



MATTHEW

28 CHAPTERS

Originated from KJV Bible

MATTHEW 1

This is the family story of Jesus Christ, a special descendant of King David and great-grandfather Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, and Jacob had Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar), Perez had Hezron, and Hezron had Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab had Nahshon, and Nahshon had Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab), Boaz had Obed (whose mother was Ruth), and Obed had Jesse.

Jesse was the father of King David, and David was the father of Solomon (whose mother had been Uriah's wife). Solomon had Rehoboam, Rehoboam had Abijah, and Abijah had Asa. Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat had Joram, and Joram had Uzziah. Uzziah had Jotham, Jotham had Ahaz, and Ahaz had Hezekiah. Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh had Amon, and Amon had Josiah. Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, right around the time God's people were forced away to Babylon.

After everyone was taken to Babylon, Jeconiah had Shealtiel, and Shealtiel had Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud had Eliakim, and Eliakim had Azor. Azor had Zadok, Zadok had Achim, and Achim had Eliud. Eliud had Eleazar, Eleazar had Matthan, and Matthan had Jacob. Finally, Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—and Mary is the one who gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Christ.

So, to sum it up: there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen more from David until the exile in Babylon, and fourteen more from the exile to the arrival of Christ.

Now, the story of how Jesus was born happened like this: His mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph. But before they even lived together, Mary found out she was going to have a baby through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a really good man. He didn't want to shame her publicly, so he quietly planned to call off the engagement in secret.

While he was lying awake worrying about this, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, descendant of David," the angel said, "don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby growing inside her is from the Holy Spirit. She is going to have a son, and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who will rescue his people from their sins."

All of this happened to bring to life what the Lord had promised long ago through a prophet: *"Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"*—which is just another way of saying, "God is right here with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did exactly what the angel told him to do. He welcomed Mary as his wife, and even though they didn't live together as husband and wife until after the baby was born, Joseph proudly named her firstborn son Jesus.

MATTHEW 2

Long ago, during the time when King Herod ruled over Judea, Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem. Around that same time, some wise travelers from the far east looked up at the night sky and saw a brand-new, brilliant star.

Excitedly, they packed their bags and traveled all the way to Jerusalem, asking everyone they met, "Where is the newborn baby who is the King of the Jews? We saw His special star in the east, and we've come to celebrate and honor Him!"

When King Herod heard this, he panicked—and the whole city of Jerusalem worried right along with him. Herod quickly called a meeting with all the top religious leaders and teachers to ask them a very important question: "According to our holy books, exactly where is the promised Savior supposed to be born?"

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they replied, reminding him of what an ancient prophet had written: *"And you, Bethlehem, are certainly not the least important town in Judah, for out of you will come a strong leader who will guide and care for my people, Israel."*

Secretly, King Herod invited the wise men to a private meeting. He pumped them for information, asking for the exact date the mysterious star had first appeared. Then he sent them on their way to Bethlehem with a sly smile, saying, "Go and search everywhere for the little child. Once you find Him, come straight back and let me know, so I can go honor Him too!" (Though Herod was actually plotting something very different in his heart.)

The wise men happily left the palace, and—to their amazement—the very same star they had seen back home started moving right before them! It floated through the sky until it stopped directly above the house where the little boy was staying. Beaming with pure joy, they rushed inside.

There they found the toddler with His mother, Mary. Overjoyed, they bowed low to the ground and gave Him wonderful gifts they had carried all this way: gleaming gold, sweet-smelling frankincense, and precious myrrh.

Before heading back to Herod, the wise men received a warning in a dream from God telling them to avoid the wicked king entirely. So, they quietly sneaked back to their home country by a completely different route.

As soon as they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream with an urgent message: "Wake up! Grab the young child and His mother, and run away to Egypt right now! Stay there until I tell you it's safe, because King Herod is going to hunt the boy down to kill Him."

Without wasting a second, Joseph woke his family up in the middle of the night and hurried away to Egypt. They stayed safely hidden there until Herod passed away, fulfilling an ancient promise from God that He would call His son out of Egypt.

Back in Jerusalem, when Herod realized the wise men had tricked him, he flew into a furious rage. Determined to wipe out the newborn King no matter what, he sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to destroy every single young boy who was two years old and under—using the exact timeline the wise men had given him. This heartbreaking

cruelty fulfilled words spoken long ago by the prophet Jeremiah, describing the deep, weeping sorrow of mothers who had lost their precious little ones and refused to be comforted because their children were gone.

Eventually, wicked King Herod died. Once again, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, who was still hiding out in Egypt.

"Get up," the angel said, "take the boy and His mother, and head back to the land of Israel. The people who wanted to harm the child are gone."

Joseph packed up his family and crossed the border back home. But when he heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, had taken over the throne in Judea, Joseph got nervous about settling there. Once more, God guided him in a dream, so Joseph steered his family away from danger and headed north into the hills of Galilee.

They finally settled down in a quiet little town called Nazareth, fulfilling the old prophetic saying that the Savior would one day be known as a Nazarene.

MATTHEW 3

Deep in the wild Judean desert, a rugged man named John stepped forward to deliver a bold message. Clothed in scratchy camel-skin with a simple leather belt, and snacking on wild honey and crunchy locusts, John was hard to miss!

"Turn away from your wrong choices!" he called out to the crowds.
"God's great kingdom is arriving right now!"

Centuries before, a prophet named Isaiah had written about this exact moment, describing John as a lone voice echoing through the wasteland, shouting, "Clear the road for the Lord and smooth out His pathways!"

Soon, massive crowds poured out from Jerusalem, all across Judea, and the entire Jordan River valley to hear him. As they admitted to their mistakes and said they were sorry, John dunked them clean in the rushing waters of the Jordan River.

One day, a group of stuck-up religious leaders—the Pharisees and Sadducees—showed up at the riverbank. John spotted them and didn't hold back: "You a bunch of sneaky snakes! Who tricked you into thinking you could escape the trouble coming your way? If you're truly sorry, prove it by doing good things! Don't just sit there thinking, 'We're safe because Abraham is our ancestor.' Let me tell you, God could turn these ordinary desert rocks into children of Abraham if He wanted to! The axe is already resting right against the tree roots. Every single tree that doesn't grow good fruit is getting chopped down and tossed straight into the fire."

The people whispered among themselves, wondering if John was the hero they were waiting for. But John shook his head. "Look, I'm just using water to help you change your hearts. But someone much greater is on the way—someone so powerful I'm not even worthy to carry His shoes. He is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with blazing fire! He's coming with a winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor. He'll put the good wheat safely in His

barn, but He'll burn up the useless chaff in a fire that never goes out."

Right then, a young man named Jesus traveled all the way from Galilee to the Jordan River, walking right up to John and asking to be baptized.

John's eyes went wide, and he immediately tried to stop Him. "Wait! You should be baptizing *me*! Why are you coming to *me*?"

Jesus just smiled and said, "Let it be this way for now. We need to do what is right." So John finally agreed.

The moment Jesus came splashing up out of the river water, the sky suddenly ripped open above Him. He saw the Spirit of God floating down like a gentle dove, landing right on His shoulder.

And then, a booming voice echoed straight from the clouds: **"This is my dearly loved Son, and I am endlessly proud of Him!"**

MATTHEW 4

Driven by the Holy Spirit, Jesus headed into the lonely desert to face tests from the devil.

After going without food for forty long days and nights, his stomach was completely empty, and he felt intensely hungry.

The trickster showed up and challenged him, "If you're truly God's Son, turn these rocks into loaves of bread!"

Jesus fired right back, "The scriptures say human life depends on more than just food; we live by every single word that comes straight from God's mouth."

Next, the devil transported him to the holy city of Jerusalem, perching him high on the rooftop of the temple.

"Prove you're God's Son by jumping off," the devil taunted. "After all, the Bible promises that God will send His angels to catch you so you won't even stub your toe on a stone."

Jesus calmly replied, "The scriptures also warn us not to test the Lord our God."

For the final test, the devil took Jesus up to the peak of a towering mountain, displaying all the glittering kingdoms of the world in a single sweeping view.

"All this power and glory is yours," the devil whispered, "if you'll just bow down and worship me."

Jesus shouted, "Back off, Satan! The Bible commands us to worship the Lord our God and serve Him alone."

Defeated, the devil vanished, and bright angels immediately arrived to care for Jesus.

Learning that John the Baptist had been thrown into prison, Jesus packed up and traveled north to Galilee.

Leaving His hometown of Nazareth behind, He settled in Capernaum, a bustling coastal town in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

This move fulfilled an ancient prophecy spoken by Isaiah:

"The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali—along the sea route, across the Jordan, and into Gentile Galilee—

Those living in deep darkness have witnessed a brilliant light. For everyone trapped in the shadow of death, a new dawn has finally broken."

From that moment on, Jesus began traveling and preaching his core message: "Change your hearts and lives, because the kingdom of heaven is right here!"

While strolling along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He spotted two brothers, Simon (whom we call Peter) and Andrew, tossing their fishing nets into the water.

Jesus called out to them, "Come with me, and I'll teach you how to fish for people instead of fish."

Without a moment's hesitation, they dropped their nets and followed Him.

Walking a bit farther, He saw two more brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father Zebedee, busy mending their nets.

Jesus called out to them as well, and immediately they left their boat and their father behind to follow Him.

Jesus traveled all over Galilee, teaching packed crowds in the local meeting places, sharing the good news of God's kingdom, and curing every kind of sickness and disease.

Word about His incredible miracles spread rapidly across the entire region of Syria. People rushed to Him, bringing friends and family

suffering from every imaginable pain, illness, mental struggle, and paralysis—and He healed every single one of them.

Massive crowds began following Him everywhere He went, streaming in from Galilee, the Decapolis region, Jerusalem, Judea, and even from across the Jordan River.

MATTHEW 5

Seeing the huge crowd waiting for him, Jesus climbed up a quiet green hill and sat down. His friends and followers gathered closely around him, and he began to share some wonderful secrets for living a happy life:

"God is especially close to those who feel weak and helpless inside, because His big, beautiful kingdom belongs to them. If you are sad and crying right now, don't worry—God is going to wrap you in a warm hug and make you feel better. People who are gentle and kind are the luckiest ones of all, because the whole world will eventually be theirs to enjoy. If you have a deep, rumbling hunger to do what is right, keep going, because God is going to fill you right up! If you show mercy and forgive others, you will get right back the same sweet mercy you give. If your heart is clean and honest, you get the amazing treat of getting to experience God up close. If you help stop fights and bring peace, everyone will know you are a true member of God's family. And if people are mean to you just because you are trying to do the right thing, smile! Heaven is your special home.

Be super happy when people tease you or lie about you because you love me. Just remember, they did the exact same thing to God's brave messengers who lived long ago!

You kids are like the salt of the earth, adding flavor and goodness to everything around you. But if salt loses its salty taste, you can't fix it—it's just tossed aside. You are also the bright, shining light of the world. Think about it: a giant city built right on top of a hill can't be hidden in the dark, can it? People don't light a cozy candle and then hide it underneath a heavy bowl; they put it up high on a stand so it can light up the whole room and help everyone see. So, let your good deeds shine out brightly for everyone to see, so they can praise your loving Father in heaven!

Don't ever think I came to throw away God's ancient rules and laws. I didn't come to destroy them; I came to bring them to life in the best way possible! Trust me, until the sky and earth disappear, every single tiny dot and mark of God's law matters. If anyone tries to wiggle out of even the smallest rule and teaches others to do the same, they won't be very important in heaven. But the person who actually lives by God's rules and teaches others to do the same? They will be rockstars in God's kingdom! In fact, unless your goodness is deeper and truer than the strict religious teachers of today, you won't even sniff the kingdom of heaven.

You've heard people say in the old days, 'Do not murder, and if you do, you'll have to face a judge.' But I'm telling you that even losing your temper and screaming angry, hateful words at someone puts your heart in serious danger. So, picture this: you walk all the way to church to give a special gift to God, and suddenly you remember

that your brother or sister is mad at you about something. Stop right there! Leave your gift right by the altar, run home to fix things and make peace with them first, and *then* come back to give your gift to God.

If someone is marching you off to court, try to settle things with them quickly while you're still walking down the road together. Otherwise, they might hand you over to the judge, the judge might hand you over to the guard, and *boom*—you're locked in a jail cell. And let me tell you, you aren't coming out until you've paid every single penny you owe!

You've heard the old rule, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I'm telling you that even letting your eyes linger on someone with sneaky, greedy thoughts in your heart is just as bad. So, listen closely: if your right eye is leading you into trouble, cover it up or look away! It's way better to lose one little part of your body than to let your whole self tumble into a mess of trouble. And if your right hand is causing you to do bad things, stop using it! Better to get rid of the bad habit than to ruin your whole life.

It used to be that a husband could just write a quick note and throw his wife away in a messy divorce. But I'm telling you that tossing your marriage aside—unless someone broke the biggest promise—breaks the relationship apart, and anyone who marries someone just thrown away like that gets caught up in the mess.

You've also heard people say, 'Never break a promise; always keep the big oaths you make to God.' But I say: don't make fancy, dramatic promises swearing on heaven (which is God's throne), or the earth (which is His footstool), or Jerusalem (His favorite city), or even your

own head (since you can't magically change a single hair on your head from black to white!). Just keep your word super simple: let your 'yes' mean yes, and your 'no' mean no. Making a big show out of swearing promises usually comes from a sneaky place.

You know the old saying, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' It sounds fair, right? But I'm telling you: don't fight back against mean people. If someone loses their temper and slaps your right cheek, don't punch them back—just turn the other cheek to them, too! If someone takes you to court just to steal your warm winter coat, let them have your fancy cloak as well. If a soldier forces you to carry his heavy backpack for one mile, surprise him and carry it for two miles! Be generous: when someone asks you for help, give to them; and when someone needs to borrow something, don't turn them away.

You've heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But here is my secret rule for you: *Love your enemies*. Bless the people who yell at you, do nice things for the people who can't stand you, and pray for the kids who treat you terribly and pick on you. Why? Because that is how you act like true children of your amazing Father in heaven! He makes His warm, golden sun shine down on both the kind people and the mean people, and He sends refreshing rain to help the gardens of both the good and the bad. If you only love the people who are already nice to you, what makes you so special? Even people nobody likes do that! And if you only say hello to your best friends, are you doing anything awesome? Of course not!

So, aim high and be wonderfully, perfectly loving—just like your Father in heaven is perfect."

MATTHEW 6

Hey kids! When you do something nice to help others, don't go bragging about it just to get a pat on the back. If you do it just to show off, that applause is the only prize you're going to get.

Instead, when you give to someone in need, keep it super quiet. Do it so secretly that even your own hands barely know what you're up to! Your heavenly Father sees what you do behind the scenes, and He will reward you openly.

And when you talk to God in prayer, don't be like the show-offs who stand on busy street corners just so people will notice how "holy" they look. Nope! When you want to pray, go to your room, close the door, and talk quietly to your Father in heaven, who is always listening.

When you pray, don't just ramble on and on, repeating the same boring words over and over like you're trying to wear God out. He already knows what you need before you even open your mouth! Here is a great way to talk to Him:

"Our Father in heaven, we think You are wonderful and holy. Please bring Your peace to our world, and help us down here to do what You want, just like the angels do up in heaven. Please give us the food we need for today. And please forgive us when we mess up, just like we forgive the kids who do wrong to us. Keep us safe from bad choices

and rescue us from trouble. Everything belongs to You, and You are so powerful and wonderful forever! Amen.”

Just remember: if you are quick to forgive others when they mess up, God will forgive you, too. But if you hold grudges and refuse to forgive, your heavenly Father won't forgive your mistakes either.

Also, when you have to do a hard thing like fasting, don't walk around moping with a sad, gloomy face just to make everyone feel sorry for you. Wash your face, put a smile on, and keep it between you and God. Your Father sees your heart and will reward you.

Don't spend all your time collecting toys and stuff down here on earth that can break, rust, or get stolen by sneaky thieves. Instead, build up treasures in heaven that last forever! After all, whatever you care about the most is where your heart will live.

Think of your eyes like the windows to your soul. If your windows are clean and focused on good things, your whole life will be full of bright, happy light. But if your focus is dark and selfish, your whole world will be gloomy.

You can't have two different bosses at the same time—you'll either end up loving one and hating the other. You can't serve God and just chase after money and material things.

So, honestly, stop stressing out and worrying about your life! Don't sit around fretting over what you're going to eat, drink, or wear. Look at the little birds flying around in the trees. They don't plant gardens or bake bread, but your heavenly Father feeds them every single day. And aren't you way more important to Him than little birds? Besides, all your worrying won't make you grow even an inch taller!

And why worry about clothes? Just look at the wildflowers growing in the grass. They don't work or sew clothes, yet even King Solomon, with all his fancy gold and jewels, wasn't dressed half as nicely as one of those little flowers! If God takes that much care of weeds that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He take even better care of you? Oh, you guys just need a little more trust!

So stop stressing out, asking, "What are we going to eat today?" or "What will we wear?" People who don't know God chase after all those things, but your heavenly Father knows you need them all.

Instead, make God's friendship and His goodness your #1 priority, and He will take care of giving you everything else you need.

So don't borrow trouble by worrying about tomorrow. Tomorrow has enough worries of its own. Today has plenty to deal with—so just focus on today!

MATTHEW 7

Stop pointing fingers at others, or people will do the exact same to you. Whatever standard you use to judge your friends is the very standard you'll be measured by. Why do you obsess over the tiny speck of dust in your friend's eye while completely ignoring the giant log stuck in your own? It makes no sense to try and fix someone else when you're a mess yourself. Clean up your own act first; then you'll actually see clearly enough to help your buddy.

Don't waste your most precious gifts on people who won't appreciate them, or they'll just ruin them and turn on you.

Instead, just ask and you will receive; keep looking and you will find; knock on the door and it will swing open for you. Everyone who truly asks gets an answer. Think about it: if your hungry child asks you for a sandwich, would you hand them a heavy rock? If they ask for a snack, would you give them a creepy snake? Of course not! If you—even with all your flaws—know how to treat your kids right, how much more does your loving Father in heaven want to give amazing things to those who ask?

Here is the golden rule for life: always treat people the exact way you want them to treat you. That sums up all the best advice in the world.

Choosing to do the right thing can feel like squeezing through a tiny, cramped doorway. The easy path—the one where anything goes—is wide and crowded, but it leads straight to a dead end. The right path is narrow and tough to find, but it leads to real life.

Watch out for phonies and tricksters who look sweet and harmless on the outside, but are actually sneaky and mean on the inside. You can always spot them by looking at how they act. Can you harvest juicy grapes from a cactus? Do you pick tasty figs from a weed? Of course not! A healthy tree naturally grows delicious fruit, while a sick, dying tree only produces garbage. Any tree that doesn't grow good fruit gets chopped down and thrown in the fire. Actions speak louder than words; look at people's behavior to see who they really are.

Just talking the talk isn't enough. Not everyone who calls me their leader will make it into a wonderful future; only the ones who actually put these good ideas into practice will.

If you listen to my advice and actually live it out, you're like a smart builder who built his house on solid bedrock. When the fierce storms came, the rain poured, the rivers flooded, and howling winds crashed against that house, it didn't budge an inch because it was anchored to rock. But if you hear these words and completely ignore them, you're like a foolish person who built their house right on a shifting sandbox. When the exact same storm hit—the rain pouring, the floods rising, and the winds battering—that house completely collapsed, and it was a total disaster.

When Jesus finished teaching all of this, the crowd was completely blown away by his words. He didn't sound boring or repetitive like the usual teachers; he spoke with real confidence, wisdom, and authority.

MATTHEW 8

As Jesus walked down the mountainside, massive crowds tagged along behind him. Suddenly, a man covered in skin sores ran up, bowed low, and begged, "Master, if you truly want to, I know you can make me healthy again."

Jesus smiled, reached out, and gently touched him. "I certainly want to—be healed!" Instantly, the man's skin was completely clear. Jesus told him quietly, "Don't make a big speech about this yet. Just hurry off, let the priest check you out, and offer the gift Moses required so everyone knows you're well."

When Jesus arrived in the town of Capernaum, a Roman army officer hurried over, looking heartbroken. "Sir, my young servant is paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."

"I'll come right over and fix that," Jesus replied.

The officer shook his head. "Oh, Lord, I'm nobody special; I don't deserve to have you in my house. Just give the order from right here, and my servant will be cured! After all, I command soldiers myself. I tell one to march, and he marches; I tell another to run, and he runs. I just tell my helper to do something, and it gets done."

Jesus blinked in absolute amazement, turning to the crowd following him. "Listen to this! I haven't seen trust this strong anywhere in the whole country. And let me tell you, people are going to travel from all over the world to join the great feast in heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Meanwhile, some who thought they had VIP access will find themselves locked out in the cold dark, crying and wishing they'd listened."

Then Jesus looked at the officer and said, "Head on home; because you believed, it's done." And right at that second, the servant was completely healed.

Next, Jesus stopped by Peter's house and found Peter's mother-in-law flat on her back with a blazing fever. He simply touched her hand, and the fever vanished like magic. She jumped right up and started fixing them lunch!

By evening, folks were dragging all kinds of people troubled by bad spirits right up to Jesus' doorstep. With just a few words, he chased the darkness away and cured every single sick person, fulfilling the

old prophecy about how he would carry away our weaknesses and pains.

Realizing how huge the crowds were getting, Jesus told his crew they were heading across the lake. Just then, a schoolteacher walked up and said, "Teacher, I'll go with you anywhere!"

Jesus warned him, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man doesn't even own a pillow to rest his head."

Another follower raised his hand. "Lord, do you mind if I run home first to bury my dad?"

Jesus looked at him seriously. "Come with me now, and let the spiritually dead worry about burying the physically dead."

Soon, they all climbed into a boat and set sail. Out of nowhere, a ferocious windstorm kicked up, slamming giant waves over the sides of the boat while Jesus was fast asleep. Panicking, the disciples shook him awake, screaming, "Lord, help us! We're going to drown!"

Jesus sat up, rubbing his eyes, and scolded them gently, "Why are you so terrified? Where is your faith?" He stood up, glared at the howling wind and roaring waves, and snapped, "Quiet down!" Instantly, the sea turned as smooth as glass.

The disciples stared at each other in sheer disbelief, whispering, "Who on earth is this guy? Even the wind and the ocean follow his orders!"

When they finally landed on the other side in the region of the Gergesenes, two fiercely aggressive men possessed by dark spirits

rushed straight out of a graveyard, making that whole road too dangerous for anyone to walk down.

"Leave us alone, Jesus, Son of God!" they shrieked. "Did you come here to ruin our day early?"

A short distance away, a huge herd of pigs was happily munching on grass. The dark spirits begged Jesus, "If you're going to kick us out, at least let us jump into those pigs!"

Jesus gave a single nod. "Go."

The unseen troublemakers leaped out of the men and dove straight into the pigs. Suddenly, the entire herd went wild, stampeded down the steep cliff, and splashed straight into the deep water, where they all sank.

The pig-herders panicked, sprinted back into town, and spilled every single detail about what had just happened to the two men. Within minutes, the whole town poured out to the shoreline to see Jesus—and the very first thing they did was beg him to please pack up and leave their neighborhood immediately!

MATTHEW 9

Jesus hopped into a boat, sailed across the water, and headed straight back to his hometown.

Suddenly, some people carried in a paralyzed man lying flat on a mat. Seeing how much trust they had in him, Jesus smiled at the

man and said, "Cheer up, my friend! Your wrong choices and mistakes are all forgiven."

Right away, a few religious teachers grumbled to themselves, "Who does this guy think he is? That's disrespectful to God!"

Jesus read their minds like an open book and asked, "Why are you thinking such grumpy thoughts? Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk around'? Watch this." He turned to the man on the mat and announced, "Stand up, grab your bed, and walk on home!"

The man instantly jumped to his feet and marched happily back to his house. When the huge crowd saw that happen, their jaws dropped in amazement, and they cheered for God, who had given humans such incredible power.

Leaving that spot, Jesus walked past a tax office and saw a man named Matthew sitting at his desk. "Come, follow me," Jesus said. Matthew jumped right up and joined him.

Later, Jesus had a big dinner party at a house, and many local tax collectors and troublemakers showed up to eat with him and his friends.

When the strict Pharisees saw this, they whispered to Jesus' followers, "Why on earth is your teacher hanging out and eating with low-lives and sinners?"

Jesus overheard them and called out, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—only the sick do! Go look up what God means when He says, '*I want mercy, not just strict rules.*' I didn't come to invite perfect people; I came to rescue messy sinners."

Soon, John the Baptist's followers came over with a question: "We and the Pharisees fast and skip meals all the time, but your crew doesn't. Why is that?"

Jesus explained, "Do wedding guests starve and cry while the groom is still hanging out with them at the party? Of course not! But the day will come when the groom is gone, and *then* they will fast. Besides, nobody patches an old jacket with brand-new, shrinkable cloth, or it will rip a huge hole. And you don't pour fresh, bubbly wine into old, brittle leather bags, or they'll burst and ruin everything. New wine goes in brand-new bags so both survive!"

While he was talking, a local official rushed up, bowed low, and begged, "My little daughter just passed away! Please come and touch her, and she'll live again." Jesus stood up and went with him, along with all his disciples.

Right behind him walked a woman who had been sick and hurting for twelve whole years. She whispered to herself, "If I can just brush my hand against his coat, I'll be completely healed." She reached out and touched the fringe of his garment—and *zap!*—she was instantly cured. Jesus spun around, saw her, and said, "Cheer up, little lady! Your faith just made you well."

When Jesus finally reached the official's house, he found a noisy crowd of musicians and mourners crying loudly.

"Quiet down!" Jesus told them. "The little girl isn't dead; she's just taking a nap."

The crowd burst into mean laughter, mocking him. But Jesus cleared everyone out of the room, walked in, took the girl by the hand, and—

poof—she sat right up! News of this amazing miracle spread like wildfire across the entire region.

As Jesus walked on, two blind men chased after him, shouting, "Son of David, please have mercy on us!"

When they finally caught up to him inside a house, Jesus asked them, "Do you honestly believe I can fix your eyes?"

"Yes, Lord! We do!" they answered.

Jesus gently touched their eyes and said, "Let it happen just as you believe!"

Instantly, their eyes popped open and they could see everything! Jesus sternly warned them, "Don't go shouting this to everyone." But they were so excited that they ran out and told the whole countryside about him anyway.

Just as those men left, some people brought a mute man who couldn't talk because he was troubled by a scary spirit. The moment Jesus kicked the bad spirit out, the man started talking up a storm! The crowds were blown away, shouting, "We have never seen anything like this in our entire lives!"

But the grumpy Pharisees shook their heads and muttered, "He's only driving out bad guys with the help of the king of bad guys."

Jesus traveled through every nearby town and village, teaching in the community centers, telling the great news about God's kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease in sight.

When he looked out at the massive crowds, his heart ached for them. They looked so worn out, helpless, and lost—just like a bunch of wandering sheep with no shepherd to guide them.

He turned to his friends and said, "The crop is totally ready for picking, but there aren't nearly enough workers to help harvest it. So, pray to the Boss of the farm to send out tons of workers to help gather His wonderful crop!"

MATTHEW 10

Gathering his twelve closest friends, Jesus gave them special superpowers to drive out gloomy shadows and heal every kind of boo-boo and sickness.

Here is the roster of the twelve squad leaders: First, Simon (better known as Peter) and his brother Andrew; James and John, the sons of Zebedee; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; and Thaddaeus; Simon the patriot; and Judas Iscariot, the one who would later turn against him.

Jesus sent this team out on a mission with some very specific ground rules: "Don't visit the Gentile towns or drop by the cities of Samaria," he instructed them. "Instead, go straight to the lost sheep of Israel. As you walk, spread the good news: God's wonderful kingdom is right around the corner! Heal the sick, clean up those with skin diseases, bring people back to life, and chase away bad

spirits. You received all these amazing gifts for free, so share them with others for free.

Don't pack any money in your pockets—no gold, silver, or copper. Leave your backpacks at home, and don't bring an extra change of clothes, extra shoes, or even a walking stick. After all, a worker deserves to be fed!

When you roll into a new town or village, find someone who is kind and trustworthy, and stay at their house until you move on to the next place. When you first step inside, give them a friendly greeting. If they are good people, let your blessing rest upon them; if not, take your blessing back. And if any town gives you the cold shoulder and refuses to listen, just walk away and dust the dirt off your shoes as you leave. Trust me, on judgment day, things will go much easier for the ancient city of Sodom than for a town that shuts you out!

Listen carefully: I am sending you out like defenseless lambs right into a pack of wolves. So, you need to be as clever as snakes and as gentle as doves. Watch your backs around people, because they will drag you in front of local councils, whip you in their meeting places, and haul you before governors and kings because of me. This will give you a chance to tell them—and everyone else—about me.

When they arrest you, don't panic or stress out about what to say. The right words will be given to you at the exact moment you need them. It won't actually be you talking, but the Spirit of your heavenly Father speaking right through you.

Families are going to fall apart over this. Brothers will hand their own brothers over to be killed, fathers will do the same to their children, and kids will rebel against their parents and get them executed.

Everyone is going to hate you because you follow me. But if you hang in there and finish the race to the very end, you will be rescued!

Whenever people chase you out of one town, just run to the next one. I promise you won't even finish visiting all the towns in Israel before the Son of Man arrives.

Remember, a student is never better than their teacher, and a servant is not above their boss. It's enough for a student to just be like their teacher, and a servant like their master. If people started calling the head of the house the Prince of Devils, just imagine what terrible things they're going to say about you!

So don't be afraid of them. Everything that is currently hidden is eventually going to come out into the open, and every secret will finally be known. What I whisper to you in the dark, I want you to shout out in the daylight. What you hear whispered in your ear, climb up on your roofs and broadcast to the whole neighborhood!

Don't be scared of people who can hurt your body but can't touch your soul. Instead, respect and honor the One who has the power to destroy both your body and soul in the great fire.

Think about it: two little sparrows only cost a penny, right? Yet not a single one of them drops to the ground without your Father knowing about it. In fact, every single hair on your head is already counted! So stop being afraid—you are worth way more than a whole flock of sparrows.

If you are brave enough to stand up and claim me in front of other people, I will gladly stand up and claim you in front of my Father in

heaven. But if you pretend you don't know me down here, I'll pretend I don't know you up there with my Father.

Don't ever think I came to bring peaceful, quiet times to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace; I came bringing a sword! I came to turn family members against each other—sons against fathers, daughters against mothers, and daughters-in-law against mothers-in-law. A person's worst enemies will turn out to be right inside their own home.

If you love your mom or dad more than you love me, you aren't ready to follow me. If you love your sons or daughters more than me, you aren't worthy of me. If you aren't willing to pick up your heavy cross and march right behind me, you can't be my disciple. If you try to save your life selfishly, you'll end up losing it. But if you throw your life away for my sake, you will truly find it.

Whoever welcomes you is really welcoming me, and whoever welcomes me is welcoming the One who sent me. If you welcome a prophet because he's a spokesperson for God, you'll get a prophet's reward. If you welcome a good person because they do what's right, you'll get a good person's reward. And let me tell you the absolute truth: even if you just hand a cup of cold water to one of these ordinary little followers of mine because they belong to me, you will definitely get your reward!"

MATTHEW 11

After finishing his instructions to the twelve disciples, Jesus moved on to teach and preach in nearby towns.

Around that same time, John the Baptist was sitting in a dark prison cell. When he heard about all the amazing things Jesus was doing, he sent two of his own followers to ask Him a direct question:

"Are you really the special one we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

Jesus smiled and told them, "Go back and tell John what you are seeing and hearing with your own eyes: blind people can see again, people who couldn't walk are running around, sick people are being healed, deaf people can hear, lives are being brought back from the dead, and the poor are hearing wonderful good news. And tell him: blessed is the person who doesn't lose faith in me!"

As John's messengers left, Jesus turned to the huge crowd and started talking about John.

"What did you guys hike out into the lonely desert to see?" Jesus asked. "Were you expecting to see a weak reed blowing in the wind? Or were you looking for a guy dressed in fancy, soft clothes? Of course not—people who wear fancy clothes live in royal palaces! No, you went out to see a prophet, right? Yes, and I'm telling you, he is much more than just a prophet. In fact, John is the exact person the ancient writings talked about when they said: *'Look, I am sending my special messenger ahead of you to clear the path for you.'*

"I'm telling you the truth," Jesus continued, "out of everyone ever born, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist. Yet, even the smallest person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is."

Jesus explained that ever since the days of John, God's kingdom has faced fierce opposition, but people who are full of passion and faith are pressing right into it. The prophets and the law all pointed forward to John. "And if you're ready to accept it," Jesus added, "John is basically the Elijah who was supposed to come back. If you have ears, you better listen up!"

Then Jesus shook His head. "What does this generation act like? It's like a bunch of stubborn kids sitting in the town square shouting at their playmates: *'We played happy flute music for you, but you wouldn't dance! We sang sad funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry!'*

"Think about it," Jesus said. "John came along living a super strict life—not eating fancy food or drinking wine—and people said, 'He's got a demon!' Then I, the Son of Man, came along eating and drinking normally, and what do they say? 'Look at him! A total glutton and a party animal who hangs out with bad people!' But God's wisdom is always proven right by the people who actually follow it."

Next, Jesus began to scold the towns where He had done most of His most amazing miracles, because the people there refused to change their selfish ways.

"How terrible it will be for you, Chorazin! And woe to you, Bethsaida!" Jesus warned. "Because if the powerful miracles that happened in your streets had been performed in wicked old Tyre and

Sidon, those people would have repented long ago, wearing rough sackcloth and sitting in ashes to show they were sorry. I'm telling you, it will go much easier for Tyre and Sidon on Judgment Day than it will for you!

"And what about you, Capernaum?" Jesus continued, pointing to the city that felt so proud. "You think you're going all the way up to heaven, but you're going to crash down to the depths! If the miracles done in you had happened in Sodom, that terrible city would still be standing today. Trust me, judgment day will be kinder to Sodom than it is going to be for you."

Right after that, Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed, "Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you hid these deep truths from the people who think they are so smart and wise, and instead you showed them to everyday kids and humble people. Yes, Father, that is what made you happy."

Jesus turned back to the crowd and said, "My Father has trusted me with everything. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son—and anyone the Son decides to introduce Him to."

Then Jesus offered a gentle, loving invitation to everyone listening:

"Are you tired, worn out, and carrying heavy burdens? Come to me. I will give you rest. Put on my easy yoke and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble at heart. When you do, your soul will finally find peace. Because the path I'm asking you to walk is good, and the load I ask you to carry is light."

MATTHEW 12

One sunny Sabbath afternoon, Jesus and His hungry friends were walking through a golden grain field. As they strolled, the disciples plucked a few stalks of wheat, rubbed them in their hands, and began to snack.

Some strict religious leaders, called Pharisees, were watching closely. "Look!" they whispered to Jesus. "Your friends are breaking the rules! Working and harvesting on the Sabbath is forbidden!"

Jesus smiled calmly and asked them, "Haven't you ever read the story about King David? When he and his soldiers were starving, they went into God's house and ate the holy bread that only the priests were supposed to eat. God didn't punish them because people are more important than rigid rules. Besides, the Sabbath was made to help people rest and feel God's love, not to tie them up in knots. And let me tell you, someone much greater than this temple is standing right here with you!"

Leaving the grain fields, Jesus went into a local church. Sitting near the front was a man whose hand was shriveled up and paralyzed. The watching Pharisees hoped to trap Jesus, so they bluntly asked, "Is it okay to heal someone on the Sabbath?"

Jesus looked right through their trick and replied, "If you had a single sheep and it fell into a deep ditch on the Sabbath, wouldn't you grab it and pull it out? Of course you would! And a human being is worth so much more than a sheep. Therefore, doing good and helping others is always right on the Sabbath."

Turning to the man with the injured hand, Jesus said, "Stretch out your arm." The man did, and instantly his hand popped open, strong and completely healed, looking just like the other one!

Instead of being happy, the angry Pharisees stormed outside and began plotting how they could get rid of Jesus.

Knowing their dangerous plans, Jesus quietly slipped away to a peaceful spot by the lake. Huge crowds followed Him there, and He gently healed every single sick person among them. He asked the people not to make a big fuss about Him, fulfilling an old poem by the prophet Isaiah:

God's chosen servant will lead with gentle justice. He won't shout in the streets or pick fights. He is so kind and tender that He won't snap a cracked twig or put out a flickering candle. And because of Him, people everywhere will find hope.

Soon, the crowd brought to Him a man who was blind, could not speak, and was tormented by a dark spirit. With just a word, Jesus set the man free, so he could see clearly and shout for joy.

The crowd gasped in amazement. "Could this finally be the great King David's promised descendant?" they whispered.

When the Pharisees heard this, they grew furious and muttered, "He only casts out evil spirits because He's working for the boss of demons, Beelzebub!"

Jesus read their minds and challenged their silly logic. "That makes no sense," He explained. "If a kingdom or a family fights against itself, it immediately falls apart. If Satan is fighting Satan, his power is already over. When I drive out darkness by the power of God's

Spirit, it means God's kingdom has arrived right in your midst to rescue you. If you want to rob a strong man's house, you have to tie him up first, right? Well, I am here to rescue people from the grip of darkness. So choose your side: if you aren't working with Me to spread love, you're working against it."

Jesus paused, looking seriously at the leaders. "Listen closely: every mistake and bad choice can be forgiven. But hardening your heart completely against God's Holy Spirit—calling goodness evil—is a dangerous trap with no way back. Your words show what is truly hiding in your heart. Just like a healthy tree grows sweet fruit, a good person shares kind words, while an angry person spills out bitterness. One day, everyone will have to give an account for every careless word they've ever spoken."

Some of the teachers stepped forward and demanded, "Teacher, show us a magical trick or a sign from the sky to prove you're real!"

Jesus shook His head. "Only a stubborn and ungrateful generation begs for magic tricks. The only sign you'll get is the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah spent three days inside a giant fish, the Son of Man will spend three days inside the heart of the earth before coming back to life. Even the people of Nineveh listened to Jonah and changed their ways, and someone much greater than Jonah is talking to you right now!"

Jesus continued, warning them about empty hearts. "When an evil spirit leaves a person, it wanders through dry deserts looking for rest. When it doesn't find any, it says, 'I'll go back to my old house.' If it finds that life swept clean and empty, it brings seven even worse

spirits inside, and the person ends up worse off than before. That is exactly what is happening to this stubborn generation!"

While Jesus was still teaching the crowd, a messenger elbowed his way through. "Teacher! Your mother and your brothers are standing outside. They want to talk to you."

Jesus looked around at the circle of eager listeners, sat down, and spread His hands wide. "Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?"

He pointed directly at His disciples. "Look right here! These are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who listens to God and does what my heavenly Father wants is part of my truest, closest family—my brother, my sister, and my mother."

MATTHEW 13

That same day, Jesus left the house and walked down to sit by the sparkling blue sea.

So many people crowded around to hear Him that the shoreline became a sea of faces. To make sure everyone could see and hear Him, Jesus stepped into a little fishing boat, pushed off just a tiny bit from the land, and sat down. The huge crowd stayed on the sandy beach, hanging on His every word.

Jesus loved to tell stories with special hidden meanings, called parables. He smiled at the crowd and began:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant seeds in his field. As he scattered the seeds by hand, some fell right onto the hard walking path. Quick as a flash, hungry birds swooped down and gobbled them all up!

"Some seeds bounced onto rocky ground where there wasn't much dirt. Because the soil was so shallow, the little green shoots popped up super fast. But when the hot sun climbed high into the sky, it scorched the tiny plants. Since they didn't have deep roots to drink from, they quickly withered away.

"Other seeds fell among prickly thornbushes. As the weeds grew tall and strong, they crowded out the little plants and choked the life right out of them.

"Finally, some seeds landed in rich, dark, wonderful soil. Those seeds grew strong and healthy, producing an amazing harvest—some plants made a hundred new seeds, some sixty, and some thirty! Anyone with ears should really listen and think about this!"

Later, when the crowd had wandered home and it was quiet, the disciples walked up to Jesus. "Why do You always tell stories instead of just explaining things plainly?" they asked.

Jesus looked kindly at His friends and answered, "You are so lucky! You get to understand the wonderful secrets about how God's kingdom works. But for people who close their hearts and refuse to listen, these stories just sound like puzzles. They look with their eyes, but they don't really see; they hear with their ears, but they don't really understand. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote about people just like this—people whose hearts are too stubborn to change. But your eyes and ears are blessed because you truly want to learn!

"Now, let Me explain what the story of the farmer really means," Jesus continued.

"The seed is God's message.

- The seed on the footpath is like someone who hears the message of God's kingdom, but doesn't understand it at all. The sneaky bad guy swoops in and steals the truth right out of their heart.
- The seed on the rocky ground is like someone who hears the message and gets super excited, accepting it with joy right away. But they don't put down deep roots. As soon as trouble or teasing comes along because they believe in Me, they give up immediately.
- The seed in the thornbushes is like someone who hears the message, but gets completely distracted by everyday worries, stress, and the greedy chase for money. Those worries choke out the message, and they never do anything helpful for God.
- But the seed in the good, rich soil? That is the person who hears God's word, truly understands it, and lets it grow their life into something beautiful and fruitful!"

Then Jesus told them another story:

"God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. But late at night, while everyone was fast asleep, his sneaky enemy crept in and scattered weed seeds—called tares—right among the wheat, then snuck away.

"Weeks later, the green stalks shot up and started to form grain, and the ugly weeds showed up too.

"The farmer's workers came to him and gasped, 'Master, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Where did all these nasty weeds come from?'

"An enemy did this,' the farmer replied.

"Do you want us to go pull them all up right now?' the workers asked.

"No,' he said. 'If you pull up the weeds now, you might accidentally pull up the good wheat with them. Let them both grow together until harvest time. When harvest day comes, I will tell the farmhands to gather the weeds first, tie them in bundles, and burn them. Then, they will bring the precious wheat into my barn.'"

Jesus didn't stop there. He told them story after story:

"God's kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in his garden," Jesus said. "It is the tiniest speck of all seeds on Earth! But when it sprouts and grows up, it turns into a huge, leafy tree, big enough for birds to come and build cozy nests in its branches."

Then He told another: "God's kingdom is like a little bit of yeast that a baker woman mixed into a massive bowl of flour. Even though you can hardly see the yeast, it works quietly all through the dough until the whole batch rises up high and fluffy."

Jesus used stories like these for everything He taught the crowds. He never spoke to them without a parable, just as the ancient prophets had promised: *"I will open My mouth in stories; I will talk about secrets kept hidden since the world began."*

When Jesus finally sent the crowds home and stepped back inside the house, His disciples hurried over to Him. "Please," they begged, "explain the story about the weeds in the field."

Jesus smiled and broke it down for them: "The farmer who plants the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the whole wide world. The good seed represents the people who belong to God's kingdom, while the weeds represent the people who follow the evil one. The enemy who plants the bad seeds is the devil. The harvest is the end of this age, and the reapers are God's bright angels.

"Just like the weeds are gathered up and tossed into a bonfire at harvest time, that is how it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will clean up His kingdom, removing everything that causes sin and everyone who does evil. The angels will toss them into a fiery furnace, where there will be crying and gnashing of teeth. But the people who live right and love God will shine as bright as the sun in their Father's kingdom. Anyone with ears, listen up!"

Jesus kept going: "God's kingdom is like a hidden treasure buried deep in a field. A man stumbles across it by accident, and he is so full of joy that he covers it back up, runs home, and sells every single thing he owns just to buy that field!

"Or think of it like a traveling merchant looking for gorgeous pearls. When he discovers one absolute pearl of great price—a pearl more magnificent than any he has ever seen—he immediately sells everything he has and buys it!

"Or think of a huge fishing net cast deep into the sea, scooping up every kind of fish imaginable. When the net is completely full, the

fishermen drag it up onto the beach, sit down, and sort through the catch. They put the good fish into nice containers, but they throw the bad ones away.

"That is exactly how it will be at the end of the age," Jesus warned. "The angels will come down, separate the bad people from the good, and throw the bad into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and wailing."

Jesus looked around at His disciples. "Did you understand all these things?"

"Yes, Lord!" they answered.

Then Jesus said, "Because of that, every teacher of God's word who has learned about the kingdom of heaven is like a wise homeowner who pulls wonderful things—both brand new treasures and old family heirlooms—out of his safe to share with everyone."

When Jesus finished telling all these parables, He left that area and traveled to His hometown. He went straight to their local synagogue and began to teach the people. Everyone was completely amazed.

"Where did this man get such incredible wisdom?" they whispered to each other, staring in shock. "And how is he doing these amazing miracles? Isn't this just the carpenter's son? Isn't his mom named Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And don't all his sisters live right here in our town? How on earth does he know all this stuff?"

Instead of being excited, they turned their noses up at Him and refused to believe.

Jesus looked at them and said quietly, "A prophet is respected everywhere in the world—except in his own hometown and inside his own family."

And because the people there stubbornly refused to believe in Him, Jesus did not perform many miracles in that town.

MATTHEW 14

Word traveled fast all the way to King Herod, who heard wild stories about the amazing miracles Jesus was performing. Terrified, Herod whispered to his advisors, "It must be John the Baptist! He has come back from the dead, which is why he has such supernatural power!"

You see, Herod had previously arrested John and thrown him into a dark prison. Why? Because John had courageously told the king, "It is against God's law for you to marry your brother Philip's wife, Herodias."

Herod wanted to execute John, but he was afraid of the angry crowd, who truly believed John was a prophet of God. However, Herodias finally got her chance during Herod's grand birthday banquet. Her daughter danced for the guests, completely charming the king. In his excitement, Herod made a reckless promise, swearing on oath to give the girl whatever she wished.

Prompted by her vengeful mother, the girl replied, "Bring me the head of John the Baptist on a platter, right now."

The king's heart sank, and he was deeply grieved. But because he had made a public oath in front of all his important guests, he felt trapped and commanded that her gruesome wish be granted. He sent an executioner to behead John in the dungeon. The gruesome gift was delivered on a platter to the young girl, who handed it straight to her mother. Later, John's sorrowful followers came, took his body away to be buried, and rushed off to tell Jesus the tragic news.

When Jesus heard what had happened, he quietly climbed into a boat and sailed away to a lonely, deserted place to grieve. But the crowds from the nearby towns found out and chased after him on foot.

Stepping ashore, Jesus saw the massive sea of people. Instead of sending them away, his heart flooded with compassion, and he spent the day healing their sick.

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, his disciples came up and said, "We're out in the middle of nowhere, and it's getting late. Send the crowds away so they can head into the local villages and buy themselves some dinner."

Jesus smiled and replied, "They don't need to leave. You give them something to eat."

The disciples stared at him in disbelief. "Are you kidding? All we have are five little loaves of bread and two small fish!"

"Bring them here to me," Jesus said.

He instructed the massive crowd to sit down and relax on the lush green grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish, Jesus looked up

toward the sky, thanked God, broke the food into pieces, and handed it to his disciples to pass out to the hungry people.

Unbelievably, everyone ate until they were completely full! Afterward, the disciples gathered up the leftover scraps, filling twelve large baskets. And that incredible meal fed about five thousand men, not even counting the women and children!

Immediately after, Jesus insisted that his disciples jump back into their boat and sail across the lake ahead of him while he dismissed the remaining crowds. Once everyone was finally gone, Jesus hiked up a quiet mountainside all by himself to pray late into the night.

Out on the water, the disciples' boat was being thrashed by giant waves because a fierce, howling wind was blowing right against them.

Right in the middle of the dark, stormy night—around four in the morning—Jesus came walking toward them right across the choppy waves!

When the disciples spotted a figure gliding across the sea, absolute terror gripped them. "It's a ghost!" they screamed in panic.

Instantly, Jesus called out above the wind, "Hey, calm down! It's just me. Don't be afraid."

Peter blinked, squinted, and shouted back, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to walk out on the water to you!"

"Come on," Jesus said.

Without hesitation, Peter climbed over the side of the boat and actually started walking on top of the water toward Jesus! But a

second later, he felt the freezing wind whip past his face, panicked, and began to sink like a stone. "Lord, save me!" he shrieked.

In a flash, Jesus reached out his hand, grabbed Peter, and pulled him up. "You of little faith," Jesus gently teased him, "why did you let doubt creep in?"

The moment the two of them climbed back into the boat, the fierce wind instantly died down. Awe-struck, the disciples bowed down and worshipped him, whispering, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

They finally finished crossing the lake and landed safely in the region of Gennesaret. As soon as the locals recognized Jesus, they sent word racing through the entire countryside. People rushed out, carrying all their sick friends and family members to him, begging just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak—and every single person who touched it was instantly healed!

MATTHEW 15

One day, some religious leaders from the big city of Jerusalem came over to Jesus and asked him a tricky question.

"Hey, why aren't your friends following our old rules?" they grumbled. "They don't even wash their hands properly before they eat!"

Jesus wasn't fooled by their game. He shot right back at them, "Well, let me ask *you* something: Why do *you* break God's actual rules just to follow your own made-up traditions? God told you clearly to love

and honor your mom and dad, and that anyone who treats their parents terribly should face serious consequences. But you guys have invented a sneaky loophole! You tell your parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you with my money because I promised it to God instead.' You cancel out God's commands just so you can keep your own stubborn rules."

Jesus shook his head and called them out. "You hypocrites! Isaiah the prophet had your number ages ago when he wrote: *'These people put on a good show with their mouths and pretend to honor me, but their hearts are miles away. Their worship is totally fake because they teach human rules as if they were God's laws.'*"

Then Jesus waved the crowd closer. "Listen up, everyone, and really think about this!" he said. "It's not the food you put in your mouth that makes you dirty on the inside. It's the nasty stuff that comes *out* of your mouth—that's what ruins a person."

Later, the disciples pulled Jesus aside. "Um, do you realize the Pharisees were super mad after what you just said?" they whispered.

Jesus just shrugged. "Every plant that my heavenly Father didn't plant is going to get yanked up by the roots. Leave those guys alone. They're like blind people trying to lead other blind people—and sooner or later, they're both tumbling right into a ditch!"

Peter raised his hand. "Wait, can you explain what that word puzzle meant?"

Jesus sighed playfully. "Are you guys still not getting it? Whatever you eat goes into your stomach and eventually just flushes away. But the

words and actions that come out of your mouth bubble up straight from your heart! And your heart is where all the ugly stuff starts—evil thoughts, meanness, stealing, lying, and cheating. *That* is what makes a person truly messy inside. Eating with unwashed hands? That's no big deal at all."

After that, Jesus packed up and traveled north toward the foreign towns of Tyre and Sidon. Suddenly, a local woman from that region rushed up to him, crying out, "Please, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! A bad ghost is tormenting my poor daughter, and she is in terrible shape."

At first, Jesus didn't say a single word.

His disciples got annoyed and urged him, "Just make her go away! She won't stop screaming behind us."

Jesus turned to the woman and said, "I was only sent to help the lost sheep of Israel."

That didn't stop her. She fell to her knees right in front of him, begging, "Lord, please help me!"

Jesus looked at her and tested her resolve further, saying, "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the little dogs."

Without missing a beat, the woman smiled bravely and replied, "That's true, Lord... but even the little dogs under the table get to eat the yummy crumbs that the children drop."

Jesus' face lit up with a big smile. "Woman, your faith is incredible! It will happen exactly the way you want it to." And right at that very second, her daughter was completely healed.

Moving on from there, Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, climbed up a grassy hill, and sat down. Huge crowds swarmed around him, bringing all kinds of hurting people—the lame, the blind, the mute, and the injured—and dropped them right at his feet. Jesus healed every single one of them!

The crowds were completely mind-blown. People who couldn't speak were singing, people who couldn't move were jumping around, and blind people were staring wide-eyed at the sunshine. Everyone cheered and praised the God of Israel.

Eventually, Jesus called his disciples over and said, "My heart aches for these crowds. They've been out here with me for three whole days now, and they have nothing left to eat. I can't send them away starving, or they might pass out on the long walk home."

The disciples looked around helplessly. "Are you kidding? Where on earth are we going to find enough food in the middle of this giant wilderness to feed all these people?"

"How much food do we have left?" Jesus asked.

"Just seven little loaves of bread and a couple of tiny fish," they admitted.

Jesus told everyone to sit down and make themselves comfortable on the grass. Then he took the bread and the fish, looked up to the sky to say a happy thank-you prayer, broke them into pieces, and handed them to the disciples to pass out to the massive crowd.

Miraculously, everybody ate until their bellies were totally full! Afterward, the disciples gathered up all the leftover food and filled seven huge baskets.

Four thousand men had eaten that day, not even counting all the women and children!

Once everyone was stuffed and happy, Jesus sent the crowds home, hopped into a boat with his friends, and sailed across the water to the region of Magdala.

MATTHEW 16

One day, the religious leaders—the Pharisees and Sadducees—walked up to Jesus just to test Him. "Show us a cool magic trick from the sky to prove who you are!" they demanded.

Jesus looked at them and shook His head. "You guys are great weather reporters," He said. "When the sky is red at night, you say, 'It's going to be a sunny tomorrow!' And when the morning sky is dark and angry, you say, 'Storms are coming!' You can easily read the weather, but you completely miss what God is doing right in front of you today. Only a stubborn, fake crowd looks for cheap parlor tricks. The only sign you're getting is the story of Jonah." With that, He turned around and walked away.

Later, Jesus and His friends crossed the lake in a boat. But the disciples suddenly realized they had forgotten to pack any snacks!

Jesus noticed them whispering and said, "Watch out and stay far away from the 'yeast' of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

The disciples panicked. *"Oh no,"* they whispered to each other, *"He's saying this because we forgot to bring bread!"*

Jesus heard them and gently sighed. "Oh, you guys have tiny faith! Why are you stressing over a missing sandwich? Do you already forget when I fed five thousand people with just a few loaves and you still had baskets left over? Or when I fed four thousand and filled even more baskets? Why can't you see I'm not talking about baking? I'm warning you to stay away from the *bad teachings* of those religious leaders."

Then finally, it clicked. They realized He meant ideas, not ingredients.

Later on, when they reached the sunny town of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His friends a big question: "Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

They shouted out answers: "Well, some say you're John the Baptist! Others say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets come back to life."

Jesus smiled and looked right at them. "And what about you guys? Who do *you* think I am?"

Simon Peter stepped forward and shouted, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

Jesus beamed at him. "You are so blessed, Simon! People didn't teach you that; my Father in heaven whispered it right to your heart. And because of that strong faith, I'm calling you Peter, the Rock. On this rock-solid truth, I will build my family—my church—and not even the scariest dark powers will ever tear it down! I'm also giving you the keys to heaven's kingdom: whatever you declare right on earth will match what God declares in heaven." Then He warned

them not to tell anyone just yet that He was the special promised King.

From that day on, Jesus started explaining what was really going to happen. He told His friends, "I have to go to Jerusalem, where the big leaders and teachers are going to be very mean to me. They will make me suffer, they will kill me, and on the third day, I will wake right back up and rise again!"

Peter pulled Jesus aside and practically scolded Him, "Oh no, Lord! Never! That is never, ever going to happen to you!"

Jesus turned and looked right at Peter, saying firmly, "Get out of my way, Satan! You are trying to trip me up. You're thinking like a regular human instead of thinking about what God wants."

Then Jesus gathered all His followers close and said, "If anyone wants to be my friend and follow me, they have to stop being selfish, carry their own heavy cross, and stick by me. Because if you try to save your own life and do whatever you want, you'll actually lose it. But if you give up your life to follow me, you'll truly find it!

Think about it: even if you could somehow win every video game, toy, and treasure in the whole wide world, what good is it if you lose your own heart and soul? You can't buy a soul back!

Soon, the Son of Man is coming back in glorious light with His angels to give everyone the exact reward they deserve for how they lived. And listen to this: some of you standing right here won't even die before you see the Son of Man arriving in His royal kingdom!"

MATTHEW 17

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John up to a quiet mountain all by themselves.

Right there in front of them, Jesus changed! His face shone like the bright sun, and his clothes glowed as white as pure light.

Suddenly, guess who popped up? Moses and Elijah were right there, talking with him!

Peter looked around, amazed, and said to Jesus, "Master, it is so awesome that we are here! If you want, I can build three little tent-houses: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While Peter was still talking, a bright, glowing cloud wrapped all around them. Then, a booming voice came right out of the cloud, saying, "This is my special Son, and I love him very much! Make sure you listen to him."

When the disciples heard that scary-cool voice, they fell flat on their faces and were super frightened.

But Jesus walked over, gently touched them, and said, "Stand up! Don't be afraid."

When they opened their eyes and looked around, nobody else was there—just Jesus.

As they hiked back down the mountain, Jesus whispered to them, "Keep this a secret. Don't tell a single soul what you saw until the Son of Man rises back up from the dead."

The disciples scratched their heads and asked him, "Wait a minute, why do the teachers of the law always say that Elijah has to come first?"

Jesus answered, "Oh, Elijah is definitely coming first to fix everything up. But let me tell you a secret: Elijah *already* came, and people didn't recognize him. They treated him however they wanted. And guess what? They are going to treat the Son of Man the same way, causing him to suffer."

Then the disciples finally realized he was talking about John the Baptist!

When they got back down to the big crowd, a man hurried over, dropped to his knees right in front of Jesus, and cried out,

"Lord, please have mercy on my son! He has severe seizures and is in so much pain. He keeps falling right into the fire and sometimes into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't fix him."

Jesus sighed and said, "Oh, you people have no faith and keep going the wrong way! How much longer do I have to stay with you? How much longer can I put up with this? Bring the boy right here to me."

Jesus spoke sternly to the mean sickness-spirit inside the boy, and it zoomed right out of him. The child was completely healed from that exact second!

Later, the disciples pulled Jesus aside and whispered, "Why couldn't we cast that bad spirit out?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "Because your faith was way too small. Listen to me: if you just have a tiny bit of faith—even as small

as a tiny mustard seed—you could point to a mountain and say, 'Move over there,' and it would move! Nothing would be impossible for you. But remember, getting rid of a tough problem like that takes a lot of prayer and spending time close to God."

While they were traveling around Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the hands of bad men. They are going to kill him, but on the third day, he will bounce right back to life!" Hearing this made the disciples super sad.

When they finally arrived in the town of Capernaum, the men who collected the temple tax walked up to Peter and asked, "Does your teacher pay the temple tax?"

"Yep, he sure does," Peter replied.

As soon as Peter walked inside the house, Jesus beat him to the punch and asked, "What do you think, Simon? Who do kings collect taxes from—their own kids, or people from other towns?"

"From other towns," Peter answered.

Jesus smiled and said, "Right! So the kids don't have to pay. But hey, we don't want to make them angry or start a fight. So go down to the lake, toss in a fishing hook, and pull up the very first fish that bites. Open its mouth, and you'll find a shiny silver coin inside! Grab that coin and use it to pay the tax for both of us."

MATTHEW 18

Right at that moment, the disciples walked up to Jesus and asked a big question: "Who is the most important person in heaven?"

Jesus smiled, called a little child over, and gently stood the kid right in the middle of them.

"Listen closely," Jesus told them. "Unless you change your ways and become humble like little children, you won't even get into heaven. The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is simply whoever humbles themselves like this little child. And if you welcome a child like this because you love me, you are really welcoming me!"

Then Jesus got very serious. "If anyone leads one of these little ones who believes in me into doing something wrong, it would be better for them to have a giant heavy rock tied around their neck and be dropped deep in the ocean! The world is full of temptations and traps, and bad things happen, but watch out for the person who causes them!

"In fact, if your hand or your foot causes you to do bad things, cut it off and throw it away! It is much better to go through life missing a hand or a foot than to keep both and end up in the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to do wrong, pluck it out and toss it away. It's better to enter life with only one eye than to keep two and be thrown into fiery hell."

Jesus leaned in closer. "Make sure you never look down on or ignore these little ones. I'm telling you, their guardian angels in heaven are

always looking right at my Father's face! After all, the Son of Man came to rescue those who are lost.

"Let me ask you a question," Jesus continued. "Imagine a shepherd who owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off and gets lost. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine sheep safely in the hills and go out to search everywhere for the one that strayed? And if he finds it, I promise you, he is happier about that one sheep than the ninety-nine that never got lost at all! In the exact same way, your Father in heaven does not want even a single one of these little ones to be lost."

Jesus then shared some advice on how to handle conflicts. "If your friend hurts you or does something wrong against you, go talk to them privately just between the two of you. If they listen and apologize, you've won your friend back! But if they won't listen to you, take one or two other people along so that everything can be settled fairly with witnesses. And if they still refuse to listen, tell the whole community. If they ignore the community too, then treat them like an outsider.

"I'm telling you the truth," Jesus added, "whatever rules you set on earth regarding right and wrong will match heaven's rules. Furthermore, if two of you on earth agree on anything you pray for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. Because wherever two or three of you get together in my name, I am right there in the middle of you!"

Peter stepped forward and asked, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister when they sin against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus looked at him and said, "Not just seven times—try seventy times seven times!" (Which means: never stop forgiving!)

"To explain this, let me tell you a story about the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said. "A king decided to settle all the money his servants owed him. As he started doing the math, a servant was brought in who owed him a staggering ten thousand bags of gold!

"Since the servant had no way to pay it back, the king gave an order: 'Sell him, his wife, his children, and everything he owns to pay off the debt.'

"The terrified servant fell to his knees, bowing deeply. 'Please, have patience with me!' he begged. 'I promise I will pay you back every single penny!'

"The king's heart melted. He felt so sorry for the man that he let him go completely free and wiped out the massive debt entirely.

"Right after leaving, that same servant ran into a fellow servant who owed him just a few coins. Grabbing him by the throat, the ungrateful servant choked him and snarled, 'Pay me what you owe!'

"His fellow servant fell to the ground, begging just like he had: 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you back!'

"But the man refused. Instead, he had his fellow servant thrown straight into jail until he could pay the debt.

"When the other servants saw what happened, they were deeply upset and went straight to the king to tell him the whole story.

"The king was furious. He called the wicked servant back in and shouted, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire mountain of debt just

because you asked me to! Shouldn't you have shown mercy to your fellow servant, just like I showed mercy to you?'

"Angry and disgusted, the king handed the man over to the prison guards to be tortured until he could pay back every last coin."

Jesus looked around at his disciples and finished with this warning: "That is exactly how my heavenly Father will treat every single one of you, unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from the bottom of your hearts."

MATTHEW 19

Leaving Galilee behind, Jesus traveled across the Jordan River into the region of Judea, with massive crowds following closely behind Him. Wherever He went, He healed the sick and helped those in need.

Before long, some religious leaders known as the Pharisees came up to Him with a tricky question, hoping to test Him. "Is it okay for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason at all?" they asked.

Jesus smiled patiently and pointed them back to the very beginning of the world. "Haven't you read the scriptures?" He asked. "When God made people, He created them male and female. He said that a man would leave his parents, join with his wife, and the two of them would become like one person. Because God joined them together, no human should ever try to tear them apart."

"Well, then," the leaders argued, "why did Moses give permission for a man to write up divorce papers and send his wife away?"

Jesus shook His head. "Moses allowed that only because your hearts were stubborn and hard to change. But that wasn't how God designed it from the start. Let me tell you straight: except for a major betrayal, if a man divorces his wife to marry someone else, he is breaking his marriage promise."

Later, when Jesus and His disciples were resting, the disciples shook their heads and said, "If marriage is that serious, maybe it's better just not to get married at all!"

Jesus explained that not everyone is cut out for a single life—some people live that way naturally, some because of life's circumstances, and others choose to dedicate themselves completely to God's kingdom. "If you can understand this, embrace it," He told them.

Suddenly, parents began bringing their little children up to Jesus so He could place His hands on their heads and pray for them. The disciples tried to shoo the kids away, thinking Jesus was too busy.

But Jesus stopped them, saying, "Let the little children come to Me! Do not stop them, because God's kingdom belongs to people with hearts as pure and trusting as theirs." Then He lovingly blessed each child before moving on.

As they walked along, a young man ran up, dropped to his knees, and asked, "Good Teacher, what amazing thing do I need to do to live forever with God?"

Jesus looked at him warmly and replied, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is truly good. But if you want eternal life, keep God's commandments."

"Which ones?" the young man asked eagerly.

Jesus listed them out: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself."

The young man beamed with pride. "I've followed all those rules since I was a little boy! What am I still missing?"

Jesus looked deep into his eyes with love and challenged him: "If you want to be completely whole, go sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure waiting for you in heaven. Then come back and be My follower."

When the young man heard that, his face fell. He turned and walked away with a heavy heart, because he was extremely wealthy and loved his stuff too much to let it go.

Jesus watched him go and told His disciples, "It is so hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom. In fact, it's easier for a giant camel to squeeze through the tiny eye of a sewing needle than for a rich person to enter heaven."

The disciples gasped in shock. "If rich people can't make it, who on earth can be saved?!"

Jesus looked right at them and smiled. "For humans, it's impossible. But with God, absolutely anything is possible!"

Peter piped up, "Hey, what about us? We left our homes, our families, and everything we owned to follow You. What do we get?"

Jesus promised them, "Truly, I tell you, when the world is made new and I sit on My glorious throne, you who followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones helping to lead. And anyone who has given up family, homes, or land for My sake will receive a hundred times more back, plus eternal life. But remember this: many who think they are first in line will end up last, and the last will be first!"

MATTHEW 20

Imagine the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who woke up bright and early to hire workers for his grape farm.

He struck a deal with some workers for a silver coin a day and sent them off to work. A few hours later, around nine o'clock, he saw some other folks standing around doing nothing in the town square.

"Go work on my farm," he told them, "and I'll pay you whatever is fair." Off they went!

He did the exact same thing at noon, and again at three in the afternoon. Finally, around five o'clock—just one hour before quitting time—he found a few more people standing completely idle.

"Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?" he asked.

"Because nobody gave us a job," they replied.

He told them, "Well, head on over to the farm and join the others; you'll get a fair wage, too."

When evening rolled around, the farm owner told his manager, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the very last group I hired and ending with the first."

The men who had only worked for that final hour stepped up, and each one was handed a full silver coin. Naturally, when the men who had worked all day long saw this, they got super excited. They figured, *Oh, we're definitely getting extra!* But nope—they each got a single silver coin, too.

As soon as they got their pay, they started grumbling at the landowner.

"Hey! Those guys only worked for one miserable hour, and you paid them the exact same as us, even though we sweat through the heavy heat all day long!"

The owner pointed to one of them and said, "Friend, I'm not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work all day for a silver coin? Take your money and head home. I *want* to give this last guy the exact same pay I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you just jealous because I decided to be generous?"

That's how it goes: the last will be first, and the first will be last, because many get invited, but only a few truly choose to follow.

Later on, as Jesus and his twelve close friends were walking up the road to Jerusalem, Jesus pulled them aside and whispered a heavy secret.

"Listen," he said. "We are heading to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is going to be handed over to the religious leaders. They are going to

sentence him to death and turn him over to outsiders to be mocked, whipped, and nailed to a cross. But don't worry—on the third day, he will rise right back to life!"

Right after he said this, the mother of James and John came running up with her two sons. She bowed down low, acting like she wanted to ask a huge favor.

"What can I do for you?" Jesus asked.

She smiled and said, "Promise me that when you rule in your kingdom, these two boys of mine can sit right next to you—one on your right hand and one on your left!"

Jesus looked at them and shook his head. "You guys have no idea what you're actually asking. Can you handle drinking from the very bitter cup of suffering I'm about to drink? Can you go through the tough baptism I'm about to face?"

"Oh, absolutely! We can do that," they answered bravely.

Jesus nodded. "Well, you *will* share in my suffering, yes. But sitting on my right hand and my left? That's not up to me to hand out. My Father has already prepared those special spots for specific people."

When the other ten disciples found out about this, they were hopping mad at James and John.

So Jesus gathered all of them close in a circle. "You guys know how worldly leaders boss people around and throw their weight around like big shots?" he asked. "Well, it is *not* going to be like that with us! If you want to be truly great in this family, you have to become a helper to everyone else. If you want to be the most important, you

must become a willing servant. Think about it: even the Son of Man didn't come here to be waited on hand and foot. He came to serve others and to give up his life to rescue a whole bunch of people."

As they were leaving the city of Jericho, a giant crowd swarmed behind them. Two blind men were sitting right by the dirt road, begging. When they heard a rumor that Jesus of Nazareth was walking right past them, they started shouting at the top of their lungs, "Lord! Son of David! Have mercy on us!"

The noisy crowd tried to shush them, yelling, "Be quiet!"

Instead, the blind men just shouted even louder: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Jesus stopped dead in his tracks. He turned around, smiled, and said, "Bring them here. What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord," they cried, "we want to be able to see!"

Jesus felt a wave of deep love and compassion wash over him. He reached out and gently touched their eyes. *Blink!* Instantly, their vision cleared up, everything snapped into focus, and they jumped up and started following him down the road, cheering all the way.

MATTHEW 21

As they neared Jerusalem and stopped at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples on a special mission.

"Go into the village ahead of you," he told them, "and right away you will find a donkey tied up with her little colt beside her. Untie them

both and bring them to me. If anyone asks you what you're doing, just say, 'The Master needs them,' and they will let you take them immediately."

This all happened just as the prophet had written long ago: *"Tell the people of Jerusalem, look, your King is coming to you! He is gentle, and riding on a donkey, even on a little colt."*

The disciples did exactly as Jesus asked. They brought the donkey and the colt, draped their coats over the animals' backs, and helped Jesus climb on.

As Jesus rode toward the city, a massive crowd rolled out the red carpet—or rather, their own coats!—laying them across the dusty road. Others chopped leafy branches from the trees and waved them like green flags. The crowds marching ahead and behind him cheered wildly:

"Ho-sanna! Praise to the Son of David! God bless the One who comes in the Lord's name! Ho-sanna in the highest!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was buzzing with excitement. "Who on earth is this?" people asked.

And the crowd shouted back, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee!"

Right after that, Jesus headed straight to the temple. When he walked inside, he found people turning God's house into a noisy marketplace, selling animals and exchanging money. Furious, he flipped over the tables of the money-changers and chased out the merchants, shouting, "The Scriptures say, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a hideout for crooks!"

As soon as the merchants were gone, blind and lame people came up to Jesus right there in the temple, and he healed every single one of them.

But when the chief priests and religious teachers saw these amazing miracles—and even heard children chanting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"—they were furious.

"Do you hear what these kids are saying?" they demanded.

"Yes," Jesus replied with a smile. "Haven't you ever read the verse, *'From the lips of children and babies, you, Lord, have called forth perfect praise'?*"

Leaving the grumbling leaders behind, Jesus left the city and spent the night in Bethany.

Early the next morning, as he walked back to Jerusalem, Jesus felt hungry. Seeing a leafy fig tree by the side of the road, he walked up to it, hoping for a snack. But when he got there, it was completely bare—nothing but green leaves.

Jesus looked at the tree and said, "May you never bear fruit again." Instantly, the fig tree shriveled up and died right before their eyes.

When the disciples saw this, their jaws dropped. "How did that fig tree wither so fast?!" they gasped.

Jesus turned to them and said, "I promise you, if you have real faith and zero doubt, you won't just be able to wither fig trees. If you tell this mountain, 'Get up and throw yourself into the ocean,' it will happen! If you believe when you pray, you will receive whatever you ask for."

Back at the temple, while Jesus was teaching, the chief priests and elders cornered him. "Who gave you the authority to do these crazy things?" they demanded.

Jesus cleverly answered, "I'll answer your question if you answer mine first. Where did John the baptizer get his authority? From heaven, or from humans?"

The leaders huddled together to whisper. *"If we say 'From heaven,' he'll ask why we didn't believe him,"* they argued. *"But if we say 'From humans,' we'll make the crowd mad, because everyone thinks John was a true prophet."*

So, they chickened out and told Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus smirked. "Then I won't tell you who gave me my authority, either."

Then Jesus threw a riddle at them: "What do you think of this? A man had two sons. He walked up to the first and said, 'Son, go work in the vineyard today.' The boy answered, 'No way.' But later, he felt bad about it, changed his mind, and went to work. The father went to the second son and said the exact same thing. This son replied, 'Sure thing, Dad!' But he never actually went. Now, which of the two sons did what his father wanted?"

"The first one," the religious leaders admitted.

Jesus looked them square in the eye and said, "You've got that right. And I'm telling you the truth: tax collectors and sinners are getting into God's kingdom way before you guys. Because John came showing you the right path, and you refused to believe him—while

the outcasts and sinners believed him instantly. Even when you saw that happen, you still refused to change your minds and follow God."

Jesus wasn't done yet. He gave them another parable:

"Listen to this story. A landowner planted a gorgeous vineyard, put a protective wall around it, dug out a winepress, built a tall watchtower, and rented it out to some farmers before traveling far away. When harvest time came, he sent his servants to collect his share of the grapes. But the wicked farmers grabbed the servants—they beat one, murdered another, and stoned a third!

So, the owner sent a larger group of servants. The farmers treated them the exact same way. Finally, the owner sent his own son, thinking, *'Surely they will respect my son.'*

But when the farmers saw the son coming, they whispered to each other, *'Look, here's the heir! Let's kill him, and his inheritance will be all ours!'* So they dragged him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Now, when the owner of the vineyard returns, what do you think he will do to those wicked farmers?"

The leaders replied, "He will wipe them out completely and rent the vineyard to other farmers who will actually give him his fruit when it's ready!"

Jesus stared at them. "Have you never read this in the Scriptures: *'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the most important stone of all. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing to watch'*?"

"Because of this, I'm telling you that God's kingdom will be taken away from you and given to people who actually produce good fruit.

Anyone who trips over this stone will be broken, but anyone it falls on will be crushed to dust."

When the chief priests and Pharisees heard these parables, it finally clicked: Jesus was talking directly about *them*. They wanted to arrest him right then and there, but they were too terrified of the crowd, who still looked at Jesus as a mighty prophet.

MATTHEW 22

Jesus used stories to explain what heaven is like.

"Imagine a powerful king who threw a massive wedding party for his prince," Jesus told the crowd. "He sent his helpers to tell the invited guests, 'The feast is ready! Come join the celebration!' But the guests were too busy. Some rushed off to tend their farms, others hurried to their shops, and some even grabbed the king's helpers, beat them up, and threw them out."

When the king heard this, his face turned red with anger. "Bring my soldiers!" he commanded, and they went out and stopped the troublemakers once and for all.

Then the king told his helpers, "The banquet hall is ready, but those rude guests didn't deserve to come. Go out to the main roads and invite absolutely everyone you see—good people, bad people, strangers off the street."

So the helpers ran outside and gathered a huge crowd until the party room was completely packed with guests.

As the king walked around, greeting everyone, he noticed a man wearing dirty everyday clothes instead of the special wedding robe provided for the guests.

"Excuse me, friend," the king asked, "how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" The man stood there, totally silent.

The king shook his head and told his guards, "Tie him up and throw him outside in the dark, where people are crying and wishing they had listened." Then Jesus added, "Many are invited, but only a few truly choose to accept."

Hearing this, the religious leaders—the Pharisees—put their heads together to hatch a sneaky plan to trap Jesus with His own words. They sent some of their students along with a group of politicians called Herodians to question Him.

"Teacher," they buttered up, "we know you always tell the truth about God's way and that you aren't afraid of anybody, no matter who they are."

Then came the trap: "Tell us, is it right to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, or not?"

Jesus saw right through their game. "You tricksters!" He said. "Why are you trying to trap Me? Show me a coin used for the tax."

They handed Him a small silver coin.

"Whose face and name are stamped on this?" Jesus asked.

"Caesar's," they replied.

Jesus smiled slightly. "Then give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give God what belongs to God."

Astounded by His clever answer, the men shook their heads and walked away.

Later that same day, a different group called the Sadducees—who didn't believe people could ever come back to life after dying—came up with a trick question of their own.

"Teacher," they began, "Moses taught that if a married man dies without kids, his brother has to marry the widow to keep the family name going. Well, there were seven brothers in a family. The first married a woman and died without kids, so the second brother married her. Then he died, and the third married her, all the way down to the seventh brother! Finally, the woman died too. So, in the life after death, whose wife will she be? All seven of them were married to her!"

Jesus looked at them patiently. "You are completely confused because you don't understand the scriptures or God's power," He explained. "When people rise from the dead, they don't get married; they live like the angels in heaven. Besides, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, didn't He say, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'? God isn't the God of dead people—He is the God of the living!"

The crowd listening gasped in amazement at His teaching.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had completely silenced the Sadducees, they crowded around Him again. One of them, a smart law expert, decided to test Him one more time.

"Teacher," the lawyer asked, "which of all God's rules is the absolute most important?"

Jesus answered instantly, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the first and greatest rule. And the second rule is just as important: Love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself. Every other rule and teaching in the Bible hangs on these two."

While the Pharisees were still standing around in a circle, Jesus decided to turn the tables and ask them a question.

"What do you think about the Messiah?" Jesus asked. "Whose descendant is He?"

"He is the son of King David," they answered.

"If He is David's son," Jesus asked, "then how come David, speaking by God's Spirit, called Him 'Lord'? David said, '*The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.*' If David calls Him 'Lord,' how can He just be David's son?"

Nobody in the crowd could come up with a single word to answer Him. And from that day forward, nobody ever dared to trick or test Jesus with another question.

MATTHEW 23

Jesus turned to the crowd and His friends and said, "The religious leaders love to sit in the seat of Moses and act like they are the bosses of God's rules. Listen to the good things they teach, but please, do not copy what they actually do! They love to make up

heavy, strict rules for everyone else, but they won't lift a single finger to help carry them.

Everything they do is just to show off for other people. They wear oversized religious boxes on their arms, make the fringes on their clothes extra long, and fight for the VIP seats at parties and the front rows in the church. They love people bowing to them in the streets and calling them 'Master.'

Don't let people call you 'Master' or 'Father' in that big, bossy way—you all have one ultimate Teacher, and you are all family! The greatest person among you is the one who helps others like a servant. If you try to show off and act better than everyone, you'll get knocked down. But if you are humble, God will lift you up.

Oh, watch out for you religious leaders! You are total actors. You slam the door to God's kingdom right in people's faces—you refuse to go in yourselves, and you block anyone else trying to enter.

Shame on you! You trick poor widows out of their homes and then pretend to be super holy by praying these long, fake prayers. You are in for a big wakeup call.

Shame on you! You travel across oceans just to get one new follower, and then you fill their heads with so much ugly pride that they end up even worse than you are.

You blind guides! You make up silly rules, saying, 'If someone swears by the temple building, that doesn't count—but if they swear by the gold *inside* the temple, they're trapped!' Are you kidding me? Which is actually more important: the gold, or the holy temple that makes the gold special? And you say, 'Swearing by the altar is nothing, but

swearing by the gift on top of it binds you.' Fools! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift holy? If you swear by the altar, you're swearing by it and everything on it. If you swear by the temple, you're swearing by it and by God who lives inside. And if you swear by the sky, you're swearing right by God's throne.

Shame on you! You are so careful to give God tiny pinches of your kitchen spices like mint and dill, but you completely ignore the things that actually matter: justice, mercy, and faith. You should definitely do the little things, but never leave out the big ones! You are blind guides who spend forever picking a tiny bug out of your drink, only to turn around and swallow a giant camel whole!

Shame on you! You wash the outside of your cups and bowls until they sparkle, but on the inside, they are packed with greed and selfishness. Blind leaders! Clean the *inside* of the cup first, and then the outside will naturally be clean, too.

Shame on you! You are like pretty, freshly painted white tombs—they look gorgeous on the outside, but inside they are stuffed with rotting bones and grossness. On the outside, you look like good, righteous people to everyone passing by, but on the inside, you are full of sneaky tricks and fakeness.

Shame on you! You build fancy monuments for the ancient prophets and decorate the graves of good people, saying, 'If we had lived back then, we never would have helped kill the prophets like our ancestors did.' Look at you! By saying that, you admit you are the exact kids of the people who murdered them. Go ahead and finish the rotten job your ancestors started!

You snakes! You bundle of vipers! How do you expect to escape the disaster coming your way? Because here is what I'm going to do: I am sending you prophets, wise teachers, and messengers. Some of them you will beat up and nail to crosses; others you will whip in your churches and hunt down from town to town. Because of this, you are going to be held responsible for all the innocent blood spilled on Earth—from the very first good person, Abel, all the way to Zachariah, whom you murdered right between the temple and the altar. I'm telling you the truth: this generation is going to face the heavy consequences for all of it.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You are the city that kills God's messengers and pelts His helpers with stones. How many times I wanted to gather your kids close to Me, just like a mother hen gathers her little chicks safely under her wings—and you just wouldn't let Me!

Now, your house is being left empty and ruined. And let me tell you, you won't see Me again until the day you finally look up and say, 'Blessings on the One who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

MATTHEW 24

As Jesus was leaving the grand temple grounds, his friends—the disciples—came running up to show off the massive, beautiful stone walls.

Jesus smiled, but shook his head and said, "Do you really see all these giant buildings? Mark my words: the day is coming when every

single stone will be knocked down until not a single block is left stacked on top of another!"

Later, while Jesus was sitting quietly on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the disciples crept up to him and whispered, "Please tell us—when is all this going to happen? What miraculous sign will let us know when you are returning, and when the age is finally coming to an end?"

Jesus looked at them warmly and warned, "Make sure nobody fools you! Lots of impostors are going to show up wearing my name, shouting, 'I am the rescuer!' and they will trick a whole bunch of people. You're going to hear news broadcasts about wars breaking out nearby and far away. Don't panic! These things have to happen, but it doesn't mean the grand finale is here yet. Nations will fight nations, kingdoms will clash, and there will be terrible food shortages, weird sicknesses, and rumbling earthquakes in random places. This is just the very first contraction before the big birth.

"Next, people are going to drag you into court, torture you, and put you on trial. You'll become the most hated group on earth simply because you belong to me. That pressure will cause people to snap; friends will betray each other, and bitterness will replace kindness. A wave of sneaky tricksters will pop up everywhere, peddling fake news and lies. Because cruelty will be running wild everywhere, people's hearts will freeze over and lose all their warmth. But the person who holds on tight and refuses to give up until the very end? They will make it safely. And the good news about God's kingdom is going to be broadcast across the entire globe as a witness to every single tribe, and *then* the final curtain will drop.

"So, when you spot the ultimate nightmare—that horrifying 'abomination of desolation' spoken about long ago by the prophet Daniel—standing right where it shouldn't be in the holy temple (let the reader pay close attention here!), you need to act fast. If you're living in Judea, drop everything and sprint for the mountains! If you're hanging out on your flat roof, don't even bother climbing down to grab your favorite backpack. If you're out working in the fields, don't run back home to grab a jacket. Oh, and my heart really goes out to nursing moms and pregnant women in those terrifying days! Pray hard that your escape doesn't have to happen during a freezing winter blizzard or on a strict Sabbath day. Because that window of time will be packed with a crushing disaster unlike anything the world has ever seen since the dawn of creation—and nothing like it will ever happen again. If God hadn't decided to shorten those miserable days, nobody on earth would survive. But for the sake of His chosen ones, He's going to cut the time short.

"If anyone comes up to you then and says, 'Look! The Savior is hiding right over here!' or 'No, he's over there!'—do not believe them. Shifty charlatans and fake miracle-workers are going to stage incredible illusions and mind-boggling tricks, trying to fool even God's most dedicated followers if that were even possible. Remember, I'm giving you a heads-up right now! So if they announce, 'Hey, the leader is hiding out in the middle of the desert,' don't go looking. Or, 'He's locked away in a secret bunker downtown,' don't buy it. When the Son of Man finally arrives, it won't be a secret. It will be like a blinding flash of lightning tearing across the entire sky from east to west—impossible to miss! (And wherever a dead carcass is, you can always count on the vultures circling above.)

"Right after the worst of that dark storm passes, the sun is going to go pitch black, the moon will refuse to glow, shooting stars will rain down from the sky, and the very foundations of the atmosphere will wobble. Then, the magnificent sign of the Son of Man will light up the cosmos. Every tribe on earth will beat their chests in grief when they look up and see the Son of Man riding on the clouds with absolute power and dazzling glory. He will blast a mighty trumpet call through his angels, and they will sweep across the globe from every corner of the compass, rounding up all of God's chosen people.

"Let me teach you a quick lesson from a fig tree. When its spring branches soften up and tiny green leaves start popping out, you instantly know summer is right around the corner. It's the exact same for you guys. When you look around and see all these warning signs happening, you'll know the end is right there at the doorstep. I promise you, this current generation won't disappear completely until every last piece of this puzzle clicks into place. The physical universe—heaven and earth—might fade away one day, but my words will never, ever expire.

"As for the exact date and hour? Absolutely nobody knows. Not the wisest scholars, not the dazzling angels in heaven, not even the Son—only my Father knows that secret.

"Think back to the days of Noah. That's exactly what the return of the Son of Man will feel like. Back before the great flood wiped everything out, people were totally oblivious. They were throwing huge dinner parties, clinking glasses, getting married, and planning weddings right up until the exact moment Noah opened the big door

and marched into the ark. They didn't have a clue what was happening until the rushing floodwaters swept the whole lot of them away. That's how it's going to be when the Son of Man appears. Suddenly, two guys will be working side-by-side in a field; one will be whisked away, and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding grain together at the handmill; one will be taken, and the other left.

"So stay wide awake! Keep your eyes peeled, because you have no idea what hour your Master is showing up. Think about it this way: if a homeowner knew precisely what time of night a sneaky burglar was planning to break in, he'd stay awake with a flashlight and refuse to let his home get ransacked. That's why you need to be packed and ready at a moment's notice, because the Son of Man is going to show up when you least expect him.

"Who then is a truly trustworthy, smart servant? He's the one his master put in charge of running the household and serving dinner to the other workers on time. How happy and blessed is that servant when his master walks through the front door and catches him hard at work doing the right thing! I guarantee you, the master will reward him by putting him in charge of his entire estate.

"On the flip side, imagine if a lazy, wicked servant thinks to himself, *'My boss is taking forever to get back,'* and starts bullying the other workers, while hanging out at wild parties getting drunk. That boss is going to show up completely out of the blue—on a day the servant didn't plan for, at an hour he couldn't guess—and he will fire him on the spot, throwing him out with the frauds and hypocrites. There, he'll be stuck in the dark, crying and grinding his teeth in regret."

MATTHEW 25

Imagine the kingdom of heaven is a bit like a royal wedding celebration. Ten bridesmaids grabbed their glowing lanterns and stepped out into the night to welcome the groom.

Now, five of these girls were smart and prepared, but the other five were quite careless. The careless ones brought their lamps, but forgot to bring extra oil flasks. The smart ones, however, packed extra oil just in case.

Since the groom was taking a long time to arrive, all the girls grew drowsy and fell fast asleep.

Suddenly, right at midnight, a loud shout echoed through the dark: "Look! The groom is finally here! Go out and meet him!"

All the bridesmaids jumped up and hurried to fix their lamps. The careless ones panicked because their flames were flickering out. "Please, give us some of your oil!" they begged the smart girls. "Our lamps are dying!"

"We can't," the smart girls replied. "There won't be enough for all of us. You'd better run down to the market and buy some for yourselves."

While the careless girls were rushing off to find oil, the groom arrived. The bridesmaids who were ready walked right into the wedding feast with him, and the heavy wooden doors were locked tight.

A little later, the other girls finally showed up, pounding on the door and calling out, "Master, Master, open up for us!"

But a voice from inside answered, "I'm sorry, I don't know you."

The lesson here is simple: always stay ready and pay attention, because you never know the exact day or hour the Son of Man will return.

The kingdom of heaven is also like a wealthy traveler who was about to take a long journey. Before leaving, he called his three workers together and trusted them with his money. Based on what each worker could handle, he gave five bags of gold to the first, two bags to the second, and just one bag to the third. Then, he left.

The worker with five bags went straight to work, investing the money wisely until he had doubled it to ten bags. The worker with two bags did the same thing, successfully doubling his money to four.

But the worker who received only one bag took it, dug a hole in the dirt, and buried his master's money to keep it safe.

After a very long time, the master returned to check on his money and see how they had done.

The first worker stepped forward, handing over ten bags of gold.

"Master, you gave me five bags, and I've earned five more!"

Beaming with pride, the master said, "Fantastic job, my good and faithful worker! You handled a small task brilliantly, so now I'm going to give you much greater responsibilities. Come celebrate with me!"

The second worker came forward next. "Master, you trusted me with two bags, and I've doubled them into four."

The master smiled. "Well done! You've proven trustworthy with a little, so now I will put you in charge of much more. Come join the celebration."

Finally, the worker with the single bag walked up. "Master," he mumbled, "I know you are a strict man who expects results, so I was terrified. I went and hid your money safely in the dirt. Here, take back what is yours."

The master was furious. "You lazy and wicked worker! If you knew I expected results, you should have at least put my money in the bank so it could earn some interest! Take that bag of gold away from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For those who use what they have will get even more, but those who do nothing will lose everything they thought they had."

Then he turned to his guards and said, "Throw this useless worker out into the dark, where people are crying and regretful."

When the Son of Man finally arrives in all His glorious majesty, surrounded by angels, He will sit upon His glorious throne. Every single nation will be gathered before Him, and He will sort the people into two groups—just like a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

He will place the sheep on His right side and the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to the ones on His right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father! Step into the kingdom prepared for you since

the world began. Because when I was starving, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me a drink. When I was a lonely stranger, you welcomed me in. When I had no clothes, you dressed me. When I was sick, you cared for me, and when I was locked in prison, you came to visit me."

The good people will look confused and ask, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or needing clothes and help you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and go to you?"

And the King will answer, "Whenever you did one of these kind things for the poorest, weakest, or most overlooked person around you, you were doing it right for me."

Then He will turn to the ones on His left and say, "Away from me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his helpers! Because when I was hungry, you gave me nothing. When I was thirsty, you ignored me. When I was a stranger, you shut the door. When I was naked, you didn't help. When I was sick and in prison, you never came."

They will argue, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison, and not help you?"

And He will reply, "The truth is, whenever you refused to help one of the least of these people, you were refusing to help me."

And with that, the wrongdoers will go away to face eternal punishment, while the righteous will step into eternal, joyful life.

MATTHEW 26

Once upon a time, just two days before the happy Passover celebration, Jesus gathered His close friends and helpers together. He had some very important and surprising news to share with them.

"You all know that Passover is coming in a couple of days," Jesus gently explained. "That is when the Son of Man will be handed over to people who want to put Him to death on a cross."

Meanwhile, all the important religious leaders—the chief priests, the scribes, and the village elders—were having a secret meeting at the grand palace of the High Priest, whose name was Caiaphas. They were putting their heads together, whispering and plotting about how they could trick Jesus and quietly have Him arrested and killed.

"We shouldn't do it during the big festival, though," one of them pointed out. "If we do, the huge crowds of people might get angry and start a riot."

While they were scheming, Jesus was visiting a village called Bethany, resting at the home of a man named Simon. As Jesus sat at the table enjoying a meal, a woman walked in carrying a tiny, beautiful jar made of pure alabaster stone. Inside the jar was a very rare, sweet-smelling perfume. She gently opened it and poured the precious liquid right over Jesus's head.

Some of the disciples grumbled when they saw this, frowning and shaking their heads.

"What a terrible waste!" they whispered to each other. "That fancy perfume could have been sold for a whole lot of money, and we could have given all that cash to the poor!"

Jesus heard them whispering and softly defended her. "Why are you giving this woman a hard time?" He asked. "She has just done a wonderful, loving thing for Me. You will always have poor people around you who you can help, but I won't be with you much longer. By pouring this perfume on My body, she is getting Me ready for My burial. Listen to my words: wherever the good news is shared all over the world, what this woman did today will always be remembered and talked about."

Around the exact same time, one of the twelve special disciples—a man named Judas Iscariot—slipped away from the group and went straight to the chief priests.

"What will you give me if I help you catch Jesus and hand Him over to you?" Judas asked greedily.

The leaders smiled and promised to pay him thirty shiny pieces of silver. From that exact moment on, Judas kept his eyes peeled, waiting for the perfect chance to betray his friend.

When the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread arrived, the disciples walked up to Jesus and asked, "Where would You like us to go and get the Passover dinner ready for You?"

Jesus smiled and told two of them, "Go straight into the city and look for a certain man. Tell him, 'The Master says: My time has finally come. I want to celebrate the Passover at your house with My disciples.'"

The disciples did exactly as Jesus asked, setting up a wonderful meal.

When evening finally fell, Jesus sat down at the table with His twelve friends. As they began to eat, Jesus grew very quiet. Then, looking around the table, He said sadly, "I tell you the truth—one of you eating right here with Me tonight is going to betray me."

A wave of heavy sadness fell over the room. Everyone looked at each other in shock, and one by one, they started asking, "Lord, is it me?"

Jesus answered, "The one who dips his piece of bread into the bowl right beside Me is the one who will do it. The Son of Man must go away just like the ancient stories say He will, but how terrible it will be for the person who betrays Him! It would have been better for that man if he had never even been born."

Then Judas, the very one who was planning the betrayal, looked up and asked, "Master, is it me?"

Jesus looked right at him and said, "You have said so."

While they were still eating, Jesus picked up a loaf of bread, thanked God for it, broke it into pieces, and handed it to His friends. "Take this and eat it," He said. "This is My body."

Then He picked up a cup of juice, thanked God again, and passed it around. "All of you, drink from this," He said. "This is My blood, which seals a brand-new promise and is poured out to wash away the sins of many. But I want you to know: I won't drink this juice again until the day I share it fresh with you in My Father's kingdom."

After singing a happy song together to praise God, they all stood up and walked out into the cool night air, heading toward the quiet Mount of Olives.

As they walked, Jesus turned to them and said, "Tonight, all of you will be so scared that you will run away and leave Me. The ancient writings say, '*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter in all directions.*' But don't worry—after I rise back to life, I will meet you in Galilee."

Peter puffed out his chest proudly and said, "Even if everyone else runs away and is scared of you, I promise I never will be!"

Jesus looked at Peter kindly and said, "The truth is, Peter, tonight before the rooster crows at dawn, you will pretend you don't even know Me three whole times."

"Never!" Peter insisted, shaking his head. "Even if I have to die by your side, I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples nodded and said the exact same thing.

Soon, they arrived at a quiet, shadowy olive grove called Gethsemane. Jesus told the group, "Sit here and wait while I go over there to pray."

He took Peter, James, and John—the two sons of Zebedee—with Him a little further. Suddenly, a heavy, dark sadness crashed over Jesus's heart. He felt so terribly sad and overwhelmed that He felt like He might die from it.

"My heart is breaking with deep sorrow," Jesus told the three friends. "Stay right here and keep watch with Me."

Jesus walked just a few steps further, bowed all the way to the ground with His face in the dirt, and prayed, "O My Father, if there is any possible way, please take this terrible suffering away from Me. But more than anything, I want Your will to be done, not Mine."

When Jesus walked back to check on His three friends, He found them all fast asleep! He gently woke Peter up and asked, "Couldn't you stay awake and keep watch with Me for even one hour? Wake up and pray so you don't give in to temptation. The human spirit is willing and wants to do right, but the human body is so weak."

Jesus walked away a second time and prayed the exact same thing: "O My Father, if this terrible cup of suffering cannot be taken away unless I drink it, then let Your will be done."

When He returned, He found them fast asleep again because their eyelids were so heavy and tired. So He let them rest, walked away a third time, and prayed the exact same words.

Finally, Jesus came back to the disciples and said, "Go ahead and sleep now, and get your rest. Look, the time has come! The Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners. Get up, let's go! Look, the one who is betraying Me is right here."

Even as the words were leaving His mouth, Judas—one of the twelve—showed up. Behind him came a huge, noisy angry mob carrying heavy wooden clubs and shiny swords, sent by the chief priests and elders.

Judas had given them a special secret signal. "The man I walk up to and kiss," he had told them, "that is Him! Grab Him tightly and don't let Him get away."

Right away, Judas marched straight up to Jesus, smiled, and said, "Hello, Master!" and kissed Him on the cheek.

Jesus looked at him warmly and said, "My friend, why have you come here?"

Then the angry mob rushed forward, grabbed hold of Jesus, and tied Him up.

Suddenly, one of the disciples standing with Jesus panicked. He pulled out a hidden sword, swung it through the air, and chopped off the ear of a servant who worked for the High Priest.

"Stop!" Jesus commanded, gently touching the servant's ear to heal it. "Put your sword away. Everyone who lives by fighting with swords will end up dying by swords. Don't you realize that I could simply ask My Father right now, and He would instantly send down more than twelve whole armies of angels to protect Me? But if I did that, how could the ancient stories come true? This is how it has to happen."

Then Jesus turned to the rowdy crowd of armed men and shouted, "Did you really have to bring swords and clubs to capture Me like I'm a dangerous robber? Every single day I sat right out in the open teaching in the temple, and you never laid a finger on Me. But all this is happening just so the words of the prophets come true."

Terrified by the roaring crowd, all of the disciples suddenly panicked, turned around, and ran away into the dark night, leaving Jesus all alone.

The men who had captured Jesus dragged Him away to the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest, where all the scribes and elders were waiting. Peter followed them from a safe distance, sneaking quietly

into the palace courtyard and sitting down by a warm fire with the guards to watch how it would all end.

Inside, the chief priests and the whole council were desperately trying to find people who would tell lies about Jesus so they could have an excuse to put Him to death. But even though many people came forward with silly lies, none of their stories matched up.

Finally, two men stepped forward and lied, "This man said, 'I am strong enough to tear down the Temple of God and rebuild it completely in just three days!'"

The High Priest stood up from his big chair, glared at Jesus, and demanded, "Well? Aren't you going to answer that? What do you have to say about these terrible things they are saying about you?"

Jesus stayed completely silent, not saying a single word.

Frustrated, the High Priest shouted, "I put you under oath before the living God! Tell us the absolute truth right now: Are you the Christ, the Son of God?"

Jesus looked right at him and replied, "You have said it yourself. But I tell you all the truth: from now on, you are going to see the Son of Man sitting in the place of power at God's right hand, riding on the clouds of heaven!"

At those words, the High Priest grew furious, grabbed his own clothes, and ripped them right down the front. "He has spoken against God!" he yelled. "We don't need any more witnesses! You all just heard His terrible words with your own ears. What do you think?"

The crowd shouted back, "He is guilty! He deserves to die!"

Then some of the mean men stepped forward and spit right in Jesus's face. They punched Him, slapped Him across the face, and taunted, "Hey, Mr. Prophet! Since you're so smart, tell us—who was it that just hit you?"

Out in the courtyard, Peter was still sitting quietly by the fire. A young servant girl walked past, stared at him, and announced to everyone, "Hey! This man was with Jesus of Galilee!"

Peter's heart skipped a beat. He shook his head and said in front of everyone, "I have no idea what you're talking about!"

He tried to act casual and walked out onto the front porch. Another girl spotted him and told the people standing nearby, "Look, this guy was definitely with Jesus of Nazareth!"

Peter raised his voice and swore an oath, saying, "I swear to you, I don't even know the man!"

A little while later, several other people walked up to Peter and said, "We know you're one of them. We can tell by the way you talk—you have the exact same accent!"

Peter began to panic. He started cursing and shouting, "I'm telling you, I do not know this man!"

The very second those words left his mouth, a rooster crowed loudly in the quiet morning air.

Suddenly, Peter remembered the promise Jesus had made to him just a few hours earlier: *"Before the rooster crows tonight, you will deny Me three times."*

Peter's eyes filled with hot tears. He covered his face, turned away, and ran out into the dark night, crying bitterly.

MATTHEW 27

As the sun peeked over the hills, the religious leaders and city elders held a secret meeting. Their minds were made up: Jesus had to die. They tied his hands, marched him away, and handed him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Meanwhile, Judas—the very friend who had handed Jesus over—watched as the terrible verdict was announced. Remorse crashed over him like a wave. He rushed back to the temple priests, clutching the thirty silver coins they had paid him.

“I have sinned!” Judas cried out. “I have betrayed an innocent man!”

The leaders just shrugged. “That’s your problem, not ours.”

Heartbroken and filled with despair, Judas threw the silver coins clattering onto the temple floor, ran off, and took his own life.

The priests picked up the money, whispering among themselves. “We can’t put this in the temple treasury; it’s blood money.” After some quick planning, they used the coins to buy a piece of land known as the potter’s field, turning it into a graveyard for travelers. To this day, people still call it the Field of Blood. This even matched an old prophecy about the thirty pieces of silver and the potter's field.

Soon, Jesus was standing in front of the governor.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate asked.

“You have said so,” Jesus replied calmly.

When the chief priests shouted a storm of wild accusations, Jesus didn’t say a single word. Pilate stared at him, completely amazed.

Now, it was a holiday tradition for the governor to release one prisoner that the crowd chose. And they happened to have a notorious prisoner locked up, a troublemaker named Barabbas.

As the angry crowd gathered, Pilate gave them a choice: “Who do you want me to set free? Barabbas, or Jesus, the one they call the King?” Pilate knew the leaders were just jealous of Jesus.

Just then, a messenger rushed through the crowd with a note from Pilate’s wife. “*Stay away from that innocent man,*” it warned. “*I’ve had terrible nightmares about him all morning!*”

But the chief priests and elders worked the crowd into a frenzy, whispering in people’s ears until everyone was shouting for Barabbas and demanding Jesus’s execution.

“Which of the two do you want me to release?” Pilate asked again.

“Barabbas!” they roared.

“Then what should I do with Jesus?” Pilate asked.

“Crucify him!” they screamed back.

“Why?” Pilate protested. “What terrible crime has he committed?”

That only made them louder. “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Seeing that a riot was about to break out and he was losing control, Pilate called for a bowl of water. He washed his hands in front of the

massive crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he declared. “You handle it yourselves.”

The crowd shouted a chilling reply: “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”

With that, Pilate set Barabbas free. But as for Jesus, he ordered his guards to whip him mercilessly before handing him over to be nailed to a cross.

The governor's soldiers led Jesus into the guardroom, calling the whole regiment together. They ripped off his clothes and threw a bright red soldier's cape over his shoulders. Then they wove a crown out of sharp thorns, shoved it onto his head, and jammed a wooden stick into his right hand. Kneeling down in mock worship, they sneered, “All hail, King of the Jews!” They spit on him, grabbed the stick, and beat him over the head with it.

When they finally finished their cruel game, they took off the cape, put his own clothes back on, and marched him out to be crucified.

Along the way, they bumped into a traveler named Simon from Cyrene and forced him to carry the heavy wooden cross. They finally arrived at a grim hill called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull."

They tried to give Jesus a bitter, drugged drink to dull the pain, but when he tasted it, he refused.

Then came the agonizing moments of the crucifixion. As the nails were driven in, the soldiers sat down to divide his clothes among themselves by rolling dice, fulfilling an ancient prophecy: *“They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”*

Above Jesus's head, they nailed a wooden sign stating the charge against him: **This Is Jesus, The King Of The Jews.** Two thieves were crucified beside him, one on the right and one on the left.

People strolling by shook their heads and hurled insults. “So you’re the one who said he could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? Save yourself! If you’re really the Son of God, climb down off that cross!”

The religious leaders joined in the mockery with the teachers of the law. “He saved others, but he can’t even save himself!” they jeered. “If he’s the King of Israel, let him climb down now and we’ll believe in him! He trusted in God—let God rescue him if he wants him, since he claimed to be God’s Son!” Even the two thieves hanging beside him yelled insults at him.

Suddenly, right around noon, a strange, heavy darkness fell over the entire land for three hours.

As the afternoon shadows stretched, Jesus cried out in a loud, heartbreaking voice: *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”* which means, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Some people standing nearby misheard him and joked, “Listen, he’s calling for the prophet Elijah!”

One man quickly grabbed a sponge, soaked it in sour wine, put it on the end of a stick, and held it up to Jesus's lips so he could drink. The others waved him off, saying, “Leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah actually comes to rescue him.”

Then Jesus shouted one last time with all his might, and breathed his last breath.

At that exact moment, the thick curtain hanging inside the temple ripped completely in two, from top to bottom. The ground began to shake, rocks cracked open, and tombs burst wide open. Many faithful people who had died woke up, and after Jesus rose again, they walked into the holy city and showed themselves to many people.

The Roman army captain and the soldiers guarding Jesus felt the ground shake and saw everything that happened. Terrified, the captain whispered, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

A group of women who had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of James and John.

As evening approached, a wealthy follower of Jesus from the town of Arimathea, named Joseph, went to see Pilate. He boldly asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave the order to release it.

Joseph took the body down, wrapped it in a fresh, clean linen sheet, and laid it in his own brand-new tomb that had been carved out of solid rock. Then he rolled a massive stone across the entrance and walked away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat nearby, keeping watch over the tomb.

The next day—the day after the Sabbath preparations—the chief priests and Pharisees rushed to see Pilate.

“Sir,” they said, “we just remembered that while that deceiver was still alive, he bragged, ‘*After three days I will rise again.*’ Please, give orders to seal the tomb tightly until the third day. Otherwise, his

disciples might sneak in by night, steal his body, and tell everyone he came back to life. That last lie would be worse than the first!”

Pilate nodded. “Take a guard of soldiers and make it as secure as you possibly can.”

So they rushed to the tomb, secured the heavy stone with a special seal, and posted the guards to watch over it day and night.

MATTHEW 28

As the Sabbath ended and the very first rays of Sunday morning sun began to peek over the hills, Mary Magdalene and her friend Mary walked down the quiet path to check on Jesus’s tomb.

Suddenly, the ground began to rumble beneath their feet! A powerful angel of God flashed down from the sky like a shooting star, pushed the heavy stone door aside as if it were a feather, and sat right down on top of it. He glowed as bright as lightning, and his clothes were as white as freshly fallen snow. The Roman guards standing watch were so terrified that they froze stiff, shaking with fear until they passed out cold.

The glowing angel smiled gently at the women and said, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to the cross. But He isn't here—He has come back to life, just like He promised He would! Come look inside and see the empty spot where the Lord was resting. Now, hurry up! Run and tell His disciples the wonderful news: Jesus has risen from the dead, and He is already heading to

Galilee ahead of you. You will see Him there. That's my message for you!"

With their hearts pounding a wild mix of nervous shivers and bubbling, ecstatic joy, the two women sprinted away from the tomb to find the disciples.

Suddenly, someone stepped right into their path and said, "Hello there!"

They stopped dead in their tracks—it was Jesus! Overjoyed, they fell to the ground, hugged His feet, and worshipped Him.

Jesus smiled and said, "Don't be scared. Go tell my brothers to head to Galilee, and they will see me there."

While the women were running off, some of the guards who had fainted managed to stagger back into the city. They rushed straight to the chief priests and spilled every single detail about what had happened. The priests quickly called a secret meeting with the town elders. Panicked that the truth would get out, they bribed the soldiers with a massive bag of silver coins, telling them, "Here's what you must tell everyone: 'His disciples snuck in while we were asleep and stole the body.' And if the Roman governor hears about this, don't worry—we'll talk to him and keep you safe."

The soldiers took the heavy bribe and followed the plan. To this very day, people in town still repeat that silly made-up story.

Meanwhile, the eleven faithful disciples packed their bags and traveled north to Galilee, climbing up the exact mountain Jesus had told them to go to. When they finally spotted Him in the distance,

they dropped to their knees in worship—though a few of them still blinked in wonder, hardly daring to believe their own eyes.

Jesus walked right up to them with a warm, confident smile and said, "God has given Me all authority and power in heaven and on earth. So, I am giving you a mission! Go out into the whole world and bring everyone into God's family, teaching them to follow the ways of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I've ever taught you. And remember this forever: no matter where you go or what happens, I am right here with you every single day, all the way until the end of time. Amen!"