

# biblestudy: march 2023

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*Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series*

## March 5, 2023 Text: Matthew 20:20-28 “Sharing in Jesus’ Cup”

“Back in the day” there was a custom that the king would protect and give benefit to anyone who was allowed to drink from the king’s cup. No wonder the mother of James and John wanted them to drink from Jesus’ cup!

Then, our Lord explains that this might not be exactly what the disciples are expecting (Matthew 20:22). To drink from Jesus’ cup does not assure one of privilege; it means that one will be given the role of servant (even stronger, as slave) (Matthew 20:26-27). To drink from Jesus’ cup is not to make oneself “number one”; it is to work for victory for others (v. 28).

In this second week in Lent, from our perspective we can begin to see the shadow of a cross. Those early disciples did not have the benefit of knowing “how the story ended.” They were “testing the waters” to see what following Jesus would mean for them.

In reality, that is not so different for us. What does it mean for my relationships if I choose to follow Jesus? What does it mean for my enemies if I choose to follow Jesus? What does it mean for social justice if I choose to follow Jesus? Jesus came to serve, not to be served. What happens if I am called to service, rather than to being served? (Matthew 20:28).

Well, maybe it won’t be so bad to do all that serving if it earns me a place in God’s Kingdom. After all, we can hardly expect to get such

a reward without a lot of work on our part.

Uh, Jesus doesn’t think so. Look at verse 23. Jesus says, in effect, that you can do all the good works you can but a place in God’s Kingdom is finally only by God’s grace. In a sense, we do the good works not to earn God’s grace, but to say “thank you” for God’s grace.

Why do you think the ten disciples got angry with the two who made the request of Jesus for a special place in the coming Kingdom (v. 24)? Maybe they are upset that they didn’t think of it first. Maybe they thought James and John didn’t understand some of the basics. Maybe they are envious of the special time Jesus has for the mother of Zebedee’s sons. Jesus does not blast back at the ten angry disciples. He simply takes this as a teaching moment. What envy do I have for others in the Church? What anger do I have because I think another Christian fails to understand the Gospel? Maybe Jesus still has some teaching to do!

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Chrysostom, a fourth century bishop, (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT 1b*, Intervarsity Press) wrote: “A person is not a true disciple who does not imitate his or her teacher; nor is it a true image that is not like its creator.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Send me on service, Lord.”

## March 12, 2023 Text: Matthew 21:23-27 “The Source of Jesus’ Authority”

Did you see the headline in this morning’s paper? Did you see the news that screamed across the Internet today? Well, I didn’t. I am writing this several months ahead of when you will read it, but I have a guess about the headlines you will see today. There will be one or two articles that will raise the questions “Who do those people think they are?” “Who gave him the power to do things like that?” “Who put her in charge?” It’s not unusual to raise question about the authority others have for doing what they do. That’s what is happening in today’s study text. The leadership saw Jesus come into the temple (v. 23). They watched him teaching and asked a very forthright question: “Who gave you this authority?” (Matthew 21:23)

Evidently, Matthew enjoyed exploring issues of authority. Take a look at these verses in the Gospel according to Matthew: 7:29, 9:6, 9:34, 12:24, 12:27, 28:18. In each of these situations, there is some inquiry or statement about Jesus’ authority. Jesus was clear about His authority. He said, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:19).

So, when he answers this inquiry about his authority by asking a question, it is not because Jesus was unsure; it was His way of handling a devious crowd. As Matthew points out, the temple chief priests and elders got so entangled in their disagreement about the authority of John the Baptizer that they had to admit they could not agree.: “We don’t know.” (Matthew 21:27). That opened the door for Jesus to set aside the issue.

## March 19, 2023 Text: Matthew 22:15-22 “What Do We Owe the Emperor?”

Have you begun to pull together all those receipts and papers you will need to file this year’s taxes? (Now don’t embarrass me by saying that you have already filed for this year. Maybe I had to put it off until I had a chance to purview this text.)

There is something at the beginning of this account that challenges me. When those who wanted to trap Jesus (the Greek word for “trap” is one used for trapping an animal) began speaking, they began with a load of praise (Matthew 22:16). They tell Jesus that He is Mr. Wonderful and surely always He teaches exactly what God would have taught. Jesus sees right through that flattery and knows they are up to no good (v. 8). What bothers me here is that now I am wondering: Do all of my praises of our Lord seem hollow to Jesus? When Jesus looks at my actions (and not merely my words), does He see that I am posturing and pretending?

Yet, the question does not go away. The Twenty-first Century asks: Is Jesus just a wise teacher from another generation? Is Jesus an out-of-date religious guru? Is Jesus just one of many who thought about serious things? Perhaps the bottom line is: Do you believe what John 1:14 says? “The Word became flesh...” Is this Jesus what God wants to say and do among us?

Perhaps this question from the leaders of the temple---“Who gave you this authority?---is one of life’s most important questions. You live your life according to what you think the answer is to that question. What say you?

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Mind of Jesus* (Harper and Row), William Barclay wrote: “So then Jesus came with the claim for absolute obedience, with the claim for complete loyalty, with the claim to have the right to disturb life, with the claim to be the agent of judgment, with the claim to be nothing less than the touchstone of God. If anyone makes a claim like that, he is either a deluded megalomaniac or the Son of God; he is either mad or divine. Which was Jesus?”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, Son of God...”

When has my lauding of Jesus not matched the way I lived my life?

Jesus’ answer to his questioners is not a slam dunk of clarity. Over the years students of the Bible have disagreed as to the implications of what Jesus said. Did He mean that faithful Jews should submit to Roman authority? Did He mean that government has a legitimate place in human society? Was He giving a principle for our understanding of separation of Church and State?

It helps to look at the context in which Jesus spoke. He was addressing Pharisees (v. 15) and Herodians (v. 16). So, He was facing two groups, one of whom was a strict stickler for every minute detail of the Law of Moses and the other who was a political ally of Herod. Maybe He is saying to the Herodians, “Go ahead; pay your taxes.” Maybe He is saying to the Pharisees, “Everything in life belongs to God.” Neither

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the Pharisees nor Herodians could argue with those statements. No wonder “...they were astonished at His teaching” (Matthew 22:33).

It helps to look at the verses that follow this study text. The Pharisees

What Someone Else Has Said:

In the Charles P. Frank novel *Digging for Cash* (iUniverse), there is this scene: “Bette Curtis got up from her seat, walked directly to Gertie, and embraced her. ‘Ms. Babble, I have loved you. I do love you. I will love you. Does that cover all the tenses?’”

March 26, 2023 Text: Matthew 22:41-46 “The Identity of the Son of God”

Students of the Bible often conclude that Matthew addressed his gospel account largely to the Jewish Christian community. He begins his account with that lengthy Hebrew genealogy of the Messiah, traced all the way back to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17). So, it is not surprising to find this question in this week’s focal text: Is the Messiah the son of David? (Matthew 22:41-46)

Jesus starts the conversation with the Pharisees by asking whose son the Messiah is. The religious Pharisees know their heritage and assert that the Messiah will be the son of David (v. 42). That is when Jesus plays a surprise card; He quotes the psalm in which David refers to the Messiah as “my lord,” a term that a father would not use to depict a son (Psalm 110:1). Jesus is moving to the claim that He, the Messiah, is the Son of God.

The other gospel writers find ways to make the same claim. Mark 12:35-37 tells the same story as we have looked at in Matthew. Luke 20:41 gives the same account. John 1:14 is clear that Jesus is the Word made flesh and is the father’s only son. Going back to Matthew, remember the writer’s reminder that the Christ is from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20). God’s Son.

How important is all this? Let me come at it this way. This morning I received an ad from an office supply store; it said that crayons were 20% off this week. That is not particularly valuable information for me. I suppose I could go and buy a few boxes of crayons for a local

have a follow-up question: “What is the greatest commandment of the Law?” (Matthew 22:6)That is when our Lord reminded us all of our call to love God fully (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to love neighbor fully (Leviticus 19:18). And I think that is what this week’s lesson is about!

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, teach me to love both myself and my neighbor...”

kindergarten, but you get the picture: fresh crayons are not a big part of my life. On the other hand, knowing that Jesus is the Son of God makes a transitional difference for me. It marks my relationship with God. It gives God’s voice in a human life that I can follow. It becomes the fullness of God’s saving gift to me. And it is not 20% off; it is a free gift of grace!

Let’s close with this. I have a desk calendar that has a “word of the day.” The word on the day I am writing this is “eidetic.” It means “extraordinarily accurate and vivid recall.” When I know that Jesus is the Son of God, I recall those accounts of His ministry with new accuracy: healing, love of justice, reconciliation, forgiveness, sacrifice, teaching—all as the work of God. In Jesus we are hearing the voice of God.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The United Methodist Hymnal* (no. 436) (United Methodist Publishing House) is a hymn by John Haynes Holmes: “The voice of God is calling its summons in our day; Isaiah heard in Zion and we now hear God say: ‘Whom shall I send to succor my people in their need? Whom shall I send to loosen the bonds of shame and greed?’”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “I hear You, Lord, Jesus, and know that I hear the voice of God...”

Biblical References - February, March, April 2023

FEBRUARY

February 5, 2023 Text:

1 John 4:7-21; Ruth 4 “The Tie That Binds”

February 12, 2023 Text:

1 Kings 3:16-28 “A Parent’s Love”

February 19, 2023 Text:

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7, 20 “True Friendship”

February 26, 2023 Text:

Matthew 16:21-28 “To Gain the World But Lose Our Life”

MARCH

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Matthew 20:20-28 “Sharing in Jesus’ Cup”

March 12, 2023 Text:

Matthew 21:23-27 “The Source of Jesus’ Authority”

March 19, 2023 Text:

Matthew 22:15-22 “What Do We Owe the Emperor?”

March 26, 2023 Text:

Matthew 22:41-46 “The Identity of the Son of God”

APRIL

April 2, 2023 Text:

Matthew 26:36-46 “Your Will Be Done”

April 9, 2023 Text:

Matthew 28:1-15 “Resurrection Turns Everything Upside Down”

April 16, 2023 Text:

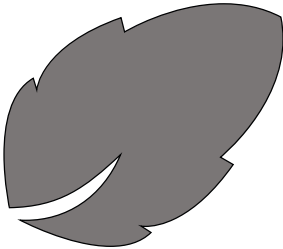
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April 23, 2023 Text:

1 Corinthians 15:12-28 “Unwrapping the Gift of the Resurrection”

April 30, 2023 Text:

1 Peter 1:3-16 “A Living Hope and Nonperishable Inheritance”



And above all these  
put on love, which  
binds everything  
together in perfect  
harmony.

Colossians 3:14