

MISUNDERSTANDING JESUS

It's been a while since we were in Matthew's gospel. Last we heard, Jesus was teaching in parables, about how his kingdom would reveal itself in the world. In one of his most famous parables, Jesus spoke about how a sower scatters seed (representing the word of God) on the ground, and how much of it won't grow, for various reasons, but some will. And here, we step back into the narrative, and we see this happening in real-time. Jesus continues on in his ministry, and in every direction, people seem to be misunderstanding Jesus' ministry, mission, and identity. From the townspeople to the kings, from beggars to his own disciples, everyone seems to bring their own challenges and stumbling blocks to seeing Jesus clearly.

For those with eyes to see, Jesus' kingdom is hidden in the most unexpected places; as he's already taught: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:3-5). As we walk with Jesus over the next four weeks, let's keep our eyes open, and our hearts humbled, for all the ways that God might change the way we see the world.

"But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Matthew 16:15

We pray that these studies will help you to see God's kingdom, and God's hand at work in your lives, in the most unexpected places. Just like in Matthew's gospel, everything is pointing towards the cross where Jesus died, the ultimate example of God working in unexpected places: the place where Jesus died to save us, to bring us back to having peace with God.

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In this series, we want you all to feel like your groups are freed up to read these passages afresh, and bring your own questions to these stories, as you meet Jesus each week. These five simple questions will be repeated in every study, to try to help that:



What do you like about this passage?



What don't you understand about this passage?



What do we learn about Jesus' heart in this passage?

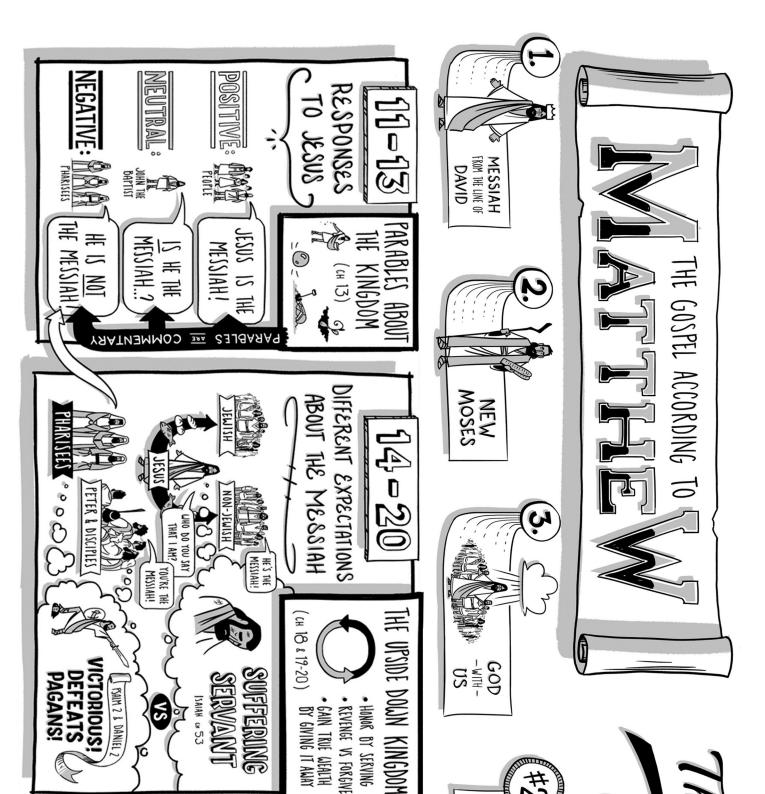


How do people misunderstand Jesus in this passage? How does Jesus respond?



How does Jesus want to shape the way you live in this story?

If you feel like you need a little bit more guidance in working through the passages, there will also be more specific questions in each study, as well. But feel free to work through the stories in whatever way is most helpful for your group.



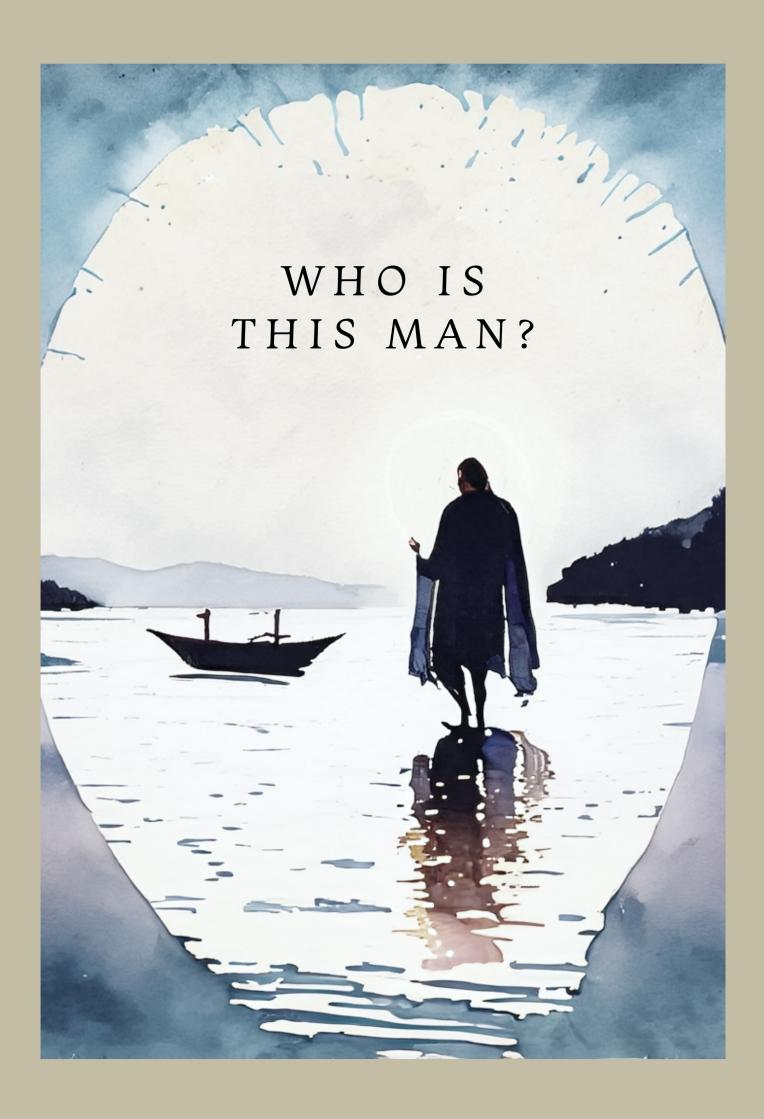
Things to look for

#1 2 QUOTATIONS = (THERE ARE A LOT)

PEOPLE WHO ACCEPT JESUS

INTERIGIOUS I + = FAITH = TRANSFORMATION

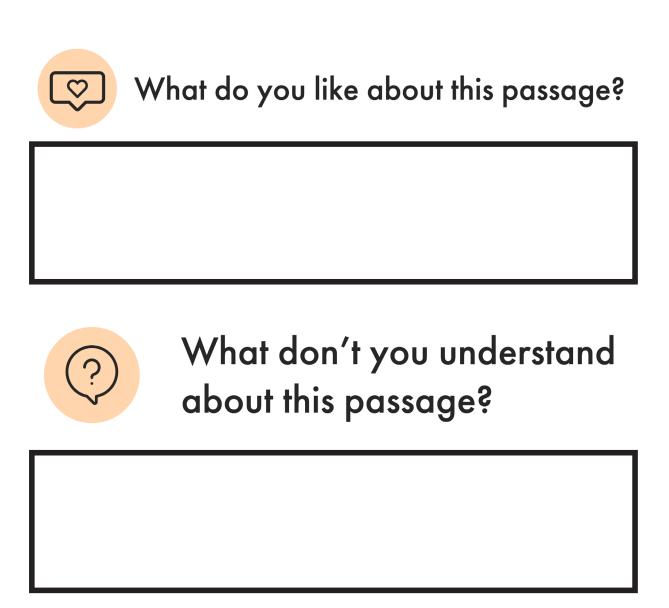
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From the first verse ("when Jesus had finished these parables..."), we are reminded that we're stepping back into Matthew mid-way through a story. What were these parables about?

Throughout this passage, Jesus is misunderstood by his hometown, a powerful leader, and one of his closest friends.

READ MATTHEW 13:53-14:33





How do people misunderstand Jesus in this passage? How does Jesus respond?

How do each of these people misunderstand who Jesus is?



Jesus' hometown Matthew 13:54-57

King Herod Matthew 14:1-2



Peter Matthew 14:22-33



Are there any other barriers that may have caused each of these people to be blind to who Jesus is? Pride? Fear?



What do we learn about Jesus' heart in this passage?

Each of these stories finishes with Jesus responding to the	e
unbelief of people (13:58, 14:13 and 14:31). What do his	
reactions show us about Jesus' nature?	

How does Jesus show care for people in need? How does he show patience and gentleness with his disciples?

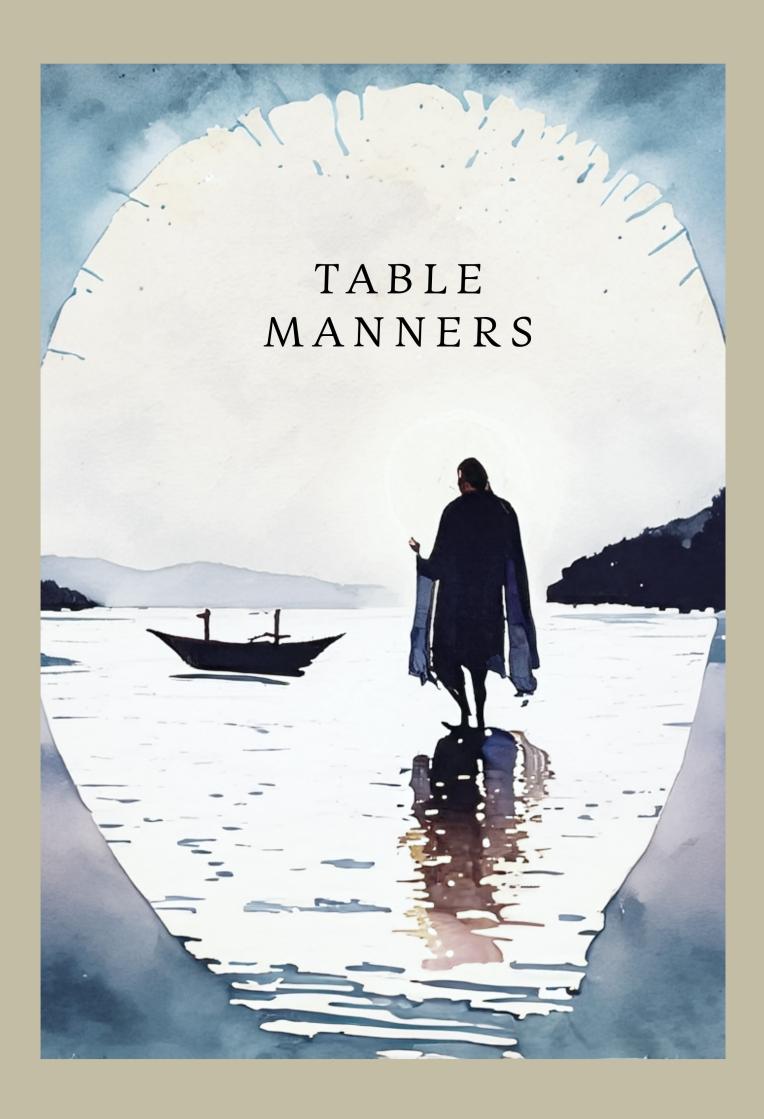
How might this passage be contrasting King Herod (14:1-12) and King Jesus (14:13-21)? How do they both treat people?

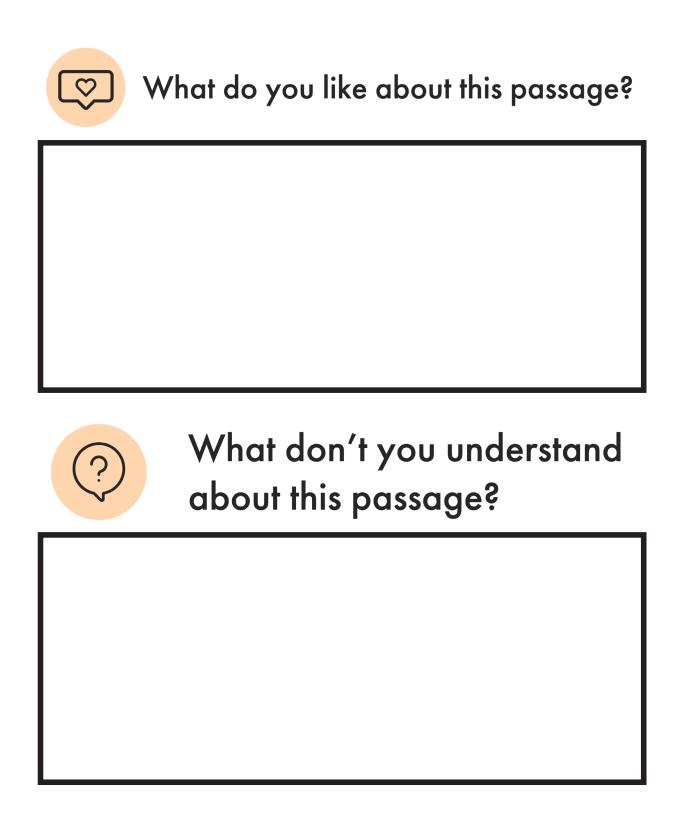


How does Jesus want to shape the way you live in this story?

Which of the three misunderstandings (Jesus' family, Herod, Peter) do you relate to the most?

How do you need to remember Jesus' heart of mercy towards you today?







misunderstanding.

How do people misunderstand Jesus in this passage? How does Jesus respond?

This passage is like an Inception of misunderstanding:
There's a misunderstanding, then a misunderstanding
about misunderstanding, then a misunderstanding about
the explanation of the misunderstanding about the

How do the Pharisees misunderstand Jesus in verse 2?

The quote from Isaiah highlights two ways that the Pharisees are acting as hypocrites. What are they?

How do the disciples misunderstand Jesus' response in v 12?

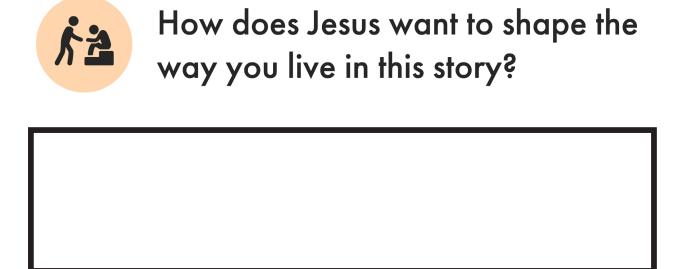
How does Peter struggle to understand Jesus' explanation in verse 15?



What do we learn about Jesus' heart in this passage?

How would you describe Jesus' tone towards the Pharisees in this passage? What seems to make him the most upset?

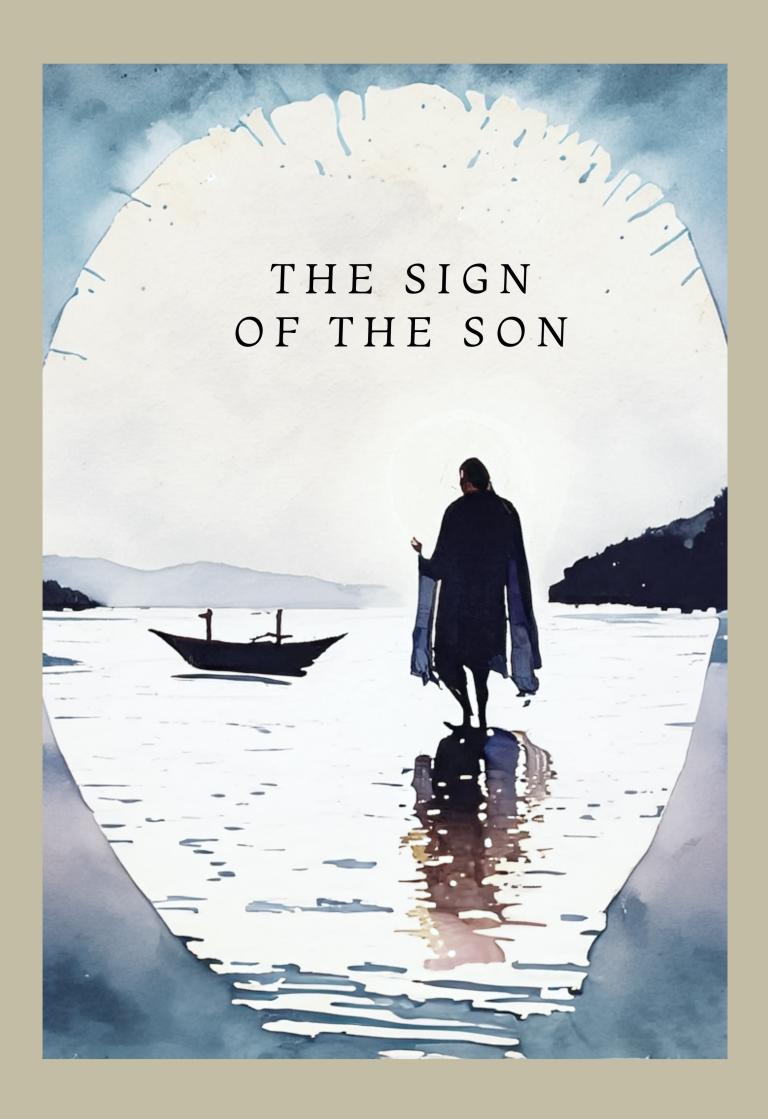
This passage makes it pretty clear: People can follow God's law, and human tradition, but still not understand the heart of God. What are these laws and traditions meant to reveal about God's heart?



Why do you think it's so easy for us to focus on rules and regulations, instead of God himself?

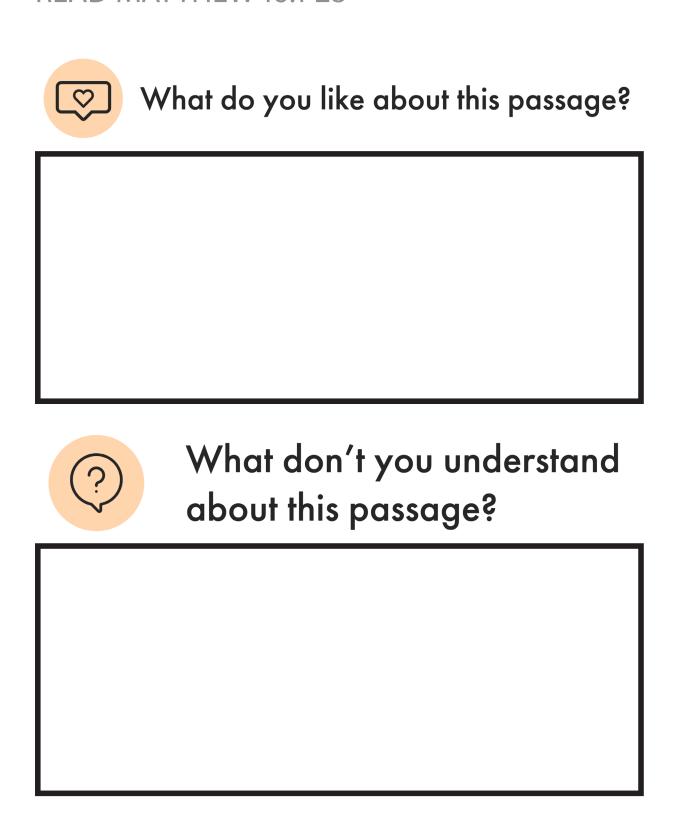
Where do you see yourself in the actions and attitudes of the Pharisees? In what ways are you tempted to focus on outward appearance in your walk with God, rather than focusing on worship and inward change?

Verses 18-19 are very bold words from Jesus. Are there any that are speaking into your heart at the moment, that you need prayer for God's Spirit to be at work on?



Can you think of a time when you (or someone you knew) had just enough knowledge to be "dangerous"? Why can it be dangerous to have partial knowledge, or limited experience?

READ MATTHEW 16:1-28





How do people misunderstand Jesus in this passage? How does Jesus respond?

What's ironic given the Pharisees' and Sadducees' question in verse 1 (given the last thing that Jesus did)?

How do the disciples misunderstand Jesus in verses 6-12?

Jesus asks his disciples the ultimate question, in verses 13 and 15. What's encouraging about Jesus' response to Peter (verses 17-20)?

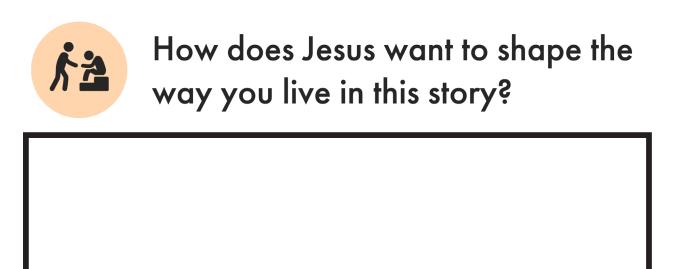
How does Peter misunderstand Jesus' mission in verse 22?



What do we learn about Jesus' heart in this passage?

How can we see Jesus' power in this passage?

How can we see Jesus' humility in this passage?



How should Matthew 16:18 change the way we think about church?

Jesus insists that suffering and death are a necessary part of his purposes on earth. How does he apply this to his followers, too (verses 24-28)?

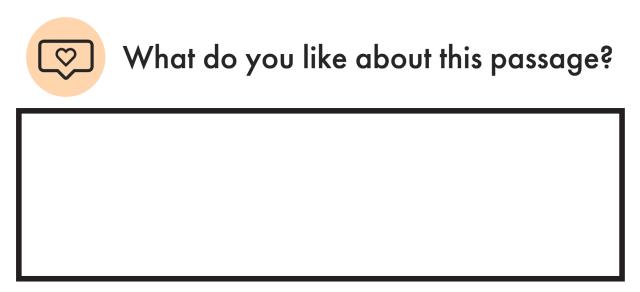
How does this calling speak to you today?

Peter falls into the trap of wanting Jesus' kingdom of power without his kingdom of humble sacrifice. We all have temptations toward an unhealthy relationship with power, in some ways, in some areas of our lives. How can you see this temptation in yourself (in certain friendships, your motivations, a longing for control), to seek power without humble sacrifice?

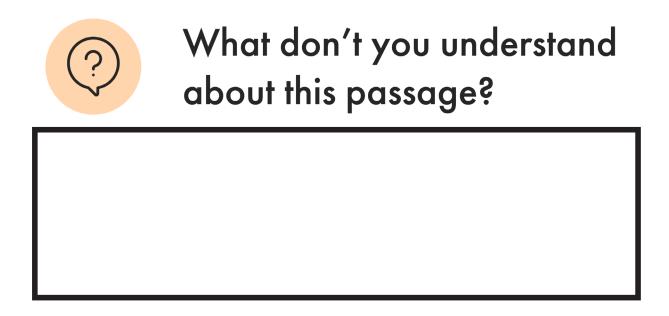


In this chapter, we hear about the transfiguration of Jesus (v1-13), the demon only Jesus could cast out (v14-23), and the temple tax Jesus and his followers shouldn't have to pay (v24-27). In each episode, even Jesus' closest followers misunderstand who Jesus is and what he came to do. That should give us pause if we think WE have Jesus all figured out!

Read Matthew 17, looking for what people seem to be missing about Jesus.



What do you like in these three episodes? The way the disciples come across as a bit silly (which makes them pretty relatable!)? The supreme power of Jesus? His wisdom? What do you like?



What would you like to understand better in these episodes? What Jesus says about Elijah? Why his disciples couldn't cast out the demon? What he meant about the temple tax? What should we discuss?



How do people misunderstand Jesus in this passage? How does Jesus respond?

Peter, James and John see Jesus gloriously transfigured, a foretaste of the glory of Jesus' second coming. They see him with Moses and Elijah, who represent "the law and the prophets", the main sections of the Old Testament.

How does Peter show he thinks Moses and Elijah are equal with Jesus? How does Peter get corrected?

Read Malachi 4:4-6. Probably the sight of Moses and Elijah reminds the disciples of what God says here.

So they ask about Elijah's role. Clearly John the Baptist wasn't literally Elijah (they've just seen actual Elijah), but John was thought to play the Elijah role, calling people to repent before judgement. How did John's Elijah role turn out contrary to the disciples' expectations?

Why should they have had different expectations for Jesus too? (see also v22-23)



How does Jesus want to shape the way you live in this story?

Jesus is not just another prophet, but God's own Son.

How seriously should we listen to Jesus? What would serious listening look like?

If God's Son had to suffer before glory, what should we expect if we follow him?

When the disciples try to cast out a demon (17:16), unlike previous times (see 10:8) they can't do it. It seems the problem isn't how strong their faith is (it can be "the size of a mustard seed") but where it's placed. Where should we place all our faith, and why?

Jews around the world were expected to pay tax for the temple, God's house in Jerusalem. What's the point that Jesus makes about whether he should pay it?

Why does he get Peter to pay it anyway?

Jesus isn't just another prophet, but God's own Son. And his first coming wasn't to be glorified but to die in our place. This is Christianity 101, but it has profound implications that his closest followers took a long time to grasp. Let's pray that Jesus as God's Son would shape our lives deeply now.

PRAYER POINTS

