

Chapter 25: The Gloves Come Off

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Matthew 11:6

Will you believe, despite your discomfort? Because it turned out most did not:

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

John 6:66

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

—C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

You have only two options: Believe, or not.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God metamorphose you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

Romans 12:2

All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed.

1 Corinthians 15:51

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

John 7:37-39

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

Isaiah 12:3

John 1:14

NIV: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

NT Expanded Translation: And the Word, entering a new mode of existence, became flesh, and lived in a tent [His physical body] among us. And we gazed with attentive and careful regard and spiritual perception at His glory, a glory such as that of a uniquely begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

International Standard Version: The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We gazed on his glory, the kind of glory that belongs to the Father's unique Son, full of grace and truth.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:26

Is there anyone who can remember this house—the Temple—as it was before? In comparison, how does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all! But now take courage, Zerubbabel, says the LORD. Take courage, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Take courage, all you people still left in the land, says the LORD. Take courage and work, for I am with you, says the LORD Almighty. The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD Almighty.

Haggai 2:3-4, 9

Today's Equipping Point

Cleanse and restore _____

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

Revelation 21:1-5, 22-23

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had a moment of truth where you had to stand up and be counted?
2. How can the message be so simple: “Believe in Me and you’ll have life.”
3. Which part of the symbolism of chapter 25 struck you the most?

Teaching Script

Before we begin Chapter 25 of *The Story*, we need to briefly go back and refresh our memory from the end of Chapter 24.

You'll remember last week we talked about not the predicted Messiah who would return Israel to world prominence, but an unexpected, avant-garde, offbeat Messiah who confounded predictions and brought a message of a spiritual kingdom rather than an earthly one. And you'll remember at the end of the lesson, we came to the "fork in the road," a "put up or shut up", a "do or die" moment: You've heard about this different kingdom, you've seen God's power—now the next move is yours:

Believe or not.

And Jesus said:

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Matthew 11:6

Blessed is he who can turn his preconceptions upside-down and not stumble because the Messiah that came is radically different than the one forecasted. Blessed is he who gets it. **Will you believe, despite your discomfort? Because it turned out most did not.** At the moment of truth in John's gospel, the Bible says:

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

John 6:66

Now we come to Chapter 25, and, as they say, the gloves come off. The initial winnowing is done. Those who were following just because they got fed have wandered back home. The curiosity seekers have stopped asking for autographs.

Chapter 25 is where the rubber meets the road because those who didn't turn back now have to grapple with the greatest assertion of all: that the man they see in front of them is, in fact, the Son of God. No more speaking in riddles. All bets are off—believe it, don't believe it, but you can't just ignore it.

Here's how C.S. Lewis put the dilemma that faced not just these first century followers, but every single one of us:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

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Deciding not to decide is not an option. If you're a movie buff, this is the point in the movie when the camera zooms in on the hero's face, and his true character comes out—the moment of truth.

You've seen lots of movies where the tide turns. This is the moment in the third Rocky movie where he's getting beat up, and he uses his teeth to untie and pull off his gloves so he can get serious with Hulk Hogan. This is the climax of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* where Jimmy Stewart defies all odds and continues his filibuster until he literally collapses and hearts are finally changed. This is the moment when Popeye says, "I've had all I can stand, and I can't stand no more," while he downs his spinach. This is the scene in the movie "Gladiator" where Joaquin Phoenix, the emperor, says to Russell Crowe, the Gladiator:

Why doesn't the hero reveal himself and tell your real name? You do have a name?

My name is Gladiator.

"How dare you show your back to me?" the Emperor says. "Slave! You will remove your helmet and tell me your name."

And Russell Crowe turns around, removes his helmet, glares at the emperor, and says, "My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius...commander of the armies of the north...general of the Legions...loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius...father to a murdered son...husband to a murdered wife...**and I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.**"

Chapter 25 is that moment for Jesus. His identity is revealed beyond a shadow of a doubt. Earlier he would warn those he healed to say nothing, to go show yourself to the priests, as prescribed by law. Now, everything is out in the open. It's crunch time. There can be no more wishy-washy responses, no halfway professions of faith. As we said last week, the ball is now in the people's court:

You have only two options: Believe, or not.

We could do film clips all day on this chapter. This is the scene in the third Indiana Jones movie where the bad guy shoots Indy's father, Sean Connery, and says, "It's time you asked yourself what you really believe."

I want you to listen to the wrestling in this chapter as people tangle with the identity of this Jesus. People agonized over what to think. Listen to their comments:

- "Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him." Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."
- "How did this man get such learning without being taught?"
- "Isn't this the man they're trying to kill?"
- "Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah?"
- "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"
- Some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?"

- Thus the people were divided over Jesus.
- “Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

To paraphrase *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, “Who is this guy?”

They are now at the point of decision—conclusions had to be reached—a response was required. And the required response was simple: just believe. Listen to the number of times in Chapter 25 where Jesus spells it out in no uncertain terms:

- “Whoever believes in Me, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”
- “Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness.”
- “If you do not believe that I am He, you will indeed die in your sins.”
- “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.”
- “Anyone who believes in Me will live even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”
- “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”
- “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”
- “I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent Me.”
- “Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in Him.”
- “Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”
- “Those who believe in Me do not believe in Me only, but in the One who sent me.”
- “No one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.”

It started with the Twelve: *Who do you say that I am?* “You are the Messiah,” Peter answered. And then, for the first of three times, Jesus told them what that meant: He would be killed and rise again. No one will be spared the details. And when Peter took Him aside and said He’d gone a little too far with this Messiah complex, Jesus rebuked the words of Satan that were coming out of Peter. “Wrong! It is for this that I have come!”

But then two interesting things happened. The first was that Jesus took the opportunity to give a discipleship lesson. He said, in essence, the same thing will be required of you. “Whoever wants to be My disciple must take up their cross, die to themselves, and follow Me. Whoever loses their life for Me will save it.” You may think I’m a deranged martyr, willing to throw My life away, but in fact, a very real kind of death awaits you if you are My disciple.

The very next thing that happened was the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John got to see Him up close in all his glory. The Greek word for transfigured is metamorphosis: a complete change in form, structure, and substance—a transformation.

And so Jesus used the first prediction of His death as a teaching point for two things: a death to yourselves awaits you as well, but a glorification you can't imagine into a body you can't imagine also awaits you.

Paul echoed this throughout his letters:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God metamorphose you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

Romans 12:2

All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed.

1 Corinthians 15:51

Jesus is saying for those who stick around, for those willing to follow, what awaits you is beyond your comprehension.

There were a total of three times in Chapter 25 that Jesus tells His followers that He must be taken to Jerusalem and killed. It's interesting: three predictions of death, three denials by Peter, three days in the tomb, and three questions to restore Peter after the resurrection.

And even though it's not recorded in *The Story*, after each of those other two prophecies about His death, Jesus stops and has a teaching moment similar to the first time. After the first prediction, He says you too must die if you are to live. After the second prediction, the disciples were arguing among themselves who would be greatest in the kingdom, and Jesus picked up a child and put him in the circle and said, "Gentlemen, there is greatness. Become like that."

And after the third prediction, the same thing: James and John just wanted to sit on His right hand and on His left, in positions of power and influence. And Jesus once again taught on humility: "*Whoever desires to be first must be servant of all.*"

The message is the same: it's all about humility.

No more pulling punches: what's coming requires submission, not a sword; not prominence but persecution; and if you're on board, the watchwords are denial of self, death to sin, and humility and servitude. There it is: no more soft shoe.

Jesus speaks hard truths in Chapter 25, but what is just as important, is the backdrop in which He says it. In the life of Jesus, nothing is wasted, and almost every event has a deep symbolic meaning far beneath the telling of the story.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, it's the beginning of the Festival of Tabernacles, or Festival of Booths. You may not have heard much about it, but it was one of the three great festivals the Jews observed every year. It was an annual celebration to commemorate God's deliverance, protection, and provision for Israel while they were wandering in the wilderness after they listened to the 10 intimidated spies instead of Joshua and Caleb. For 40 years they wandered, and both the presence of God and the habitat of his people were tabernacles, or huts, temporary dwellings. This is how He sustained them during this time. So during the feast, there were also great ceremonies around the drawing of water, and the lighting of lamps, because in the desert, God constantly provided the most basic needs of His people: water and light.

Now each year at this festival, people made tabernacles or booths with branches and palms, and lived in them for a week as they remembered God's care for their ancestors. This is really important to understand, because halfway through this festival was when Jesus began to teach in the temple courts. And then, on the last and greatest day, He said in a loud voice,

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

John 7:37-39

Jesus times this perfectly. Because in the Feast of Tabernacles, a golden container filled with water from the pool of Siloam was carried in a procession by the High Priest to the temple. As he arrived, three trumpet blasts were sounded and the people recited Isaiah 12.3:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

The water symbolized the blessing of adequate rainfall in the desert for their survival. And at this precise moment, Jesus stands and says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."

This great invitation by Jesus is saying that HE is the fulfillment of all the Feast of Tabernacles anticipated. HE is the living water. And right here, we need to push the pause button and go back to the first chapter of John's gospel. Listen to verse 14 in three translations:

John 1:14

NIV: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

NT Expanded Translation: *And the Word, entering a new mode of existence, became flesh, and lived in a tent [His physical body] among us. And we gazed with attentive and careful regard and spiritual perception at His glory, a glory such as that of a uniquely begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

International Standard Version: *The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We gazed on his glory, the kind of glory that belongs to the Father's unique Son, full of grace and truth.*

At the culmination of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is the Person of God building His tabernacle among men. Jesus has pitched His tent with us—He has become one of us.

And not only that, He is the giver of living water, so that anyone who believes in Him need not ceremonially draw water, but will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart. Do you see the remarkable symbolism? But there's more...

We discover He is also the sender of the Holy Spirit, who would be God's permanent Tabernacle within all believers, convicting them of sin and leading them into all truth. No more booths, no more palms and branches, because the dwelling of God is now with men.

And as if all this weren't enough, one more significant sign: in the top of page 357 of *The Story*, it says,

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

No more lamp-lighting ceremonies either, because the Light of the World has come.

The waiting was over. In the last chapter, He said *I AM the bread of life*. And now, in Chapter 25, *I AM the light of the world*; and *I AM the resurrection and the life*.

Then, "*Before Abraham was, I AM.*" In today's terms, He was now completely "outed." This is how God referred to Himself to Moses. And that was the straw that broke the camel's back. There would be no turning back now. The Pharisees began to formulate a plot to kill Jesus, and everything was set in motion.

And sure enough, in His encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus demanded exactly what He said He would: everything. Come and die to what you have been...and sadly the man left. Who then can be saved, asked His disciples? The reply is the key verse of the chapter:

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:26

Salvation is completely a God-thing.

Then Jesus resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem and allowed the crowds, who would later turn on Him, to honor Him at the Triumphal Entry. But because everything was fair game now, after the procession, He went straight to the temple courts and drove out the moneychangers and extortionists to make room for the prayer warriors, the blind, the lame, and the children. This was His house, and sure enough, the prophecy from back in Chapter 19 came true. You remember when Zerubbabel led the first 50,000 Jews back from Persia to rebuild the temple, they were upset that it would never come close to the glory of Solomon's temple.

Remember what Haggai said?

"Is there anyone who can remember this house—the Temple—as it was before? In comparison, how does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all! But now take courage, Zerubbabel," says the LORD. "Take courage, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Take courage, all you people still left in the land, says

the LORD. Take courage and work, for I am with you,” says the LORD Almighty. “The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory,” says the LORD Almighty.

Haggai 2:3-4, 9

The prophecy came true: this temple far outshone Solomon's, because Jesus Himself, the source of living water, the light of the world, He who made a tabernacle with men...He Himself cleansed this temple and restored it, in the last week of His life, to a house of worship.

And it's from this prophecy that we get our Equipping Point for today:

Cleanse and restore your temple.

If we are to lead our families to a closer relationship with God, the Holy Spirit must be unobstructed in His work through us. And the only way to do that is to allow our temple to be cleansed through confession of our weaknesses, and redeemed by the Holy Spirit who not only brings that conviction, but then comes along side, as *Paraclete* (John 16) to walk with us, teach us, and restore His dwelling place.

What a week in the life of Jesus: a week of revelation, high symbolism, and fulfillment of prophecy.

But there's just one more thing we can't miss about this chapter. This is not the end of this discussion about the tabernacle, or water, or light. It's only the first fulfillment—there will be a second. Jesus shows Himself to be the embodiment of moving into the neighborhood, of God making His home with men, and the capstone of the Feast of Tabernacles. But even this is not the end of the story—even this last week of Jesus' life points to something more, something greater: it points to the end of time, when the tabernacle made within us by the Holy Spirit is superseded in the New Jerusalem:

Read with me from Revelation 21:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

And then John said:

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

Revelation 21:1-5, 22-23

Chapter 25 is stunning in its unflinching portrayal of Jesus as completely human and completely divine—the one true Son of God. He was present as the tabernacles were first built on the plains of the Middle East; He fulfilled every facet of the Feast of Tabernacles the week of His death, and later He would send the Holy Spirit into each believer. The tabernacle was now within.

But in the *New* Jerusalem, there will be no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, and God Himself will hand out the Kleenex just once...to wipe away every tear, as the former things pass away, and the Lamb illuminates our resurrected bodies forever. This is the great promise of chapter 25 of the Story—the promise of Christ Himself—the promise to all who believe.