

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*Lesson 16 – Study Questions*

*Matthew 23:1-39; 24:1-44*

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**Review:** *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

**NOTE:** As this chapter begins, Jesus is teaching in the temple. He severely criticizes the scribes and Pharisees and demonstrates the sorrow and compassion he feels toward the ordinary mass of the people, who have been ill-used, like sheep without a shepherd. He identifies their principal vices and corrupt practices, confronts them and speaks his famous “woes” (which in effect are the reverse of the beatitudes he preached in chapter 5); and he weeps over Jerusalem, so grieved is he by the evils into which the blind pride and hardheartedness of the scribes and Pharisees have misled the people. *Navarre Bible*

### DAY ONE

Read Matthew 23:1-12

**NOTE:** The mention of the “chair of Moses” is a reference to the teaching authority possessed by the scribes and Pharisees, despite their hypocrisy. The use of the phrase scribes and Pharisees is a set formula in Matthew, occurring nine times. For Matthew, the scribes and Pharisees equal the official representatives of Jewish theology and piety, the Jewish magisterium which regrouped and led Judaism after A.D. 70. *Meier*

1. Jesus is not condemning the law (the “chair” or seat of Moses); rather, how the scribes and Pharisees are interpreting it and their behavior, especially their hypocrisy, pride, and ostentatiousness. Read and record Galatians 6:3.

2. Jesus begins severely criticizing the scribes and Pharisees for not practicing what they preach and encouraging his listeners to follow the path of service and humility. He stresses that the word of God is true; it is their interpretation that is false. From verses 1-7, choose and record one of these short verses in which Jesus describes the self-serving evils of the Pharisees.

3. From verses 8-12 select one of the verses in which Jesus counsels his followers as to what they should do to live according to God’s intentions and comment on why it is applicable in today’s world.

4. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites” again and again, as he has done in earlier chapters. Why is hypocrisy often so difficult to recognize?

5. CONNECTION: In the Church, as well as in other aspects of our life, we have leaders. There will always be good ones and unfortunately, there will sometimes be bad ones. Describe someone with whom you have had a personal experience and who you think is a true servant leader.

Read Galatians 6:9-10 and pray today for good leaders in our Church and in our world.

## **DAY TWO**

**Read Matthew 23:13-39**

6. Jesus begins the pronouncement of the seven woes by saying, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.” (verse 13) See if you can find and record the biblical definition of “woe.”

7. In verses 13-36, Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees with a number of derogatory titles, among them, “blind guides, blind fools, blind ones, blind Pharisees,” indicating their spiritual blindness. (*Cavins and Christmyer*) What does spiritual blindness mean to you?

**NOTE:** In today’s lesson Matthew shows us a Jesus who harshly reviles his enemies while still counseling and teaching his disciples and listeners. In Jesus’ culture, “disagreements were often expressed in terms that we find harsh today. Matthew was not only recounting the conflicts at the time of Jesus but addressing church conflicts happening during his own time...This is Jesus’ last public appearance before his arrest; the remainder of his teachings will be for his disciples in private.” *Martin*

8. Choose one or two examples of the seven woes (verses 13-36) and comment on what negative effect the actions of the scribes and Pharisees would have had on the Jewish people.

9. In verses 37-39 we read the “Lament over Jerusalem” in which Jesus indicates that Jerusalem is on a course to destruction. And yet, we can hear both the sorrow and concern in his words, as well as his promise that they will not see him until a future time when they will again hail his coming. What was happening when we heard the words of verse 39 before in Matthew 21:9?

10. CONNECTION: As chapter 23 closes, we can imagine Jesus' disciples, perplexed by his words about Jerusalem's desolation and about his coming again. Surely, they had questions for him. We too sometimes have questions that we would like to ask the Lord, often starting with, "Will I...", "Should I..." or "When will..." How do you find a way to listen for your direction from the Holy Spirit?

Read John 14:26 and begin your prayer today asking the Lord to speak, for you are listening.

### **DAY THREE**

**Read Matthew 24:1-14**

**NOTE:** Jesus left the temple and now he speaks only to his disciples, and "perhaps making his way back toward Bethany, where he will spend the night. Since the road to Bethany goes over the Mount of Olives, perhaps they looked down upon the great temple, which Herod the Great had expanded and ringed with colonnaded halls..." *Martin*

11. As chapter 24 begins, Jesus and the disciples leave the temple, and the disciples point out the temple buildings. Jesus replies prophesying the destruction of the temple. The temple was considered the holy place where God's presence lived. For what reason then will the temple be destroyed? (see Matthew 21:13 or 23:37-38 for hints)

**NOTE:** Chapter 24 includes what is referred to as "The Eschatological Discourse" also known as "The Apocalyptic Discourse." All three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) contain an apocalyptic discourse of Jesus that describes the future destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the signs of the final tribulation before the end of the age, and the last coming of Christ.

12. In verse 3 the disciples ask when the Temple will be destroyed and what sign will announce Jesus' coming at the end of the age. What are a few of the calamities Jesus says will occur? (verses 5-7)

**NOTE:** The NABRE translation uses the word "coming" (in verse 24:3) to refer to the time when Jesus will reappear. Some other translations use the word "Parousia". Here are a few definitions from Felix Just, S.J. (<https://catholic-resources.org>) which may be helpful in studying this chapter:

**Apocalypse:** An "apocalypse" is not an event, but a "revelation" that reveals truths and is recorded in written form

**Biblical Prophecy:** Usually, a message from God to his people; may be about past, present or future events and may be a warning rather than a prediction

**Eschatology/Eschatological:** Any teaching about the "end" times and/or the future world beyond the end of normal time

**Parousia:** The "coming" or "arrival" of any important figure, esp. of Jesus at the end of time, in early Christian expectations

**Tribulation:** A period of great suffering and turmoil before the Second Coming of Christ

13. Jesus continues by comparing a woman's labor pains with the sufferings of his present time. Continuing with the birth metaphor, if the sufferings of the present time are but the beginning, what does this indicate to you about the future?

14. Reading more of the calamities they will begin to see through verse 14, what does Jesus prophesy for the disciples and the growing Church?

15. CONNECTION: Like the disciples and the Church, we too are called to live through troubled times, and to not let our faith "grow cold." (verse 12) One way, as Bishop Robert Barron has said, is to "stay close to the fire," that is, stay close to Jesus through Eucharistic Adoration. Have you experienced Eucharistic Adoration? If so, share your reasons for visiting Jesus in this way. If not, what are other ways where you find special closeness to Jesus?

Read Ephesians 3:19 and write a short prayer to Jesus thanking him for loving you.

#### **DAY FOUR**

**Read Matthew 24:15-28**

16. In verse 15 Jesus refers to the "desolating abomination" from the prophet Daniel. To better understand this descriptive phrase, look up the definitions of both the words "desolating" and "abomination."

17. The expression "desolating abomination" in the Book of Daniel refers to a pagan altar that the Syrian ruler Antiochus IV erected over the altar in the temple to suppress Jewish religious practices. Jesus uses the prophetic words of Daniel to indicate that the prophecy will be manifested in the temple. Read and record the prophecy in Daniel 11:31.

**NOTE:** The "Desolating Abomination" did happen in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies destroyed and profaned the temple, and later under Hadrian who ordered the erection of a statue of Jupiter on the ruins. *Navarre Bible*

18. When these signs occur, Jesus warns the people to flee to the mountains with great haste, not even stopping to pick up their cloak, praying that it is not winter, and that a woman would not be with child or nursing. Mountains are a familiar biblical symbol. What do you think they may symbolize here?

19. Jesus again warns against false messiahs and false prophets (verses 23-26), comparing them to his glorious second coming. He warns them again not to be deceived. The false prophets will say that the Messiah is in the shadows, the desert or the inner rooms. How does Jesus say that he will be coming?

20. CONNECTION: Jesus again warns the disciples to “beware of false prophets,” yet even he says they may appear real as they may “perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive.” Consider and list a few of the characteristics of one who might be a false prophet and how we could recognize them?

Read Deuteronomy 18:21-22 and write a prayer today asking the Holy Spirit for the wisdom to discern the false prophets in our world.

#### **DAY FIVE**

**Read Matthew 24:29-44**

21. Verse 29 includes powerful images of the coming of the Son of Man, beginning with vast changes in the heavens. “The spiritual disasters which Jesus has listed are now matched by cosmic disasters. The old world passes away completely.” *Meier* In end times, the Son of Man will fulfill Daniel’s prophecy and gather his elect. (verse 30) Read Daniel 7:13-14 and record some of the images that describe the coming of the son of man.

22. Verses 32-35 describe the sprouting fig tree, which heralds the coming of summer. Jesus relates this event to the signs he has shared, pointing to the certainty of the events to come. From verse 36, what answer does he give as to the exact time? (Good memory verse)

**NOTE:** In verses 34-35 Matthew cannot mean that the end of the world will come before Jesus’ generation dies out. By the time Matthew writes, it already has...Jesus’ teaching is the one sure point of stability in a world which is passing away amid upheavals, and so the disciples must hold firmly to his teaching. Knowledge of the exact date is restricted to the Father alone. *Meier*

23. In verses 37-39 Jesus recounts the story of Noah and the flood. Briefly summarize the point Jesus is making in these verses.

24. Jesus continues with his teaching, ending with an admonition. Record verse 44. (Good memory verse)

25. CONNECTION: “No one knows the precise time of the Son of Man’s coming. Nevertheless, we believe that his coming is certain (see Matthew 24:35) on the authority of the Son of Man himself. His coming will be unexpected, as was the flood in the days of Noah. It will, moreover, separate people in judgment...Christians should always act as if the coming of the Son of Man were near.” *Sacra Pagina* With these thoughts in mind, share in what ways you are preparing for the coming of the Son of Man.

Read and record Revelation 22:20-21 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

#### FINAL THOUGHT for the WEEK

In each liturgy after the Lord’s prayer the priest will say, “Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant us peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the *blessed hope* and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” Share some thoughts on your hope for the final coming.

Read pages 114-122 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.