

## STUDY GUIDE

Monday, March 1- Friday, March 5

**Monday, March 1. Read Matthew 12:1-14.** Jesus' enemies tried to trip him up well before the final week in Jerusalem, of course. For instance, they were always eager to catch him ignoring their strict rules (literally volumes of them) about proper Sabbath rituals. Jesus, as always, cared more about people and their needs than about rules. Jesus doesn't just say the Pharisees' rules are mistaken. He claims his kingly authority— "the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath." Are there rules (from your childhood, from long habit) that are holding your spiritual life hostage? What would it mean for you to accept Jesus as Lord over those rules? Have you, like the religious leaders in this passage, ever looked to find fault with someone else out of fear or envy? What is it in us that sometimes make us feel stronger when all we've done is pull someone else down? What principles of Jesus' Kingdom can help you resist those urges?

**Tuesday, March 2- Read John 8:48- 59.** John says this took place when Jesus was in the Temple courts (John 8:20). Jesus boldly claimed kingly power even over death, in spite of his enemies' scorn for his claim. Then he added, stunningly, "Before Abraham was, I am." "I Am" was no less than the Old Testament name of God! (Exodus 3:13, 14) "Who do you think you are?" the religious leaders asked Jesus. C. S. Lewis wrote that anyone who made the claims Jesus made must either be dangerously insane, or else precisely who he claimed to be. Who do you believe Jesus is? What difference does your answer make in how you live your life? Jesus said he was not interested in getting glory or honor for himself. What light does that cast on the kind of Kingdom Jesus was establishing? In what ways, if any, does that challenge you to look more deeply at your motives for serving Jesus?

**Wednesday, March 3 – Read Matthew 19:3- 12.** In Jesus' day, rabbis had various views on divorce. One even said a man could divorce his wife for burning breakfast! Jesus disagreed, saying God's ideal is that marriages last. His foes then cited Moses' divorce laws (see Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus refused to use the Bible in that simple black-and-white way. Jesus' disciples have a fascinating reaction to this exchange (verse 10). Jesus does not rebuke them, either, but stresses the gravity of a marriage vow. What has your life experience taught you about marriage? What loving reasons does God have for wanting us to take marriage seriously? In these entrapment stories, Jesus' enemies are not searching for truth. For them, the subject is incidental—what matters is that it causes conflict. Have you ever known (or been) a person like that? How can you discern the difference between conflict for its own sake and a desire to learn and grow?

**Thursday, March 4 – Read Luke 20:20- 40.** You can almost hear Jesus' enemies saying, with malicious glee, "This will stump him." They asked about taxes—always a tough subject! Next they had a trick question meant to make belief in the resurrection seem absurd. Jesus calmly, deftly avoided the traps and turned the questions aside. Did paying taxes to Caesar mean betraying God? The question assumed it did; Jesus said no. Does Christian faithfulness ever call us to defy human laws (e.g. Nazi Germany, South African apartheid)? If so, how can we discern when to "pay taxes to Caesar" and when to refuse to obey evil laws? The second question was not about marriage (verse 27). It was about whether belief in life beyond death makes sense. How do you understand Jesus' answer? Did he rule out loving relationships in the life to come? Or did he simply say it's foolish to assume earthly conditions in that life?

**Friday, March 5. Matthew 21:23- 39.** What kind of king was Jesus? The religious leaders wanted to deny his authority. So Jesus asked them a question, one they found too tough to answer. His stories pointed to God as the final authority. He was God's son, sent to the vineyard. The leaders should have honored him, but were fighting God instead. Jesus' first story contrasts a son who talks a good game with a son who ends up actually doing what his father asked. In what areas, if any, are you aware of a need to grow toward greater authenticity in your spiritual life? Ask God for the courage to speak the truth in love, to yourself, others and God. 2000 years later, it's easy to look down on the religious leaders. Jesus told them that tax collectors and prostitutes (the people they most despised) were entering the Kingdom before them. But how do his words speak to you? How are you responding to, or resisting, Jesus' call on your life?