

# SESSION 1: PROMISED LIKE NO OTHER

## ISAIAH 53:2-12

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### *Isaiah 53:2-3 Commentary*

Isaiah is known as one of the great eighth-century prophets of Israel and Judah. Included in Isaiah's prophecies are a number of poems called servant songs (generally viewed as 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12). Most Christian scholars view these songs as describing the promised Messiah's ministry as God's Suffering Servant. The fourth servant song in Isaiah begins in 52:13, where God called attention to His Servant. God proclaimed that His Servant would act in such a wise and intelligent way that He would be successful and exalted (Isa. 52:13). Although many would be awestruck by the Servant's disfigured appearance, He would purify (or startle) many nations by His selfless suffering and resulting exaltation. In Isaiah 53, the prophet's main focus was not on the Servant's suffering, as horrible as that was, but rather the Servant's triumph and victory over and through His suffering.

**[VERSE 2]** At the beginning of His redemptive role, God's Suffering Servant appeared to be lowly and unattractive. The phrase **He grew up before Him** stressed God's watchful and protective care for His Servant. To observers, **a young plant** was merely an ordinary shoot among many others, attracting little notice. **A root out of dry ground** existed in adverse circumstances and likely would wither and die. The phrases stressed the Servant's humble beginnings and the hostile environment in which He lived. The Servant's personal appearance (**form**) was unimpressive. People conferred no honor on Him. They paid no attention to Him; they gave Him no second look.

**[VERSE 3]** People the Servant encountered by and large treated Him with contempt and drew back from (shunned) Him. He suffered pain and experienced human weakness. The phrase **who knew what sickness was** could have the sense of either the Servant being heartsick at people's rejection of Him or His involvement with others' pain and sickness to relieve them. The Servant was **someone people turned away from**—literally, hid their faces from—as though they could not bear to look at Him. The repetition of the phrase **was despised** emphasized people's contempt for the Servant. They did not value Him; that is, they reckoned Him as nothing. They did not recognize the Servant for who He was and what He was accomplishing.

Note the parallels between Jesus and the Suffering Servant. Jesus came as God's Suffering-Servant Messiah. His mother was a young peasant woman and His legal father was a carpenter. He grew up as merely one more peasant boy in the lightly regarded village of Nazareth in Galilee. He grew as all Jewish boys grew and was only one among many. Few if any took notice of Him. As soon as He began His public ministry, He experienced rejection, and He carried out His entire redemptive mission in a hostile environment.

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### *Isaiah 53:4-9 Commentary*

At first, people who viewed the Servant's sufferings drew the wrong conclusion. In accord with the accepted view of their time, they viewed His sufferings as God's punishment for His sins. The words **stricken, struck down, and afflicted** stressed the intensity of the Servant's suffering and the violence involved. In a dramatic reversal of their thinking, they came to understand that the Servant suffered for them. In reality, the Servant took on Himself people's **sicknesses** and **pains**.

**[VERSES 5-6]** In the clarity of their insight concerning the Servant's sufferings, people realized that their **transgressions** (rebellions against God) and **iniquities** (perversity, wrongdoings) led to the Servant's being **pierced** and **crushed**. The Hebrew words for the violence He endured were the strongest terms possible for painful death. The Servant's violent, excruciating death resulted in people's **peace**—their being made whole—and brought spiritual healing through forgiveness. He provided the remedy for sin, which brought reconciliation and peace with God. The phrase **we all** encompasses everybody; no one is excluded. Finally, we have to be careful how we interpret the phrase **the Lord has punished Him**. The Servant was not punished for anything He had done. The Hebrew word translated *punished* means "to cause to light on" or "to cause to fall on." The Servant's suffering involved His taking on Himself the **iniquity** (wrongdoings) of everyone else.

**[VERSES 7-9]** The Servant endured His suffering in regal silence. The images of **a lamb led to the slaughter** and of **a sheep silent before her shearers** drive home the point that the Servant made no cry of protest as He suffered. His lack of complaint indicated He suffered willingly on others' behalf. Isaiah 53:8 seems to describe the Servant's trial and death. The phrase **taken away because of oppression and judgment** has been interpreted as the Servant's being taken from confinement to a trial and the verdict of death. The Servant was killed (**cut off**) as a result of people's **rebellion**, or willful disobedience of God's commands. The people who killed the Servant intended to make His grave **with the wicked**, but God's intervention placed Him **with a rich man**; He received an honorable burial. The Servant was innocent of any wrongdoing. He had no sin or guilt.

The parallels between Isaiah's prophecy Servant and Jesus are many and obvious. Jesus adopted the Suffering Servant model for His ministry, and His disciples saw His suffering mirrored in the words of Isaiah's song. Early believers viewed Jesus' excruciating death on the cross as voluntary and vicarious; He willingly died on sinners' behalf. At Jesus' trial, He remained silent in the face of false charges. His burial was intended to be that of a common criminal, with His corpse likely thrown into the Valley of Hinnom. Joseph of Arimathea, however, provided a new tomb and gave Jesus an honorable burial.

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## **Isaiah 53:10-12 Commentary**

God took no delight in the Servant's suffering. Rather, God took the provision of forgiveness and reconciliation on Himself. The phrase **the LORD was pleased** has the sense of God's will or purpose. God's will was that the Servant give Himself on others' behalf, even to the extent of being crushed (bruised) **severely**. The Servant's voluntary self-sacrifice was a **restitution offering**; offering Himself provided the complete means for people to receive forgiveness. At this point the verb tenses become future. The Servant's death would not be the end for Him. He would be vindicated and victorious. He would have spiritual offspring who would continue His influence. Also, He would **prolong His days**, a statement that seems to suggest resurrection. Beyond His suffering and death, the Servant would look back and be **satisfied** by a mission well-done. Because the sinless Servant would **carry** people's **iniquities**, they would have access to God through Him.

**[VERSE 12]** God is the Speaker in verse 12. Because the Servant would faithfully fulfill His redemptive mission, God would **give Him the many as His portion**. This verse is translated in two ways. The first has God giving the Servant numerous followers as the recompense for His self-sacrifice (HCSB). The second interpretation has the Servant among the victorious dividing the spoils (NIV, ESV). An additional reward would be His receiving homage from the world's **mighty**. Some interpreters take **spoil** as plunder or booty taken in war; thus the Servant would receive His share—the greater share—of His victory's results. Others view the world's great ones as the Servant's spoil or reward; He would be sovereign over all others. In either case, God would exalt His Servant because the Servant willingly gave Himself to the extent of dying. He was branded as a rebel against God, One who transgressed against Him. The truth, however, was that the Servant **bore the sin of many**. The Servant voluntarily died for the sake of the true **rebels**—people who stubbornly revolted against God and refused to obey Him.

Again, the parallels between the Suffering Servant and Christ stand out. Christ voluntarily suffered and died to provide atonement for sins. He was raised to life and gained spiritual offspring—faithful followers who continue to extend His redemptive ministry. He accomplished God's redemptive purpose and was satisfied He had done His task well. Through Jesus' atoning self-giving, sinners can be made right with God. Because of Jesus' faithfulness to His mission, even to the extent of dying, God has drawn many people to Him and has exalted Him as sovereign. Jesus died between two insurrectionists (rebels against Rome) and was counted as one of them. Yet He actually intervened on sinners' behalf by bearing their sins. He provided a means of rescue from sin and its consequences. Isaiah 53:1-12 helped early Christians make sense of Jesus' crucifixion. That's why quotations from Isaiah 53:1-12 occur in the four Gospels, Acts, Romans, Philippians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter.

## SESSION 2: A BIRTH LIKE NO OTHER

### LUKE 1:26-35

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#### Luke 1:26-31 Commentary

**[VERSES 26-27]** In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (see Lk. 1:24-25), **God** honored His messenger **Gabriel** with the task of announcing the Messiah's conception. Galilee was the northernmost part of the holy land; Nazareth was located about 70 miles northeast of Jerusalem and was viewed as an insignificant village. The Old Testament makes no mention of it (see John 1:46). Specifically, Gabriel was sent **to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph**. The term *virgin* referred to an unmarried woman who was of marriageable age and sexually pure. In Jewish culture of the time, betrothal was as binding as marriage, usually lasted a year, and could be broken only by divorce. That Joseph was **of the house** (of the lineage) **of David** was significant because the Messiah would be David's descendant (see 2 Sam. 7:11b-16). **The virgin's name was Mary**, the Greek name for the Hebrew *Miriam*.

**[VERSE 28]** Gabriel suddenly appeared to Mary and greeted her. The Greek word translated **rejoice** can be rendered "hail," the usual manner of greeting in the Greco-Roman world. Gabriel announced that Mary was **favored** and that **the Lord** was **with** her. The term translated *favored* has the sense of receiving grace; the word's form has the idea of being the special object of grace. Although Mary likely was a pious young Jewish maiden, she had not earned the role Gabriel was about to announce. God graciously had chosen her. Also, the emphasis of **favored woman** is on Mary's receiving grace, not on her being able to bestow it. The phrase **the Lord is with you** stressed the presence of God's power and was meant to calm and reassure Mary.

**[VERSES 29-30]** Gabriel's words of greeting **deeply troubled** Mary. Likely, his sudden appearance startled her, but his words upset and perplexed her. She may have felt the angel's greeting was too lofty to be addressed to her. Gabriel quickly reassured her. She had no reason to fear (literally, "stop being afraid"), for she had **found favor** [grace] **with God**. Grace is God's unmerited favor. In His sovereignty, God had selected Mary for a prominent role in His redemptive purpose.

**[VERSE 31]** The phrase **now listen** was used to introduce and call attention to something that was new and unexpected but certain. Gabriel's next words must have stunned Mary: She would **conceive and give birth to a son**. Incredible! Even though she and Joseph were betrothed, they did not live together. They could not have marital relations until after their marriage was formalized. She would not commit adultery by having relations with another man. What did the angel mean? Gabriel added that Mary would give her son the name **Jesus**. Derived from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, the word means "the Lord (Yahweh) is salvation." Luke did not elaborate on the name *Jesus*, but Matthew explained the reason for it: The son to be born to Mary would "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

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#### Luke 1:32-33 Commentary

**[VERSE 32]** The son to be born to Mary would not merely be another Jewish boy-child. Her son would **be great**. Gabriel had told Zechariah that the son born to Elizabeth and him would be great in God's estimation (see Luke 1:15). Mary's son, however, would be infinitely greater. The Greek term rendered *great* conveys the sense of being eminent because of ability, virtue, authority, and power. It expresses exalted rank that surpasses other people.

As the Messiah's forerunner, John would have the distinction of playing a key role in God's provision of salvation. Jesus, however, would **be called the Son of the Most High**. His greatness would excel that of everyone and everything else. The phrase *the Most High* is an oblique reference to God and *the Son of the Most High* is a messianic title. The phrase *will be called* has the sense of "will be" or "will be recognized as." Jesus' preeminence again is emphasized: John would be recognized as a "prophet of the Most High" (v. 76) who would announce the Messiah's coming; Jesus would be God's Son in a special sense. He would be fully human and fully divine.

With Gabriel's next words, no doubt the magnitude of God's gracious gift to Mary began to dawn on her. In the background is 2 Samuel 7:11b-16, which became known as the Davidic Covenant and was the basis of the Jews' expectation of the Messiah. **The Lord God** would **give** His Son David's **throne**. The word *throne* symbolizes absolute power. God would fulfill His promise to David of a descendant who would rule forever.

The phrase **His father David** did not infer that Jesus was David's literal son, but rather placed the coming Messiah in David's line. Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed, was David's descendant (see Luke 1:27). Because Joseph would be Jesus' legal father, Jesus would be in David's line.

**[VERSE 33]** The Messiah would **reign over the house of Jacob forever**. The phrase *the house of Jacob* referred to Israel. Mary's son would be the Jews' long-awaited Messiah-King. Unlike David's reign, the Messiah's **kingdom** would **have no end**.

The term *kingdom* has the sense of sovereign rule, not of realm or territory. In 2 Samuel 7:13, God promised to establish the throne of David's descendant forever. The Messiah's reign would be spiritual and everlasting, not earthly and temporary.

In other words, Jesus would be born to reign as Messiah throughout eternity.

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## **Luke 1:34-35 Commentary**

**[VERSE 34]** Mary was most likely well acquainted with God's promise to send the Messiah. As in the case of all other Jewish maidens, she probably hoped for the privilege of being the Messiah's mother. At this point, she likely understood that God had chosen her for that magnificent role. Gabriel's reference to her child's deity, His being David's descendant, and His kingly reign identified Him as the Messiah. No doubt she was elated, but she also was puzzled. Her question, "**How can this be?**" did not express doubt or disbelief concerning God's promise through Gabriel. It was not a matter of *whether* the promise would be fulfilled but *how* it would happen. Earlier, Zechariah had expressed doubt that he and Elizabeth could have a son; he wanted Gabriel to provide proof, and he received a rebuke (see 1:18-19). Mary asked by what means the conception would be accomplished and received no rebuke. Mary was sexually pure. She had **not been intimate** with Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, or with any other man. If her conception would not occur as a result of sexual intimacy, how would it be accomplished?

**[VERSE 35]** Gabriel graciously answered Mary's question. Her conception would result from God's creative ability at work. Gabriel used Hebrew parallelism to stress that what would take place would originate with God. He would take the initiative to accomplish His purpose. **The Holy Spirit**—God's creative presence and power—would **come upon** Mary. Stated differently for emphasis, God's **power** would **overshadow** her. The poetic language does not convey the idea of sexual union between God (or the Spirit) with Mary. Neither the phrase *come upon* nor the term *overshadow* was used to indicate sexual relationship. Rather, Luke used the words to refer to God's miraculous power.

Gabriel described the son Mary would conceive as **the holy One**. Jesus would be set apart for His redemptive mission. In addition, He would be morally pure. He would be sinless and would accomplish God's purpose of providing salvation. Jesus also would be called **the Son of God**; that is, He would be God's Son. Infinitely more important than being David's son (see Luke 1:32), Jesus would have a relationship with God that no other person could have. The language does not suggest that Jesus became God's Son at His conception; rather, He would reveal His deity through His humanity.

Luke 1:34-35 presents a number of truths for our careful consideration: (1) Jesus' conception was the result of God's creative power. (2) Jesus was fully human. He went through the normal gestation period and the birth process. (3) Jesus was fully divine. (4) Jesus was the sinless Savior whom God sent to provide forgiveness for sinners.

As a sidenote, Mary's response to Gabriel's gentle assurance is one of most beautiful expressions in the Scriptures of obedience to and trust in God (see 1:38).

## SESSION 3: POWER LIKE NO OTHER

### MARK 4:35-41

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#### Mark 4:35-38a Commentary

**[VERSE 35]** Jesus had spent a full day teaching a large crowd by the Sea of Galilee. Privately, He explained to the disciples the parables He used in teaching (see vv. 33-34). **When evening had come**, Jesus must have been exhausted. The term *evening* could refer to a time before or after sundown. In this context, the time was probably between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., which would allow for the ensuing events. Jesus had been teaching from a boat positioned near the shore (see v. 1). He proposed that He and the disciples use it to **cross over to the other side of the sea**. His purpose could have been to escape the crowds to rest or to extend His ministry in another area. They would travel from the western shore of the sea to the eastern shore, a region outside of Galilee predominately populated by Gentiles.

**[VERSE 36]** The disciples **left the crowd** and took Jesus with them. Evidently they had been on the shore and joined Jesus in the boat. Mark noted that Jesus **was already in the boat**. Mark added that **other boats were with Him**—that is, other people entered boats and began crossing the sea. No other mention is made of them. One suggestion is that they turned back when they detected the oncoming storm. An alternate view is that what was about to take place was a miracle that included the saving of other boats in addition to the one that held Jesus and the disciples.

**[VERSE 37]** Suddenly, **a fierce windstorm arose**. Literally, “a great (violent) squall of wind (a hurricane) came.” Such a storm was not unusual, but it was terrifying because of its suddenness and intensity. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by high mountains, which form a type of basin. Ravines funnel strong southwest winds downward onto the sea with violent force. In an instant, calmness can turn to turbulence. Quickly, wind-driven waves began **breaking over the boat**. The boat began taking on water. Literally, it was being filled with water. No doubt the disciples quickly began bailing to prevent the boat from being swamped.

**[VERSE 38a]** The word **but** draws a sharp contrast between storm’s fury and Jesus’ calm serenity. The disciples were furiously working to keep the boat afloat. In contrast to their frenzied efforts, Jesus was **in the boat’s stern, sleeping on the cushion**. Likely, He was fatigued from His long day of intense teaching. In addition to this indication of His true humanity, His resting peacefully has been viewed as evidence of His deity: He who was the agent of creation (see John 1:3) had no reason to fear nature’s tempest. The phrase *the cushion* referred to the pillow kept in the stern for someone not involved in fishing or the task of sailing, for an oarsman’s use, or for the seat of honor. Interpreters have suggested that this detail is evidence of an eyewitness account. The apostle Peter is a good candidate, for Christian tradition holds that the Gospel of Mark reflects Peter’s account of his experiences with Jesus.

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#### Mark 4:38b-39 Commentary

**[VERSE 38b]** Addressing Jesus as **Teacher**, the disciples roused Him from sleep. The tenses of the Greek words rendered “sleeping” (4:38a) and **woke** convey ongoing action. The implication may be that Jesus’ sleep was so deep and peaceful that the disciples had difficulty awakening Him. The use of this term *Teacher* may indicate that at this point in their experience of following Jesus, the disciples viewed Him as an extraordinary, authoritative rabbi (teacher) with the power to heal—but had not come to complete understanding of His identity. Though at least some of the disciples believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah (see John 1:40-41,44-45), evidently their perception was limited.

The disciples’ panicked question had the force of a rebuke: **“Don’t you care that we’re going to die?”** Contributing to the disciples’ perplexity was their having set out on the trip across the sea at Jesus’ suggestion. The question’s bluntness is further evidence that at this point, the disciples had no idea they were addressing Deity, the incarnate Son of God.

**[VERSE 39]** Jesus **got up** and **rebuked the wind**. The Greek term rendered *rebuked* is a strong word that means to reprove, censure severely, admonish, or sternly warn. Then Jesus said to the sea, **“Silence! Be still!”** The Greek word translated *silence* has the sense of being hushed or calm; it can mean “be muzzled.”

At Jesus’ command, **the wind ceased, and there was a great calm**. He who was God’s agent in creation (see Col. 1:16) exercised power over His creation. In the background of this event may be Old Testament accounts in which God is revealed as sovereign over the sea (see Ps. 89:9) and in which He commanded the Red Sea to part so His people could cross over safely (see Ps. 106:9). In Psalm 107:29-30, the psalmist wrote that God stilled the storm and hushed the sea so that the waves grew quiet and the people reached safe harbor. Jesus’ stilling the storm seems to connect with these accounts and indicate He did what only God could accomplish.

Mark had definite purposes for including in his Gospel the account of Jesus’ stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee. First, it was part of his emphasis on Jesus’ absolute authority. Mark already had shown Jesus’ authority over demons and diseases (see 1:32-33,40-42) and His authority to forgive sins (see 2:1-12). In 4:35-39, Mark emphasized Jesus’ authority over nature. A second and equally important purpose was to encourage and assure the recipients of his Gospel. Mark was writing to a church that had faced opposition and hardship. Many believers may well have been asking: “Does Jesus not care that we are perishing? Can He help us; and, if so, why does He not do something?” Mark’s account assured hard-pressed Christians that Jesus was present and cared about them and their circumstances.

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## **Mark 4:40-41 Commentary**

**[VERSE 40]** The disciples had asked Jesus a question with the force of a rebuke: “Don’t you care that we’re going to die?” (Mark 4:38). After rebuking and stilling the wind, Jesus rebuked the disciples with two counter questions. First, He asked: **“Why are you fearful?”** The Greek term for *fearful* is always used in a bad sense in the New Testament. It can express the idea of timidity, but it also can carry the stronger sense of cowardice. The disciples had observed Jesus’ power miraculously displayed; thus, they should have trusted Him rather than panicking.

Hard on the heels of Jesus’ question about the disciples’ fear came His question about their lack of faith: **“Do you still have no faith?”** That is, had they not arrived at the point of trusting Him completely? Implied was the charge that they should have done so. Jesus did not indicate the object of their faith. One view is that the disciples should have had faith in His ability to work miracles. A second approach is that Jesus meant faith in God rather than in Jesus. Jesus probably had in mind faith in God’s saving power displayed in Jesus’ action of rescue. Jesus’ questions presented the truth that faith and fear cannot coexist. Genuine commitment to Jesus includes consistent trust in Him, His care for His own, and His presence in power.

**[VERSE 41]** Jesus’ power to calm a raging storm **terrified** the disciples. Literally, “they feared a great fear.” The Greek word translated *terrified* is a different term from the one Jesus used in verse 40 for the disciples’ fear. The word in verse 41 can have the ideas of severe fright, astonishment or amazement, and reverential awe and respect. In a real sense, all three responses likely were present. Certainly the disciples were awed and amazed by Jesus’ display of power. Also, they had feared the storm’s fierce power, but Jesus’ infinitely greater power shown by His commanding calm caused even greater fright.

The disciples asked one another, **“Who then is this?”** and marveled, **“Even the wind and the sea obey Him.”** The Greek term rendered *obey* has the sense of submission or compliance. The emphasis is on Jesus’ sovereign authority over the wind and the sea. They began to speak to one another in their awed, spontaneous reaction to what they had witnessed. They were beginning to grasp the truth that they were in the presence of someone who did not fit into the category of a mere man. They had witnessed His power to heal and to exorcise demons. Now they had seen Him tame the forces of nature. The only acceptable answer to the disciples’ question to each other was the response of faith.

The disciples’ understanding of Jesus’ identity would be a process, and His calming the storm was a step toward the realization of who Jesus truly was. Even so, only after the crucifixion and resurrection would the disciples fully understand Jesus’ true identity.

## SESSION 4: TEACHINGS LIKE NO OTHER

### MARK 1:21-22; 10:17-22

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#### Mark 1:21-22 Commentary

**[VERSE 21]** The events in **Capernaum** follow the account of Jesus starting His ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14-15) and His calling four disciples—Simon, Andrew, James and John—on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (vv. 16-20). Capernaum was an important town in the territory of Herod Antipas on the main trade route from Mesopotamia to Egypt. This town would be Jesus’ base of operations during His Galilean ministry.

On entering the city, Jesus immediately went to the **synagogue** on the **Sabbath**. Luke noted that Jesus’ attending synagogue services was His usual practice or custom (Luke 4:16). On the occasion in Capernaum, the synagogue setting was the logical and appropriate place for Jesus to announce the good news of God (Mark 1:14-15). Services consisted of prayer, praise, reading from the (Hebrew) Scriptures, and an exposition of the reading. The leader of the synagogue could invite anyone he deemed capable to read and expound the Scriptures. (Luke 4:14-27 is a prime example of the practice.) It’s likely that because of Jesus’ preaching ministry in Galilee (see Mark 1:14-15), He was known to be a capable teacher. Thus, He was invited to speak and immediately **began to teach**.

**[VERSE 22]** The synagogue congregation was in for a surprise as the visiting speaker began to teach. The congregation was amazed because, **unlike the scribes, He was teaching them as one having authority**. Jewish scribes were experts in the law. When the role of scribes was first created, recording events and decisions had been their task. During the Babylonian exile, they took on the role of copying the Hebrew Scriptures in order to preserve them. Because of their thorough familiarity with the Scriptures, the scribes began to interpret and teach the Scriptures. By the time of the New Testament, a professional class of scribes had developed. In their role, they sought to apply the Scriptures’ dictates to all areas of life. The scribes seldom if ever gave a personal, independent judgment. Instead, they referred to past legal experts to bolster their decisions.

In sharp contrast, Jesus did not quote past authorities but spoke with the force of personal authority. The term **teaching** probably referred to both what Jesus taught (the content) and manner in which He taught. His authoritative teaching **astonished** (astounded, amazed) the listeners. They may even have been alarmed by His distinctively different teaching. They had never heard such forceful teaching.

In part, the people’s astonishment arose from their knowledge that Jesus was not a trained scribe but a lay teacher. He lacked a rabbi’s credentials. Yet Jesus spoke prophetically, having divine inspiration and authority that came directly from God.

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#### Mark 10:17-21a Commentary

**[VERSES 17-19]** As Jesus was setting out on a journey—His final journey—toward Jerusalem (see 10:32), **a man ran up** to Him. The man **knelt down before** Jesus. Customarily, people did not kneel to a rabbi, so his act was unusual. The man’s question to Jesus rang with urgency: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Notice that Jesus did not give the man a concise answer. Instead, Jesus directed his attention to the Ten Commandments’ second table, with which the man was thoroughly familiar. Commandments Five through Ten deal with relationships with other human beings. Jesus placed the Fifth Commandment last, and rephrased the Commandment not to covet as **“do not defraud.”** The Greek term rendered *defraud* has the sense of depriving someone of what rightly belongs to that person, of removing anything from another.

**[VERSES 20-21a]** The inquirer confidently informed Jesus that beginning from his **youth** (perhaps age 13), he had **kept** the Commandments Jesus listed. As Jesus looked at the man, He **loved him**. The Greek word translated **looking** conveys the idea of gazing searchingly or earnestly. The term rendered **loved** is a form of the word *agape*, God’s kind of love. In response to the man’s sincerity, Jesus genuinely wanted to help him enter God’s kingdom.

Jesus then answered the man's question about receiving eternal life. He indicated the man lacked **one thing**. Then came the totally unexpected directive: **"Go, sell all you have and give to the poor."** The man was to convert all his assets to cash and distribute the money to people reduced to begging in order to survive, people who were destitute.

Why was Jesus' requirement so severe? Behind the directive seems to be the man's focus on his wealth. His security was in what he had, not in God. Nowhere did Jesus reference the first table of the Law—the first four Commandments—that deal with relationship with God. Yet by implication, the man's wealth had become his god; it occupied the center of his life, was uppermost in his mind, and drew his life's energies. In essence, he had broken the First Commandment that only God is to be worshiped and served (see Ex. 20:3). Possessions had become the man's idol.

Jesus' demand of the man is not to be applied to every person who commits to Him; He does not call all His followers to reduce themselves to poverty. Instead, Jesus addressed a particular situation in which a man's possessions had replaced God as the consuming priority of his life. Yet we must be aware that following Jesus may involve giving up something of value to us: our own plans or ambitions, occupations, lifestyles, or even relationships. Make no mistake: Jesus calls us to costly discipleship.

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## **Mark 10:21b-22 Commentary**

**[VERSE 21b]** Jesus' invitation to the man, **"come, follow Me,"** most likely was a call to attach himself to Jesus as a disciple. Accepting that call would be to receive Jesus' gift of Himself and thus of eternal life. Answering Jesus' call involved self-sacrifice, obedience, selfless service, and total dedication to Jesus and His redemptive mission.

**[VERSE 22]** The man was **stunned** at Jesus' **demand**. The Greek term rendered *stunned* means "to put on a gloomy and downcast look." It was used of the sky's lowering with clouds. At Jesus' words, the man's face expressed his disappointment. Perhaps his look was something like a puzzled, shocked frown. The term *demand* literally is "word" and likely refers both to Jesus' instruction that the man rid himself of his wealth and to His call to committed discipleship.

The man **went away grieving because he had many possessions**. He was unwilling to follow Jesus' instructions. He experienced lingering grief because he had not received what he came seeking. The Greek word translated *many* can mean *great*. The term rendered *possessions* could have the sense of holdings such as property, lands, or estates. Today, we would say he was a man of considerable means, with many and varied investments and assets.

Some interpreters have suggested the man's grief offered a faint note of hope in an otherwise tragically sad scene. His sorrow may have left open the possibility that he later came to repentance and faith. We can only speculate about the ultimate outcome of the man's encounter with Jesus. What is clear is that as the account ends, the man held on to his wealth but suffered incalculable loss. He lost the opportunity to receive the eternal life, entrance into God's kingdom, he sought. He lost the priceless gift of being with Jesus and being instrumental in His redemptive work. He lost the opportunity of investing his life in the service of others—an investment that would bring eternal dividends.

What are the implications for us in the account of the wealthy inquirer? Among the lessons are: (1) Jesus' teachings call for our response. We have to decide. (2) We receive eternal life—life of God's quality that begins now and is endless—as God's gift through repentance and faith in Jesus. (3) Jesus demands total commitment and obedience. (4) Committed discipleship often calls for sacrifice. (5) Loyal discipleship requires constant vigilance so no other people or things replace Jesus as the object of our devotion. We must be aware that idols are not figures of a remote past or of pagan cultures. We easily can fashion our own idols that draw our lives' worship and energies. (6) In love, Jesus seeks to help us realize our potential as His followers.



## SESSION 5: A DEATH LIKE NO OTHER

### MATTHEW 27:28-31,45-50,54

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#### Matthew 27:28-31 Commentary

**[VERSES 28]** These soldiers knew the Jews charged Jesus with claiming to be their King. Thus they determined to make a mockery of that claim. In mocking Jesus, they would also have been mocking the Jewish people over whom Jesus was supposedly “king” and over whom the Romans ruled. They **stripped Him** of His clothes, which had probably been put back on Him after His flogging, and dressed Him in a **scarlet military robe**. The color scarlet was similar to purple, the color associated with royalty and rulership.

**[VERSES 29]** Then the soldiers decided to add a **crown** to Jesus’ royal regalia. They gave Him a **reed** (a substantially strong reed or bamboo cane) to hold in His right hand, a poor substitute for the royal scepter representing a ruler’s power and authority. But the ultimate mockery came as they **knelt down before Him** in false homage saying, “**Hail, King of the Jews!**” This may have been a parody of the formal salute offered in honor of the Roman emperor, “Hail, Caesar!” Such carefully planned ridicule must have intensified Jesus’ suffering. How ironic that the soldiers’ words of mockery regarding Jesus’ kingship were absolutely true. Unknowingly, they knelt before the King of all kings—the sovereign Ruler of the universe.

**[VERSES 30]** The first people to **spit** in Jesus’ face had been the Jews who were present at His trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin the previous evening (Matt. 26:67-68). Now the soldiers repeated that hideous insult. Spitting on someone was one of the worst possible expressions of contempt available in Jesus’ day. The mocking soldiers added injury to insult by **hitting** Him on the head with the reed they had presented to Him as His royal scepter. Every blow from this reed drove the thorns deeper into Jesus’ head.

These actions partly fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 20:19. Jesus’ experiences also fulfilled the prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 50:6: “I gave My back to those who beat Me, and My cheeks to those who tore out My beard. I did not hide My face from scorn and spitting.”

**[VERSES 31]** When the soldiers grew weary of their evil games, they removed the mock robe, **put His clothes on Him**, and **led Him away to crucify Him**. They had satisfied their desire to treat Jesus with complete contempt. Now they planned to finish the gruesome task—execution by crucifixion on a cross. The usual practice was for criminals to be taken to the place of their crucifixion naked. In returning Jesus’ clothes, the Romans may have been making a concession to Jewish sensitivities concerning public nakedness, particularly with the massive crowds present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.

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#### Matthew 27:45-50 Commentary

**[VERSE 45]** Matthew, Mark, and Luke all note that **darkness** covered the land for a period of time. Various explanations for the darkness have been offered—including a violent windstorm (sirocco), a solar eclipse, and God’s supernatural intervention. Darkness is often associated with God’s judgment at the Day of the Lord (see Joel 2:2,31).

**[VERSE 46]** Jesus’ cry on the cross was so stunning that Matthew preserved the precise language He used. “**Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni**” is Aramaic, the language of everyday conversation in first-century Israel. The words are from the first verse in Psalm 22, a psalm that is woven into the crucifixion narrative. Verses 7-8 from the psalm reflect the mocking of the crowd (Matt. 27:39-44), and verse 18 reflects the soldier’s casting of lots for Jesus’ clothing (Matt. 27:35).

**[VERSE 47]** The term for “my God,” *Eli*, was very close to the name **Elijah**. Since messianic expectation was so fervent at this time, someone in the crowd perhaps mistakenly thought Jesus was calling for Elijah, the forerunner who would appear before the Day of the Lord, to save Him. The phrase **some of those standing there** refers to the Jews in the crowd around the cross, not to the Roman soldiers present. This was likely an act of mockery, something taken half-seriously by those present.

**[VERSES 48-49]** The **sour wine** was a popular, inexpensive beverage normally consumed by soldiers and members of the lower social classes of society. It also had the benefit of being more effective in relieving one's thirst than water alone. Jesus had been offered this before but had refused it (Matt. 27:34). This drink typically was offered to victims of crucifixion, and this may have been the reason the soldiers allowed someone to come near to Jesus on the cross. While at least one person was moved with compassion, the rest were merely morbidly curious and continuing in their mockery, wanting to see if Elijah would come to save Jesus. Unlike the individual who gave Jesus a drink, these others did nothing but watch Jesus suffer.

**[VERSE 50]** Matthew records two times when Jesus spoke from the cross with a loud voice. The first was when He spoke the words about God forsaking Him (Matt. 27:46), and the second here when Jesus **shouted again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit**. The phrase translated *gave up His spirit* indicates that Jesus stopped breathing. It may also underscore Jesus' final authority over His own life.

What Jesus did, He did voluntarily. No one took His life. He gave it up of His own will.

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## **Matthew 27:54 Commentary**

**[VERSE 54]** The **centurion and those with him** were the detachment of soldiers tasked with crucifying Jesus and watching over His execution. The centurion was in charge of a unit of one hundred soldiers (called a *century*; there were 60 centuries in a legion, divided into 10 cohorts of 6 centuries each).

The soldiers were terrified at the occurrence of the **earthquake** and the other events involving Jesus' crucifixion and death, and said, **"This man really was God's Son!"** The use of the term *really* means *truly* and indicates the certainty of their statement about who Jesus was.

The soldiers' statement stands in stark contrast to their previous actions of verbally and physically mocking Jesus, as well as their false homage of Him as "the King of the Jews." Apart from the disciples (Matt. 14:33; 16:16), these Gentile Roman soldiers are the first human beings to recognize Jesus' unique relationship with God and the significance of the events unfolding before them. The fact that it is the Gentiles, not the Jews, who make this connection hints at the spread of the gospel beyond Israel to all the nations of the world (see Matt. 8:11-12).

Jesus' death—His sacrificial death for our sins—lies at the heart of the gospel. His was a death like no other. Like the centurion and the soldiers with him, each one of us is faced with answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" How we answer that question is the single most important decision in our lives.

Do we deny and mock Him like the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman soldiers before and during His crucifixion? Or, do we, like the centurion and those with him gazing up at Jesus at the moment of His death, acknowledge Jesus for who He really is—the Son of God and the Savior of all those who will repent of their sins and place their faith in the sacrifice He made on our behalf on the cross? Putting your faith in Jesus, God's Son, means forgiveness of your sins, love, and eternal life.

Choose wisely!

## **SESSION 6: RESURRECTED LIKE NO OTHER MATTHEW 28:1-10**

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### **Matthew 28:1-7 Commentary**

All four Gospels affirm the fact of Jesus' resurrection. In the Book of Acts, Jesus' resurrection was the central theme in the preaching of Peter, Stephen, and Paul, as well as being the dominant theme throughout the entire New Testament.

**[VERSES 1-3]** The Gospel of Matthew mentions **Mary Magdalene** and **the other Mary**, who were present at Jesus' crucifixion and burial (Matt. 27:56,61), as the ones who first returned to the tomb. The "other Mary" was the mother of James and Joseph. Matthew states the women had come in order **to view the tomb**. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who mentions the **earthquake**. This powerful force was the result of **an angel of the Lord** descending from heaven in order to roll back **the stone** to let the women go in and see that Jesus was no longer there. Notice the description of this angel. **His appearance** was like **lightning**—a radiant brilliance, like a bolt of lightning. And **his robe** was as **white as snow**. The angel represented and came in the power and authority of God.

**[VERSES 4-5]** Only the Gospel of Matthew mentions that the angel was sitting on the stone as the women came near. In fact, when the guards saw the angel they were so shaken from **fear** of him that they became like **dead men**—paralyzed by fear! The word **angel** means "messenger," and this angel had come from heaven to share with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary the best news human ears have ever heard. The powerful earthquake and the angel's radiant appearance brought a sense of fear to the two women, but he sought to reassure them by saying, **"Don't be afraid."** In spite of Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32), none of His followers had believed He would be raised. The women arrived at the tomb looking for Jesus who had been **crucified**. Their task was to complete the burial preparations, not to welcome a risen Lord.

**[VERSES 6]** The angel's announcement, **"He has been resurrected,"** is a passive voice construction that emphasizes God the Father's work in the resurrection of His Son. God was responsible for this miracle. God raised Jesus. And this miracle had occurred **just as He said**, a reminder pointing to Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection. Since Jesus was correct in what He said about this most important matter, then we can trust His words in all other matters.

**[VERSE 7]** The angel then instructed the two women to **go quickly** and tell others; that is, they were to be witnesses of the living Christ. Good news must be shared! For a second time, the angel emphasized the fact that Jesus **has been raised from the dead**. The angel then went on to assure the women that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. **"Going ahead of you to Galilee"** and **"you will see Him there"** point readers to the resurrection appearance described in verses 16-20.

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## **Matthew 28:8-10 Commentary**

**[VERSE 8]** In first-century Jewish culture, the testimony of women was not considered credible and was not admissible in a court of law. But God used these women to be the first evangelists in the sense of proclaiming the good news. The same women who went to the tomb with grief and anxiety left **quickly** from the tomb in obedience to the angel's command with **fear and great joy**. Fear and joy sounds like an unusual combination, but the presence of both is understandable. These women had just lived through an earthquake, seen a radiant angel, and heard the news of Jesus' resurrection.

**[VERSE 9]** While Mary Magdalene and the other Mary ran to tell the disciples about their joyous discovery, **Jesus met them**. What a surprise! The greeting Jesus offered them, **"Good morning!"** literally means "rejoice!" It emphasized the nature of His appearance. The word conveys joyfulness. It is a kind of cheery greeting that reverses the circumstances. What had once been a dreadfully sad morning suddenly turned into a joyous event. The two Marys responded by coming near enough to kneel down to take hold of Jesus' feet as they **worshiped Him**. The act of taking hold of someone's feet was one of great submission, homage, and worship. It also was an indication to Matthew's readers that Jesus was physically present before the two women.

**[VERSE 10]** Jesus repeated the words of the angel as He told these witnesses, **"Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there."** On other occasions before His death, Jesus addressed His followers with the same words of reassurance, "Do not be afraid." He knows how often and easily we become fearful. In Jesus' presence we will feel His grace fully and have a sense of being before Someone who loves us more than we could ever imagine. **Do not be afraid** are words that invite trust and joy. We gain courage to face whatever circumstances come our way by trusting Him.

Jesus referred to His disciples as **My brothers**. This is not the first time Jesus had referred to those who are His disciples as brothers (12:46-50; 25:40). However, it is an interesting phrase in light of the total failure of the disciples. These were the same disciples who

earlier had fled in fear from the garden of Gethsemane. We are sometimes rather hard on Peter for denying Jesus, but at least he had the courage to follow Jesus after His arrest. That Jesus would look forward to a reunion with His brothers emphasizes His mercy and grace. Just as Jesus predicted that His disciples would flee from His side, so too He predicted that they would be gathered together again—in Galilee (26:31-32). Jesus always accepts His disciples where they are and leads them forward. Jesus sent the women to tell these brothers of His next appointment with them. They would meet in Galilee, the place they first met Jesus and began their journey with Him.

## **SESSION 7: ASCENDED LIKE NO OTHER**

### **ACTS 1:3-11**

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#### **Acts 1:3 Commentary**

**[VERSE 3]** Acts 1 and Luke 24 cover much of the same material, although Acts 1 summarizes what Luke 24 addresses in much greater detail. After His crucifixion, Jesus appeared to His disciples, showing Himself to be risen bodily with **many convincing proofs**. The term *convincing proofs* has the sense of irrefutable evidence which there was no way of getting around or away from. He appeared to them many times over a period of 40 days, most likely to strengthen their faith for their task of being His witnesses and helping them to deal with any lingering doubts they might have had (Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:38).

Jesus took steps to demonstrate to His disciples that He had in fact been bodily resurrected (Luke 24:37-39). He invited them to physically touch Him; showed them His hands and feet, which would have borne the scars of His crucifixion; and ate with them (vv. 36-43).

Luke records only three of Jesus' many appearances to His disciples—His appearance to Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus (vv. 13-32), His appearance to Simon (v. 34), and His appearance to “the Eleven and those with them gathered together” (vv. 33,36-49). The apostle Paul provides a more detailed list of Jesus' appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. In addition to Jesus appearing to Peter and the other disciples multiple times, Paul relates that Jesus appeared to 500 of His followers at one time and to His brother James.

Jesus was instructing the disciples during those 40 days concerning the **kingdom of God**, which had been the central theme of His earthly ministry from the very beginning—“After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of God: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!’” (Mark 1:14-15). The *kingdom of God* is the exercise of God's sovereign rule. The promise of the kingdom of God became a reality in the presence and ministry of Jesus. The gospel was preached, prophecies were fulfilled, and demons cast out of people. Wherever Jesus ministered, the kingdom of God was manifest. Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection furthered the coming of the kingdom as Satan, sin, and death were defeated. Now God's kingdom would be spread through the coming of the Holy Spirit and the witness of the disciples to what they had seen and experienced in their time with Jesus.

Luke's Gospel gives some additional insight into exactly what Jesus was teaching the disciples. “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27; also see vv. 44-47).

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#### **Acts 1:4-8 Commentary**

**[VERSES 4-5]** While Jesus was with His disciples, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until they had received **the Father's promise**. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:12; 24:49). In the upper room on the night of His arrest and betrayal, Jesus had told His disciples the Spirit would be coming to be with them forever when He left to return to the Father (John 14:16,26). Jesus' reference to **John** baptizing with **water** recalls John the Baptist's declaration, “I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). The word translated

**baptized** means “immersed” or “submerged.” Used in conjunction with the **Holy Spirit**, the term refers to God’s pouring out the Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4).

**[VERSE 6]** Jesus met with the disciples one final time before His ascension on the Mount of Olives. The disciples asked Jesus a question that revealed a major concern and a monumental misunderstanding. “**Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?**” The disciples appear to have interpreted Jesus’ words about God’s fulfilling His promise and the Spirit’s coming to mean the final coming of God’s kingdom was about to occur. Jewish eschatology of that time associated both the coming of the Spirit and the fulfillment of God’s promises with the apocalyptic Day of the Lord and the final salvation of the nation of Israel. The disciples were expecting the immediate, full, and final establishment of the **kingdom** of God, with Israel returned to a place of prominence and authority.

**[VERSES 7-8]** Jesus shifted the disciples’ focus. They were not to be concerned with knowing the specific **times or periods** God had set for establishing the kingdom and the critical events involved in its coming. Jesus did not deny the restoration of Israel; instead, He gave the disciples a new perspective. Their concern was no longer to be nationalistic, but rather it would now focus on a mission that would encompass the entire world. They were to bring the light of salvation to both the Jews of Israel and all the Gentile nations (Isa. 49:6).

Jesus’ command to His disciples revealed what they were to do, how they were to accomplish their mission, and where they were to go. As they waited in Jerusalem, they would **receive power** to be Jesus’ witnesses. God the Holy Spirit would supply the necessary power to accomplish this task. The disciples would begin witnessing in **Jerusalem** among their own people and move out from there. Their mission would expand to the province of **Judea**, then into the non-Jewish territory of **Samaria**, and finally to **the ends of the earth**. Jesus’ words in verse 8 give an outline of Christianity’s geographic expansion as the Spirit empowered Jesus’ followers in the Book of Acts, although Acts contains much more than just the account of where the gospel spread.

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## **Acts 1:9-11 Commentary**

**[VERSE 9]** The ascension marks the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the end of the 40 day period of the resurrected Lord among His disciples, and serves as the moment of His exaltation to the right hand of the Father. As Peter wrote, Jesus “has gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22; see 1 Tim. 3:16).

While the term **cloud** is used of normal, everyday weather-related phenomena (Luke 12:54), in the New Testament clouds are usually associated with the power and presence of God and/or eschatological events (see Luke 9:28-36; Matt. 24:30). Clouds are associated with the presence and power of God in the Old Testament as well. A few examples include: God led the Israelites out of Egypt going before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21). God appeared to Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites in a cloud that displayed His glory to them (16:10; 19:9; 24:16). When the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (tent of meeting), a cloud covered the tent (Ex. 40:34-38; Num. 9:15-22). Finally, God’s presence appeared above the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in a cloud (Lev. 16:2).

**[VERSES 10-11]** The actual ascension of Jesus is detailed in a single verse. The primary focus is not on the event, as significant as that was, but rather on the message of the two heavenly messengers. Just as Jesus had redirected the focus of His disciples previously (Acts 1:7-8), now the two angels redirect the disciples’ focus away from the miraculous ascension of their Lord with the question, “**Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?**” Jesus was gone, into the cloud and out of their sight. The time had come for the disciples to stop **gazing** at the sky and redirect their attention to the task at hand which Jesus had given them—witnessing about all they had seen, culminating in the taking of Jesus into **heaven**.

However, the reality of Jesus’ ascension serves to give weight to the promise that the angels spoke to the disciples concerning Jesus’ return. Jesus would return **in the same way** in which He had gone, “in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27). Jesus promised His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them and that He would return for them, to take them to the Father’s house (John 14:2-3). The Book of Revelation tells of that glorious day when the body of Christ will gather together

with Jesus at the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). It further details Jesus' return as conquering King and Ruler over all the nations (vv. 11-16). The promise of Jesus' eventual return is as much a fact and reality as was His going **into heaven**. The Son of God who first came in peace, mercy, and humility to bring salvation will return in righteousness, judgment, and glory. However, in order for that event to come to pass, "the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mark 13:10).

## SESSION 8: EXALTED LIKE NO OTHER EPHESIANS 1:7-10,18-23

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### ***Ephesians 1:7-10 Commentary***

The Letter to the Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul, most likely sometime between A.D. 61-62 during his imprisonment in Rome. Ephesians 1:3-14 makes up a single, exceedingly complex sentence in the original Greek language. It's as though once Paul started writing about the wonder of God's plan of salvation, he couldn't find a place to come to a stop. This passage falls naturally into three sections: the work of the Father in planning our salvation (1:3-6); the work of Christ in accomplishing our salvation (vv. 7-12); and the work of the Spirit in securing our salvation (vv. 13-14). Remember, however, that everything in these verses flows from the words, "Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3).

**[VERSES 7-8] Redemption** is one of several important biblical terms used to describe salvation. It refers to the payment of a price (ransom) in order to set someone free. The death (**blood**) of Christ was the price paid to free sinners from their bondage to sin. The price Jesus paid on the cross, and that alone, makes possible the **forgiveness of our trespasses**. The word *forgiveness* refers to the cancellation of a debt (see Matt. 18:27). The basis of God's actions in redemption was and is **the riches of His grace that He lavished on us**. We still don't deserve forgiveness, but He loves us.

The term *lavish* means to have more than enough, to abound in excess. God has been extravagantly generous. The riches of His grace toward undeserving sinners has overflowed like a mighty waterfall. *Grace* is God's undeserved favor. Not only does God lavish upon believers the unmerited gift of redemption, but He also provides the **wisdom** and **understanding** we need to live properly in relation to Him and what He has accomplished for us through our redemption in Jesus Christ. *Wisdom* means seeing things as they really are, from an eternal perspective. *Understanding* suggests the ability to solve problems and make good life choices.

**[VERSES 9-10]** In Scripture, a **mystery** is a spiritual truth that previously had been obscure or hidden but is now made known. Paul rooted this new revelation in God's **good pleasure** (in eternity past), which as God's will is certain to be accomplished. The apostle also looked ahead to the days of fulfillment. God's plan is more inclusive than the salvation of individuals. He will bring everything together in the Messiah. The entire universe will finally "add up" (a way to translate **bring everything together**). Everything will be recognized as submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. Nothing and no one will escape, whether in the supernatural realm (**things in heaven**) or in the natural realm (**things on earth**). Paul was not teaching universalism here, the notion that every person will eventually be saved. Rather, he was stating that one day every part of the universe will be renewed and brought into subjection to its true Lord (Rom. 8:20-21; Phil. 2:10-11).

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### ***Ephesians 1:22-23 Commentary***

**[VERSE 22]** Paul quoted from Psalm 8:6 with the words **He put everything under His feet**. There the psalmist was reflecting on the grandeur of mankind—created in God's image—as the pinnacle of creation. Yet human dominion has been distorted by sin and human rule over creation is often abusive and corrupt. Thus the psalmist also looked forward to the perfect God-Man, Christ Jesus, in whom the true dominion God intended for humanity has been established (Heb. 2:9).

The supremacy of Christ—raised from the dead and seated at God’s right hand—is summarized by the phrase **appointed Him as head over everything**. The term **head** is related to Christ’s authority and rule over everything. Nothing is excluded—everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen. (Note the term *everything* is used twice in this verse.)

Therefore, one reason for Jesus’ supremacy over everything is **for the church**.

**[VERSE 23]** By analogy to human anatomy, we can understand how Christ is the head and the church is **His body**. What is puzzling, however, is the phrase **the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way**.

Due to the difficulty of the grammar in the Greek, there have been multiple interpretations of this. First, the fullness can refer to the church as filling Christ. Second, it can refer to Christ as the fullness—that is, the complete expression—of God. Third, it can refer to Christ as filling the church. The third interpretation is perhaps the best. The church is the fullness of Christ in the sense that it is filled by Him, who is the One who fills everything. Meaning, He exercises His sovereign rule over all things.

Although He fills all things, in a special, unique way, Jesus is constantly filling the church with His presence and power. The Lord of the universe has been pleased to express His fullness in the church, to which you and I have the privilege of belonging!