



Our Savior

JESUS ENDURED THE CROSS SO THAT WE MIGHT HAVE ACCESS TO GOD.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 27:27-31,45-54 Memory Verse: Matthew 27:50-51

Jesus was arrested and tried by both the Jewish Sanhedrin (the nation's governing council) and Roman authorities (namely, Pilate and Herod Antipas). Then, He was handed over to the governor's guard for crucifixion. This military cohort used the occasion to mock Jesus. They put a scarlet robe on Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, gave Him an imitation scepter, and then hailed Him as they would Caesar.

After they had their fun, the soldiers led Jesus to the place of crucifixion. Hanging on a cross as the sacrifice for human sin, He felt abandoned by His Father. The darkness over the land reflected the darkness Jesus felt. When Jesus died, more supernatural events occurred: the temple curtain was torn, an earthquake split boulders, and tombs were broken open. All this led the centurion in charge to confess Jesus as the Son of God.

As you prepare for this final session from Matthew, spend time quietly reflecting on the agony Jesus experienced for humanity. Ask Him to help you avoid taking His finished work on the cross for granted. And identify ways you can lead adults to understand that Jesus endured everything on the cross so that we could have access to God.



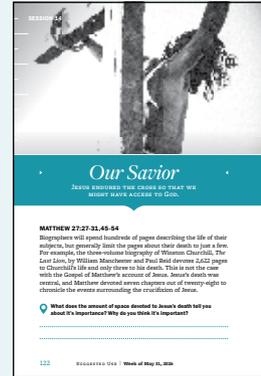
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



Biographers will spend hundreds of pages describing the life of their subjects, but generally limit the pages about their death to just a few. For example, the three-volume biography of Winston Churchill, *The Last Lion*, by William Manchester and Paul Reid devotes 2,622 pages to Churchill's life and only three to his death. This is not the case with the Gospel of Matthew's account of Jesus. Jesus's death was central, and Matthew devoted seven chapters out of twenty-eight to chronicle the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. (PSG, p. 122)

What does the amount of space devoted to Jesus's death tell you about its importance? Why do you think it's important?



Understand the Context (Matthew 27:1-66)

After Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He talked with His disciples about His departure, their need to stay connected to Him, and the coming Holy Spirit. Part of this "farewell discourse" took place in the upper room, and part occurred as they walked to Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Jesus concluded by offering a prayer for Himself, for His disciples, and for future believers (John 14-17).

When they arrived at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed while His exhausted disciples dozed. Soon, Judas arrived with an armed mob sent by the religious leaders (Matt. 26:47). After arresting Jesus, they took Him to Annas, the former high priest. He also was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the current high priest (John 18:12-14,19-23). Even though Annas had been deposed in AD 15, he still wielded considerable power since five of his sons, as well as Caiaphas, had served as high priests.

While still night, Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, where witnesses made false accusations against Him (Matt. 26:57-68). Meanwhile, Peter, who had entered the high priest's courtyard, denied knowing Jesus when confronted by others (vv. 69-75).

In first-century Israel, trials were considered legal only if held during the day. Since Jesus's initial appearance had been at night, the Sanhedrin reconvened after daylight to convict Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah and

the Son of God (Luke 22:66-71). While the Sanhedrin could convict Him, they did not have the power to execute. So they quickly brought Jesus to the Roman governor's headquarters. There the Jewish leaders switched accusations from blasphemy—a capital offense for the Jews—to sedition—a capital offense for the Romans—because Jesus claimed to be a king (John 18:28-38).

Pilate, the Roman procurator, could find no grounds for charging Jesus (18:38). But when he learned that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee who was in Jerusalem for Passover. Antipas, the man who had executed John the Baptist, sent Jesus back to Pilate after treating Him with contempt (Luke 23:6-12).

Attempting to release Jesus, Pilate offered to free either Barabbas, a convicted murderer, or Jesus. Sure that the crowd would pick Jesus, Pilate was shocked when they chose Barabbas and called for Jesus's death (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15).

Pilate made one final attempt to release Jesus, thinking that scourging Jesus would satisfy the Jews (Luke 23:22; John 19:12). Eventually, though, Pilate washed his hands of the whole affair and turned Jesus over to his soldiers for crucifixion (Matt. 27:24-26).

Read Matthew 27:27-31,45-54 in your Bible to gain an understanding of all Jesus went through. (PSG, p. 123)

Mocked (Matt. 27:27-31)

27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s residence and gathered the whole company around him. **28** They stripped him and dressed him in a scarlet robe. **29** They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: “Hail, king of the Jews!” **30** Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. **31** After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

(v. 27) Pilate, the Roman governor, condemned Jesus. His **soldiers** were not legionnaires, but auxiliary troops recruited from the surrounding area. **The governor’s residence** usually referred to Pilate’s official praetorium in Caesarea Maritima. It is not clear where he stayed in Jerusalem. Some scholars assume he took up residence in a luxurious palace formerly belonging to Herod the Great or at the Tower of Antonia, a Roman fortress at the northwest corner of the temple complex.

Whole company literally can be rendered “whole cohort.” A Roman cohort was a tenth of a legion and numbered about six hundred men. Whether the term is exact or not, it suggests a large number of soldiers around Pilate.

(vv. 28-30) Since Jesus had been found guilty of claiming royalty, the soldiers mocked Him as such. **They stripped him**, a shameful thing for a Jew. Then, they dressed Him in **a scarlet robe**. The word *robe* specifically referred to a military cloak worn by officers. Since every king needed a crown, the soldiers **twisted together a crown of thorns** and **put it on his head**.

Scholars are uncertain as to which thorns were used, but the attempt to mimic a royal diadem is clear. Many works of art portray the thorns as part of Jesus’s physical torture. However, this was humiliation as well. Some speculate that the thorns would have pointed out representing the sun as in Caesar’s image on coins.

Every king also needed a scepter, so they **placed a staff in his right hand**. The improvised rod was either a flimsy stalk (see Matt. 11:7; 12:20) or, more likely, a substantial measuring stick (Rev. 11:1; 21:15). Only Matthew mentioned this item. Perhaps it was the bamboo cane used for flogging.

Matthew also was the only Gospel writer to mention that **they knelt down before him**. To mock Him further, they shouted, **Hail, king of the Jews!** *Hail* parodies the formal address of

greeting for royalty. For example, the Romans greeted the emperor with, “Hail, Caesar!” Pilate had asked Jesus if He were the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:11), and that charge was posted above Jesus’s head at the cross (Matt. 27:37). Little did these soldiers know that their mockery contained profound truths about Jesus.

Eventually, the Romans dropped all pretense and focused on abusing and humiliating Jesus. **They spat on him**, showing great contempt in a culture where honor was valued highly. They also **kept hitting him on the head** with the “scepter.” The imperfect tense of the verb shows the repeated nature of this action. Any thorns pointing inward were driven deeper into Jesus’s head. The spitting and repeated blows fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 50:6 and recalls the treatment of Jesus by the Sanhedrin in Matthew 26:67-68. All of this fulfilled Jesus’s prediction in Matthew 20:19 and Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 53:7-8.

(v. 31) Completing their ridicule, the Romans **stripped** Jesus of the robe and **put his own clothes on him**. Then the execution squad, usually four soldiers and a centurion, **led him away**. As a final shaming, criminals usually were left naked when led to their execution site. That they put Jesus’s clothes back on Him may have been a concession to Jewish scruples—especially at Passover. Verse 35 records that Jesus’s clothes were again removed at the cross, as the soldiers gambled for them.



Passion Week

Learn more about Jesus’s final week on earth—the events that led Him to the cross and the hope that followed.



APPLICATION POINT: Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.

BACKGROUND:

Highlight again the trials Jesus endured. Point out the last few items on **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Peter in Matthew's Gospel*). Note that, along with the trials and humiliation, Jesus endured the betrayal of Judas, the denial by Peter, and the scattering of His other followers.

SAY:

But all of these just set the stage for the deeper suffering He was going to experience.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 27:27-31 aloud as adults underline examples of how the soldiers treated Him.

RECAP:

Emphasize the cruelty of the Roman soldiers, as portrayed in this passage:

The soldiers mocked Jesus. They picked up on the charge against Him that He claimed to be the King of the Jews. Using that, they mocked Jesus as a king by stripping Him of His clothing and putting a scarlet robe on Him. This robe was an outer garment a soldier used to keep warm as he stood guard. Adding to the mockery of the robe, the soldiers fashioned a crown out of a thorn bush. The design was a copy of the wreath worn by the Caesar on special occasions. Pictures of this wreath are engraved on Roman coins. This fake crown was then pressed into Jesus's head. (PSG, p. 124)

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to read Matthew 27:27-31 again and to identify other ways the Roman soldiers mocked and humiliated Jesus. Allow a few volunteers to share what resonates with them about these verses.

ASK:

What emotions does this passage evoke in you? (PSG, p. 125)

SHARE:

Remind adults that this intense suffering was not without a purpose. Note that while we might see it as a tragedy, Jesus had predicted all of this and understood that it was a necessary part of God's plan of salvation.

PRAY:

Give adults a few moments for quiet reflection and prayer. Urge them to thank Jesus for the things He experienced on our behalf that day.



Forsaken (Matt. 27:45-49)

45 From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the whole land. **46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” **47** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling for Elijah.” **48** Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink. **49** But the rest said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

(v. 45) Supernatural events accompanied Jesus’s crucifixion. For example, ***darkness came over the whole land*** during the brightest hours of the day. ***From noon until three in the afternoon***, the region went dark. *The whole land* probably refers to Jerusalem and Judea, or perhaps to all of Israel. Some skeptics have suggested the darkness was the result of an eclipse. However, Passover always involves a full moon, and an eclipse can occur only during a new moon.

The darkness recalls the ninth plague on Egypt (Ex. 10:21-29), along with other Old Testament prophecies that describe God’s judgment (see Amos 8:9). Significantly, the Egyptian plague lasted three days, while this darkness lasted three hours. Still, both were associated with Passover, and both occurred over a limited area (Ex. 10:21-23).

(v. 46) But the darkness had deeper meaning. During this time, God dealt with human sin and the atoning sacrifice for it. Figuratively speaking, God, who is too holy to look on sin (Hab. 1:13), turned His back on the sin-bearer (Isa. 53:5,10).

Jesus’s cry of ***Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni*** represents the first words of Jesus recorded by Matthew since His reply to Pilate in 27:11. Significantly, Jesus uttered this prayer ***about three in the afternoon***, the exact time for the afternoon Jewish prayers (Acts 3:1; 10:3).

The words come directly from Psalm 22:1; and, as recorded by Matthew, are partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. Matthew provided the translation, ***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*** The Psalm goes on to answer why this abandonment was necessary: “You are holy” (Ps. 22:3). That ***Jesus cried out with a loud voice*** indicates that He meant His words to be heard. Since this is the only one of Jesus’s seven cries from the cross that he recorded, we can assume it was significant to Matthew as well.

(vv. 47-48) In its original language, Jesus’s loud cry sounds like the name ***Elijah***, the prophet who was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11) and was predicted to return before the end of time (Mal. 4:5-6). Many also believed that Elijah would come to the aid of those who were suffering if they called to him.

We don’t know if ***heard this*** referred to Jewish bystanders or the Gentile soldiers. Likewise, we don’t know who filled the sponge ***with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink***. A sponge was a standard part of a soldier’s supply kit, and even the common people carried *sour wine* because it was a reliable, inexpensive thirst quencher.

Immediately . . . ran shows this unnamed man quickly responded to Jesus. But Matthew did not explain the man’s motives. On one hand, he may have been acting out of kindness and sympathy. On the other hand, he may have seen this as another way to torture Jesus and prolong His pain by extending His life (see Ps. 69:21). ***Offered him a drink*** is written in an imperfect tense, which could indicate that the person was “playing with” Jesus (as a mocking gesture) or that it took him repeated attempts to hit his mark. The *stick* indicates Jesus was hung at some height above the ground.

(v. 49) And because we don’t know the identity of the man, we also don’t know if ***the rest*** refers to the other soldiers or to onlookers. Their wording around Elijah coming ***to save him*** includes an admonition for the man to stop because the speakers did not approve of his actions. ***Comes*** is present tense and further emphasizes their mocking. It implies that if Elijah was going to come, he had better do it soon. Mark 15:36 clarifies their meaning of *to save him* was “to take him down.”



APPLICATION POINT: We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.

OVERVIEW:

Briefly summarize the events of Matthew 27:32-44. Note that being hung with criminals (Isa. 53:12) and having soldiers gamble for His clothes (Ps. 22:18) fulfilled messianic prophecy.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 27:45-49 aloud as the group listens for the supernatural events related to Jesus's death.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to discuss the source of the darkness. Summarize the following information from page 126 of the PSG to provide additional insights:

“Around noon the sky became unnaturally dark. This was the first of four supernatural events surrounding Jesus's death. The other three are the temple curtain being torn, the earthquake, and the dead raised (vv. 51-52). Matthew's inference is that the darkness was a sign of God's displeasure. It was reminiscent of the darkness in Egypt during the first deliverance of God's people (Ex. 10:22-23). . . . God is holy and cannot look on sin. He turned away from Jesus bearing the sin of all the world and of all time on the cross. This is a deep look at the extreme seriousness of sin and its ultimate results.”

ASK:

How does Jesus's cry on the cross point to the greatness of our sin? (PSG, p. 127)

SHARE:

Briefly discuss the crowd's response and why they would have mentioned Elijah. Emphasize that through the entire experience, Jesus remained in complete control of His life and, ultimately, His death.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Darkness

Make your room as dark as possible. Share a time when you were in the dark and longing for some light. Allow a few volunteers to share their experiences. Ask: ***How does darkness add intensity to a situation? What do you think the people in Jerusalem imagined was causing the darkness? What does this darkness reveal about how God views sin and death?***

Son of God (Matt. 27:50-54)

50 But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. **51** Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. **53** And they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

(v. 50) This time, Matthew did not record Jesus’s words, only that He **cried out again with a loud voice**. The statement that Jesus **gave up his spirit** points to the fact that He voluntarily gave His life.

(vv. 51-53) While darkness occurred as Jesus was dying, the other supernatural signs took place at His death. Scholars debate which **curtain** in the temple **was torn in two**: the large outer curtain that everyone could see (Ex. 26:36-37; 38:18-19; Num. 3:26) or the curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies, which was visible only to priests (2 Chron. 3:14). Either way, the curtain tearing from **top to bottom** shows this was God’s doing. Also, since the curtain was torn before the earthquake, it did not cause the tearing.

If this curtain was separating the holy of holies, the symbolism indicated that everyone now had access to God’s presence (Heb. 6:19; 9:12-13; 10:19-20). If Matthew was referring to the outer curtain, the symbolism pointed to the coming destruction of the temple.

The earth quaked, probably causing rocks to **split**. At the same time, **tombs were also opened** and **saints . . . were raised**. An earthquake is a common biblical symbol for God’s activity. A large earthquake would cause the rocks, massive boulders, to split. Many tombs were hewn into the rock, so they also could be opened in earthquake-prone areas.

Fallen asleep is a common euphemism for death. The **saints**, the “holy ones,” refers to God’s faithful people (Dan. 7:18,21-22; Zech. 14:5). Matthew did not indicate which saints or how many were raised. And he did not share when they had lived.

Scholars question why these saints raised on Friday would not enter the city until after Jesus’s resurrection on Sunday (v. 53). One way to resolve this is to put a period after *opened* in

verse 52. With that, the tombs were opened at Jesus’s death, while the appearance in verse 53 could have happened after the resurrection.

Many other questions about these saints have been raised, including if they died again or were transported to heaven. For his part, Matthew did not try to satisfy our curiosity. He merely testified to the power of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Key Doctrine

Salvation

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. (See John 1:12-13; Titus 2:14.)

(v. 54) In this verse, Matthew returned to what happened at the cross. The **centurion**, mentioned here for the first time, and the execution squad **saw the earthquake** as well as the other supernatural events that took place during the crucifixion. They likely associated these events with Jesus’s loud cries from the cross. Regardless, they were **terrified** by it all.

What these soldiers meant by, **Truly this man was the Son of God**, has also raised questions when compared with Luke 23:47. *Truly* emphasized certainty, and Romans would use *Son of God* exclusively as a title for the emperor. Even if these words did not have the full meaning of later Christian confessions, making the same confession as the disciples (Matt. 14:33) and Peter (16:16) was significant to Matthew. He intended his readers (including us) to interpret these words in their highest and truest sense.



APPLICATION POINT: The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.

READ:

Instruct the group to read Matthew 27:50-54 carefully, paying attention to all the details of Jesus's death.

ASK:

What evidence from the day's events might be used to help others recognize that Jesus was the Son of God? (PSG, p. 129)

EXAMINE:

Highlight the supernatural events around Jesus's death:

The curtain in Herod's temple was reportedly almost twenty-one inches thick. For such a curtain to be split from top to bottom could only be an act of God. Symbolically, the barrier between Holy God and unholy humanity was removed by the death of Jesus. The way was now open for all to approach God (Heb. 4:16). Coinciding with the curtain being torn in two was a violent earthquake. This earthquake evidently was the force behind another supernatural occurrence at the time of Jesus's death, the opening of the graves of a select group of people. (PSG, p. 128)

ASK:

How would you respond if you had witnessed these events?

DISCUSS:

Lead a brief discussion about the centurion's response. Affirm that he and those with him were eyewitnesses to all that had happened, and it led to a confession of Jesus's deity. Share this comment from page 148 of the Leader Guide: *Even if these words did not have the full meaning of later Christian confessions, making the same confession as the disciples (Matt. 14:33) and Peter (16:16) was significant to Matthew. He intended his readers (including us) to interpret these words in their highest and truest sense.* Note that as Christ followers, we need to live out this confession and encourage others to respond to Jesus in faith.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Of Jesus's seven cries from the cross, the only one Matthew recorded was Jesus's quote from Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm that predicted much of what Jesus suffered on the cross. Read and reflect on Psalm 22. ***Why are these messianic prophecies so important today?*** Use what you learned from Psalm 22 as a cross reference for deeper study into Matthew 27:33-50; Mark 15:22-37; Luke 23:33-48; and John 19:17-37.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 130 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.*
- *We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.*
- *The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.*

REFLECT:

Remind adults that Jesus's death requires a response from each person. Challenge them to take a few minutes to examine their own hearts and to decide if they have made that response to Jesus. If so, encourage them to identify someone who still needs to accept Him and to start praying for them.

DISCUSS:

Invite adults to read the second set of questions on page 130 of the PSG silently. Urge the group to keep these questions in mind this week as they recall this study of Christ's crucifixion. Encourage them to invite the Holy Spirit to guide them into deeper understanding of the gospel and a willingness to share it.

PRAY:

Invite adults to bow their heads as you read Matthew 27:50-51 aloud. Invite them to respond aloud as God reveals the impact of today's passage on their hearts. Close with prayer, thanking Jesus for His death, which provided access to God.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send adults a group text or email during the week, directing them to read and respond to the first set of questions on page 130 of the PSG. Encourage them to journal their responses and to consider sharing them when you gather for your next Bible study. Remind them that this was the final session in Matthew's Gospel. Share that the group will be starting a new study in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.

LEADER EXTRAS



For free bonus introduction and application ideas that connect to a current news event, go to goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras.

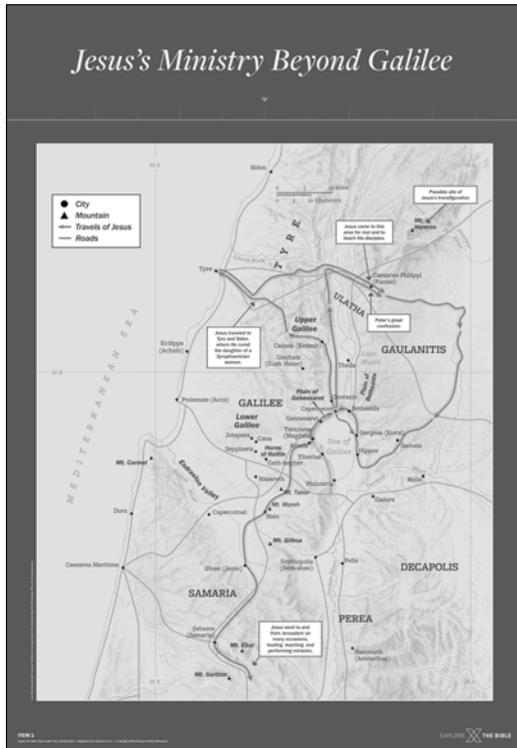
EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

LEADER PACK IDEAS

Pack Item 1

Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee
Sessions 1-14

Locate a map that highlights the key places where Jesus traveled and ministered outside of Galilee in Matthew 14–28.



Pack Item 2

Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28
Sessions 1-14

Refer to page 8 of the PSG to create a poster that outlines Matthew 14–28.

Pack Item 3

Poster: Peter in Matthew's Gospel
Sessions 1, 3-5

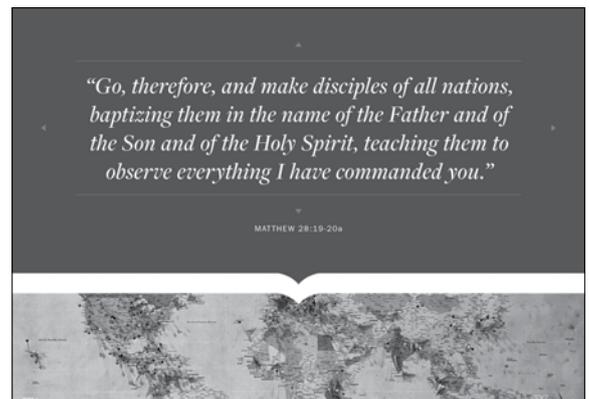
Create a chart that highlights Peter's role in Matthew's Gospel. Include locations, references, and descriptions of each experience.

Pack Item 4

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20a
Session 6

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 28:19-20a:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”



Examples from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.
The Pack is available for purchase at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://www.goExploreTheBible.com).

Pack Item 5

Poster: Parables of Jesus
Sessions 8, 9, 11

Create a chart that identifies and explains the key parables of Jesus found in Matthew 14–28. Include the name of the parable, where it is found in Matthew’s Gospel, and its teaching emphasis.

Pack Item 6

Poster: Loving God, Loving Others
Session 10

Create a four column poster with these headings: Heart, Soul, Mind, Neighbors. This will be used in application to help adults identify how they can love God and others better.

The poster has a dark header with the title "Loving God, Loving Others" in white. Below the header is a paragraph: "As we reflect on Jesus's 'Great Commandments,' list ways believers can demonstrate their love for God with their hearts, souls, and minds. Consider practical ways we can love our neighbors as we love ourselves." Below this is a table with four columns labeled HEART, SOUL, MIND, and NEIGHBORS. The table is mostly empty, with a few faint lines indicating where to write. At the bottom left, there is a small logo for "LIFEWAY" and at the bottom right, "© 2015 LIFEWAY CHRISTIAN RESOURCES".

Pack Item 7

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 25:40
Session 12

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 25:40:

“And the King will answer them, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.””

Pack Item 8

Handout: Matthew Time Line
Sessions 1-14

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events related to the Gospel of Matthew. Include both biblical and non-biblical historical references for context.

Pack Item 9

Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel
Sessions 1-14

Create a handout to help adults pray through key Scriptures in the Gospel of Matthew. Provide the following prompts:

- Session/Verse
- General thoughts from the passage
- What does this passage teach you about God and His character?
- How is God leading you to respond to what He is showing you about Himself?
- Written prayer based on the passage

Pack Item 10

Handout: Traditions of the Elders
Session 2

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a brief article that describes the traditions of the elders mentioned in Matthew 15.

Pack Item 11

Handout: Why Caesarea Philippi?
Session 3

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a brief article that describes the history and significance of the areas where Peter made His great confession of Jesus as the Messiah.

Pack Item 12

Handout: The Mount of Transfiguration
Session 4

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a brief article that considers the possible locations of the mountain where Jesus was transfigured.

Pack Item 13

Handout: Interpreting Parables
Sessions 5, 8, 9

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a chart that explains key principles for interpreting the parables Jesus shared in Matthew's Gospel.

Pack Item 14

Handout: Greatness in the Kingdom
Session 7

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a brief article that considers how greatness was measured in the ancient world and how Jesus redefined the idea through His teachings.

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.” These words of Shakespeare are well known. But what is greatness? How did the Greco-Roman world, including first-century Jews, view greatness? And how did Jesus define it? Despite the New Testament, especially the Gospels, is the best place to find answers to both questions. Sometimes answers come as only hints, at other times they come explicitly.

IN EARTHLY KINGDOMS
The secular world of Jesus's day sometimes measured greatness by pedigree. Having distinguished ancestors in one's family tree could elevate a person's reputation. Tracing Jesus's heritage back through David to Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17) was a badge of their ancestry, although the Gospel's genealogies primarily identified him as Messiah. “Such Jewish leaders claimed, ‘Our father is Abraham,’ believing that relationship made them greater than Jesus (John 8:39). Their lineage was ‘impeccable,’” and they believed this to be significant to all. Their close ties to the patriarch, however, did not make them great men.

Another measure of greatness was wealth. Generally the first-century Jews believed wealth indicated God's blessing. “People saw it as a marker of greatness. As it turned out, however, that first-century ‘prosperity gospel’ was wrong (Matt. 19:23-24; Luke 16:13-15). Great possessions do not make a man great in God's eyes.

Authority also indicated greatness. In offering authority over earth and heaven, Satan tempted Jesus to seize the idea of greatness (Matt. 4:8-9). And the Lord himself spoke of how human rulers dominate their subjects (20:25-28; Luke 22:26-27). Peter boasted of his greatness (Luke 19:13). Jesus's reply? There would have no authority at all unless God gave it to him (1:1).

Perhaps the most important measure of greatness in Jesus's day was honor. People said a “great” man was the one being served at a banquet, not the one serving (Luke 22:27). Jewish leaders regularly sought honor, as indicated by their being robes and exalting in the knowledge of the Law. The scribes loved to be greeted and take the first seats in the synagogues. As a result, people sought for places nearest the front at the head of the table. Honor was the issue.

Even Jesus's disciples fought about who was greatest (Mark 9:33-34, 10:37). All of them thought great honor made great men, but Jesus had a different take.

IN GOD'S KINGDOM
Jesus turned conventional thinking about greatness on its head. His teaching about greatness made use of two main images.

Little Children. Jesus's own followers were concerned with the question of greatness in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1). In reply, Jesus called a little child to himself and told them that children faith and humility led to greatness in God's kingdom (18:2-6). It is easy to romanticize this image of innocence and dependence. But, in reality, children had little value in first-century society. The ruler of such greatness assumes the role of a parent who risks to care for all. Jesus also counted service to a little child as service done to Him and also to the Father who sent Him (18:7-9; Mark 9:37).

Humble Servants. The same words considered humility a weakness, but Jesus redefined it as a virtue. Actually, He even defined humility as much as He redefined it (Luke 14:28). Few of the parables about humility. In one, Jesus compared people against being the first seats at a banquet, and they he went for a lower place (Luke 14:7-11). Instead, He recommended taking the lowest place so that the host could move them to a more honored spot. His main point was humility.

In another, a Pharisee prided himself on being such a great person, while a tax collector went home right with God, but the Pharisee managed only to go home (18:9-14). Humility made the difference.

Humility Jesus, however, was not what made for greatness in God's kingdom; it was humble service. Specifically, Jesus commended those who humbly served the needy (Matt. 25:31-46). By “the least of these,” Jesus probably meant “great” foreigners.” Regardless, the point of humble service remains the same.

Over and over, greatness in God's kingdom is radically different to greatness in the kingdoms of earth. It rests on humbling oneself as a little child and serving others in Jesus's name.

© 2018 Lifeway Christian Resources. All rights reserved. This document is for personal use only. Reproduction or distribution is prohibited without written permission from Lifeway Christian Resources. For more information, visit www.lifeway.com.

ITEM 14
Content of Bible that Luther King, Jr. spoke at the March 7, 1968. © Copyright 2018 Lifeway Christian Resources.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Examples from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.
The Pack is available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH

Session 1: **Strong and Courageous** (Joshua 1:1-11,16-18)

Session 2: **Amazing Grace** (Joshua 2:4-21)

Session 3: **Remembering God's Works** (Joshua 3:14-4:9)

Session 4: **Winning Strategy** (Joshua 6:12-25)

Session 5: **Sin Revealed** (Joshua 7:10-23)

Session 6: **Unwavering Determination** (Joshua 14:1-15)

Session 7: **Vital Decision** (Joshua 24:14-24)

Session 8: **Consequences** (Judges 2:11-23)

Session 9: **Called** (Judges 6:1-4,7-16)

Session 10: **Trust** (Judges 7:1-8,19-23)

Session 11: **Compromise** (Judges 16:16-31)

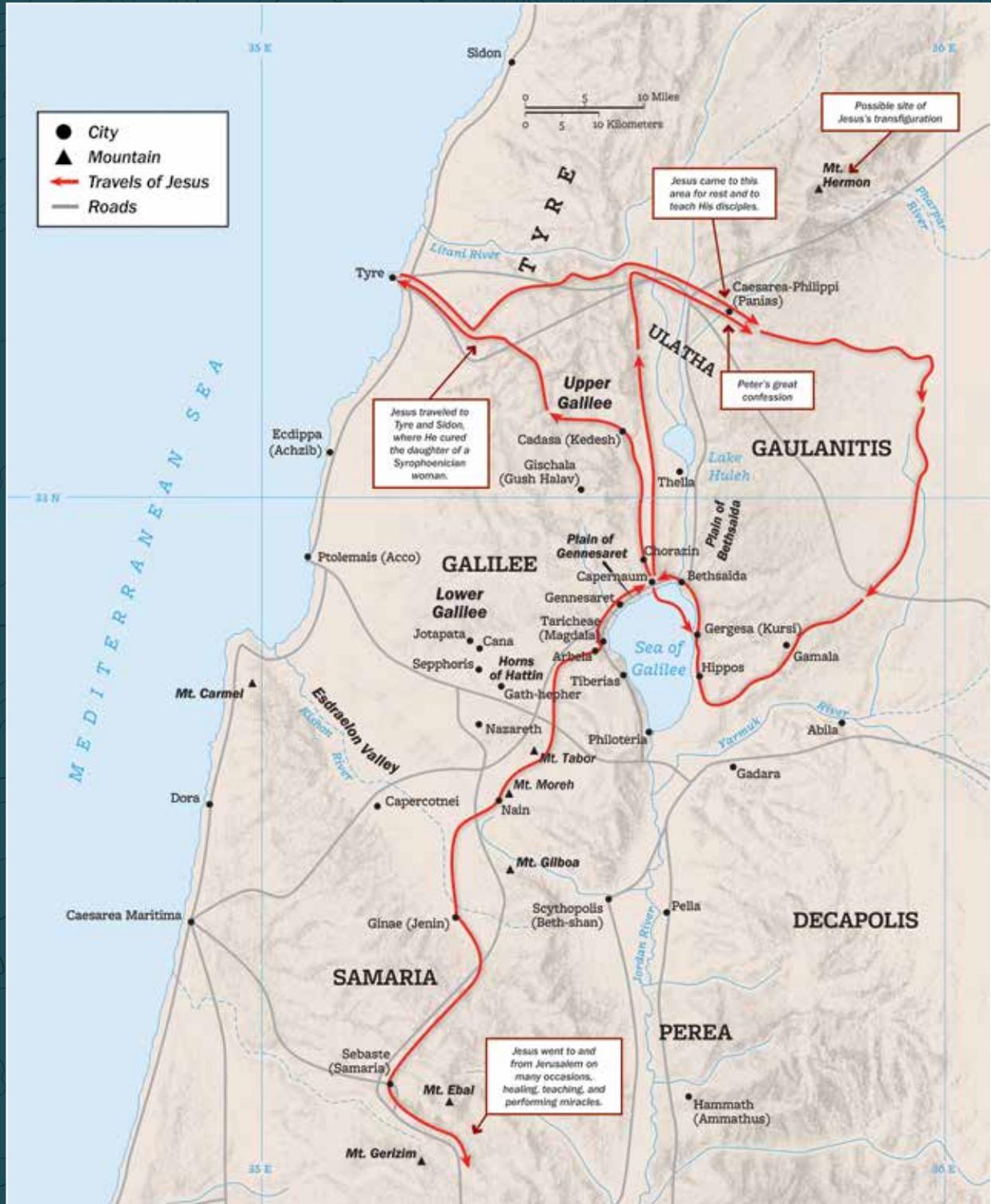
Session 12: **Faithfulness** (Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12)

Session 13: **Redemption** (Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17)

Explore

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee



"Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee" is based on "The Ministry of Jesus Beyond Galilee," Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1998), p. 224. Used with permission.

MATTHEW 14–28

Turning points are key to any story. A character moving in one direction suddenly transitions to a new path. Overcoming obstacles, the hero wins in the end. Matthew 14–28 represents a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus. After preaching and healing in Galilee, Christ turned His face toward Jerusalem. His steps ultimately took Him to a cross—and an empty tomb. As believers, we benefit from this turning point. Through His example, we learn how to face our fears, overcome opposition, sacrifice for others, and embrace the hope that only He provides. By studying Matthew 14–28, we gain a better understanding of what it means to live out our faith each day—and how we can move forward to make disciples of all nations.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

WEEKLY AUDIO HELPS

Listen to Explore the Bible Adults in your favorite podcast app

BLOG

goexplorethebible.com/blog

Lifeway adults

goexplorethebible.com

RELIGION/Biblical Studies/Bible Study Guides



© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources