

Bible Studies from the Gospel of Matthew

Note: In the fourth column are the rankings of the questions. The easiest ones are marked with one *, fairly easy ones with ** and somewhat difficult ones with ***.

1.	Joseph - the foster father of God's Son	1:18-25	**
2.	Wise men from the east	2:1-12	**
3.	Jesus is baptized	3:13-17	***
4.	Jesus is tempted into sin	4:1-11	***
5.	From the sermon of the mount	5:21-32	**
6.	Do not worry!	6:25-34	**
7.	False prophets	7:15-23	***
8.	A foreign officer	8:5-13	*
9.	Calling of Matthew	9:9-13	*
10.	Perseverance in persecutions	10:16-31	***
11.	Good news for the poor	11:1-6	**
12.	A light burden	11:28-30	**
13.	Vain words	12:33-37	***
14.	Wheat and weeds	13:24-43	***
15.	Peter walks on water	14:22-34	*
16.	Great sorrow and great faith	15:21-28	*
17.	Simon becomes a rock	16:13-23	**
18.	Jesus looks like God	17:1-9	***
19.	The unmerciful servant	18:21-35	**
20.	Marriage, divorce and remarriage	19:1-12	***
21.	Never too late	20:1-16	***
22.	The King rides to his city	21:1-11	**
23.	The wedding banquet of a prince	22:1-14	**
24.	Who is a hypocrite?	23:1-12	***
25.	Heaven and earth will pass away	24:29-44	***
26.	Ten virgins	25:1-13	***
27.	Investing in talents	25:14-30	***
28.	Sheep and goats	25:31-46	**
29.	Struggle in Gethsemane	26:36-46	**
30.	Why did you forsake me	27:33-54	**
31.	Guarding a gravesite	27:62-28:15	**
32.	The great commission	28:16-20	***

1. JOSEPH - THE FOSTER FATHER OF GOD'S SON (Matt.1:18-25)

BACKGROUND: The leader may explain briefly [Luke 1:26-38](#). According to Mosaic Law, engagement was as binding as marriage, and unfaithfulness during engagement was also punished by stoning. Sexual relations were not supposed to start before marriage ([Deut.22](#)).

1. What shows us that Joseph suspected Mary of having deceived him (vs.18-19)?
 - What do you think was most difficult for Joseph in that situation?
 - Do you think Mary had talked to Joseph about the visitation of an angel? If not, why not? If yes, then why didn't Joseph believe her?

1. Why didn't Joseph want to revenge the injustice and sue Mary and her family although, according to the law, he had the right to do it?
 - How do you think Joseph felt towards Mary in the situation described in verses 18-19?

1. Why didn't God send an angel to Joseph the very same day that he sent one to Mary (vs.20)? (Why should Joseph's love have been tested in such a hard way?)

2. A virgin birth means that a sperm cell comes to Mary's womb from outside this universe. On what grounds could Joseph believe in virgin birth, although no such thing had ever happened in world history before (vs.20-23)?
 - What features in our text prove to us that virgin birth is not a made-up story?

1. Why do you think the virgin birth is for many (theologians too) the most difficult doctrine to believe?
 - How does the belief in the virgin birth and our concept of God belong together?

1. Why wouldn't it have been possible for Jesus to save his people from their sins if he had been the son of Joseph and Mary?
 - Recall a sin that your conscience is accusing you for committing. Then read verse 21 again, putting your own name in the place of words "his people". Do you believe this verse is true when read in this way?

1. How could Joseph keep himself from touching his beloved Mary even when they were living under the same roof (vs.25)?

2. Probably everybody thought that the child Mary was bearing was Joseph's. Do you think Joseph tried to free himself from false accusations in front of his and Mary's relatives?
 - Why did God choose none other than Joseph to be a foster father for his Son?

GLAD TIDINGS: Joseph probably died before Jesus started his public ministry, but he knew the main thing about his foster son: He would save his people - including his foster father - from their sins.

2. WISE MEN FROM THE EAST (Matt.2:1-12)

BACKGROUND: Many Jews had stayed in Persia (formerly Babylon) even after the exile had ended 500 years earlier. The wise men were both astrologers and astronomers and had a different religion from that of the Jews. The distance between Persia and Palestine was 1000-1500 km.

1. How long would the wise men's journey have taken, if a camel walks 30 km a day?
 - What do you think the bosses, wives and neighbors of these men thought about this journey?

1. Why did the wise men want to worship the king of the Jews, instead of their own king?
 - Why did the wise men want to give valuable presents to the new Jewish king (vs.11)?

1. The Jews hadn't had a king for about 600 years. Herod was only a vassal of the Romans. Why were Herod and all Jerusalem disturbed when they heard about the birth of a new king (vs.3)?
 - What did Herod in fact believe in **verses 4,16**? (What did he believe concerning his own power - the Bible - the Messiah - God's plan?)

1. From which point to which point did the star lead the wise men - look at verses 2 and 9?
 - Why didn't God let the star lead the wise men directly to Bethlehem - why the detour through Jerusalem? (Why was it important for the wise men to come to contact with God's written word?)
 - What kind of "star" has God sent into your life to lead you to Jesus?

1. Babylonians built the tower of Babel, stole the Arc of the Covenant and destroyed the Temple. The wise men were their descendants. Why did God lead his enemies to be the first to worship his newborn Son as a king?

2. When hearing rumors about the new king being born in Bethlehem, only 12 km away, why didn't any of the people in Jerusalem go to worship him there?

3. In what ways was the new king different from what the men had perhaps imagined beforehand?
 - What in the faith of the wise men an example to us?

1. The wise men gave precious gifts to baby Jesus. What did they get from him in return?
 - Why were these presents badly needed in Joseph's family (vs.13)?
 - What should you give to Jesus as a birthday present this year?

1. How do you think the life of these wise men was back in Persia, in the midst of idol worship and pagan religions?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus was not treated as a king many times during his life. The wise men worshipped him as such in the beginning of his life, and the Roman governor Pilate wrote that title on his cross. Jesus was a king who welcomed even his enemies to come and worship him.

3. JESUS IS BAPTIZED (Matt.3:13-17)

BACKGROUND: Two men in their early thirties met each other by the river Jordan. In fact, they were cousins. One of them was wearing strange clothes. Jesus had up till that time been living in Galilee, John in the desert of Judea. We are not told whether these men had met before. (The leader should briefly summarize what is said in [Matt.3:1-12](#).)

1. What was the difference between the childhood and young age of these two men?
 - When do you think John understood that Jesus was the Son of God?
 - Why didn't fame/popularity spoil John?

1. What was the difference between Jesus and other people who wanted to be baptized?
 - Why didn't John want to baptize Jesus?
 - Why did Jesus want to be baptized although John's baptism was meant only for sinners?

1. What do the words of Jesus in verse 15 mean?
 - The leader should read [John 19:30](#). How did Jesus fulfill all righteousness?

1. What does this passage tell us about the relationship between Jesus and God?
 - What does this passage teach us about the Trinity?
 - The Holy Spirit had been in Jesus all the time. Why did he appear in visible form only when Jesus was baptized?

1. Why did God want to proclaim to all people the things he said in verse 17?
 - Recall what has happened to you during the last month. Do you think God could say about you the same thing as he said about Jesus in verse 17?

1. John baptized people only after they had confessed their sins; that is why his baptism is called the baptism of repentance. What is the difference between Christian baptism and John's baptism? (See also [Acts 2:38](#)).

2. During Christian baptism God says to the one baptized the same words as he said to his Son (vs.17). On what grounds can he say this to a sinner?

3. The leader should explain briefly how Abraham offered his son to God ([Gen.22](#)). The words in verse 17 are vaguely reminiscent of the words God said to Abraham in [Gen.22:2](#). What are the common points between Abraham and God sacrificing their sons?

4. JESUS IS TEMPTED INTO SIN (Matt.4:1-11)

BACKGROUND: Satan tempted Eve in the paradise and caused her fall into sin. In the same way he tempted God's people during the 40 years in the wilderness, and made them fall over and over again. Satan has tempted every one of us and caused us to sin many a time. Jesus, too, had to be tempted because he was a real man and a representative of mankind.

1. Imagine that you had to spend one and a half month all alone in a desert, eating nothing, meeting no one. What do you think would be worst for you in that situation?
 - What do you think was the physical and spiritual state of Jesus after 40 days of fasting?
 - Compare your temptations with the temptations of Jesus. What is the difference?

1. We often think of the Holy Spirit as leading a believer to fullness of life. Why, then, did he lead Jesus to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (vs.1)?
 - Why does the Holy Spirit lead us also to a situation where we are tempted by the Devil?

1. The first temptation concerns our basic needs: hunger, thirst, sexual needs, need for safety etc (vs.3-4). Why would it have been a sin if Jesus had acquired something to eat by changing stones into bread?

2. Do you think that a human being can live by the Word of God alone, without his basic needs having been fulfilled (vs.4)? Please, give an honest answer and give also your reasons.

3. The second temptation concerns our relationship with God (vs.5-7). What could Jesus have proved to the world if he had jumped down from the top of the temple and got away with it?
 - In which form does the second temptation come into our lives?

1. The third temptation concerns the object of our faith. Does Satan speak the truth in verse 9? Give your reasons.
 - What would the world perhaps have gained temporarily if Jesus had done as Satan tempted him to do?
 - What temporary gain can we get if we bow down before gods and lords other than the living God?

1. What was Jesus' weapon when he was fighting with the Devil?
 - What is your weapon when fighting against temptations and sins?

1. Jesus won the battle against Satan. Why was he then punished by a death sentence, which was prescribed only for those who have lost their battles?
 - What kind of God would Jesus have been, if he had not been tempted?
 - What kind of a Christian would you be, if you had not been tempted?

GLAD TIDINGS: The leader reads [Hebr.2:18](#).

5. FROM THE SERMON OF THE MOUNT (Matt.5:21-32)

BACKGROUND: As Moses gave the law of God to his people from Mount Sinai, so did Jesus, "the new Moses". Jesus added new understanding to old commandments.

1. What does anger have in common with murder (verses 21-22)?
 - Have you ever been called "a good for nothing" or "a fool"? How did it feel?
 - How does it affect a child if he is repeatedly being called "a good-for-nothing" or "a fool".

1. What punishment would you yourself give for the sins mentioned in verses 21-22?
 - What punishment would you want to give for these sins if they were committed towards someone you love?

1. Why must we be reconciled with other people before performing our religious duties (vs.23-24)?
 - Why isn't Jesus interested in whose fault the quarrel was, but commands his hearers to take the first step in order to be reconciled to their brother (vs.23-25)?
 - What would happen in your family/school/working place, if you started to act like Jesus commands you to do in these verses?

1. What if Jesus had said: "If your brother has something against you, forget it, don't think about it any more!" Would it be any easier for you to follow such commandment than the one he actually gave?
 - What will happen to a person who never forgives another person who has harmed him/her?
 - Who is the person whose sins Jesus wants you to forgive today? (You can answer in your heart.)

1. Why does Jesus think that a sin committed in one's imagination is as grave as the actual deed (vs.27-28)?
 - Recall a situation when your eyes or your hands tempted you to sin. In what concrete ways could you have stopped them to sin (vs.29-30)?

1. What does Jesus in fact teach about divorce (vs.31-32)? Stick to the text!
 - Imagine a situation when a married man or woman falls in love with a third person. What good does it do to all concerned if this person decides to follow the commandment of Jesus?

1. What is the biggest difference between what Jesus teaches about marriage and what people in our day think about it?

2. How would you explain this passage to a person who claims to have been able to live according to these commandments? What about to a person who is desperate for not having been able to live according to them?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus was punished with all the punishments mentioned in this text: from the judgment to the fire of hell. He had to pay even his last penny to be able to repay our debt - the

debt we owed to God for not having followed his commandments. (Cf. verse 26.)

6. DO NOT WORRY! (Matt.6:25-34)

BACKGROUND: The word righteousness (vs.33) means complete purity in thoughts words and deeds. Only a righteous man/ woman is acceptable to God and can go to heaven.

1. Put in your own words the things that Jesus forbids us to worry about in this passage.
 - Which of the things mentioned in this passage worries you most?
 - How would your life change if you could stop worrying about the things mentioned in this passage?

1. What will happen in a family, if one of its members is always worried about money, health, future and the like?
 - What does worrying do to our bodies?

1. What does worrying have in common with lack of faith?
 - How could we reduce the amount of worrying and lack of faith in our lives?

1. Find all the promises Jesus gives his disciples in this passage.
 - Which of these promises is the easiest for you to believe? Which one is most difficult?

1. Read verses 31-32. What is the thing you feel you most desperately need today? (You can answer in your heart.)
 - Are you convinced that your Heavenly Father knows what you really need today? Give your reasons.

1. What does it mean in practice to seek first the kingdom of God (vs.33)?
 - Why do people usually seek first their earthly happiness rather than the kingdom of God?
 - What do you seek first? (You can answer in your heart.)

1. What does it mean in practice to seek God's righteousness, not one's own (vs.33b)?
 - If you have experienced having been led from seeking your own righteousness to seeking God's righteousness, please share your experience with others.

1. What does verse 34 mean?
 - Recall a time when you were worrying about something in the future. What should you have done in that situation instead of worrying?
 - Knowing your present circumstances Jesus still speaks verses 33-34 to you. What do you answer him?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus put always God's kingdom above everything else. And yet he was not given one of the good things promised in this passage, but the cross. Jesus carried to the cross the punishment of our worrying and not believing in God. That is why he can now receive even people who have only a little faith.

7. FALSE PROPHETS (Matt.7:15-23)

BACKGROUND: Prophets were individuals who proclaimed God's word to his people. We can apply the criteria of this passage to any person who stands in front of others claiming to proclaim the word of God, regardless of whether he/she is a pastor or a layperson.

1. Try to find as many reasons as possible from this passage as to why it is difficult to tell a false prophet from a true one.
 - According to this passage, do false prophets act inside the church or outside it?
1. What do you think a false prophet, who is in fact a wolf in sheep's clothing, actually does inside the church (vs.15)?
 - Do false teachers themselves know that they are wolves in sheep's clothing? Give your reasons.
 - What is the fruit by which you can tell if a prophet is true or false (verses 16-20)? Give some concrete examples.
1. Where in our day do you hear such things happening as are described in verse 22 (prophecies, demon casting, miracles)?
 - What is Jesus criticizing those people, who even perform great miracles in his name, for (vs.22)?
 - By what yardstick must we evaluate those people who perform miracles in Christian churches?
1. What do the false prophets consider to be the purpose of religion?
 - Imagine a person who is visiting only such meetings where miracles happen. What will still be lacking from his faith?
1. What is the attitude of the false prophets towards sin (verses 21,23)?
 - Why don't false prophets realize themselves that they are evildoers?
1. Think about the way the false prophets use Jesus' name. For what purpose do they not use it?
 - The leader may read **Rom.10:13**. What is the difference between false prophets and the people Paul is referring to in the above verse, regarding how the name of Jesus is used?
1. How does Jesus get to know his own (vs.23)?
 - Why doesn't Jesus know these people who have performed great miracles in his name?
 - How can we know today whether Jesus will acknowledge us in the last day or not?
1. What message do true prophets have for those who are sinners - losers - who have lost their happiness in this world- or who are facing death?
 - Whose duty is in our day it to warn Christians about false prophets?

GLAD TIDINGS: Satan can never be like the Lamb of God, Jesus, because he hasn't any wounds on his body. The problem with false prophets is that they don't admit their sins and, consequently,

don't need the cross. That is why they never learn to know Jesus as their Savior.

8. A FOREIGN OFFICER (**Matt.8:5-13**)

BACKGROUND: A centurion was a Roman officer representing the occupation forces. Most probably he had killed people in armed clashes and executions. The religion of Roman soldiers was emperor worship. The leader should explain briefly the main facts about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

1. The centurion in the text had perhaps heard teaching about the true God from his (Jewish) servant. Think of some other reasons why the Roman officer might have become so attached to him (verses 5-6).
2. The Jews didn't usually visit homes of foreigners, because it made them ritually unclean. What other reasons might have been in centurion's mind for not considering himself worthy of receiving Jesus under his roof (vs.7-8)?
3. Describe the centurion's faith at the point when he was approaching Jesus.
 - Do you believe that your problems would be solved by one single word from Jesus (vs.8)?
1. What did the centurion think he had in common with Jesus (vs.9)?
 - How could the centurion see the invisible army of Jesus that no one else was able to see?
 - Do you believe that Jesus can command today one of his invisible angels to help the person you have just prayed for? Give your reasons.
1. The gospels mention only two incidents of Jesus admiring somebody's faith. What was so special about the centurion's faith (verses 8-10)? (What is the difference between believing in a miracle and believing in Jesus' word?)
 - Do you think the man himself knew that he had great faith?
 - If you believed in Jesus' word even before you saw his help, please share your experiences.
1. In verses 11 and 12 Jesus says that it may be easier for foreigners, who originally confess other religions, to believe in him than for those who always knew the Bible. Why is that?
 - What is the criterion for who will go into the kingdom of God (heaven) and who will be thrown into the darkness (hell)?
1. God had given his promises concerning the Messiah and the Land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How does the faith of these three men resemble the faith of the Roman centurion?
2. The centurion didn't know yet what had happened to his servant. What do you think he expected to find at home (vs.13)?
 - Jesus says the words in verse 13 to you personally today. What will you answer him?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus was "thrown outside (of God's Kingdom), into the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs.12). In this way he prepared "passports to heaven" for Roman soldiers and for us who originally didn't have any right to become citizens of his Kingdom.

9. CALLING OF MATTHEW (Matt.9:9-13)

BACKGROUND: Eating together was a sign of friendship for the Jews of Jesus' time. The publicans were looked down on by the religious people, because they were not honest with matters of money. Matthew is usually considered to be the man who wrote the gospel, which bears his name.

1. Imagine the everyday life of Matthew, the tax collector. What were its good and bad points?
 - What do you think Matthew's relationship with God was like while he still was a tax collector?
 - What did Matthew perhaps expect Jesus to say, when he entered the tax collector's booth?

1. Why didn't Jesus ask Matthew: "Do you want to become my disciple?"
 - How do you think Matthew felt when the famous teacher and miracle-worker asked him to be his follower?
 - Why did Jesus want to have a former tax collector as his disciple even when he knew perfectly well that he would be criticized for it?
 - Why does Jesus want you to become his disciple?

1. What did his colleagues think when Matthew left his booth without even tidying up his desk?
 - How did Matthew have the courage to give up his regular job and income?
 - What did Matthew get instead of all the things he lost by following Jesus?
 - Jesus tells to you, perhaps for the first time in your life, perhaps for the hundredth: "Follow me!" What do you answer him?

1. With Matthew, the father of the house believing in Jesus, how do you think the life of his wife and children changed?
 - Why did Matthew want to have a party for Jesus and his previous colleagues (vs.10)?

1. What are the groups of the people in our society, with whom decent people don't want to associate?
 - Why did Jesus want to associate with all kinds of people?

1. What did Jesus mean by verses 12-13?
 - Which of these two groups do you feel you belong: healthy or sick, the righteous or the sinners? (You can answer in your heart.)
 - In the light of this text, why do you think you have experienced illness and sin in your life?
 - Why is it sometimes easier to sacrifice something for God than to show mercy to one's neighbors (vs.13)?

1. Why is it that Jesus, "the doctor", had to become bruised? Why did he, the only righteous one, have to be counted among sinners?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for God - that is why God doesn't desire any

other sacrifice from us except that we use our energy to serve our neighbors.

10. PERSEVERANCE IN PERSECUTIONS (Matt.10:16-31)

1. To what extent do you think Christians are subject to scorn or even persecution in our society?
 - What are Christians criticized for most in our society?

1. What will happen to sheep among wolves (vs.16)?
 - What does Jesus mean by saying that he will send his disciples like sheep among wolves?
 - How can one be shrewd as a snake and as innocent as a dove?

1. For what "crimes" are Jesus' disciples accused for when they are brought to trial (verses 17-22)?
 - If you knew that you would be brought to trial because of your faith, do you think you could stop worrying what to say there (vs.19-20)?

1. In what sort of society could family members do things described in verse 21?
 - What makes a person stick to his convictions even when everybody else disagrees with him/her (vs.22)?
 - How do you think you would behave if you one day were persecuted because of your faith?

1. How can verse 23 be applied to our time?

2. What does it mean for a disciple that his teacher has already endured the same persecutions as him/her (vs.24-25)?

3. Imagine two people in the midst of persecutions. One knows that the lies will be disclosed and the truth will win in the end. The other isn't so sure about it. How is the situation of these two different (vs.26)?

4. Find from these verses as many reasons as possible why a Christian doesn't have to be afraid of persecutions (vs.26-31).
 - What should a Christian do even during persecutions (vs.27)?

1. Does Jesus refer in verse 28 to God or Satan?
 - How does the Christian behave who fears no one else but God even during persecutions? What about a Christian who fears Satan?
 - What, according to verse 28, is the only true tragedy in the life of a human being?

1. Jesus admits that even a Christian may be killed by his enemies (vs.28). How can we then apply verses 29-31 to the lives of martyrs, e.g. John the Baptist?
 - Why is it impossible to annihilate the real Christian church by persecution?
 - Jesus says to you today the words in verses 30-31. What do they mean to you in your present situation?

11. GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR (Matt.11:1-6)

BACKGROUND: John the Baptist, now 30 years old, was the man who had baptized Jesus and witnessed how the Holy Spirit descended on him from heaven. In his answer to John, Jesus is quoting the prophet Isaiah. (Is.35:5,6 and Is.61:1). The leader should read these verses.

1. John the Baptist was imprisoned in the midst of a flourishing ministry for having criticized King Herod for his adultery. Which aspects of his imprisonment were perhaps most frustrating for him?
 - When John had met Jesus for the first time, he had said: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). What made him now doubt his previous convictions?

1. What conclusion would John have to draw about his own life if it became clear that Jesus had after all not been Christ?
 - If you have ever doubted whether Jesus is God or not, in which circumstances did it happen?

1. When sending his disciples to Jesus, do you think John expected him to come and free him from prison in a miraculous way (verses 2-3)? Give your reasons.
 - Why didn't Jesus come and visit John in prison?

1. Why didn't Jesus simply answer to John's question: "Yes, it is I. You don't have to wait for anyone else"? (Why did Jesus want to answer with a quotation from the Old Testament?)
 - How do you feel if you get from your friend a Bible verse in the midst of your sorrows?
 - While quoting Isaiah, why did Jesus skip the promise about the Messiah freeing prisoners?

1. Which words in Jesus' reply could John apply to himself?
 - The phrase "the good news" means above all the forgiveness of sins (vs.5). For which sin did John need God's forgiveness in that situation?
 - Why does God often make his believers as "poor" as John the Baptist was in prison?

1. What do Jesus' words in verse 6 mean?
 - According to this passage, what should we do if we become offended by the way Jesus treats our loved ones and us?

1. How do you think John felt about Jesus' answer? (Did he get peace in his heart before he died?)
 - John had been a true believer for all his life. How do you think his faith changed through this last contact with Jesus?

1. What did John probably think about his life and death, when Herod's henchman came to cut his head off?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus said that he came to "preach the good news to the poor, to bind up the

brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives... to comfort all who mourn" (Is.61:1-2). He comes also to you today and does all that - through his word.

12. A LIGHT BURDEN (Matt.11:28-30)

BACKGROUND: A yoke means a wooden frame, which links two oxen so that they can pull together a plough, a load, etc.

1. What are some of the most common burdens that people are carrying on their shoulders in our day?
 - Try to picture your present suffering as a concrete burden. If the heaviest burden imaginable weighs 100 kg, how much do you think your present burden would weigh?

1. How is the burden of suffering different from the burden of sin? (Which is more difficult for you to bear: suffering or a bad conscience?)

2. Imagine your life without any burdens - what would the good and bad sides of such a life be?

3. What kind of person do you think would be able carry your burden with you?
 - What does it mean in practice that you go to Jesus with your burden and put it in front of him?

1. What does Jesus mean by verse 29?
 - Have you found rest for your soul? (You can answer in your heart.)
 - Why can only a humble person find rest from his/her burden? (Why do so many people become bitter while carrying their burdens?)
 - How could we become as humble and meek as Jesus was?

1. What do these words of Jesus mean: "Take my yoke on you"? (What is the yoke of Jesus? How does it differ from our own burdens?)
 - How does our situation change if we carry the yoke together with Jesus?

1. What does Jesus mean by saying that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (vs.30)?

2. What do those people do with their burdens who don't want to take them to Jesus?
 - Why is it that even Christians don't always take their burdens to Jesus?

1. How much lighter do you think your burden would become if you knew that there wasn't any guilt in it and you didn't have to think about whose fault the problem was?
How much lighter would your burden become if you could believe that Jesus will change all your sufferings to be the best for all concerned?

GLAD TIDINGS: The leader should read [John 19:17](#). The cross of Jesus contained all our burdens; both our sufferings and our sins.

13. VAIN WORDS (Matt.12:33-37)

BACKGROUND: Before the discussion, recall what kind of words you talked about last week.

1. In what kind of situation is it most difficult for you to restrain your tongue?
 - If you could live your life once again, to whom would you speak differently than you actually did? (You can also answer in your heart.)

1. Why are our words as important to God as much as our deeds?
 - In what respect do our words resemble the fruit of a tree (vs.33)?
 - How can a bad tree change into a good tree?
 - How can a bad man become a good man?

1. Jesus uses a strong image when he calls his hearers "brood of vipers". What does a poisonous snake have in common with a person who speaks evil words (vs.34)?
 - What does Jesus mean by his words: "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (vs.34)?
 - Apply the test of verse 34 to yourself. What is your heart full of? (You can answer in your heart.)

1. In verse 35 Jesus indicates that everyone has "a store" in his or her heart. With what things do people usually fill the stores of their hearts?
 - Consider what you speak about Jesus or to him. What do your words or lack of them show about your relationship with him?

1. What are "careless words" (vs.36)?
 - What would be the opposite of "careless words"?
 - Why do we have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every "careless" word rather than every "bad" word?
 - Based on this passage, what do you think will happen to you on the Day of Judgment?

1. Do you think it is possible to conceal from others in the long run what is inside of your heart? Is it possible, for example, to speak only sweet words when your heart is full of hatred and bitterness?
 - What do you think about a person who speaks as little as possible in order not to utter any careless words?

1. How probable do you think it is that you will follow this teaching of Jesus from now on?

2. Jesus said once that he is a vine and his disciples are branches (John 15:1). How can we then bear good fruit even with a bad store in our hearts?

GLAD TIDINGS: The store of Jesus' heart was full of good things, and yet he was condemned by his words - as a blasphemer. His cross was the tree that bore the bitter fruit of our vain words.

14. WHEAT AND WEEDS (Matt.13:24-30 and 36-43)

BACKGROUND: The weeds refer to darnel, which looks very much like wheat while it is young. Because the seed of darnel often contains poisonous fungus it is carefully kept apart from wheat at harvest time.

1. THE PARABLE (verses 24-30)

- What is the difference between attending to a field, which only grows wheat, and attending to a field, which grows both wheat and darnel?
- What possible motives might a person have who sows weeds among the wheat of his neighbor?
- How would you take it if somebody sabotaged your work in a similar way?
- What is surprising about how the owner of the field takes the sabotage (vs.28-30)?
- Why was every head/ear of the wheat so important to this farmer (vs.29)?
- What is the relation between the seed and the fruit it produces?

1. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE (verses 36-43). Note that the word "field" has two meanings: "the world" (verse 38) and "the kingdom of the Son of Man" (verse 41), i.e. the Christian church.

- Earlier on Jesus had called the word of God the seed. Why does he now call people as seeds (vs.38)?
- Who sows people and how (vs.37,39)?
- What does this parable teach us about the way the Devil is working?
- What is the goal of Satan when sowing his sons inside the Christian church, of all the places?
- How would God's congregation look, if it didn't contain any imposters?
- Why can't we always know who is God's son and who is Satan's?
- Why is it not allowed to throw "the sons of the Devil" out of the church before the last judgment?
- Apply the message of this parable into your own Christian fellowship.
- Which seed do you consider yourself to be: wheat or weed? (You can answer in your heart.)
- According to this parable, do you think it possible that a person is half wheat, half weed? Give your reasons.
- What will the end of the world be like (vs.41-43)?
- What is the harvest that God is expecting from this world?

1. THE RIGHTEOUS (verse 43)

- Why does Jesus all of a sudden use the word "righteous" in the interpretation of his parable?
- The leader should read [Romans 4:5](#). How do we become righteous?

1. SUMMARIZING QUESTIONS

- What is the basic difference between a true believer and an impostor?
- What do you think Jesus wants to say to you personally through this parable?

GLAD TIDINGS: Although he was the best wheat there ever was on this earth, Jesus was "pulled

up and thrown into the fiery furnace" like a weed. That is why he can now change weeds into wheat and harvest it into his kingdom at the end of the age.

15. PETER WALKS ON WATER (Matt.14:22-34)

BACKGROUND: The Lake of Galilee is about 20x12 km inside. Sudden gusts from a mountain pass sometimes cause violent storms on this lake. The fourth watch was around three o'clock in the morning (verse 25). The disciples had already been nine hours on the lake by that time.

1. Why did Jesus send his disciples to the lake although he certainly knew what would happen to them there (vs.22)?
 - Why does Jesus sometimes also send us into "a storm"?

1. Imagine how the disciples felt and what they did while the storm was raging around them hour after hour (vs.24).
 - What did the disciples think about Jesus who didn't come with them to the boat?
 - What do you think Jesus was praying while his friends were in danger of death (vs.23)?

1. The disciples couldn't imagine that Jesus would be able to walk on water. What did they perhaps expect him to do in that situation?
 - What do you expect Jesus to do in a hopeless situation?
 - Why did the disciples think Jesus was a ghost (vs.26)?

1. How would you feel if Jesus stood in the midst of "the storm" you are experiencing now and said: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (vs.28)?
 - The words "It is I" are in fact the name of God (Yahweh) in Hebrew. Why did Jesus want to use these words in this situation?

1. Try to find as many reasons as possible why Peter wanted to walk on huge waves with the boat tossing up and down in darkness (vs.27).
 - Do you think you would have dared to step on the waves in that situation?
 - Why didn't Peter's experiment succeed (vs.30)?

1. What was still lacking in Peter's faith at that moment (vs.31)?
 - What would you answer if Jesus said to you the words recorded in verse 31?
 - Why is it important for us to learn to look realistically at our faith?
 - What consolation does this passage contain for those who know that they have too little faith?

1. Why didn't Jesus come to help his friends until 3 o'clock in the morning? (What important lesson would the disciples have missed if Jesus had come to their help sooner? cf.31-33.)
 - Why does Jesus often come to our help in a much later point of time than we were expecting him to come?

GLAD TIDINGS: Nobody reached their hand to Jesus when he was in the middle of the storm (=God's anger). That was the price Jesus had to pay for our lack of faith. But that is why he is now able to reach his saving hand even to a person who has too little faith.

16. GREAT SORROW AND GREAT FAITH (Matt.15:21-28)

BACKGROUND: Canaanites were old archenemies of Jews. Tyre and Sidon were situated at a distance of 45-60 km from Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know about this journey abroad (Mark 7:24). The leader should tell the main facts about King David (vs.22).

1. Imagine the everyday life of this mother, especially her relationships with other people. (Her daughter, husband, other children, neighbors etc.)
 - What did the mother perhaps accuse herself of?
 - Who in our day are the mothers who have as great a sorrow in her hearts as this woman did?

1. The Canaanite woman already knew something that most of the Jews were not aware of: namely that Jesus was the son of David (vs.22). How do you think she had come to know this fact?
 - Why did the mother ask mercy for herself (vs.22)?

1. What were Jesus' first three reactions to the cry for help of this mother (vs.23-26)?
 - Usually Jesus welcomed all suffering people to himself. Why did he then give this woman a cold shoulder?
 - What would you do if Jesus treated you in the same way as he treated this woman?

1. How did the disciples feel about the Canaanite woman and the whole situation (vs.23)?

2. How did the Canaanite mother react to Jesus' seeming rejection (vs.23,25,27)?

3. What do you think happened in the heart of Jesus while he was silent before the suffering mother?
 - Why does Jesus sometimes hold his silence when we are crying him for help?
 - Why must the faith of every one of us be tested?

1. Jesus praised the faith of only two people. Try to find as many characteristics of great faith in this woman as possible (vs.28).

2. How is it generally thought that one gets great faith in one's heart?
 - The leader should read Mark 7:30. How did this pagan mother get a great faith even before she had seen the miracle happen?
 - In what kind of situations do we need great faith?

1. What was Jesus' purpose in his one and only journey abroad?

GLAD TIDINGS: On the cross Jesus had to believe in God in spite of his silence, cf. Psalm 22:1-2,24. The faith of Jesus was very much similar to that of the Canaanite woman at that point. The only big difference between their situations was that in the case of Jesus God was silent because of his anger, not because of his love.

17. SIMON BECOMES A ROCK (**Matt.16:13-23**)

BACKGROUND: The title of "Christ" in the New Testament means the same as "Messiah" in the Old, i.e. the anointed one. Kings and high priests were anointed with oil when assuming their positions.

1. In the light of this passage, what do you think of the old adage: "Everyone will be saved by his own faith" (vs.13-17)?
 - Why is the correct confession of faith so important in Christianity?

1. Which of these is easiest for you to believe: that Jesus was the prophet Elijah (who died 800 years earlier) or the prophet Jeremiah (who died 600 years earlier) or John the Baptist (who had been killed a couple of years ago) or that he was Christ, the Son of the living God (verses 14-16)?
 - In your opinion, can people who answer to Jesus' question as those in verse 14 be called Christians? Give your reasons.

1. In spite of all the miracles Jesus performed, why didn't most of his contemporaries realize that he was the Messiah, who had been prophesied in the Old Testament?

2. According to this passage, how do we come to the true faith (vs.17)?

3. How would you feel if someone called you "a rock"?
 - How do you think Peter felt when being called "a rock" by Jesus?
 - Some people think that by "the rock" Jesus meant Peter as an individual. Others think that Jesus meant Peter's confession in verse 16. What do you think?

1. What do you think is the meaning of verse 19? (What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Who has them in our day?)

2. Why couldn't Peter believe that anything like the things in verse 21 would happen to Jesus?
 - Compare verses 17 and 23. From which sources do Peter's words come?
 - What was wrong with Peter's faith even after his confession?

1. How can Jesus call the same person "a rock" and "Satan"?
 - What proves that Peter was not possessed by a demon at this time?
 - What did Satan try to accomplish through Peter?
 - In what situations may even Christians do Satan's work in the lives of those they love?

1. What is the difference between the two ways of thinking mentioned in verse 23?
 - Which way of thinking is more common inside the Christian church?
 - How does Jesus treat a person who has been doing Satan's work in the lives of other people?

GLAD TIDINGS: Read verse 21 adding the words: "because of Peter's sins - and mine".

18. JESUS LOOKS LIKE GOD (Matt.17:1-9)

BACKGROUND: Moses and Elijah had wanted to see God hundreds of years before this event, but they couldn't. According to the OT, if a sinner looks holy God in the face, he will die. Concerning the death of these two, see [Deut.34:1-6](#) and [2 Kings 2:11](#). The mountain of transfiguration might have been Mt. Hermon (2760m). See a map.

1. VERSE 1: How do you think these three disciples felt when Jesus asked none other than them to go to a mountain trip with him?
 - What do you think it was like to climb a high mountain with the equipment of that time?

1. VERSE 2: Have you ever wished you could see God? If you have, in what sort of situation?
 - What was the meaning of Jesus' face and clothes changing like that?
 - Why did God want to show once the divine figure of his Son in front of human beings?
 - Why didn't the disciples die even though they saw holy God face to face?

1. VERSE 3: Why did also two representatives of the OT also have to be present at this occasion?
 - Why did God choose none other than Moses and Elijah to be on this mountain?
 - How do you think these two felt when they saw the Messiah whose coming they had prophesized?

1. VERSE 4: What made the disciples feel so good in this situation?
 - If you have had a religious experience after which you didn't want to return to your everyday life, tell us about it.
 - How do you think Peter planned to live on a high mountain from that point on?

1. VERSE 5: What was the meaning of the cloud in that situation?
 - Why didn't God say, "Obey him", but "Listen to him!"
 - Compare this situation to the one when God gave his law written on stone tablets on Mt. Sinai to his people. What is the difference?

1. VERSE 6: Peter had just said that he felt very good. What was he afraid of now?
 - Does it feel good or a bad when one is near holy God himself?
 - Which Jesus do you feel is easier to communicate with: the one who wears the clothes of a carpenter or the one who has on the white garment of righteousness? Give your reasons.

1. VERSES 7-9: What was the significance of Jesus touching his disciples?
 - How do you think the disciples felt about Moses and Elijah having disappeared?
 - Why didn't Jesus want his transfiguration to be known to anyone else, not even the 9 other disciples?

GLAD TIDINGS: From the mountain of transfiguration Jesus started his course towards another mountain, namely Golgotha. In order to give the white garment of righteousness to us Jesus had to die naked on the cross, bearing the shame of our sins.

19. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT (Matt.18:21-35)

BACKGROUND: In this parable, the king represents God, the servants represent us people, the debt represent our sins and the prison represents hell. One talent is equivalent of 17 years' wages (vs.24). 100 denarii are equivalent of 3 months' wages (vs.28).

1. How many times do you think it is possible to forgive another person who hasn't stopped doing wrong against you (vs.21)?

2. THE PARABLE

- How much money would 10 000 talents mean in our currency (verses 23-24)?
- How is it possible that one single person has lost such a sum of money?
- In your opinion, was the King's verdict fair or not (verse 25)? Give your reasons.
- Why didn't the servant ask his King to forgive the debt (vs.26)?
- How do you think this servant was going to earn 10000 talents for the repayment of his debt (vs.26)?
- The servant does not strike one as being happy and thankful about the cancelled debt (verses 27-28). Why?
- How long does one have to save in order to make the equivalent of three months' pay (vs.29)?
- What should have happened to the first servant in order for him to be able to forgive the second one (vs.30)?

1. APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE

- What do debt and sin have in common?
- Imagine that you run into debt in front of God every time you sin: a lie 50 dollars, a dirty thought 100 dollars, hating a person 1000 dollars etc. How much do you think you are indebted to him at this moment?
- How do we usually defend ourselves when we don't want to forgive the sins of our neighbor?
- What is wrong with the faith of a person who says to God the words in verse 26?

1. SUMMARY

- Does the first servant refer to a Christian or a non-Christian? Give your reasons.
- What is the difference between not wanting to forgive and not being able to do so?
- How, according to this parable, do we get a forgiving heart (verses 32-33)?
- Jesus prayed for those who nailed him to the cross. Why then was he punished as the unmerciful servant in this parable (verses 34-35)?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus changed places with us unmerciful servants. He paid our debt and the debt of all mankind to the last penny. The currency was neither gold nor silver but his own precious blood (1 Pet.1:18-19).

20. MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE (**Matt.19:1-12**)

1. DIVORCE 1-9

- Why were the Pharisees occupied with the question of divorce (vs.3)?
- What do people in our time think about divorce?
- According to Jesus, what happens when two people get married (verses 4-5a)?
- The leader should read **Deut.24:1**. What exactly did Moses command and what did he allow in this passage? Compare his words with the Pharisees' interpretation of them (vs.7).
- According to Jesus, what are the arguments for a life-long marriage (verses 4,5,6,8,9).
- Why do you think unfaithfulness is the one and only reason that Jesus would accept for divorce (vs.9)?
- What will happen in a society where divorce becomes more and more common?

1. REMARRIAGE 9-10

- Compare verses 8-9 to **Matt.5:32**. What does Jesus teach about remarriage while the divorced spouse is still living? Stick to the text!
- The leader should read **1 Cor.7:10-11** and **Rom.7:2-3**. What does Paul teach about remarriage while the previous spouse is living?
- Why did the disciples react as they did to Jesus' teaching (verse 10)?
- Why do you think the teaching of Jesus and Paul concerning remarriage is practically stifled to death even inside Christian churches of our day?

1. SINGLENESS 11-12

- What does it mean that somebody is born as "an eunuch"?
- In what ways may other people make a person unable to marry?
- What does it mean in practice that somebody renounces marriage because of the kingdom of heaven?

1. SUMMARY

- Do you think that a person can lead a good life without sexual fulfillment? Give your reasons.
- What, according to Jesus, is more important for a Christian than attaining personal happiness?
- Whose good was Jesus concerned about when making such strict rules for our relationships with the other sex?
- What should a person, who has not fulfilled the commandments Jesus gives in this passage, do?
- What do you think will happen to a person's attitude to the Bible if he/she denies the validity of Jesus' teaching in this passage?

GLAD TIDINGS: The leader should read **John 8:4-11**.

21. NEVER TOO LATE (Matt.20:1-16)

BACKGROUND: In Jesus' time the life of day laborers was very uncertain. Divide the average annual salary of our day into 300 parts and you have the value of one denarius. Hours were counted from six o'clock in the morning. The landowner of the parable represents God and the vineyard represents his Kingdom.

1. THE PARABLE

- How many times a day did the landowner go to hire laborers to his vineyard (vs.1-6)?
- Why did the landowner notify only the first group how much the wages would be (vs.2,4)?
- Think of various reasons why some of the laborers were not at the marketplace at six o'clock in the morning.
- Why didn't the landowner hire only the best men but anyone who was available?
- Why hadn't anyone hired the last group of men (vs.6-7)? Think of various reasons.
- Compare the first group's day with the last group's (vs.7,12). Which one was more interesting?
- Let's assume that there were five men in the last group. How much money (in our currency) the landowner would have "saved" if he hadn't hired that group?
- Why did the landowner start by first paying those who were hired last (vs.8)?
- Why did the first group complain although they got what was promised to them?
- Was the landowner's way of paying the wages fair in your opinion? Give your reasons.
- Why did the landowner want to give the same sum to everybody? Try to find as many explanations/reasons as you can.

1. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE

- Why does God want anybody and everybody to work in his kingdom?
- What do "the wages" refer to in this parable?
- Why are the wages the same for everybody in the kingdom of God?
- At what time of "the day" have you been called to the kingdom of God?
- Who do you think is luckier: a person's who has worked in God's kingdom for all his life, or a person who is saved in the last minute? Give your reasons.
- How do you feel if somebody else is praised in your church and you know perfectly well that you have done more than he/she has?
- How do you think you will feel if God will give you on the last day the same wages as, let's say, to apostle Paul?
- What does verse 16 mean in the light of this parable?
- Jesus is saying to you today: "You also go and work in my vineyard!" What will you answer him?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus himself did the hardest work in the kingdom of God. In fact, he worked so hard that on the last day every man and woman on earth could be paid a denarius each with what he earned.

22. THE KING RIDES TO HIS CITY (Matt.21:1-11)

BACKGROUND: People were waiting for a sign which would prove if Jesus was a king or not - and the donkey was the sign, prophesied by Zechariah (Zech.9:9). In fact, Jesus was the son of King David in the 30th generation.

1. THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY

- What do people usually expect from a king who enters triumphantly into the capital?
- What, if anything, was different in what the disciples expected from Jesus with what the crowds did?
- Look carefully at the chain reaction, which occurred while Jesus was approaching Jerusalem for the last time. Who had planned the welcome? How did it all start? Why did the people spread their cloaks on the road? Why was the whole city stirred?

1. THE KING

- Why did Jesus ride to Jerusalem on a donkey, not on a horse?
- How could the people know that Jesus was the son of David? (Cf. Matt.20:31)
- What in the behavior of Jesus was royal?
- Why were the people all of a sudden not afraid of calling Jesus a king, though the Roman occupying forces didn't like of hearing things like that?
- Up till this point Jesus had hidden the fact that he was a king. Why did he now take it for granted?
- What is the difference between kings of this world and Jesus in this situation?
- Why did Jesus have to die as a king?

1. THE PEOPLE

- Do you think Jesus was happy about his sudden popularity? Give your reasons.
- How many percent of these people would you guess were shouting, "Crucify him!" after five days?
- Why didn't any one of this crowd stand up and defend Jesus when he was mistreated?
- How would you behave, if you had to stand alone with all of your friends disagreeing with you?

1. HOSANNA (which means, "O Lord save/help us!")

- What does the cry of the people in verse 9 really say? Cf. the meaning of "hosanna".
- Why is it more proper to shout, "Help me!" to the King Jesus than "Hurray!"
- What is surprising about verse 11?
- What effect did this incident have on Jesus' future?

1. YOU AND ME

- What things have made you to cry, "Hosanna, help me!" lately/ during this Advent?
- Why is this cry the best preparation for Christmas?

GLAD TIDINGS: Read verse 5 once more and put your own name in the place of "the Daughter of Zion".

23. THE WEDDING BANQUET OF A PRINCE (Matt.22:1-14)

BACKGROUND: A wedding was one of the highlights in the everyday lives of people in Jesus' time. In the book of Revelation heaven is sometimes called "a wedding". The invited guests in this parable originally referred to Jews, but now they mean anyone who has contact with Christian church, but doesn't take its invitation seriously.

1. Recall a royal wedding that you have seen on TV. What sort of people were invited?
 - Who in our day do you think would perhaps behave in the way described in verses 3-5?

1. What did the invited guests perhaps think about the king?
 - Why was it comparatively easy for the guests to refuse the invitation?
 - Why were the invited guests not afraid of the consequences of their behavior?

1. God calls us people to his royal wedding in heaven through his servants and the Bible. Why do most of the people behave like those invited in this parable (vs.3-5)?

2. How do you feel when you are invited to church, a Bible-study etc while you are busy with other things?
 - Based on your attitude towards God's invitation (the Bible), how much do you value the royal wedding, i.e. heaven?

1. Why are God's servants sometimes treated in this world like those in verse 6?
 - When was verse 7 fulfilled? / When will it be fulfilled?

1. Compare the everyday life of the first and second group invited to the wedding (verses 5,10).
 - Who in our day are those who come to the kingdom of heaven from "street corners" (vs.9-10)?
 - How could the loiterers believe that the invitation of the king was meant to be taken seriously?
 - For whom is the invitation to God's heavenly wedding a joy rather than a drudge?

1. It is usually thought that the king had prepared a garment for each of the guests who came from street corners. Why do you think one of the guests had refused to wear this garment (verses 11-12)?
 - In the Bible a wedding garment often refers to the robe of righteousness that God puts on a sinner. What kind of faith has the person who thinks he can go to heaven wearing his own "clothes"?

1. What does verse 14 mean in the light of this parable?
 - Who haven't got the invitation to the royal wedding of God yet?
 - Who are not chosen? Stick to the text.

1. Why had Jesus to experience the same fate as the servant without the wedding garment of (verse 13)?

GLAD TIDINGS: The leader should read [Rev.7:13-14](#).

24. WHO IS A HYPOCRITE? (Matt.23:1-12)

BACKGROUND: When Jesus publicly criticized the Pharisees and the teachers of the law it was as big a scandal as it would be in our day to call famous religious leaders hypocrites on TV. "Sitting in Moses' seat" meant being qualified to teach the Law of Moses, that is: the Old Testament (vs.2).

1. What were the characteristics of a hypocrite in Jesus time (vs.2-7)?
 - Say in one sentence what Jesus had against the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

1. What are the characteristics of a hypocrite in our own time?
 - Where can you meet Pharisees in our time?
 - What kind of teaching increases the number of Pharisees in Christian fellowships?

1. By what standards did the Pharisees of Jesus time categorize people?
 - By what standards do the hypocrites of our day categorize people?

1. Why do people usually value titles and degrees very much (vs.7-10)?
 - How important would you say degrees and titles are in your Christian fellowship?
 - What, according to Jesus, is wrong with titles and degrees?

1. Why is it sometimes difficult even for Christians to become servants of others (vs.11)?
 - What is the difference between being a servant (in the sense how Jesus uses the word in verse 11), and having an inferiority complex?
 - Describe a Christian leader who takes verse 11 seriously.

1. What does verse 12 mean in practice?
 - Tell an experience of how verse 12 came true in your life.

1. In what respect was Jesus different from the religious leaders of his time?
 - Why didn't Jesus ever demand respect and position for himself, even though he would have deserved them more than anyone else in the whole world?

1. What is the most important teaching of this passage to you personally? What about to your Christian fellowship?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus never tied up heavy loads for others to carry. Quite on the opposite - he took the sins of all the mankind on his shoulders and carried them to the cross.

25. HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY (Matt.24:29-44)

BACKGROUND: There are many theories among Christians in which order things happen when Jesus comes back to this earth. In this Bible study we don't discuss the order of the things but the things themselves. The leader should explain briefly about Noah and his time. (vs.37-39, cf. Gen.6-7)

1. How would you feel if you heard that Jesus would come back today?
 - How is it different to wait for Jesus and to wait for death?

1. What kind of changes will happen in the stratosphere and space before Jesus' coming? Try to describe these phenomena in modern words (vs.29). (What may cause the darkening of sun and moon when seen from the earth? Remember also Noah's time.)
 - What changes predicted here have not yet happened (vs.29)?

1. How does the first coming of Jesus differ from the second one? Try to find as many differences as possible (vs.30).
 - What will all the nations mourn when Jesus comes back (vs.30)?

1. What will happen to Christians when Jesus comes back (vs.31)?
 - Would you like to be alive when the events of verse 31 happen? Give your reasons.

1. What does Jesus want to say about the time of his coming through the little parable of fig tree (verses 32-34)? (Do you think this parable speaks about modern Israel? If it does, how?)

2. What is the meaning of Jesus' words (=the Bible) for the Christians of the last generation (vs.35)?
 - What does it mean to you that there is something in this world that will never pass away?

1. Why must the day of the second coming be a secret even for Jesus himself (vs.36)?
 - How would your life change if you knew when Jesus will come back?

1. How do the contemporaries of Noah resemble the people of our time (verses 38-39)? (What were they interested in and what were they not interested in at all?)

2. What do verses 40-41 mean? Compare them to Noah's time and verse 31.
 - Imagine how the world would look like the day when the things predicted in these verses take place (vs.40-41).

1. To whom will the coming of Jesus be like a thief breaking into his house (vs.43-44)? To whom will it be like a longed for meeting with a dear friend?
 - What do verses 42 and 44 advice us to do in practice?
 - How might the second coming of Jesus be a consolation for us, rather than a frightening thought?

26. TEN VIRGINS (Matt.25:1-13)

BACKGROUND: The meaning of "oil" in this parable has been interpreted in three different ways through times: A) It means the Holy Spirit. B) It means faith in Jesus. C) It means the Bible. The bridegroom refers to Jesus and the wedding represents heaven, which is preceded by his second coming.

1. What do you think a "watchful Christian" would be like?

2. THE PARABLE

- The task of these girls in the wedding was to light up the way for the bridegroom in darkness. With no watches in existence yet, delays were the rule rather than the exception. Why do you think the foolish virgins didn't see to it that they would have had enough oil in every situation?
- Think of various reasons - conscious as well as unconscious - for a person not caring whether the wedding of his friend will go smoothly or not?
- How might the relationship of the wise virgins to the bridegroom have been different from that of the foolish ones?
- Why couldn't even the wise virgins stay awake until midnight (vs.5-7)?
- What do you think about the wise virgins not sharing their oil with their friends (vs.8-10)?
- The bridegroom must have known all ten girls from before. Why did he then say to the foolish ones that he didn't know them (vs.11-12)?

1. THE INTERPRETATION

- Whom did Jesus mean by wise virgins?
- Whom did Jesus refer to by the foolish ones?
- What are the preparations we must do for the second coming of Jesus depending on which of the three interpretations we choose? (Cf. "Background")
- What is the difference between the faith of a person who is ready for Jesus' second coming and that of a person who is not?
- Do you think you have done sufficient preparations for the second coming of Jesus?
- What does Jesus want to teach us when he makes all ten virgins fall asleep while waiting (vs.5,13)?
- When and how does Jesus learn to know his own (vs.12)?
- In what situations do we learn to appreciate the wedding in heaven?
- What does verse 13 say to you personally?

GLAD TIDINGS: We will never learn to know a person until he reveals even his worst sides to us. Jesus will not know us in the real sense of the word, if we don't tell him our sins and ask him to forgive them.

27. INVESTING IN TALENTS (Matt.25:14-30)

BACKGROUND: One talent is the equivalent to 17 years' wages. There are three ways how to interpret receiving of the talents of this parable: **A.** They represent our abilities and spiritual gifts. **B.** They represent God's grace (the gospel). (Cf. Eph.4:7) **C.** They represent the means of grace, i.e. the Bible, baptism and Holy Communion.

1. How much would one talent be worth in our currency today? How much two? What about five (verses 14-15)?
 - What do you think would be the best way to invest a sum equivalent to one talent in our time?
 - How many years do you think it would take to double the sum?
 - Why is it not always easy to invest other person's money?

1. What was the criterion by which the rich man divided his money (verse 15)?
 - What does it mean that the servants got different amounts of talents according interpretations A, B and C?
 - When and how did you get your talent(s) from God?

1. How did the feelings of the servants towards their master influence their behavior?
 - In what different ways did the servants handle the situation of the master not returning soon (verse 19A)?
 - How does one "invest" one's spiritual gifts (A)? How does one "invest" God's grace (B)? What about the means of grace (C) (verse 16)?
 - How does one bury one's spiritual gifts into the ground? What about the gospel? And the means of grace (vs.18)?
 - Which of these interpretations do you think is right?

1. What does verse 26 teach us about God?
 - In what situations have you felt that God is a hard man who requires the impossible from you (vs.24)?
 - What is wrong with the faith of a person who is like the third servant in the parable (vs.24-27)?

1. When will the lazy servant have the only talent taking from him (vs.28)?
 - What does verse 29 mean in the light of interpretations A, B and C?

1. Why was the punishment of the third servant so severe even though he hadn't actually embezzled his master's money (verse 30)? Think of each of the three interpretations again.
 - Why was Jesus himself punished like the wicked and lazy servant (vs.30)?

1. What must we do, if we realize that we are wicked and lazy servants?

2. What makes us Christians "invest" our talents?
 - Imagine of Jesus saying verse 21 to you on the Judgment Day. What will you answer him?

28. SHEEP AND GOATS (Matt.25:31-46)

BACKGROUND: This parable has usually been interpreted in three ways: the least brothers of Jesus mean A. suffering Christians, B. suffering Jews, C. all the suffering people in the world.

1. What do you find especially frightening in the parable of the last judgment?
 - What, if anything, do you find comforting in this parable?
 - What would you think about God if he wouldn't ever punish the wrong done against you?

1. What does this parable teach us about heaven and hell (vs. 34, 41, 46)?
 - Based on common sense, what kind of people should end up in hell?
 - According to this parable, what is the sin that "throws" a person to hell?
 - Why is hell spoken of and believed in less and less in our time?

1. How many groups of the "least brothers" appear in this parable (vs.35-36, 42-43)?
 - How many of these groups have you helped?
 - Which of these six groups do you find most difficult to help?

1. Why is it so difficult to see Jesus in a hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick and (especially!) imprisoned person?
 - What does your Christian fellowship do for each of these six groups?

1. How did "the goats" perhaps defend their behavior: why didn't they help these six groups?
 - "The goats" were honestly surprised when hearing their verdict. Why had they expected it to be different (vs.44)?

1. Why were "the sheep" also surprised at the words of the king (vs.38-39)?
 - Where did "the sheep" get the power to love even those who in fact were not very lovable?

1. Which of the interpretations mentioned above do you consider to be the right one?
 - What are the consequences of each of these interpretations on our behavior?

1. The parable of the last judgment seemingly deals only with our deeds. Where does faith enter into the picture? (How are the people divided into goats and sheep in the first place?)

2. When did Jesus himself experience the fate of his least brothers: when was he hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick and imprisoned?
 - Why was the same sentence pronounced for Jesus as for the goats in verse 41?

GLAD TIDINGS: In the whole history of mankind, there are two crucially important trials: the trial of Jesus, and the last judgment. Every one of us must give account, in one of these trials or the other, for our shortcomings towards our least brothers. As surely as you rely on your sins having been condemned in Jesus' trial, you will be declared not guilty on the last day.

29. STRUGGLE IN GETHSEMANE (Matt.26:36-46)

BACKGROUND: In the Bible a cup often means a cup full of God's wrath, which the sinner has to gulp down (vs.39).

1. When you feel really unhappy, how many people would you like to have around you? (Why didn't Jesus want to go alone to Gethsemane?)
 - These three disciples were all fishermen who had been working through many a night. Why couldn't they now stay awake one single hour?

1. This is the one and only time when Jesus spoke about his own pain and sorrow (vs.38). What exactly was so painful for him in this situation?
 - If you have ever felt yourself overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, in what situation did it happen?

1. Many people have met their deaths without showing any fear. Why not Jesus? (What if Jesus had died like that, what would his behavior have signified to us?)
 - What makes someone lie face down on the earth (verse 39)?

1. Why didn't Jesus ask his disciples to pray for him (verse 40-41)?
 - What kind of temptation does Jesus speak about in verse 41?

1. Look at Jesus' prayer in verse 39. Did Jesus have the same will as his Father at that moment?
 - Why is the first part of this prayer important? Why the second part equally important?
 - What will happen to us, if we only pray half of that prayer?

1. How did Jesus' prayer change when he prayed for the second time (vs.39,42)?
 - Why didn't Jesus stop after having prayed once or twice (vs.39,42,44)?

1. Did Jesus' own will change while he was praying? If it did, in what way?
 - Do you think you could ever pray that the person you love above all would forsake you, if necessary? Give your reasons.
 - What would have happened to us if Jesus had refused to drink the cup of God's wrath?

1. What impression do you get about Jesus in verses 45-46 compared to how he was before that? (Why was he so calm from this point on until his death?)

2. What would have happened if Jesus had ended up on the cross without this struggle?
 - Why is it so important that we too have our own Gethsemane before our Golgotha?

GLAD TIDINGS: Jesus was so shaken because he knew that his deep relationship with his father would be cut off from that moment on. We don't have to drink the cup of God's wrath because Jesus drank it for us.

30. WHY DID YOU FORSAKE ME (Matt.27:33-54)

BACKGROUND: It is hard for someone being crucified to speak, sometimes even to breathe. The prophet Elijah (vs.49) had lived 800 years earlier. Ordinary people were not allowed to look at the Holy of Holies behind the curtain in the temple (vs.51).

1. The execution of death sentence was left to occupying forces. Based on verses 33-36, how do you think these Roman soldiers felt when commanded to nail living people to a cross?
 - Wine was usually given to those crucified to relieve the pain. Why do you think the soldiers had in this case mixed it with gall so that it became impossible to drink (vs.34)?
 - What might make a person get used to suffering of another human being and even start to enjoy it? (How much do you think violence in movies and video games may influence us?)

1. What is surprising about the reasons why the enemies of Jesus mocked him (vs.39-44)?
 - If you had seen Jesus at that moment, do you think you could have believed he was God?

1. What did the enemies of Jesus perhaps expect him to say as his last words?
 - Why had God forsaken Jesus (vs.46)?
 - If you have ever felt that God has forsaken you, in what situation did it happen?

1. How do you think those present felt when Jesus still called God his own God?
 - The words in verse 46 are a quotation from the **Psalm 22:1**. Why did Jesus want to express his agony through the words of the Bible rather than with his own words?
 - What would you like to say as your last words on this earth?

1. Why do some people cry while dying (vs.50)?
 - What does the cry of Jesus reveal about his death?

1. How did the atmosphere on Golgotha change during the day (vs.51-54)?

2. What made the Roman officer (who didn't know the Bible) believe that this man forsaken by God and men was in fact the Son of God (vs.54)?
 - Why did the Jews see the death of Jesus in such a different light than the Roman officer did?

1. We often think that the suffering of Jesus was so great because he was carrying all the sins of the world on his shoulders. How great do you think his suffering would have been if he had carried just your sins to the cross?
 - If you had been only one human being on this earth, do you think Jesus would have come and suffered all this just because of you? Give your reasons.

GLAD TIDINGS: When you look at this passage you can clearly see one thing, namely how much Jesus loves you.

31. GUARDING A GRAVESITE (Matt.27:62-28:15)

BACKGROUND: The enemies of Jesus had planned for him the fate of a common criminal. Usually dogs ate what fell down from a cross. Jesus, however, was buried properly (vs.57-62). Roman soldiers were usually considered to be very brave.

1. How could the high priests and the Pharisees remember Jesus' prediction about his own resurrection when the disciples had completely forgotten it (vs.62-63)?
 - Why did the high priests regard the disciples as more courageous than they actually were (vs.64)?
 - Do you think the high priests really believed in the possibility of Jesus rising from the death?

1. Verse 65 is the last mention about Pilate in the Bible. What kind of impression do you get of him at this point?
 - What did Pilate perhaps think about the events of that day?
 - Do you think Pilate could ever forget Jesus? Give your reasons.

1. How do you think Roman soldiers reacted when they were commanded to guard a dead body?
 - Look carefully at what these soldiers experienced on Easter morning (vs.2-4).
 - How could we describe in medical language the state of the soldiers in verse 4?

1. What made the courageous Roman soldiers so frightened that they fled their post?
 - Do you think the soldiers looked into the grave before they fled the scene? Give your reasons.

1. How do you think the high priests interpreted the report of the soldiers (verses 11-14)?
 - What does it prove that the high priests didn't demand the guards to be punished, but gave them a large sum of money instead (vs.12-15)?
 - How did God change to the best for his kingdom even the things the high priests did?

1. List up all the things that should have convinced the high priests that Jesus had really risen from the dead?
 - Do you think you would have believed in resurrection if you had been in the place of these high priests and Pharisees?

1. What great inconsequence does the story of the soldiers contain (vs.13)?
 - How do you think the centurion (their commanding officer) reacted if he heard this story (vs.13)?

1. Why didn't Jesus appear in front of the high priests?
 - Soon after this the disciples changed into brave men and started to proclaim the resurrection unafraid even of death. Why didn't the enemies of Jesus become Christians at that point either? (Cf. [Luke 16:31](#))
 - What do you think the rest of life of these men was like?

1. What does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you personally?

32. THE GREAT COMMISSION (Matt.28:16-20)

BACKGROUND: 40 days had passed since Easter. Jesus met his disciples for the last time and revealed his will to them. He wanted Christians to remember his last words as long as they lived.

1. What do you think is the attitude of an average Christian to mission work in your church? (How much is an average Christian willing to use his/her time, money and energy for promoting mission?)
 - How has the attitude towards the missions changed within the time you can remember?

1. What did the disciples perhaps think they were going to do on the mountain where Jesus had invited them (vs.16)?
 - What did some of the disciples still doubt (vs.17)?
 - Why did Jesus want to say exactly these words as his last command to his disciples?

1. How could Jesus expect these 11 uneducated men to win the whole world for his cause?
 - Jesus had called these men already three years earlier to follow him. In what ways was that calling different from the great commission in this passage?

1. How do you think the disciples felt when hearing the word "all nations", not just Israel (vs.19)?
 - How might the disciples have wanted to argue against Jesus' commission?
 - How do you argue when you don't want to offer your time and money for foreign mission?

1. Why can't we see Jesus really having all authority in heaven and on earth now (vs.18)?
 - Do you believe that Jesus has all authority over the world history as well as the lives of your loved ones even today? Give your reasons.

1. What were the disciples supposed to do in the mission field (vs.19-20)?
 - According to this passage, what two things are needed for a person to become a disciple of Jesus (vs.19-20)?

1. How will Jesus help his disciples in accomplishing this great task (vs.20)?

2. Why hasn't the Christian church been able to complete this task even in 2000 years?
 - What are the most common hindrances of mission work in our day?
 - What is your task in foreign mission: should you go yourself or should you help someone else to go?
 - What do you think are the good and bad points in the life of a missionary?

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus is with you always, to the end of the age, while you are fulfilling the task he gave you?

© 2001 Glad Tidings Mission
<http://gladtidings-bs.com>