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Jeremiah chapter 15

15O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. **16**Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. **17**I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. **18**Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?

19Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them.

20And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. **21**I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

Psalm chapter 26

English Standard Version

1Of David. Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. **2**Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. **3**For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. **4**I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. **5**I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. **6**I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD, **7**proclaiming

thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. **8**O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. **9**Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, **10**in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. **11**But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. **12**My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.

What does Psalm chapter 26 mean? This psalm is not easily connected to any events recorded in the Bible. Whatever situation David was facing here, the details are not part of Scripture. Apparently, David felt he was under ruthless attack from enemies. These assaults seem to have included malicious rumors. In response, David appeals to the Lord for vindication. He reasons that God will justify him because he has led a life of integrity and has consistently trusted God. It is this sincerity which makes David confident in his relationship to the Lord (Psalm 26:1–3).

As proof of his integrity, David lists the ways in which he pursues righteousness. In this context, that includes refusing to associate closely with evil people. Balancing a need for holiness (1 Corinthians 5:9–11; 1 Peter 1:14–15) with a call to reach the lost (Matthew 5:16) can be difficult. Yet that discernment is important. David insists he does not "sit," or fellowship, with those known to be dishonest. Neither does he keep company with hypocrites. He avoids being in the same place as groups of evildoers. He stays clear of sin and gives thanks in the tabernacle. Because he deeply loves God and His truth, David publicly proclaims all the Lord's wondrous deeds. He loves the tabernacle, the place where the Lord reveals His glory (Psalm 26:4–8).

As someone who stays away from evil, and evil people, David confidently asks God not to be "swept away" by judgment against sinners. This echoes a theme of the Bible, which is that sin can bring earthly consequences—and those close to evil people risk being caught in those results (Proverbs 13:20). David knows hypocritical sinners accept bribes and commit depraved acts. As for himself, he seeks to live an honest life. He asks the Lord to deliver him and be gracious to him. David affirms that he will not be shaken from his faith and will praise the Lord when God's people assemble (Psalm 26:9–12).

Psalm 26:1

ESV

Of David. Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

What does Psalm 26:1 mean? David asks the Lord to vindicate him. He longs to have his name cleared from the false charges his enemies were bringing against him. Scripture does not record any event in David's life matching this exact plea. Whatever situation inspired this psalm, we are unsure of its details.

Rather than being guilty, David claims to have walked consistently in integrity. There was nothing hypocritical about David. In reviewing his life David sees that he has always trusted the Lord without fail. A believer may be the target of gossip and false accusations, but he can appeal to the Lord, as David did, for vindication.

When God saves a sinner, He justifies the sinner; that is, God clears the forgiven one of all charges against him (1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 2:1–10). Jesus died for sin; the believer's debt has been paid (Romans 8:1–4). At the Father's right hand, Jesus intercedes for the believer (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). When the Devil accuses the believer of wrongdoing (Revelation 12:10), Jesus turns aside every accusation. The apostle John writes: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Psalm 26:2

ESV

Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

What does Psalm 26:2 mean? David invites the Lord to test his inner being: his heart and his mind. He has claimed to be a man of integrity and faith (Psalm 26:1), now he asks the Lord to search him and see that his claim is substantiated.

In 1 Kings 9:4–5, when speaking to Solomon, the Lord affirmed David's integrity. He said: "And as for you [Solomon], if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever."

It is good to invite the Lord to examine the heart and mind. Doing so preserves the believer's integrity. Psalm 139:23 records David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!"

Psalm 26:3

ESV

For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.

What does Psalm 26:3 mean? So far, David has proclaimed his integrity (Psalm 26:1) and asked God to search him, to prove that sincerity (Psalm 26:2). Here, he affirms that he lived with a deliberate focus on God's unfailing love and truth. Of course, David sinned. In at least one case, his sin was severe (Psalm 51). And yet, the long-term course of his life demonstrates faithfulness to the Lord. He loved God and obeyed his Word (Psalm 119:11). He also believed God would keep His covenant promises.

The Christian life includes love for the Lord, which the Holy Spirit puts in the heart at the moment of salvation (Romans 5:5). Having received God's love, we respond to Him by becoming obedient from the heart to His Word (Romans 6:17). Paul describes the profound change which occurs when someone becomes a believer (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1–5). He credits this to God's great love and grace (Ephesians 2:4–9; Romans 5:8) and cites God's purpose to make believers His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). A proper response to God's love is a reciprocal love demonstrated in obedience to God. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (John 14:21).

Psalm 26:4

ESV

I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.

What does Psalm 26:4 mean? As part of his commitment to holiness, David sought not to have close association with known liars or hypocrites (Psalm 26:5). This is often a difficult issue to balance when trying to live a God-honoring life. Completely disconnecting, in every way, from those who sin would not only be practically impossible (1 Corinthians 5:9–10), it would leave those persons without evidence of God's goodness (Matthew 5:16). Sensible boundaries are healthy; David recognized the value of avoiding those steeped in sin (Proverbs 13:20). Believers should try to draw unbelievers to Christ, but an equal yoke will draw believers away from Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

Jesus sent His followers into the world. But He did not tell them to copy the culture of the world. He prayed, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world...They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:15–16). First John 2:16 indicts the world's culture as full of evil desires: "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life." By contrast, the believer's desire should be to do God's will (John 7:17). The world is passing away, but the person who does God's will abides forever (John 11:25–26).

Psalm 26:5

ESV

I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.

What does Psalm 26:5 mean? Continuing from verse 4, David states his effort to avoid close relationships with those living in obvious sin. Included in his comments here are "the assembly" of those who are evil. Since the next passage deals with the house of God (Psalm 26:6–8), some believe David is referring to religious hypocrites within the nation of Israel. It's certainly possible for hypocritically evil people to participate in a religion, and Scripture warns believers to avoid such persons (1 Corinthians 5:9–11). However, the main thrust of David's point seems to be about associating with wicked persons, and their groups, in general. That's a healthy boundary which believers of any era should apply (Proverbs 13:20).

After David's kingship, Israel's spiritual commitment faded. In Isaiah's day, hypocritical worship was rampant. God responded by asking, "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?...I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats" (Isaiah 1:11). He appealed to the hypocrites: "Come now, let us reason together...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord desires pure, sincere worship that is prompted by the Holy Spirit and conducted according to truth (John 4:23–24).

Psalm 26:6

ESV

I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD,

What does Psalm 26:6 mean? In this verse David avows his innocence. He is free of hypocrisy. The wicked tried to hide their sins when they visited the tabernacle, but David was innocent. His worship is pure as he goes around the Lord's altar in the tabernacle.

In Psalm 43:3–4, the psalmist prays: "Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God." According to Exodus 30:17–21, the priests were commanded to wash their hands and feet before performing their duties. This was not only practical, but it was also powerful symbolism: they needed to pursue purity to render sincere worship and service to the Lord.

Psalm 26:7

ESV

proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

What does Psalm 26:7 mean? This is part of David's declaration of innocence and sincere devotion to God (Psalm 26:4–6). The prior verse emphasized proper, ceremonially clean acts of worship. Here, David cites two things he does at God's altar. He overtly thanks God, and he makes a point to tell others what great things God has done. Neither of these activities demands a theological degree. Expertise and intellect might help a person explain God, but neither is required to be an effective witness. Every believer has received good gifts from God (James 1:17), and therefore has much for which to be thankful.

First Thessalonians 5:18 exhorts believers to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." A believer may wonder what God's will is, but 1 Thessalonians makes it clear that thanksgiving is God's will. Proclaiming God's wondrous works is also God's will for believers. When Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, He told him to go home "and declare how much God has done for you" (Luke. 8:39). At Pentecost, the followers of Jesus proclaimed in many languages "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). Psalm 66:16 provides a good invitation every believer can extend: "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul."

Psalm 26:8**ESV**

O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.

What does Psalm 26:8 mean? David recognizes that the tabernacle is the place where God reveals His glory. His loving pursuit of holiness (Psalm 26:1–7) includes a joy at being in God's house. After Moses finished the work of building the tabernacle, according to Exodus 40:34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." The glory of the Lord was so brilliant that "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:35).

In John 1:14 we learn that Jesus dwelt among human beings, and John testifies, "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." When Christians gather to worship the Lord, they are in the presence of Jesus, who possesses the glory of God. Being in His presence at church is a prime reason to attend regularly. Hebrews 10:25 exhorts believers not to neglect to meet, "as is the habit of some."

Psalm 26:9**ESV**

Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men,

What does Psalm 26:9 mean? In this psalm, David is declaring his sincere devotion to God. As part of that, he lived with an intentional separation from those who were openly wicked (Psalm 26:4–5). Instead, he took joy in worshipping the Lord and spending time in praise and celebration (Psalm 26:6–8). A theme of this psalm is David's plea for vindication (Psalm 26:1)—to be cleared of wrongdoing and spared from consequences that he has not earned.

Statements such as this echo the wisdom of Proverbs 13:20. Those who participate in evil can expect negative earthly consequences. Those who associate with evil people risk being caught up in those results. Even so, suffering in this life is a lesser concern, compared to eternity.

David understood that hypocrites—sinners and bloodthirsty men—mingled with sincere worshipers. He also understood the Lord would sweep them away in

judgment. Jesus spoke about the mingling of the lost with the saved. He referred to wheat versus weeds and sheep versus goats (Matthew 13:24–30; 25:31–46). Ultimately, the "weeds" and "goats" will perish.

Believers must be vigilant so they will not be like hypocrites. First Corinthians 10:12 cautions: "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Although it may be difficult at times to distinguish between believers and unbelievers, the Lord knows who belongs to Him and who doesn't. Second Timothy 2:19 carries this assurance and provides a command: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'"

Psalm 26:10

ESV

in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes.

What does Psalm 26:10 mean? The Hebrew term translated "devices" here is *zimmāh*, which refers to plans or, perhaps most accurately, "schemes." The English term "devices" has also been used to mean plotting or conspiring. The idea, here, is that of evil intent. This same term appears in other Scriptures warning against underhanded plans (Proverbs 21:27). Used as a criticism, the word is strong: *zimmāh* is frequently used in reference to gross sexual immorality or other shameless acts (Leviticus 18:17; Jeremiah 13:27).

Bribes—exchanging money or favors to violate some rule or law—are routinely condemned in the Bible. "'Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" (Deuteronomy 27:25). Micah 7:2–3 issues an indictment against the ungodly element in Israel. It states that "they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net. Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well; the prince and the judge ask for a bribe." Bribes have been a common problem in every culture because they are effective ways to take advantage of human greed (Proverbs 17:8).

Psalm 26:11

ESV

But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me.

What does Psalm 26:11 mean? A person's "walk" refers his lifestyle. After pointing out the sinfulness of the hypocritical evildoers, David returns to his earlier affirmation of his integrity (Psalm 26:1–3). David's pursuit of holiness was not sporadic, nor was it temporary. Sincere devotion to God was the regular pattern of his life.

David also asks the Lord to redeem him. The meaning of "redeem" in this context is not a deliverance from sin but a deliverance from David's enemies. The word is often used in reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 2 Samuel 7:23; Micah 6:4).

To be "gracious" is to be kind or to favor a person. The Lord is gracious to all His people, not because they deserve it, but because He loves them unconditionally. Because Jonah knew the Lord is gracious and would pardon the repentant, he initially refused the Lord's commission to preach in Nineveh (Jonah 4:2).

Psalm 26:12

ESV

My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.

What does Psalm 26:12 mean? In this closing verse, David expresses confidence that he will not be moved from his commitment to the Lord. The hypocrites were on shaky ground and about to be swept away in judgment (Psalm 26:9), but David stood firm. The typical pattern of David's life was this sincere commitment to God. Though he was not perfect (Psalm 51), David was not a part-time follower of God—devotion to the Lord was a characteristic of his life. His intent to praise God in public worship was yet another sign of this loyalty.

In Psalm 143:10 David prays, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!" The believer cannot slip from the path of righteousness if he is submissive to God's will and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul urges the Ephesians—and all believers—to stand against the Devil's schemes by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11). He also tells the Thessalonians to "stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Adherence to the faith enables a believer to stand on level ground (Philippians 2:12–13). Ultimately, it is God who is "able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory

with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24–25).

Romans chapter 12

9Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10**Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. **11**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **12**Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13**Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15**Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **17**Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **18**If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19**Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." **20**To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." **21**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

What does Romans chapter 12 mean? This begins a new section in Paul's letter. As in many of his other epistles, Paul begins Romans with teaching on doctrine and ends with teaching on how we should live because of what is true. This pattern of theory, followed by application, is a hallmark of his writing. Romans 1 – 11 focused intently on the doctrine of salvation by God's grace and through our faith in Jesus. Knowing those ideas, how then should those saved by God's grace live today? How should we respond to the incredible mercy God has shown to us? Romans 12 begins to answer that question.

Since we can never repay God for forgiving our sins and including us in His family, there is only one rational response: worship. By this, Paul does not mean singing a few songs on Sunday morning. He describes our reasonable worship as presenting our bodies, our entire lives, to God as if we are holy and acceptable sacrifices. The difference between this and the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant is that we are to be living, breathing sacrifices, using up our lives in service to God (Romans 12:1).

This will require transformation, Paul writes. We must break free from, rather than conforming to, the me-first way the human world prefers. We must have our minds renewed, to look at the world through God's eyes, to begin to understand what He wants instead of focusing on what we want (Romans 12:2).

The first investment of this sacrificed life that God asks from us is to serve each other in the church. He has equipped us to do this by giving each believer specific spiritual gifts through His Holy Spirit who comes to live with us. In other words, God has supernaturally enabled us to be able to give to each other exactly what is needed. But we must do it. All together, the church is Christ's body, with each person serving a specific function that keeps the body going. Our first job is to find our function and to do it, through God's power, for the good of everyone else (Romans 12:3–8).

Next, Paul paints a picture of a living-sacrifice lifestyle. This comes with a long list of commands; a modern letter or office memo would put each of these in a separate bullet point. Paul begins by saying our love for God and each other must not be faked. It's not a performance. He writes that everything we do must be motivated by genuine love. As God does, we must learn to hate what is evil and to hold on tight to what is good. We should love each other with the loyalty of affectionate siblings. Our sibling rivalry should take the form of trying to outdo each other in giving honor to one another. We must keep our head in this game — though this is no mere game—loving and giving and serving the Lord with great enthusiasm in the burning power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:9–13).

This life of sacrifice will involve our mind, will, and emotions. We must continually acknowledge that our hope, our future in eternity with God, is worth celebrating. The suffering in this life is real, but we know it is temporary. We will be patient as we wait. We will also pray continually to the Father who hears and responds to us through the Holy Spirit.

We may be persecuted. We may have enemies in this life, people who wish to harm us for one reason or another. Christ calls us to follow His example and to refuse to curse them, to repay their evil, or to take revenge. We will let God handle that. Instead, as Jesus said, we will give food and water to our enemies in acts of kindness in order to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:14–21).

Romans 12:9

ESV

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

What does Romans 12:9 mean? In Romans 12, Paul is describing what it means to live the Christian life. How should we respond to God's great mercy toward us? Paul's first response is that we should figure out what spiritual gift or gifts God has given to us, then actually use those gifts to serve other Christians in the church.

Now he begins a list-like section of quick commands about how Christians should lead their everyday lives. We all know that we should love each other, but Paul's instruction is that our love must be genuine or sincere. In other words, Christians are not called to fake an attitude of love for each other, but to find ways to express God's love meaningfully, as an extension of God's love for us and ours for Him.

Next, Paul uses a strong word often translated as "hate" or "abhor." This is the Greek term *apostygountes*, which implies a dislike or revulsion towards something. Proverbs 6:16–19 describes seven things God hates, using the equivalent Hebrew term. None of these hated things are people; all of them are sin. Christians, too, are called to learn to hate what is evil, meaning sin. This is especially true of sin that brings harm to the innocent. This is one of the ways we need to be transformed to think like God (Romans 12:2). Hating evil, especially the sins that intrigue us, does not always come naturally.

Finally, Paul commands us to hold fast to, or cling to, what is good. Again, it can sometimes be hard to know what is truly good. We must learn to see the world through God's perspective, to deeply invest our time and energy in securing and keeping what is truly "good."

Romans 12:10

ESV

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

What does Romans 12:10 mean? Paul is giving a list of short commands to those who are in Christ. He is describing what it means to live as a self-sacrificing Christian. In the previous verse, he wrote that our love for each other must be sincere or genuine.

Now he writes of love as a kind of devotion to a sibling. We must love each other with a brotherly affection. The Greek word used here inspired the name of a city in the United States: *Philadelphia*, self-described as the city of brotherly love.

Those in Christ are truly brothers and sisters. God adopts us as His children, welcoming us into His family. That family includes everyone who knows God as Father. Brothers and sisters, of course, don't always get along. In most families, however, they share a loyalty and sense of belonging that surpasses most normal friendships.

Paul's second command in this verse urges us to compete, in a sense. We're told to outdo one another in showing honor to each other. If each of us acted on this, every person in the body of Christ would always feel deeply honored by the others and would never be satisfied that we are honoring one another enough. We would be motivated to continue asking, "How can I show more honor than he showed to me?"

Romans 12:11

ESV

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

What does Romans 12:11 mean? In the previous verse, Paul commanded Christians to seek to outdo each other in showing honor to one another. Now he writes that we must not be lazy in our enthusiasm. The two commands may well be related. Paul is urging us to be energetic in our attempts to give honor to each other. It may be that he is urging us to live with zeal or enthusiasm, in general, to remain focused, intentional, and positive about our purpose in treating each other well in the body of Christ.

He ramps the idea of enthusiasm up another notch by adding that we must be fervent in spirit; we must keep our spiritual fervor. The Greek word here is *zeontes*, related to the root word for "life," and the phrase could literally be translated that we must be boiling in our spirit. This could either mean that we must keep up our own spirits or that we should be set on fire by God's Spirit in us. In either case, this is a clear call from Paul to avoid allowing ourselves to become bored or tepid as we pursue our purpose as believers.

There is an appropriate target for this energy and enthusiasm: serving the Lord. That's the final command in the verse. Connecting that together, Paul is urging us to be "all in," both spiritually and emotionally, when it comes to serving the Lord and serving each other.

Romans 12:12

ESV

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

What does Romans 12:12 mean? Paul continues to describe our lives in Christ in a series of related short commands. The three commands in this verse are key to the emotional and spiritual well-being of every Christian.

The first command to Christians is to rejoice in hope. Often, we resist instruction about what we should *feel*: that we should change our attitudes to be joyful. The idea here, though, is more about declaring ourselves as having *reason for joy*. It's not a command to be happy, but to have the right perspective on our situation. We should agree with God that our hope is worth rejoicing over. What hope? Paul is referring to the hope of the redemption of our bodies and being united with our Father forever once our adoption is complete (Romans 8:23–24).

The next command is to be patient in tribulation or affliction. This becomes much easier if we are keeping the other two commands. Those who see their future worth celebrating and who pray to the Father continually will have a much easier time being patient during hardship. Paul is not downplaying the genuine pain of those experiences. Life can be unpleasant, and not all moments are happy moments. Yet Paul has pointed out that the struggles of life on earth are not worth comparing with the glory to come (Romans 8:18). So, we wait with patience (Romans 8:25). The final command of the verse also connects with Paul's thoughts in Romans chapter 8. We're commanded to be constant in prayer, or to keep praying continually. During any time of suffering, while waiting for what we're hoping in, we should pray. Prayer brings a connection with our Father through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26–27). He hears, understands, and helps in response to even our clumsiest attempts to communicate with Him.

Romans 12:13

ESV

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

What does Romans 12:13 mean? So far, Paul has written generally that Christians must be devoted to each other. They should show brotherly affection and honor to one another. The two commands in this verse describes practical ways we can do that.

First, Paul writes that we must contribute to the needs of other believers. The practice of the church in its earliest days was for wealthier Christians to sell their belongings to meet the physical needs of Christians who were not as well off. Not only did these acts of sacrificial giving demonstrate sincere service to God, they demonstrated to other believers and the watching world that these Christians practiced what they talked about.

In the same way, we are commanded to show hospitality to each other. The world can be a cold, lonely, and dangerous place. One hallmark of the Christian community is that it is meant to offer safe and welcoming spaces to believers through the hospitality of other believers. Traveling from town to town in Paul's day was always a risk. Christians welcomed by other genuine believers as they passed through or arrived in a new town were protected from thieves, weather, and violence. We're called to provide the same service to each other, in the contexts of our own individual cultures.

Romans 12:14

ESV

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

What does Romans 12:14 mean? Here, Paul begins a new set of commands detailing what life in Christ on this side of eternity is supposed to look like. Taken together, it paints a picture of the Christian life. Followers of Jesus should be seen as those who love and take care of each other, in powerful and self-sacrificing ways.

This new command, however, can also be applied to how Christians interact with unbelievers. Paul echoes the direct teaching of Jesus: Bless those who persecute you and don't curse them (Matthew 5:44). It's possible that Paul is referring to persecution for the sake of Christ, but the same principle applies to any situation where we are treated badly.

The normal human instinct, of course, is to do the opposite. We feel the natural desire to curse those who hurt us and to avoid doing good for them at all costs. Christians who follow Paul's teaching here, instead, will stand out in almost every culture. They will also be imitating both Jesus' words and His example, as He carried this principle even to the extent of praying for the well-being of His enemies (Luke 23:34).

While it's true that this makes a powerful statement to unbelievers, Christians can also practice this with each other. Sometimes other Christians don't follow

Paul's teachings. We can become hurtful to each other in big and small ways. Nothing communicates sincere love back to a brother or sister who is being hurtful than doing good for them and refusing to strike back at them.

Romans 12:15

ESV

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

What does Romans 12:15 mean? Of all people, Christians should be masters of empathy, according to Paul. He commands those who are in Christ to be submissive to each other even in our emotions. Nothing communicates sincere love and concern for another person more powerfully than recognizing and joining in their highs and lows. We show love by empathizing with their seasons of celebration and allowing ourselves to feel broken with them in their seasons of heartache.

Jesus Himself powerfully modeled this in John 11:33–35. He was deeply moved and wept with Mary and the others after Lazarus had died. Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus from dead, but that did not keep Him from joining in the sadness of those experiencing the loss.

Saved believers have been shown great grace by God (Romans 3:23–24), who experienced our temptations and suffering (Hebrews 4:15–16). Just as Christians, who have been shown great mercy, ought to be merciful to others (Romans 11:30–31; Ephesians 4:32), so too should they reflect God's empathy through compassion for others.

Romans 12:16

ESV

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

What does Romans 12:16 mean? Paul has previously commanded Christians to love and honor each other. The command in this verse carries a slightly different idea. Harmonizing with others musically requires each one to adjust his or her own pitch, not to perfectly match each other but to be compatible and pleasant when put together.

Paul is not instructing Christians to all be exactly alike in every behavior and opinion. In chapter 14, he will discuss the fact that Christians will inevitably have matters of differing opinions. Rather, he is commanding believers to *adjust to* each other in a way that produces pleasantness and order. This requires a level of mutual submission: a willingness to make different choices that will allow us all to get along together.

To live in harmony requires humility from everyone involved. It's not surprising, then, that Paul's next instruction is that we not be haughty or arrogant and stuck up. He makes clear what he means with a follow-up command: associate with the lowly. In other words, don't think of yourselves as being too good to hang out socially with anyone else at all.

One of the reasons Christianity attracted so many followers in its early days was that women and slaves and people of low social standing were all welcome to come to faith in Christ. The result was that people who would never associate anywhere else in Roman culture found themselves in relationship with each other in the church. Paul commands those on the upper levels of society to leave any class rivalry out of the church.

His final command in this verse is that Christians must never be wise in our own sight. This is not the same as saying that we are never wise. The idea is that we should not accept our own opinion as the final word. We submit to the word of God, as well as to the input and ideas of others.

Romans 12:17

ESV

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

What does Romans 12:17 mean? Paul continues, in a list of commands, to describe what Christians should expect life in Christ to look like. Taken together, Romans 12 is a pretty thorough picture of what it means to follow Christ on this side of eternity.

Paul now comes to what is a difficult command for many people, including Christians. It is absolutely the example Jesus set for us, however. Paul declares that we must resist our natural human instinct for revenge and refuse to ever pay back evil when evil is done to us. This would be true whether the person who hurts us is a believer or not.

Instead, Paul tells us to be thoughtful when evil is done to us. He seems to suggest we see that moment as an opportunity to demonstrate that, in Christ, we are honorable people. We cannot, after all, display the love and forgiveness of Christ until we have the opportunity to forgive. When we do, we make a powerful statement that we are choosing to live in service to God instead of to ourselves.

The following verses will expand on this idea, including the claim that doing good for one's enemies is a far more powerful response than attempting petty revenge.

Romans 12:18

ESV

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

What does Romans 12:18 mean? How do Christians live together and in the larger world? How should they live as people offering their entire lives in sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1–2)? That's the question Paul has been answering in Romans 12. Now Paul follows the command of the previous verse, which was to always act honorably.

As believers, we should live peaceably with all people. This would include our siblings in Christ, as well as unbelievers. Another way to read this command might be, "Never let yourself be the reason for an un-peaceful relationship with another person."

This is not a statement of total pacifism or complete apathy, however. Paul gives two clear conditions: "If possible" and "so far as it depends on you." This command recognizes that conflict is sometimes unavoidable. Some people are just not interested in making peace with us. There is such a thing as an appropriate time and place to disagree, to dispute, or even to fight. Not every action that makes others happy is something good, or something God would want us to do.

What does it require to live this way? For one, of course, we must be willing to admit our wrongs, to apologize, to make things right, and to forgive. This is where the idea of "so far as it depends on you" comes into play. Our own ego, pride, desires, and prejudices should never get in the way of living peaceably with others. First and foremost, that means we ought not do "wrong" things to or towards other people.

Not all conflict is related to wrongdoing, however. Sometimes, it's simply a question of two sides who disagree about an issue with no absolute answer. In those cases, maintaining the peace may require us to be willing to yield, to be moved, on an issue we care about.

The Bible is clear, however, that on matters of bedrock conviction, we must take our stand with grace, mercy, and integrity (Hebrews 10:23). When making "peace" is possible only by compromising the truth, or the commands of God (Acts 5:28–29), then peace is simply not possible, and the choice no longer depends on us. That stance might result in our own suffering or persecution. Paul has shown that it always matters more that we represent Christ well than to come away with an outcome we find favorable (Philippians 4:11–13).

Romans 12:19

ESV

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

What does Romans 12:19 mean? Paul has just written that Christians must not repay evil for evil (Romans 12:17). Now he expands that idea to make it even more clear. Those who follow Christ are commanded to never avenge themselves, to never "get even." Whether the hurt comes from fellow believers or from unbelievers, revenge is simply not a legitimate option for us.

For a change, Paul gives us a reason for this command, and it's a bit surprising. After all the other instructions to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others, we might expect something similar. Instead, Paul writes that we should refuse to take revenge *because God is much better at it than we are*. In a sense, Paul implies that taking our own revenge may dilute God's opportunity to avenge us in His great anger against those who harm us.

Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35 to show that God has always declared His intention to take vengeance on those who wrong others. A desire for justice for ourselves and those we care about is not wrong. Paul simply wants us to trust God's timing and power to deliver justice as He sees fit.

How do we respond to this idea? On the one hand, we might be concerned that God will show mercy to those who harm us instead of giving them what they deserve. After all, He has shown great mercy to us. Isn't that what God does? The truth is that God executes justice for every sin, including ours. For those in Christ, God's anger was poured out on Jesus on the cross. Someone suffered

for those sins: Christ. He experienced what we deserved. Those who refuse to receive Jesus' death in their place for their sin will suffer the consequences for that sin themselves for eternity.

With that punishment in mind, perhaps we will hesitate to wish for God's vengeance on our persecutors. Perhaps not. In either case, God says to us, "Trust me to handle revenge and justice for all who harm you instead of seeking it yourself."

Romans 12:20

ESV

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

What does Romans 12:20 mean? Paul now adds to the difficulty of the previous verse. There he wrote that Christians must quit the work of seeking revenge against those who harm us. Why? As God's children, that's our Father's work, and He's better at it than we are. Instead of seeking petty revenge on our own terms, we should leave justice to the omnipotent God of the universe.

One reasonable way to interpret Paul's command would be as an instruction to avoid and ignore those who harm us. If we can't get even, at least we can stay away from them. However, Paul now reveals that this is not the path of those who follow Christ. Instead, we are called to active, positive, and generous engagement with those who harm us. Rather than simply ignoring our enemies, we ought to seek to do good for them and to them.

This is not meant to be taken as a command to stay in a situation in which someone is actively physically harming us. Retreating from violence or avoiding a physical abuser is not being discouraged here, at all. If we can take steps to avoid future injury, that is the right and wise thing to do. God is not commanding us to welcome any kind of abuse.

Even though we're not being commanded to "embrace" abuse, this is still a hard teaching. In quoting Solomon's words from Proverbs 25:21–22, Paul's description of how to respond to evildoers is galling, even infuriating, at first. At the same time, there is a certain ruthlessness about it, spiritually speaking. We are called to bring down fiery conviction on our enemies by being relentlessly kind in seeing and meeting their basic needs. As we do, two things happen. One, we reflect God's own mercy to us who were once His enemies (Romans

5:10). Second, we show both that we do not deserve to be treated poorly and that we are stronger than those who harm us.

The description of "heaping burning coals" is a reference to Proverbs 25:21–22. In Egypt, there had been a custom to carry a pan of burning coals on one's head as a sign of repentance. Kindness and forgiveness to those who abuse us, ideally, will make them ashamed of themselves, and hopefully bring them to repent. The strongest, most powerful response to persecution and hatred is to love your enemies.

Those who choose to do good to their enemies create the opportunity Paul describes in the following verse.

Romans 12:21

ESV

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

What does Romans 12:21 mean? Romans 12 is very much a description of what it means to lead the life of a living sacrifice to God. If we're honest with ourselves, it sounds very difficult. Most of Paul's bullet-point commands in the previous verses have to do with setting ourselves aside. It's tough for us to do this for the good of our fellow Christians, let alone for our enemies. Difficult or not, Paul is calling us to live as Jesus did.

Now Paul comes to the final command of the chapter. In essence, he commands us to be strong in our conviction to live in this way. We are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. Paul seems to have in mind the idea that we are overcome by evil when we join in and give it back, when we sink to evil's level. That just results in more sin, more pain, and an endless cycle of revenge and hatred.

In other words, evil wins when we live first for ourselves, our rights, and our own good, instead of the good of others.

If we are strong in Christ, however, we have a great opportunity to overcome evil by continuing to do Christlike good. Evil won't be annihilated from the world on this side of eternity. That ultimate victory over evil is scheduled for some day in the future, at the hands of God (Revelation 20:11–15). All the same, evil can be defeated any time Christians stand up and give back good to those who do wrong to them. Evil struggles to stand against courageous and sacrificial love.

Paul will continue this thought in the next verses as he transitions to the relationship between Christians and earthly government.

Matthew chapter 16

21From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22**And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." **23**But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

24Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. **26**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? **27**For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. **28**Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Matthew 16:21

ESV

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

What does Matthew 16:21 mean? With this verse, a shift begins in Jesus' life and ministry, a change that will baffle His followers. To this point, Jesus has kept mainly to the region of Galilee in northern Israel, in addition to travelling to some Gentile regions around Galilee. He has avoided spending much time in Jerusalem, the religious and political heart of Israel. In fact, when He did come into conflict with Jewish religious leaders, He often left the area to keep things from escalating (Matthew 15:21).

Now, though, Jesus begins to show the disciples that time has ended. Instead, shockingly, Jesus begins to tell them that He must go to Jerusalem. He says to them clearly that He will suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes. In fact, He will be killed and then raised on the third day.

We know from the rest of the story that Jesus' mission was to die as a perfect, sinless sacrifice for the sins of humanity (John 12:32–34). This verse reveals that Jesus knew it also. He understood what must happen to Him for salvation to come, and He would not resist it (John 12:23–28). In their limited knowledge, Peter and the other disciples would resist that idea.

Matthew 16:22

ESV

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

What does Matthew 16:22 mean? Peter's earlier statement (Matthew 16:16) showed He knew exactly who Jesus was: the Christ, the Son of the living God. However, Peter also proves that knowing who Jesus was is separate from knowing Jesus' mission and purpose on earth. As did many in Israel, Peter had specific expectations for what the Messiah was supposed to do. Most of those opinions focused on the restoration of Israel, leading many to see the Promised One as a warrior-king, similar to David. The idea that this figure would be killed by His enemies completely contradicted their traditions and assumptions.

Thanks to that misunderstanding, and not a small amount of pride, Peter attempts to correct His master. After all, Jesus had praised Peter enthusiastically for understanding who He was. He had even given Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). Peter seems to be assuring Jesus that His disciples are up to the challenge of defending and supporting Him. Peter tells Jesus boldly that "this will never happen to you." As happens for so many of us, even today, Peter's conviction that Jesus is the Son of God does not prevent Him from attempting to "correct" God's plans.

In addition, it's clear that Peter's response is not merely a defense of his own ability. The Greek root term used here is *epitimaō*, translated as "rebuke," which carries a sense of reprimand or sharpness. Rebuking someone is not necessarily to speak in anger, and sometimes it's entirely appropriate (1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13). Still, Peter is not merely correcting Jesus—he's *scolding* Him. That might partly explain the cutting response given by Jesus in the next verse (Matthew 16:23).

Matthew 16:23**ESV**

But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

What does Matthew 16:23 mean? Peter's approach to Jesus (Matthew 16:22) would have been inappropriate for any student-teacher relationship in that culture. Disciples simply did not talk to their masters in such a way, directly contradicting them. It should also be shocking that Peter felt comfortable correcting the one he had described as the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16). That Peter would go so far as to scold Jesus—the Greek term *epitimaō* implies rebuke and reprimand—speaks to how strongly he was reacting to Jesus' recent claims (Matthew 16:21).

It was utterly foreign to Peter and the other disciples to think Messiah would willingly allow Himself to be killed by the Jewish religious leaders. In their minds, this simply couldn't happen. Peter's knowledge of who Jesus *was* did not overcome his assumptions about what He would *do*. Even today, many people become discouraged or disillusioned with Christ when they discover He's not going to do things exactly as they'd prefer (John 6:65–66).

Jesus' response to Peter may be even more shocking. Matthew has just reported on the moment in which Jesus praised Peter enthusiastically and declared that Peter now possessed the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:17–19). Now Jesus turns to Peter and says, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Interpreters of this passage sometimes disagree about whether Jesus is literally speaking to Peter, calling him "Satan," or speaking *directly to* Satan for his role in confusing Peter. Either is possible since a theme of Satan's earlier temptations (Matthew 4:1–11) was to interfere with Jesus' mission as a sacrificial Messiah. One way or the other, this is a devastating response.

Jesus goes further, saying to Peter he is a hindrance and obstacle to Jesus. More than just not helping, Peter is actively getting in the way. Jesus is clear: This is happening because Peter's mind is on human things and not the things of God.

What are those human things Peter is focused on? Perhaps he is focused on himself and his ability to protect Jesus from harm. As Peter shows in his claim during the Last Supper (John 13:37), and his actions when Jesus is arrested (John 18:10–11), he seems overly confident in his own power. Certainly, Peter

and all the others are focused on Jesus' ability to overthrow the Romans and return Israel to power and prominence. They are also thinking about, on some level, what parts each of them will play when the Messiah establishes His powerful kingdom on earth (Matthew 18:1). They do not yet understand how essential it is for Jesus to suffer and die and be resurrected to complete His mission.

Matthew 16:24

ESV

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

What does Matthew 16:24 mean? Jesus has said that He must be killed by the Jewish religious leaders before being raised on the third day (Matthew 16:21). Now He introduces the idea of crucifixion, though He does not speak of His own. That's something Jesus will allude to, regarding Himself, later in His ministry (John 12:32–34) when He speaks of execution on a cross in relation to those who would follow Him.

The Roman empire used the horror of crucifixion as one way to keep conquered populations in line, executing criminals and rebels from the lower and slave classes by the thousands. Modern culture often forgets that crucifixion was about much, much more than physical pain. It was an act of violation, public humiliation, control, and torture. Victims were typically stripped naked and beaten. The condemned were forced to carry the crossbeam themselves to the waiting upright part of the cross from which they would be hung. Mockery and insults were flung at them along the way. The crucifixion process was carefully arranged to maximize suffering and draw out death, sometimes taking *days*. The dead were often left to rot in public view.

In short, references to crucifixion in the ancient world evoked feelings of humiliation, dishonor, misery, and shame. Every person hearing Jesus' words likely had a vivid picture of this in their minds. That would have made it jarring to hear Jesus use crucifixion in comparison to following Him.

Self-denial was a common enough idea in both Jewish and Greek teaching of the day. Jesus, though, pictured a self-denial that included willing participation in the death of self. In short, nobody who follows Jesus can hold on to even the smallest bit of their own agenda, their own dreams, their own way of living in the world. They must sacrifice every ounce of self if they would choose to walk after Him.

Matthew 16:25**ESV**

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

What does Matthew 16:25 mean? The idea that following Jesus shared anything with crucifixion—the tortuous, humiliating, violating death on a cross—would have shocked the disciples. Still, He has said anyone who would follow Him must deny himself and take up his cross (Matthew 16:24). Jesus had not yet revealed that He would die on a cross, though He will include that later in His teaching (John 12:32–34). Instead, He presented this as the most vivid of metaphors. Those who followed Him would have to willingly die to every bit of their own agenda, their own identity, their own approach.

Now Jesus becomes even more clear that He is describing the death of self: whoever would save his or her life will lose it. However, those who willingly lose their lives for His sake will find true life. In saying this, Jesus changed the stakes. Death to self is required to follow Him, yes, but it is also required to find the life that is truly life. In other words, Jesus says that following Him comes at the terrible cost of losing oneself, but the alternative is to permanently lose one's life.

Jesus will make clear in the following verses that this loss of life for those who do not take the hard path of following Him will come at the judgment by Jesus and His angels (Matthew 16:27).

Matthew 16:26**ESV**

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

What does Matthew 16:26 mean? You can keep your earthly interests, or you can save your soul. That is Jesus' bottom-line declaration in this passage (Matthew 16:24–25) and in this verse. In the form of two questions, Jesus leaves those who will hear Him with only two alternatives.

What is the ultimate benefit to someone who acquires everything the world could ever possibly offer, only to spend an eternity suffering in separation from God? What is a soul worth? What should a man give in return for the saving of his soul? This is the ultimate question.

Jesus has said that those who follow Him must willingly sacrifice themselves in every way. They must be willing to deny their own wants and preferences, taking up their crosses as He is doing, and will soon do in a very literal sense. In other words, they must give up every ounce of their own agenda, totally submitting to the will of God and His purposes. It will "cost" them everything, but what is given up is temporary and relatively worthless.

Those who refuse self-sacrifice can live for themselves. Jesus' question allows for the fact that they may be quite successful in the world's terms. Perhaps they will even gain the whole world for themselves. The problem is that such earthly success can only last until death comes and raises the question of the soul persisting, and entering into eternal death.

In the end, each person must choose between one of only two options (John 14:6). Lose everything I am in the world, to follow Jesus and be eternally saved, or keep everything I am in the world, to serve myself, and lose my own soul forever in the end. Those are the only choices Jesus offers in this passage, and the only two presented in all the Bible.

Matthew 16:27

ESV

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

What does Matthew 16:27 mean? Jesus has posed a stark choice: A person can either take up the cross of self-denial and follow Jesus or live selfishly for his or her own gain. In the form of two questions, Jesus has insisted that those who live for themselves may gain the whole world but still lose their souls (John 3:36; 14:6).

Now Jesus explains why. No matter what a person gains for themselves in earthly life, the judgment of God will still come in the end (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus declares that He, the Son of Man, will come with His angels in the glory of His Father. He is describing what is sometimes called in the Bible the "Day of the Lord."

When that day comes, Christ will repay each person according to what he or she has done. The clear implication is that those who have lived for themselves alone will be repaid with judgment. Those who have taken up the cross of self-denial to follow Jesus will receive a reward.

The difference between one result and the other is not sinless perfection (1 John 1:9–10). Eternal life and eternal death are only separated by the choice whether to follow Jesus and identify with Him in His death (John 3:16–18). This basic concept is central to what we often call the gospel, or the "good news." Those who trust Jesus in this way, refusing their own agenda and trusting in His work as the Messiah, in His death and resurrection as the way to salvation, will be rewarded.

Matthew 16:28

ESV

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

What does Matthew 16:28 mean? This section ends with a controversial comment from Jesus to His closest followers. He has affirmed His role as the Messiah (Matthew 16:16–17) and declared that He will come in glory to repay each person for their deeds (Matthew 16:27). Now He adds that some standing near to hear those words would not die before seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Many different explanations have been suggested about what Jesus meant by this prediction. Most scholars and commentators agree He was referring to the "transfiguration," literally the very next event mentioned by Matthew. Jesus will be transfigured from His fully human form into His glorious kingdom appearance as the Son of God. His face will shine like the sun, and His clothes will become white as light (Matthew 17:1–2). Peter, James, and John will be eyewitnesses to this event.

A smaller number of interpreters believe Jesus was implying that the disciples would not die before seeing Him resurrected, or seeing the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or seeing increasing numbers of people believe in Jesus following His resurrection and return to heaven.

An even smaller number of scholars connect this prediction of Jesus to the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70 or to the second coming of Christ.

The transfiguration seems to be the most natural fit for Jesus' prediction here, especially since it follows so quickly after this moment. Peter, James, and John are truly given a glimpse of Jesus in the full glory of His natural state in the kingdom of heaven—something extraordinarily rare among living people.