

disciples see a glimpse of it) but also emphasizes the disciples' need to submit to Jesus ("This is my Son...Listen to him!"). Jesus commands them not to tell others because it would be like casting pearls before swine: those who have rejected Jesus would only sneer at claims that he had appeared in glory with Moses and Elijah.

### **TRAINING THE TWELVE (MATT 17:14-20:34)**

The focus of the remaining period before Jesus enters Jerusalem is on Jesus' teaching his disciples. This includes instruction on humility, leading another into sin, and the horror of hell (18:1-9). He explains the value of rescuing one sinner, restoring a brother, and forgiving one another (18:10-35). Jesus emphasizes the permanence of marriage, the danger of idols, and the reward that his followers will receive when he establishes his throne on earth (19:1-30). In the parable of the vineyard workers, Jesus teaches that God is sovereign over his kingdom and his dispensing of grace will be a shock to some (20:1-16). Once again Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem where will be killed and raised to life (20:17-19). This is not to deny that Jesus will establish his kingdom on earth, but he explains that the way to greatness in God's kingdom is not through prideful demands but through humble service (20:20-28). In the final scene before his entrance into Jerusalem, two more blind men see more clearly than others when they recognize Jesus as the Son of David (20:29-34).

### **GOING FURTHER**

Read the corresponding sections in the other Gospels (Mark 3-10; Luke 4-19; John 6-11) and identify the similar themes of (1) rejection, (2) parables; (3) explanation of kingdom delay; (4) predictions of death; (5) private instruction of the disciples.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY**

Read Matthew 21-25. Figure out the main point of each unit. Pay attention to Jesus' claims about himself, his response to opposition, and his predictions of the future.

## **REJECTION OF THE KING (MATTHEW 12-20)**

### **PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY**

Read Matthew 12-20. Think carefully about Israel's rejection of Jesus. How did Jesus respond? What changes resulted in his ministry and teaching?

### **BACKGROUND**

Many people reason that because Jesus established the church that this was always his original mission. They reject the notion that Jesus presented himself to Israel as the king come to fulfill God's promises of an earthly kingdom. This reasoning has several problems: (1) it denies or re-interprets the OT prophecies that predict a glorious kingdom of God on earth; (2) it fails to understand Jesus' ministry in its historical context. Today's study focuses on the second point, showing how the establishment of the kingdom was postponed because Israel rejected its Messiah.

### **THE KING'S IDENTITY AND DEMANDS (MATT 1-11)**

Jesus' birth was the first of many fulfillments of OT prophecies about the king God would send to establish his kingdom on earth. When Jesus began preaching, his message was "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." By this he meant that he, the king, had come and that the nation should submit to his lordship and his demands. He demonstrated his identity by doing miracles that showed his power to establish the kingdom. In his teaching, he revealed the high standard of the law that all failed to meet. Thus, the only righteous course of action was to repent and follow Jesus.

### **THE SATAN ACCUSATION (MATT 12)**

The opposition against Jesus was led by the religious leaders who refused to accept Jesus' authority over them. A line was crossed when the Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan (12:24). This was no small difference of opinion, but a blasphemous outrage against God's Spirit who worked these miracles through Jesus. This ludicrous charge signified a turning

point in Jesus' ministry. From this point on, he knew that the opposition had hardened and would only increase. Jesus and the kingdom he came to establish were being rejected by the people as undesirable. They preferred the broad road of the Pharisees rather than the narrow road of Jesus with its humble submission to God's word. In this way they were no different than their ancestors who rejected the prophets' call to obedience in order to receive God's blessing.

### **PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (MATT 13)**

Having been publicly rejected in a decisive way, Jesus began to speak in parables in order (1) to hide truth from those who rejected him and (2) to reveal truth to those who followed him. Jesus' parables in this chapter reveal new truths ("mysteries") about God's kingdom in light of the national rejection of Jesus. In the parable of the sower, Jesus reveals that his teaching is going to be largely rejected (only one of four soils receives the seed and bears fruit; 13:1-23). In the parable of the weeds, he reveals that Israel is mixed with righteous and wicked which will be sorted out in the judgment before the kingdom is established (13:24-30, 36-43). In other words, because his teaching is not accepted, there will be a period of time in which good and evil flourish before Jesus establishes the kingdom.

This doesn't mean that the kingdom would be small and insignificant, for one day it would flourish like a tree and permeate the whole earth (13:31-35). The kingdom is worth all amount of sacrifice, and pursuing its entrance is no less necessary even though there would be a delay in its establishment (13:44-46). Indeed, those who do not enter the kingdom will experience horrible judgment (13:47-50). The disciples must understand these new truths about the kingdom together with the previous revelation given in the Scriptures as they teach others (13:51-52). As if to underscore the nation's rejection of their Messiah, Matthew records that even the people of Jesus' hometown refused to accept his claims (13:53-58)

### **INTENSIFYING OPPOSITION (MATT 14:1-16:12)**

The death of John the Baptist is described here as a foreshadowing of what the opposition will ultimately do to Jesus (14:1-12). Jesus' withdrawal into a solitary place with his disciples is intentional, for Jesus is no longer seeking to publicize his messianic claims (14:13-21). Since it is clear that he is being rejected, Jesus is now going to control the timetable (of his death) and use the time for private instruction of his disciples so that they are prepared for establishing his church when he goes away. Even Jesus' walking on the water is an effort to avoid the crowds and hard-hearted leaders (14:22-36).

Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees (15:1-20) accomplishes two things: (1) It demonstrates the clear difference between Pharisaic religion and true faith that pleases God; (2) It intensifies the opposition to Jesus so that the movement to kill Jesus will gain strength. His departure to the Gentile lands of Tyre and Sidon was (1) not to bring the gospel of the kingdom to non-Jews (though one lady of remarkable faith does receive a miracle) but was (2) to escape the opposition who wouldn't follow him that far so that he could have time to instruct his disciples (15:21-28). Arriving back in Israel, Jesus again refuses to do a miracle for the hard-hearted and he warns the disciples that the opposition of the Jewish leaders will permeate the nation (16:1-12).

### **CONFESSION AND TRANSFIGURATION (MATT 16:13-17:13)**

Fleeing the crowds again, Jesus makes his identity explicitly clear privately to his disciples. Previously he demonstrated his actions by his works, but now he leaves no room for doubt: he is the Messiah, the Son of God. But he also reveals two crucial and related new truths: (1) Jesus will build his church; (2) Jesus will be killed by Israel's leaders. This is an outrageous idea for Peter who correctly expects Jesus to establish his kingdom but who fails to submit to Jesus *at all points*. Jesus will establish his kingdom but he must die first and his followers must be prepared to die. The Transfiguration serves as confirmation that Jesus will establish the kingdom (three