Session 3

Prince/Pauper

Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 8:18-22; Zechariah 9:9-10

Memory Verse

Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

– Matthew 8:20, CSB

Prince/Pauper

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus is the Prince of Peace who modeled a life of humility for us to follow.

CALL TO ACTION: We are called to live humbly to point others to Christ.

In 1881, the great American novelist Mark Twain wrote *The Prince and the Pauper*.[1]

The story features two boys: street urchin Tom Canty, whose father was a beggar and thief, and Edward Tudor, Henry VIII's long-awaited son.

Tom, who lives a hard life with his brutal father in one of the poorest neighborhoods in London, receives instruction in morality, reading, and Latin from the kindhearted Father Andrew. Father Andrew tells Tom stories of the nobility, and Tom, fascinated, dreams about what life among the nobles would be like.

One day, Tom's wanderings lead him to Westminster, where he meets Edward, who looks remarkably like him. Edward invites Tom to the palace, and, each fascinated by the other's life, the boys decide to swap clothes. When a guard spots Edward in the clothes of a pauper, the guard kicks him out of the palace, and thus the boys get to switch lives for a time.

Literally in each other's shoes, both boys go on wild adventures, with Tom forced to navigate court life and Edward forced to see how the other half lives in the most unpleasant of ways.

The book draws to a close when, at a ceremony where Tom is set to be crowned, the real prince arrives. Edward cleverly proves he's really the prince by revealing a detail only he would know, and the boys swap back. Now, however, Edward's experience as a pauper has opened his eyes to the cruel injustices being done in his kingdom, and he is a more merciful ruler because of what he has learned. Tom is made the "King's Ward" and is cared for in a way he has never experienced.

In Twain's story, the pauper and the king are two separate people, living two separate and very different lives. Nobility and poverty are not typically combined in a single person's life experience. But they were in the earthly life of the King of kings.

In our Advent series, we're studying the truths about Jesus that might seem contradictory by human standards. In His earthly life and ministry, Jesus was both fully God and fully human. He was the King of kings and a servant. Today, we're going to consider Jesus as a prince who lived as a pauper.[2]

When you think of Jesus as a prince, what comes to mind for you?

When you think of Jesus as living as a pauper, what comes to mind?

Session Summary

Earthly kings enjoy lives of privilege, including wealth and status that few of us can comprehend. Jesus has more power and authority than any earthly king ever has or ever will, and yet He lived on earth in simple humility.

Isaiah called the coming Messiah the "Prince of Peace." Jesus brings peace that is greater and more meaningful than anything we can understand or experience apart from Him. And He is worthy of all our worship as our Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

At the same time, Jesus modeled a life of simplicity. Unlike the kings and rulers of earth, Jesus had no place to lay His head. His lifestyle more closely resembled that of a pauper than a prince. As disciples of Jesus, we are meant to emulate this lifestyle of humility.

1. Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7)

How is the Messiah portrayed as a prince in this passage?

What do we learn about Jesus and His character from this passage?

Isaiah 9:6 may feel very familiar as a verse often read at Christmastime. This beautiful verse is a messianic prophecy that fits well with the celebration of Jesus's birth.

Just before this passage in chapter 9, Isaiah wrote of the promise of victory:

> *For you will break the yoke of their slavery*
> *and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.*
> *You will break the oppressor's rod,*
> *just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.*
> —Isaiah 9:4 (NLT)

How would this be accomplished? A child would be born. The Messiah would come! Notice the specific language used in verse 6: The child would be born "for us." He would be "given to us." This child, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is a gift given to us. And verse 6 acknowledges Him with several meaningful titles:

Wonderful Counselor. Christ is extraordinarily wise, and He demonstrated that wisdom in His actions and His teachings (Matthew 7:28-29).

Mighty God. Though He came in the form of a man, Jesus is also fully God, one with the Father and the Spirit in deity (John 1:1).

Eternal Father. Jesus is eternal, existing before the creation of the world. It is by Him that all things have been made (Colossians 1:15-17).

Prince of Peace. Christ brings peace. He humbly embodied peacefulness during His earthly ministry, and His church is meant to be a place of unity (John 14:27).

The biblical concept of peace is rich. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom, and it means more than just the absence of conflict. Shalom heals. Shalom restores. Shalom takes broken things and makes them whole. This is the type of peace that Jesus brings.

Which of these descriptions of Christ do you feel most in need of now? Why?

The Messiah, the Christ, is mighty, wonderful, and eternal, and He brings true peace. His prosperous reign over His kingdom will never end and will be marked with justice and righteousness. It will last forever. And yet this mighty King of kings would also be humble beyond all human comprehension.

2. No Place to Rest (Matthew 8:18-22)

What point was Jesus making to the scribe in these verses?

How does this remain relevant for our lives today?

The heading in the CSB here is "The Cost of Following Jesus." Following Jesus has a cost for all of us, but it is worth whatever sacrifice it requires.

The scribe (some translations, like the NIV, refer to him as a "teacher of the law") who approached Jesus here had a human view of the relationship he might have with Jesus. In Jesus's day, a potential disciple would find a rabbi who was popular or well equipped and then follow him to learn.[3]

But Jesus gave the scribe an unexpected response. Some scholars interpret His words to mean that He lived a simple life of poverty.[4] He got His daily bread from His Father. He gave up a secure home in heaven to suffer and be humiliated in His earthly ministry. This was all so we could be saved.

Others interpret this as Jesus communicating to the scribe that following Him wouldn't result in any sort of professional gain or benefit. Jesus was a rabbi, but He wasn't operating in the traditional way. He turned tradition on its head. Following Jesus doesn't translate into earthly gain as it might another leader. The title "Son of Man" (v. 20) furthers this point. This is a title of humility, fitting for Jesus the Suffering Servant.[5]

Many modern readers struggle with the end of this passage. It seems harsh that Jesus wouldn't let the man bury his father before coming to follow Him.

A little more context helps us see this passage in a different light. In ancient Jewish culture, the mourning and burial process would have taken over a year, and the oldest son would have had certain responsibilities. Many Jews in Jesus's day saw the commandment to honor your father and mother as supreme, considering the responsibility of giving their parents an honorable burial as the most important aspect of this charge.[6]

Here, Jesus made the point that following Him should be a disciple's highest priority. Over and beyond any earthly obligations, allegiances, or comforts, Jesus comes first.

What earthly duties are hard for you to give up in order to follow Jesus?

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3. He Will Proclaim Peace (Zechariah 9:9-10)

How is the description of the Messiah here reflective of a prince?

How is He simultaneously reflecting the status of a pauper?

Verse 9 calls to mind Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Gospel writers recognized Jesus as fulfilling this prophetic word from Zechariah (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15).

In keeping with our theme today, this passage from Zechariah paints a contradictory picture of royalty by human standards.

A king was coming (perhaps this passage would have called King David to the minds of the Jewish people). The coming King would be righteous and victorious, but also humble. This victorious King wouldn't ride in on a horse, chariot, or even a mule (2 Samuel 13:29). No, this King would arrive humbly, on a lowly donkey with no fanfare.

And when this victorious King arrived, He would dispose of the military equipment used to wage war. The Lord would cut off the chariot and the horse and remove the bow of war. In its place, He would bring peace. His rule would "extend from sea to sea" and "to the ends of the earth." And He would "proclaim peace to the nations" (v. 10).

Still, the people in Jesus's day expected the Messiah to be a military conqueror. That's what they believed they needed! Oppressed by the Roman Empire, they believed a military conqueror would bring them freedom and peace.



How have you held incorrect expectations of Jesus? How does the truth about Him change those expectations?

Jesus, the King of kings and Prince of Peace, came to bring different (and far greater) freedom and peace than the people expected. He brought freedom from the bondage of sin and peace that comes only by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:7). These are available to all who believe in and follow Him.

> *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."*
> —John 16:33

Conclusion

Jesus was unexpected in every way.

He is the King of kings and the Prince of Peace. But His rule isn't oppressive or excessive like the rule we might associate with kings throughout the pages of human history.

He brings shalom—not just the absence of conflict but the healing of all that is broken (even if not in ways we might immediately imagine).

His earthly ministry was marked with humility. He humbly obeyed the Father, and He lived simply. He had more authority and power than any other king, but no earthly trappings or pride in His ministry. He is worthy of our worship, and He is the example to emulate as we walk through life as His disciples.

What does our study of Jesus as prince and pauper teach us about Him?

What are some ways you have experienced the shalom that Jesus brings?

How might living humbly with others give us further opportunities for gospel conversations?

Memorize

Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."
- Matthew 8:20, CSB

References

[1]Britannica Editors, "The Prince and the Pauper," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed October 14, 2026, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Prince-and-the-Pauper.

[2]"Book Summary," in *The Prince and the Pauper*, CliffsNotes, accessed October 14, 2026, https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/p/the-prince-and-the-pauper/book-summary.

[3]Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 749.

[4]Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Son of Man," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1983–1984.

[5]Beetham and Erickson, NIV Application Commentary, 749.

[6]*CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).