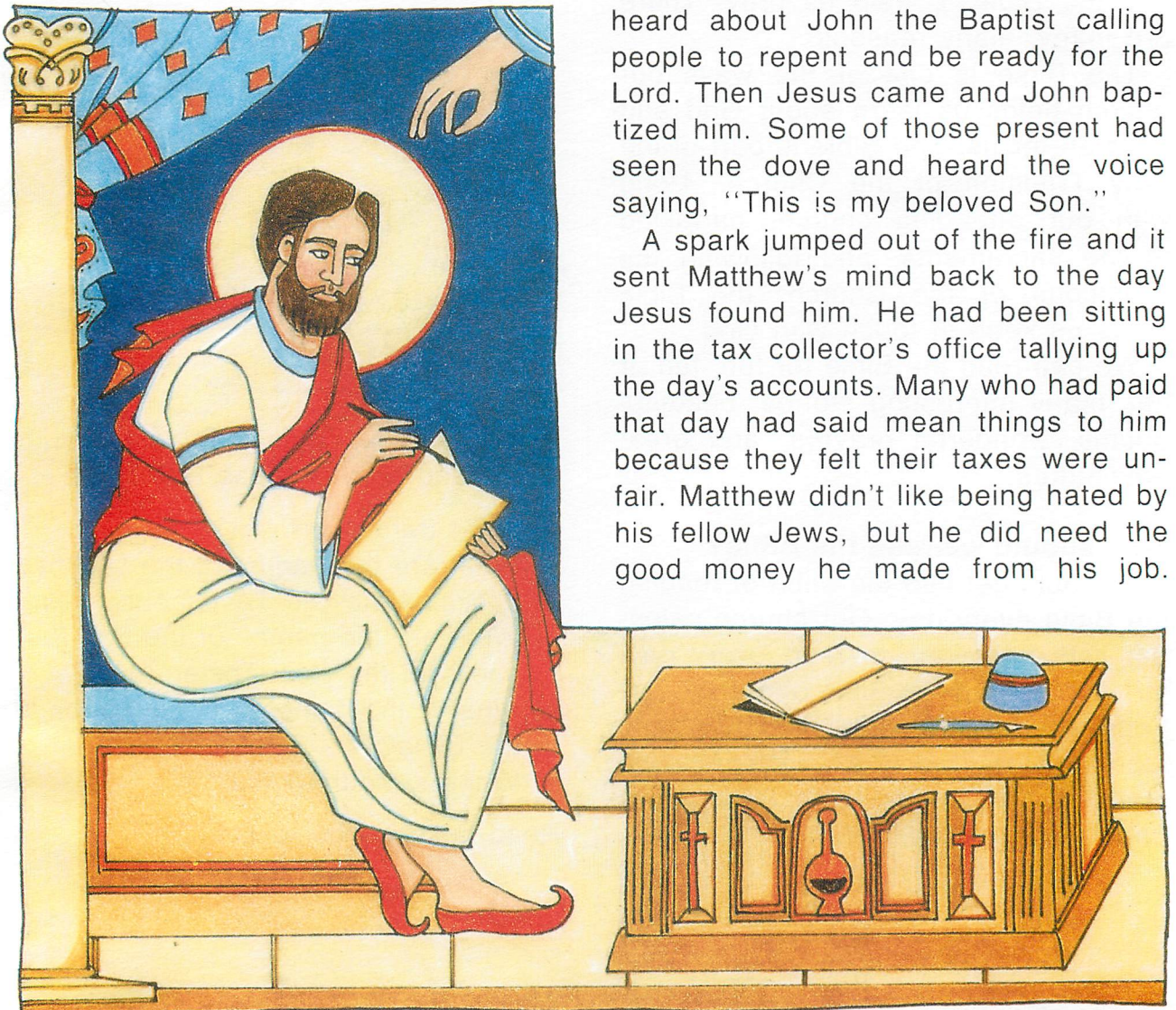


The Two Great Commandments

MATTHEW AND THE BEST COMMANDMENTS

Matthew sat watching the campfire die out. He thought about the many, many months he had spent with Jesus. It seemed like only yesterday he had heard about John the Baptist calling people to repent and be ready for the Lord. Then Jesus came and John baptized him. Some of those present had seen the dove and heard the voice saying, "This is my beloved Son."

A spark jumped out of the fire and it sent Matthew's mind back to the day Jesus found him. He had been sitting in the tax collector's office tallying up the day's accounts. Many who had paid that day had said mean things to him because they felt their taxes were unfair. Matthew didn't like being hated by his fellow Jews, but he did need the good money he made from his job.



Then Jesus called him and his life hadn't been the same since. Once he had worried about how much money he earned, and had slept in a comfortable bed. Now he was travelling around the countryside living day to day and sleeping in strangers' homes or out in the open!

Matthew had learned much from Jesus. Surely this man was learned. Matthew had thought himself a scholar and prided himself on his knowledge of the Torah. But this Jesus was to be admired for his knowledge of Scripture. And what a great teacher he was! Many times Matthew had witnessed crowds of people standing silently, listening to every word the Master said. He would never forget the day one of the men asked Jesus to teach him how to pray. Jesus told him to say, "Our Father who are in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Matthew had memorized the words and said them each day when he woke up.

The miracles Jesus performed always amazed Matthew. Blind men were able to see. Lame men were able to walk. And dead men came back to life. Just as Jesus told John the Baptist's followers, these were the signs of the coming of the Messiah, the Savior. Surely, this Jesus was the Son of God.

Now Jesus and his followers had entered Jerusalem for the Passover. Such a huge crowd turned out to see

Jesus ride into town Sunday. They shouted "Hosannah," and "God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord!", and they waved palm branches and spread their cloaks on the ground in front of him. Again he taught the people and did many miracles. But there were many who were not so happy about Jesus.

Among them were the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the chief Jewish religious leaders. They had power and position and prestige with the Hebrew people and they did not want any of it destroyed by this country fellow from Nazareth. The Pharisees and Sadducees controlled the religious thinking of Israel and they did not want a carpenter's son stirring the people up!

Many times they had tried to trick Jesus, but Jesus could not be tricked. They had hoped to discredit Jesus, to show him up as a fool. But each time they failed. Again they hoped to trap Jesus into saying something against Moses so that all Israel would despise him. They sent a teacher of the Law of Moses to ask Jesus a question that would show his disregard for the Law and Moses.

The Pharisees asked this question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" They thought for sure Jesus would say, "Do not steal" or "Love your father and mother." They could say, "You are wrong and do not know the law. You blaspheme Moses!" and then Jesus would lose his followers.

But Jesus was not tricked. He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the

greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' The whole law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

The Pharisees knew they had been caught in their own trap. Instead of losing credibility, Jesus gained further approval, and they, the Pharisees, had been made to look like fools. Again Jesus proved he knew what he was talking about, that he was someone special, someone chosen by God. Instead of choosing one commandment, he had quoted Scripture that summed up the entire Ten Commandments in two simple rules for life — love God and love your fellow man.

Matthew sighed. What was ahead for Jesus and his followers? The Sadducees and Pharisees were not going to be stopped. They must be planning something else to stop Jesus. What would it be? He worried for his Master's sake. The Sadducees and Pharisees would try anything, even try having Jesus killed! He hoped that some of them who had come to hear Jesus speak and knew Jesus to be a good man would help.

Now Matthew left the campfire and settled down to sleep. Before his eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep he thought about what Jesus had said. Matthew made a commitment: "I will love God with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind. I will love my neighbor as I love myself."

Jerusalem Times

Nation of Israel Seeks Political Freedom

At a meeting today of Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor of Judea, and Herod, King of Judea, the issue of national freedom was raised again. King Herod raised the issues of self-rule and religious freedom. Governor Pilate restated Rome's policy of limited freedom for a conquered nation. No progress was made, but both sides agreed to meet in one week.

Crowds Greet Religious Cult Leader

Hundreds of this city's residents from the wealthiest to the poorest lined the streets of Jerusalem to welcome the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. Leader of a growing group of followers, Jesus was greeted with waving palm leaves and a "carpet" of coats thrown in his path by his admirers. Cheers of "Hosannah" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" rose from the

crowds as Jesus passed by riding a donkey colt.

Humble in appearance, he did not appear as one who had gained the trust and devotion of so many throughout Judea. The sick seek him out to be healed. The rich follow his teachings. The lowly listen to his every word.

Because Jesus has such a strong following, the established religious leaders, the Sadducees and Pharisees, met to discuss the impact of Jesus' arrival in town just before the most holy of holidays, the feast of Passover. Fear was expressed that the people might riot and that the local authorities might not be able to control the crowds.

The Council of Pharisees issued this statement: The people must continue to listen to us for guidance and interpretation of the law. We and we alone have the right to decide what God does and does not want us to do. Citizens, beware of this Jesus. He has no authority, not even a formal education at the temple.

A spokesman for the Sadducees suggested that Jesus was breaking the law of Moses by his every action. They put aside Jesus' claims that he did not come to abolish the law but to help people understand and learn to live within the law. Referring to the Nazarene as just a popular hero who will fade from sight in a few months, the Sadducees dismissed the claim that he is a true religious leader.

Pilate Reports to Rome

In his latest report to headquarters in Rome, Pontius Pilate expressed concern over the growing unrest in the city of Jerusalem. Noting the number of religious and political action groups inciting the local population, he requested more troops be sent to Jerusalem to handle the crowds. He also expressed doubt that the religious and political leaders of Israel would be effective in controlling the people in the event of an unexpected surge of activity among the religious groups or those seeking freedom for Judea. Pilate also noted that the strongest of the religious groups was led by a carpenter named Jesus who is non-violent.

Religious News

Coming from gatherings in the neighboring cities of Bethany, Capernaum, Cana, and other towns, Jesus of Nazareth entered Jerusalem today with a large following of his believers. With news of miraculous healings spreading through the city, people from every district sought Jesus out for help. His teachings are not new. We've heard them all before. But this man's manner of teaching makes his listeners change their lives, and do as he says. Young and old, rich and poor, famous and humble people crowd together to hear him speak. You can catch him this week at the temple.

Israelites Demanding Freedom from Roman Rule

Another demonstration by the Zealots political party occurred today outside the offices of Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor of Israel. Three men were arrested, and Roman soldiers broke up the crowd. Demonstrators were demanding the freedom of Israel from Roman control.

Pharisees Make Ruling

The high priest of the temple and Chief Pharisee spoke for the entire Pharisee council when he stated that the carpenter from Nazareth, Jesus son of Joseph, was not to be regarded as an authority on religion. In his statement to the press, the high priest reminded the people that the Pharisees and only the Pharisees have the right to interpret the law of Moses and speak for God.

TRICKERY THAT DIDN'T WORK

Here is what the Bible tells us happened to Jesus not long after his entry into Jerusalem. Read the account and write an editorial for the *Jerusalem Times*. Give your editorial a headline. Don't forget to give your ideas about what has happened. As an editor of the *Times* you have the right to give your opinion.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together, and one of them, a

teacher of the law, tried to trap him with a question. "Teacher," he asked, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' The whole law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

person who had his name changed?" (Simon to Peter, Jacob to Israel.) "Why do you think the names were changed?" (Accept reasonable responses.)

"Who were the three strangers?" (Angels.)

"What did Abraham learn about himself from his willingness to obey God and sacrifice Isaac?" (That he was obedient and reverent and trustworthy.) "Abraham did not have to sacrifice Isaac in the end, but many centuries later God did sacrifice his son, Jesus, for us. What do you think that showed about God's trustworthiness and love for us?" (Accept reasonable responses.) (15 min.)

4. The next part of the lesson focuses on trust. Read aloud the directions for the cartoon activity from the student activity packet to be sure they all understand. Reassure the children that they do not have to be artists to do the work and that simple line drawings are quite acceptable. Allow enough time for them to complete the work, to share their cartoons with the class, or you might spend time at each student's desk talking about what was drawn. Some may want their work displayed. (10 min.)

5. The next story is about Moses. Help the children make the transition in this manner:

"Many years after Abraham, another man was called on by God to put his trust in the Lord. You may remember Moses from stories you have read about him before. Here is a rebus story to refresh your memory."

The children may want to read it aloud or to themselves.

Relate the story of Moses to the story of Jesus with these discussion remarks and questions:

"Many aspects of Moses' story are familiar when we think about the life of Jesus Christ. One of Jesus' main tasks was to form a new covenant with all people. In Moses' story the people were slaves of Egypt. In Jesus' time the people were slaves of their disobedience to God. Moses gave the Israelites physical freedom. Jesus gave us all spiritual freedom. Moses led his people to the promised land. Jesus showed us how to get to God's special Kingdom. Moses' people sacrificed a lamb and marked their doors with its blood. Jesus sacrificed himself and gave his blood for us as a sign of our bond. Moses' law, the Ten Commandments, taught the people how to live the way God wants us to live. Jesus said he came to fulfill the law. What do you think that meant?" (People could show how they would live by the law in their relationship with him; accept reasonable responses.) (10 min.)

6. The next part of the lesson provides students with basic skills in using the Bible. You may wish to read through it together or assign it for homework. (10 min.)

7. Unit Project: Continue work on class rules, if necessary, to complete a list of workable rules for

the class from the brainstorming list. (5 min.)

8. Review the homework assignment with the children to be sure each knows what to do. Assign next session's readings as well.

End class with a prayer.

Extending the Lesson

1. Using a good children's Bible, read more about Abraham and/or Moses.
2. Practice looking up passages in the Bible. (See list below.)
3. Make *Trust in the Lord* banners or posters to put up at home or to decorate the class.

Look It Up

Abraham and Isaac, Genesis 22:1-18; Moses' Story, 1:7, Deuteronomy 34; The Birth of Jesus, Matthew 1 and 2; The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13; The Last Supper, Mark 14:12-25, etc.

Session 3—The Two Great Commandments

Key Concepts

1. Jesus came to reestablish the covenant with man and restore what man lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed, namely life-everlasting.
2. The two Great Commandments, familiar to Israel but neglected, summed up the law as our guide for our relationship with God and man.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read a mock newspaper for historical background.
2. Give examples of how they could live according to the Great Commandments.
3. Continue work on the unit project.

Materials Needed

- Scissors, crayons
- Glue
- Blank paper for editorials

Procedure

1. Make a positive remark to each student about his/her special talents that you have noted over the past two weeks.

Start class with a prayer. (5 min.)

2. Begin the session by reviewing the first story, "Matthew and the Best Commandments," together. Here are some discussion starters:

- Why do you think the religious leaders of Jesus' time feared him?
- Have you ever had a good idea when someone else

comes up with a better one?

- Are you reluctant to give up your idea to go along with the other person's? Why?
- What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?
- What does it mean to love your neighbor as you love yourself? (List ideas on board.) (15 min.)

3. Look at the "Jerusalem Times" in the next part of the text and have various students read the different articles. Ask them if they have done any newspaper reporting at school to gain insight into their experience. Most students at this age do "current events" in school and are familiar with newspapers.

Discuss the religious and political climate of Jerusalem if the class is interested in learning more about the times in which Jesus lived.

Have each student write an editorial (see page 20). You might have to explain further what an editorial is. They might want to share their work or you may choose a few to be read aloud. (15 min.)

4. Go over the directions for making a "Love Box" (student activity packet).

Allow time for students to complete the activity. The children may wish to keep their responses private, but you may wish to display finished boxes. Stress neatness of work. (15 min.)

5. Unit Project: Have students judge each of the rules they have selected by the standard of the Great Commandments. If all pass evaluation, they may start making their final chart or bulletin board. (10 min.)

6. *Homework*: Try to accomplish some of the tasks in your box. Check previous week's homework.

End class with a prayer.

Session 4—The Promise of the Spirit

Key Concepts

1. We know God the Father through God the Son, Jesus Christ.
2. As Jesus left his followers, he assured them that he would not abandon them; the Holy Spirit would be with them and us always.
3. The Holy Spirit helps us remember to love God and keep the covenant.

Objectives

Students will

1. Complete an exercise to demonstrate that it is possible to know the Father through knowledge of the Son.
2. Read a story based on John 14:1-26 and underline passages that stress key concepts of this lesson.
3. Make a mobile to illustrate the passage.

4. Complete the unit project.

Background for Teacher

Concluding the unit, this session deals with the covenant once Jesus is no longer with his followers. The lesson centers around the time when Jesus tells his disciples how all can attain the Kingdom, Jesus stresses adherence to the commandments (i.e., the covenant).

The passage, John 14:1-26, starts with Jesus reassuring his followers not to worry; that he goes to prepare a place for us. He tells the disciples that the Kingdom is reached only through him. He assures his doubtful followers that to know him is to know the Father. He then tells them to continue doing his work and to ask him for whatever they need to continue the work that will glorify the Father.

Next Jesus promises his followers the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus will remain in us even though he leaves us. The Holy Spirit will teach Jesus' followers everything and remind them of all he has said.

Although this passage is complex, we will only deal with the aspects of it that relate to the covenant and how we share in God's Kingdom even now. If your class wishes to discuss the passage further, you might want to consult a good Bible commentary such as the Jerome, Abingdon, or another that your priest might suggest.

Materials Needed

- String
- Heavyweight paper
- Marker pens or crayons
- Scissors
- One paper bag with a toy inside for every two children, toy suggestion: stuffed animal or any other toy that can be easily described

Procedure

1. Make a positive remark to each student about his/her attendance as each arrives. (For example: Nice to see you, Bill. So far you have perfect attendance! Glad you're here today, Barbara.)

Start class with a prayer. (5 min.)

2. Begin the session with this activity designed to help the children understand the verses (John 14:7), "If you know me, you know my Father too"; and (John 14:9), "To have seen me is to have seen the Father." Say:

"Most of you know each other fairly well. Many of you know each other's parents, too. You could probably identify them in a crowd. Today we're going to think about each other and our parents. Suppose we had a boy in our room who had very good manners. Do you suppose one or both of his parents stress good manners in his home? What if we had a girl