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans"

Is Jesus biased and prejudiced? Is he partial? Does he show favoritism? NO. The command of Jesus to his 12 disciples to stay away from gentiles and Samaritans in the beginning of his ministry was not because He was trying to exclude others. After all, it was Jesus Himself who first preached to the Samaritans, beginning with the woman at the well and then all those who lived in the area (John 4:4-42). Jesus even healed the servants and children of Gentiles (Matthew 8:5-13 - centurion's servant; Matthew 15:21-28 - Canaanite woman's daughter). To top it all off, in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commanded them to make disciples "of all nations", and He told them in Acts 1:7-8, that they would be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."

What we must understand is that the Chosen people of God need to receive the first message because they were the ones who were waiting for the messiah. They were the ones who were promised the messiah. They knew the OT prophecies about the Messiah. Besides the above reasons, the disciples were absolutely unequipped and unprepared to preach to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. They were completely unfamiliar with both people groups and had nothing in common with them. They had everything in common only with their fellow Israelites. Jesus saw the children of Israel the same way a shepherd sees his sheep who have wandered off. As it was for the disciples in the beginning, so it is for us today. When we first become a child of God it is to our family, our friends, our neighbors and our coworkers that we go and tell the exciting news of what has happened to us. charity begins at home

Matthew 10:14 Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words – go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet

In Biblical times, when leaving Gentile cities, pious Jews often shook the dust from their feet to show their separation from Gentile practices. The Jews thought the land of Israel was so peculiarly holy, that when they came home from any heathen country, they stopped at the borders and shook or wiped off the dust of it from their feet, that the holy land might not be

polluted with it. Here in this passage, Jesus reflects the cultural mindset of the Jewish people against the rebellious Jews. According to Jesus, the Jews who had rejected the gospel were holy no longer, but were on a level with heathen and idolaters. Shaking the dust off one's feet conveys the same idea as our modern phrase "I wash my hands of it."

Shaking the dust off the feet is a symbolic indication that one has done all that can be done in a situation and therefore carries no further responsibility for it. In the scriptural examples, Jesus was telling His disciples that they were to preach the gospel to everyone. Where they were received with joy, they should stay and teach. But where their message was rejected, they had no further responsibility. They were free to walk away with a clear conscience, knowing they had done all they could do. Shaking the dust off their feet was, in effect, saying that those who rejected God's truth would not be allowed to hinder the furtherance of the gospel. There was a spiritual significance to a disciple of Jesus shaking the dust off his feet. It was a statement of finality about people who had been given the truth and who had rejected it. On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas put Jesus' words into practice. They had been preaching in Pisidian Antioch, but some of the Jewish leaders of that city stirred up persecution against the missionaries and had them expelled from the region. "So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium" ([Acts 13:51](#)).

Matthew 10: 16 So be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves

It is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things. Jesus was using similes to instruct His disciples in how to behave in their ministry. Just before He tells them to be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves, He warns them that they were being sent out "like sheep among wolves." The time of the apostles was hostile to the believers. Wolves were intentional to create harm to the sheep. Jesus taught His followers that, to be Christlike in a godless world, they must combine the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.

Character of snake and dove: The serpent was "subtle" or "crafty" or "shrewd" in Genesis 3:1. The dove, on the other hand, was thought of as innocent and harmless—doves were listed among the "clean animals" and were used for sacrifices ([Leviticus 14:22](#)). To this very day, doves are used as symbols of peace, and snakes are thought of as "sneaky." The disciples have to model the shrewdness of the serpent and purity and innocence of the dove. When they were asked to take the gospel to a hostile world, they must be shrewd (avoiding the snares set for them) and be innocent (serving the Lord blamelessly). Jesus is not suggesting that we stoop to deception but that we should model some of the serpent's famous shrewdness in a positive way. Wisdom does not equal dishonesty and innocence does not equal gullibility.

Shrewd and Simple Jesus: Jesus was known as a gentle, meek and humble person as his essence but when the occasion demanded it, He took whip in hand and chased the moneychangers out of the temple ([Jn 2:15](#)). In His more typical moments, Jesus showed that He was as shrewd as a serpent in the way He taught. He knew enough to discern the differences in His audiences (a critical skill), He used the story-telling technique to both feed and weed ([Matt 13:10-13](#)), and He refused to be caught in the many traps that His enemies laid for Him ([Mark 8:11; 10:2; 12:13](#)).

Jesus showed that He was as simple and harmless as a dove in every circumstance. He lived a pure and holy life ([Hebrews 4:15](#)), He acted in compassion ([Matt 9:36](#)), Three times, Pilate judged Jesus to be an innocent man ([John 18:38; 19:4, 6](#)). The apostle Paul also modeled the

“shrewd as serpents, simple as doves” technique. Paul lived in dove-like innocence in good conscience before God ([Acts 23:1](#)). But Paul also displayed serpent-like shrewdness when he needed it. He knew his legal rights and used the legal system to his advantage ([Acts 16:37](#); [22:25](#); [25:11](#)). Successful Christian living requires that we strike the optimal balance between the dove and the serpent. Peter admonishes us, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us

Matthew 10:34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace *but the sword*

Sword that Jesus speaks here is not a physical instrument. Jesus speaks of sword figuratively. What is this sword? The sword is the word of God (Luke 12:49-52/Rev 4:12). Conflicts and disagreement will arise between those who choose to follow Christ and these who don't. Yet we can look forward to the day when all conflict will be resolved. When we read and live the word of God, we will be different from others in living our christian life because the word of God judges the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. For some God loving people, we may be a blessing and for others, we may look like challengers.

Matthew 11:11 Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he

In a discourse about John the Baptist, Jesus honored him with the above words. John was truly a humble prophet in the NT. He certainly did not see himself as “great”. He did not see himself as worthy enough to baptize Jesus or even to carry His sandals (Matthew 3:13-14). The “greatness” that Jesus refers to concerning John has to do with John's unique position in history and not any personal merit. In fact, immediately after stating that John is the greatest “among those born of women,” Jesus says, “Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”. Another reason why Jesus called John the Baptist the “greatest” was that John held the honor of being chosen by God as the precursor of the Messiah. John's mission was to personally prepare the world for Christ's arrival. John's ministry was predicted in [Isaiah 40:3](#) and [Malachi 3:1](#). After Jesus came, John introduced Him to the world as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world ([John 1:35-36](#)). John was the herald who introduced to the world the Hero of all history. It was this introduction that accredited Jesus before the Jewish crowds and leaders, some of whom believed on Jesus, and many of whom did not.

John was also the “greatest” in that he preached with the power of Elijah ([Luke 1:17](#); [3:7-18](#)). John shared many qualities with [Elijah](#), including calling a nation to repentance, rebuking the king, and persevering in the face of public misunderstanding and malicious persecution ([Matthew 11:16-18](#); [Mark 6:14-19](#)).

John was also the “greatest” because he was the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets and stood as the first prophet in the NT. He was the last in the long line of prophets who predicted Christ, yet he was the only one who could actually see Christ in the flesh. Moses, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets had pointed to a far-distant personage they could see only faintly. John pointed at an actual human being who stood directly in front of him. No other prophet had that privilege.

The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he: Here Jesus is not making a point about John but he makes a point about the significance of being included in the Kingdom of heaven. The success or failure, greatness or smallness of our lives from an earthly view has exactly no bearing on our status in the Kingdom. The point about John the Baptist was simply that although he played a very special role in Jesus' life, this did not make him special in the Kingdom because that placement is dependent on his relationship with the redeemer. Our honor, power and position on earth is utterly irrelevant when it comes to our membership in the Kingdom.

Matthew 12:8 *The son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*

Sabbath in the Bible is usually a day of rest and worship because we read in the book of Genesis "God created the heavens and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day, which he thus confers with special status. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in Creation(Gen 2:3). In Exodus 20:8 we read "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy". It was a very important day for the Jews to keep the day of Sabbath very holy. In their zeal for God's law, they became over enthusiastic and forgot the real motif of this important day. They gave extreme importance to God and they showed complete negligence to the human beings. But Jesus kept both love for God and love for human beings. The Gospels record seven incidents in which Jesus healed people on the Sabbath. They knew that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath law. Still they invited Jesus to dinner on the Sabbath. Why? Because they wanted to catch Jesus and accuse him of breaking the Sabbath law in order to discredit his name and fame. However their motif did not prevent Jesus from curing the man. He cured the man and defended his healing act on the Sabbath. Jesus exposed the duplicity and selfishness of the Pharisees by an intelligent argument and they could not open their mouth.

Jesus says that He is the Lord (Master) of the Sabbath. What does that mean? It means that He is the one who has authority over the Sabbath! Sabbath is His day. He is the Creator; He rested on the seventh day. He can do as He wishes with the Sabbath. So the accusation of the Pharisees that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath law is not at all legitimate. Sure, He was breaking the Sabbath laws, but He had authority to do so. He is the Master, the Lord of the Sabbath. The humans cannot complain about what the Creator is doing. While the claims of ritual sacrifice are important to God, mercy and kindness to human need are even more important. The Lord does not desire our suffering. He wants nothing from us but love. He desires that we show Him love. We do this best when we love one another.

Matthew 12:22-30 *Beelzebul Vs Finger of God*

In the bible Evil is presented as a very active force with different names like 'Satan', 'Beelzebul - the 'prince of demons', the 'Devil', the 'Deceiver', the 'Father of Lies', and 'Lucifer', the fallen angel. Jesus was aware of their harmful presence and that is why in Nazareth synagogue, he declared in his mission manifesto that he came to overthrow the power of Satan and release the oppressed. We note that his numerous exorcisms brought freedom to many who were troubled and oppressed by the works of evil spirits. He himself encountered personal opposition and

battle with Satan when he was put to the test in the wilderness just before his public ministry but He overcame the Evil One.

Jesus did exorcism and healings and many people came to him. The Jewish leaders reacted vehemently to his healings and exorcisms and opposed him with malicious slander. They assumed that he was in connection with Satan to do exorcism. They attributed his healing power to Satan rather than to God. Jesus ashamed and exposed their double mindedness with two arguments. His first argument is that during Jesus' time, there were many exorcists in Palestine. And so, he caught them sharply asking, how is it that you accept your own exorcists while you refuse to accept me? If you condemn me, you must condemn them too? Secondly Jesus very strongly asserted his power and authority to cast out demons as an act of God and not human. To prove this point, he refers to the 'finger of God?

What is this finger of God reference? We read in the book of Exodus chapter 8 how Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh and his magicians with the mighty hand of God by inflicting plagues on the Egyptians. When the Egyptian magicians could not face Moses and Aaron' power, they said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God". But Pharaoh , instead of surrendering to the God of Israel, he hardened his heart. This is exactly the same with some people of Jesus' time who were very hard in their heart, spiritually deaf and blind. They did not want to see Jesus as the son of God and refused to believe in his power of healing and exorcism.

Matthew 12:31 I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, *but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.*

What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why it is an unforgivable sin? How do we understand the inherent meaning of this verse? Well, to answer this, we need to understand what the Holy Spirit does. Once we do that, we'll see why His function is so crucial that blasphemy against Him is so serious a sin that it cannot be forgiven. The Holy Spirit does three things: (1) He teaches us the things we need to know for our salvation (John 14:26). (2) The Spirit guides us into all truth (John 16:13). (3) The mission of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin (John 16:7, 8). It is a logical conclusion that as long as we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, to guide us, and to convict us, we could never be guilty of committing the unpardonable sin. But if we refuse to acknowledge these three operations of the Spirit in our life, then we become guilty of eternal punishment. Blasphemy is nothing but reducing the power of God to devil.

Difference between regular sins and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: As human beings we fall due to our sinful tendencies and when we ask for his mercy, he forgives us and restores us. But if one rejects Jesus and his divinity and if one attributes Jesus' divine power to a satanic force and refuses to accept him as God due to arrogance, pride, stubbornness and hardheartedness, then that person is in great danger. He blasphemes against the Holy Spirit who is the revealer of eternal truths about Jesus. He ventures to fight with God. He comes to a point where he or she can no longer recognize God and his mercy. Although God does not want anyone to perish, he/she consciously chooses to perish with their own arrogance and stubbornness. To such a person, God stands helpless and nothing can save them. He/she loses the hope of God as they have lost all the chances and opportunities of God to deliver them from eternal damnation. God cannot operate in their life since they are not willing to co operate with him. In short the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is any sin that a person doesn't want to give up, does not confess, and does not ask for forgiveness and thus He chooses spiritual death willingly and consciously.

Two notorious examples of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are the king Pharaoh and the religious leaders of Jesus' times(Pharisees, Sadducees and the scribes). King Pharaoh saw the power of God of Israel yet unwilling to liberate the people of God. Likewise the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees knew very well that Jesus was the promised messiah sent by the father. They heard his powerful and authoritative words and saw his healing and miracles but still they attributed his power to the work of the devil instead of to God. Thus they committed sin against the Holy Spirit by their refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Because if they accept Jesus then they have to change their life and they were not willing for that.

Matthew 15:5 But you say, 'Whoever says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is dedicated to God.'

One of the 10 commandments is to honor the parents. It is the son's responsibility to care for their parents as they got older just as the parents cared for them when he was younger. If someone says to his parents, "Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you." Thus they don't need to honor their parents. If someone says that he could not provide for them because he had dedicated their money all to God and had no more left to give to them. Initially, that sounds noble until you look deeper to see what was really going on. In saying "we give all our money to God," what they were really doing is keeping the money for themselves. They would save all their money and say to themselves, "I am keeping all of this in case God ever asks me to give it." They had no intention of giving that money to God. It was all lip service designed to get them out of a responsibility that they had while at the same time trying to make themselves look more spiritual.

Mt 15:24 I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel

In Jeremiah 50:6, God calls Israel **His people and "lost sheep."** The Messiah, spoken of throughout the Old Testament, was seen as the one who would gather these "lost sheep" (Ezekiel 34:23-24; Micah 5:4-5). When Jesus presented Himself as a shepherd to Israel, He was claiming to be the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy (Mark 6:34, 14:27; John 10:11-16; see also Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; and Revelation 7:17).

Jesus' words to the Canaanite woman also show an awareness of Israel's place in God's plan of salvation. Here Jesus does not reject the Gentiles because moments later, He heals the woman's daughter (Matthew 15:28). It is a fulfillment of prophecy, a setting of priorities, and a test of the woman's faith. Every ministry must have priorities, and Christ's ministry was no exception. When Jesus sent His disciples to preach the good news of the kingdom, He expressly told them, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). Jesus did not forbid their preaching to all Gentiles; He did, however, narrow their focus to the areas which should be most receptive – those who knew the Law and were expecting the Messiah. Paul, in his missionary journeys, followed the same priority of preaching to the Jews first (Romans 1:16). Finally, Jesus healed her daughter. This healing of a Gentile is a beautiful picture of Christ's ministry to the whole world – the Jewish Messiah is also the Savior of all who will believe (Matthew 28:19; John 10:16; Acts 10:34-36; Revelation 5:9).

Matthew 16:11 Beware of *the Leaven* of the Pharisees and Sadducees

During the time of Jesus, there were certain groups: The Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees who held positions of authority and power over the people. Other groups were the Sanhedrin, the scribes, and the lawyers. Each of these groups held power in either religious or political matters. The Herodians held political power, and most scholars believe that they were a political party that supported the Roman Empire. Although they had differences among themselves, they were united in opposing Jesus. Herod himself wanted Jesus dead (Luke 13:31) and the Pharisees had already hatched plots against Him (John 11:53), so they joined efforts to achieve their common goal.

The first appearance of the Herodians in Scripture is Mark 3:6, "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." Jesus had been doing miracles, which caused some of the people to believe in Him for salvation, and that threatened the power and position of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. Jesus regarded the two groups as in unity against Him and warned His followers against them. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (Mark 8:15). Leaven in this context is their false teaching to reject Jesus as the Messiah and their hypocrisy.

Matthew 19:24 It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

We need little geographical and sociological background to understand this expression. The camel was regarded as the largest animal in Palestine. The "eye of the needle" describes both literally and figuratively the narrow and low gate of the city walls. This narrow and low gate was used by travelers when the larger public gate was locked at night. So normal sized people had to "lower" themselves to enter that gate. So a camel would literally have to kneel and crawl through it. Unless we kneel before the Lord, crawl through his path, acknowledge our total need and dependence on him, we will not find true peace, security, and happiness. Jesus is very cautious about wealth because wealth can create false security and independence. Wealth can also lead us into hurtful desires and selfishness.

Matthew 19:30 / 20:16 The last will be first and the first will be last.

This phrase comes from the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The most direct interpretation is that all believers, no matter how long or how hard they work during this lifetime, will receive the same basic reward: eternal life. The ultimate reward of eternal life will be given to all equally, on the basis of God's grace in Christ Jesus. The thief along with crucified Jesus got first place in the heaven. There are several ways in which "the first will be last and the last first" holds true. There are some who were first to follow Christ in time yet became the last or lost in the kingdom - Judas Iscariot was one of the first disciples and was honored to be the treasurer of the group, yet his greed led to his undoing. Paul was the last of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:8-9) yet the one who worked the hardest (2 Corinthians 11:23).

The chosen people of Israel were chosen first yet not first in the kingdom. The gentiles had equal access to the kingdom of heaven like that of the Jews. The Jews, who had labored long under the Old Covenant, were jealous of the grace extended to the Gentile "newcomers" (Romans 11:11). Jesus told the Pharisees that the sinners they despised were being saved ahead

of them: “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31–32).

What Jesus is teaching in Matthew 19:30 is this: there will be many surprises in heaven. Heaven’s value system is far different from earth’s value system. Those who are esteemed and respected in this world (like the rich young ruler) may be frowned upon by God. The opposite is also true: those who are despised and rejected in this world (like the disciples) may, in fact, be rewarded by God. Don’t get caught up in the world’s way of ranking things; it’s too prone to error. Those who are first in the opinion of others (or first in their own opinion!) may be surprised to learn, on Judgment Day, they are last in God’s opinion.

Matthew 22:1-14 The parable of the wedding feast and the man without wedding garment:

It was customary for wedding guests to be given garments to wear to the banquet. It was unthinkable to refuse to wear these garments. That would insult the host who could only assume that the guest was arrogant and thought he did not need these garments or he did not want to take part in the wedding celebration. The wedding clothes picture the righteousness needed to enter God’s kingdom. Christ has provided this garment of righteousness for everyone but each person must choose to put it on in order to enter his kingdom (eternal life). There is an open invitation to all but the invitees are expected to respect the invitation by wearing a proper dress code (righteousness).

Matthew 25:14-30: For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away

It is a responsible stewardship. We have been granted the abundant grace of God (Ephesians 1:3–10), the Word of God, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6). “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

God gives us resources such as finances and time, talents such as culinary skills or musical ability, and spiritual gifts such as encouragement or teaching. We should ask God for wisdom on how to use those resources and commit ourselves to expending them according to His will so that He may be glorified. In regards to spiritual gifts, Paul said, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:6–8). This is simply responsible stewardship. We have been given much, and God desires us to use what He has given to further His Kingdom and proclaim His glory. It’s what we were created to do. “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

Matthew 25: 31-46 Separation of the sheep from the goats

What is the meaning of this metaphor? Sheep (rightists) and Goats (leftists). We are more familiar with sheep than goats. Christ is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep (John 10:11, 14). We know many of the traits of sheep through studies into Psalm 23 and John 10. Ezekiel 34 gives a clear picture of the shepherd. A sheep follows its Shepherd, peacefully moving forward

with the flock. He is content to be led because he has faith in Him. A sheep responds to his Shepherd's voice and goes where He directs.

On the other hand, a goat follows only its own lead, creating disunity when he comes in contact with others in the flock. Because of his independent nature, he often finds himself in contention with the Shepherd for leadership of the flock, leading some astray. A goat often eats things sheep would avoid because they have no value and cause sickness. Goat is shown negatively in the Bible. In Zechariah 10:3 He says He will punish the goats. In Genesis, Jacob uses goatskins to trick Isaac. Then Jacob uses goats to trick his uncle Laban. Folklores say that Goats are capricious. They are impulsive and unpredictable, devious, divisive and contrary. They hate to be confined. Fences that will handle sheep, cattle, and horses will not hold goats. Goats are not very good followers. They are not sociable and tend to resist. it is difficult to keep them in a group and difficult to lead. They are not evil but some of their traits could be deadly and non spiritual.

Matthew 27:50-51 "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"

During the lifetime of Jesus, the holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. The temple was the place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed faithfully. Hebrews 9:1-9 tells us that in the temple a veil separated the Holy of Holies (God's presence) from the rest of the temple where men dwelt. This means that man was separated from God by sin and only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this veil once each year (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7) to enter into God's presence for all of Israel and make atonement for their sins (Leviticus 16). So, what is the significance of this veil for us today? The tearing of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death dramatically symbolized that His sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood, was a sufficient atonement for sins. It signified that now the way into the Holy of Holies was open for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile.

The veil in the temple was a constant reminder that sin renders humanity unfit for the presence of God. Jesus Christ, through His death, has removed the barriers between God and man, and now we may approach Him with confidence and boldness (Hebrews 4:14-16).