

The Story – Chapters 24 – *No Ordinary Man*

Introduction

Jesus has been baptized, tempted in the wilderness, and begun his ministry. He has selected his key followers and has already amazed and angered people with his healings and challenges to the religious elite. Jesus' radical teachings that comforted some and challenged others.

This week, we look at Chapter 24, No Ordinary Man.

If you'd like to go right to the source, you can read Matthew 3-4, 11; Mark 5-7, 14; Mark 4-6; Luke 10, 15; and John 6.

Summary of Chapters 24 – No Ordinary Man

One thing about this Jesus: He never invited neutrality. His followers called Him the Christ. His contenders called Him a blasphemer. Some were drawn to Him, while others could muster nothing in His presence but contempt. His teachings were revolutionary and His miracles undeniable. He claimed nothing less than equality with God and proclaimed Himself as the long expected Messiah. Jesus never left sitting on the proverbial fence as an option.

He attracted lots of criticism, but He also drew crowds. He often taught the people in parables, pithy stories that drew spiritual lessons from everyday life to reveal the "secrets" of God's kingdom. With simple illustrations, Jesus taught that in Him, God's kingdom had come, while exposing the religious leaders' misguided view of religion. Jesus' trilogy on "lostness" told of a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son and demonstrated a God who celebrates when what was lost is found.

Jesus' concern for sinners and those on the outside created an ever-widening rift with the religious leaders. His popularity increased and so did His opposition. Yet Jesus' teaching ministry to the masses continued, and in the Sermon on the Mount, He taught them what it means to live as his follower – someone in a close relationship with God, who lives out God's Kingdom.

Jesus was a great teacher, but even His closest disciples struggled to grasp His true identity and purpose. But He authenticated His words with miracles which gave everyone little glimpses of what God's kingdom looked like. His disciples were awestruck when Jesus calmed a raging storm at sea, and the people were confounded when he expelled demons from a possessed man into a herd of pigs.

Although Jesus wasn't looking or sounding like the Messiah the people expected, the desperate came to Him for healing, and were made whole. Jesus healed a woman with a bleeding disorder, while pausing to restore her dignity and commend her faith. He also established his authority over death, by raising back to life a synagogue leaders daughter who died. He healed two blind men, and the Pharisees exposed their own desperate lack of vision by crediting such miracles to the prince of demons.

News about Jesus spread through villages and cities, homes and institutions. Wherever Jesus went, people gathered around Him. After one especially long day, Jesus fed more than 5,000 with five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The miracle was meant for more than filling empty stomachs. He had come to fill empty lives; the real point was that He is the "bread" of eternal life. As a result of his teachings, the people were divided. Many turned away, but those who truly believed remained. In one of His finest moments, Peter announced, "*You have the words of eternal life...you are the Holy One of God.*"

Discussion Questions

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for Chapter 24 on page 484 of the book and also questions that can be found on *The Story* bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. In Chapter 24, we see Jesus teaching through parables. Sometimes a parable can be comforting and reassuring; sometimes it can be unsettling. Which of Jesus' parables in Chapter 24 did you find comforting? Which were unsettling or challenging? Why?
2. When you read the parable of the lost sons (p 337- 339), which character do you most identify with – the father, the younger son, or the older son? Why? Imagine yourself as one of the other characters. Does that change how you hear the story? If so, how?
3. The parable of the Good Samaritan (p. 339-340) is one of Jesus' most famous parables. Have you ever found yourself in a situation like the man beaten on the road? What happened? Have you ever had an opportunity to be a "Good Samaritan" to someone else? What did you do?
4. It is important to know that Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day were NOT on friendly terms. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, what does Jesus do by using a Samaritan to demonstrate the ideal neighbor? What type of people are hard for you to imagine God using to demonstrate his love?
5. As you read the Lord's Prayer (p341), what do you find most challenging? How does that language about forgiving which follows immediately after the prayer impact how you understand the prayer? What does the Lord's Prayer mean to you?
6. Jesus' miracles were not random; they showed his power over different forces in this world. What forces did he conquer? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to Jesus' care and victory?
7. In what ways did the crowds misunderstand Jesus' description of their need for eternal life (p. 349-351). How is Jesus' message different from most people's idea of salvation? What do you think Jesus means by "eternal life"?