

Studies in Matthew



Santa Barbara Community Church

Fall/Winter Calendar

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Topic
9/28	Intro.	Mt. 1-28	Introduction to Matthew
10/5	1	1:1-17	Roots
10/12	2	1:18-25	Birth
10/19	3	2:1-23	Response
10/26	4	3:1-17	The Defining Moment
11/2	5	4:1-25	From Solitude to Syria
11/9	6	5:1-16	Blessing
11/16	7	5:17-48	Every Jot and Tittle
11/23	8	6:1-34	Devotion and Desire
11/30	Thanksgiving: No Matthew Study		
12/7	9	7:1-29	Redeemed Relationships
12/14	10	8:1—9:8	Six Miracles of Authority (Part 1)
12/21			Christmas Sunday
12/28	Break from Matthew		
1/4			Prayer and the Glory of God
1/11			Remembering the Unborn
1/18			Racial Reconciliation
1/25			11
2/1	12	9:9-34	New Wineskins
2/8	13	9:35—10:42	Mission
2/15	14	11:1-19	The Greatest and the Least
2/22	15	11:20-30	The Condemned and the Accepted
2/29	16	12:1-21	The Turning Point
3/7	17	12:22-50	Blasphemy!
3/14	18	13:1-23	From Synagogue to Seashore
3/21	19	13:24-43	The Quiet Kingdom: Weeds, Seeds and Yeast
3/28	20	13:44-58	The Joy and Judgment of the Kingdom

The artwork for this study was provided by Ron Davis (even numbered studies) and Micah McWilliams (the cover and the odd numbered studies), The text was written by Reed Jolley. Thanks to those who proof-read. May God bless us as we study his Word!

The Pattern of Matthew's Gospel*

Part 1: In and Around Galilee (1:1—13:58)

Part 2: To Jerusalem (14:1 — 28:20)

A. Beginnings (1:1—7:29)	B. Discipleship (8:1—11:1)	C. Accepting or Rejecting Jesus (11:2—13:58)	D. Foreshadowing the Future (14:1—19:1)	E. Judgment —By Jesus, Of Jesus and the Final Judgment (19:2—26:2)	F. The End —And the Beginning (26:3—28:20)
<p>1. Jesus' family tree (1:1-17)</p> <p>2. Birth and childhood (1:18-2:23)</p> <p>3. The beginning of Jesus' work (3:1-4:25)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Basic teaching for disciples (5:1-7:27)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority. . . .</i> 7:28-29</p>	<p>1. The disciples see Jesus' power to heal (8:1-17)</p> <p>2. Jesus discourages some, but leads the disciples on. They see his power over nature, demonic forces and sin, and his disregard of convention (his call of Matthew) (8:18-9:13)</p> <p>3. Those who see, and those who don't (9:14-34)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Instructions to disciples as they are sent out to do the work of Jesus (9:35-10:42)</p> <p><i>After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach.</i> 11:1</p>	<p>1. Grounds for accepting (11:2-30)</p> <p>2. The Pharisees reject Jesus (12:1-14)</p> <p>3. Acceptable to the Father a. Healings – leading to quotation from Isaiah b. Jesus accused of working in power of Beelzebub c. Jesus refuses to give sign d. <i>Whoever does the will of my Father. . . is my brother.</i> (12:15-50)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Parables about the kingdom (13:1-52)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on. . . to his hometown. . . "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."</i> 13:53-54; 57</p>	<p>Introduction: the death of John the Baptist</p> <p>1. The future for Israel a. Feeding 5,000 b. Jesus and Peter (who will be leader of new Israel, the church) walk on water c. Healings d. True worship (14:13-15:20)</p> <p>2. The future for the world a. Healing a Gentile girl b. Feeding 4,000 c. Interpreting signs of the times d. Peter's declaration about Jesus (15:21-16:20)</p> <p>3. The more immediate future—Jesus must go to Jerusalem and suffer (16:21-17:27)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: The kind of behavior expected of those entering (on earth) the kingdom Jesus is about to set up (18:1-35)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.</i> 19:1</p>	<p>1. Reversal of human values a. On divorce b. On children brought to Jesus c. on the rich young man d. Parable of labourers in the vineyard "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (19:3-20:16)</p> <p>2. <i>Many are invited, but few are chosen.</i> (20:17-23:39)</p> <p>3. The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus into condemning himself (22:15-39)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Predictions and parables about the time of the final judgment (24:1-25:46)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."</i> 26:1-2</p>	<p>1. Events leading to the arrest of Jesus (26:3-56)</p> <p>2. The trial of Jesus (26:57-27:26)</p> <p>3. The crucifixion (27:27-66)</p> <p>4. The resurrection (28:1-20)</p> <p><i>"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."</i> 20:19-20</p>

* This chart is found in Michael Green's commentary on Matthew, pp. 32-33. He borrowed and adapted it from *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, by Elizabeth and Ian Billingham.

SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

Barclay	William Barclay, <i>The Gospel of Matthew</i> , Volume 1. Westminster Press, 1975.
Boice	James Montgomery Boice, <i>The Gospel of Matthew</i> Vol. 1. Baker, 2001.
Brunner	Frederick Dale Bruner, <i>Matthew</i> , 2 volumes. Baker, 1987.
Carson	D. A. Carson, <i>Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , Volume 8. Zondervan, 1984.
Green	Michael Green, <i>The Message of Matthew</i> . IVP, 2000.
Gundry	Robert Gundry, <i>Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art</i> . Eerdmans, 1982.
Hendrickson	William Hendrickson, <i>Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew</i> . Baker, 1973.
KJV	King James Bible
Morris	Leon Morris, <i>The Gospel According to Matthew</i> . Eerdmans, 1992.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Ryle	J. C. Ryle, <i>Expository Thoughts on Matthew</i> . Banner of Truth Trust, 1856, 1986.
Stott	John Stott, <i>Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount</i> . IVP, 1978.
Tasker	R. V. G. Tasker, <i>The Gospel According to St. Matthew</i> . Eerdmans, 1961.

All Scripture passages are taken from the *New International Version* unless otherwise noted.

The Most Important Book in the World

Ernest Renan, a French New Testament scholar of the nineteenth century, called Matthew *the most important book in the world!* E. J. Goodspeed called this Gospel *the most successful book ever written*. William Hendrickson, a more recent commentator, says *The book is simply irresistible*. (Hendrickson, p. 79)

Why is the book of Matthew so appealing? What is it in the author's 1,068 verses that has captured readers for the past two millennia? Surely it is not the clarity of Matthew's outline. Scholars have come to no agreement as to the plan Matthew had in his writing. Some even argue Matthew had no outline at all (Gundry, p. 10). Nor can it be Matthew's originality. It would appear, in fact, that Matthew borrowed heavily from the gospel of Mark. Six hundred six of the 661 verses in Mark's gospel appear in Matthew (Hendrickson, p. 6).

Matthew is *irresistible* because of the author's portrait of Jesus. Matthew presents the regal Jesus. The King has come at last to save his people from their sins (1:21). The name *Jesus* literally means, *Yahweh saves* or *Yahweh is salvation*.¹ The implication of the name is clear: God will save his people through this messiah. The name *Jesus* will occur approximately 150 times in Matthew's narrative.² Each of these occurrences serves as a subtle reminder to the reader that this is the one Israel has been waiting for (Isaiah 25:9), the Messiah has come!

The Jewish Gospel

Thumb through the pages of Matthew and you will notice numerous Old Testament quotations and allusions. In fact, Matthew quotes the Bible of the Jews no fewer than 40 times. Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Not only does Jesus fulfill prophecy, he is the prophet. Matthew appears to have some fun presenting Jesus as the *greater* Moses. Moses delivered the people from Egypt. Jesus will deliver them from their sins. Moses wrote five books (Genesis-Deuteronomy), Jesus gives five sermons in Matthew's Gospel. Moses gave the law, Jesus gives the new, more exacting law (chapters 5-7).³

In Matthew, when we meet Jesus we meet the *Son of David*, that is, the successor of Israel's greatest king. Matthew's emphasis cannot be missed. In Mark, for example, we find the title *Son of David* only once (Mark 10:47-48)

¹ *Yahweh* is the Old Testament covenant name for God.

² This number is from the Greek text. It is approximate because of textual variants. In the NIV the name Jesus occurs 210 times in Matthew.

³ For example, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (5:21-22) Jesus agrees with, and then intensifies the law of Moses.

coming from the lips of blind Bartimaeus. But in Matthew Jesus' Davidic lineage comes up again and again. The genealogy of chapter one emphasizes David. The blind recognize Jesus as the *Son of David* on two occasions (9:17; 20:30), as does the woman of Canaan (15:22) and the crowds in Jerusalem (21:9). Even children recognize him as the successor of David as do the crowds who witness an exorcism (21:15; 12:23).

But there is a surprise for Jewish readers. Yes, Jesus has come to *save his people from their sins*, but in a way that the Jews did not anticipate. Instead of coming as the conquering king, Jesus comes as the suffering servant (8:20; 20:28). Instead of playing to the crowds, Jesus slips away to be alone, or to be with the disciples (5:1-2; 14:13). At the apex of his popularity Jesus announces that his real mission is to suffer and die (16:21ff.). The death of Jesus is no ordinary martyr's death. When the Messiah dies, the earth shakes, the rocks are split and many of the dead from Jerusalem cemeteries rise (27:51).¹ The kingdom has come! Messiah has conquered the power of death! The people have been set free from their sins!

The Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew certainly uses his pen with the purpose of evangelizing Jewish readers who have yet to recognize Jesus as Messiah, but he has a larger audience in mind. In Matthew, and in Matthew alone, Jesus speaks of *the kingdom of heaven*.² He wants to show the breadth of Jesus' saving activity.

It is *too small of a thing* for Jesus to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel God that has kept (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus is a light for the Gentiles. Through him the nations will be redeemed.

In the beginning Jesus comes to save *his* people from their sins (1:21). But because of obstinate unbelief, Jesus focus shifts to the nations.

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” (21:43-44)³

In the end, it is the *nations* (the Gentiles) which are to be baptized and taught to obey Christ (18:19).

¹ Matthew expects his readers to know that, in the Jewish milieu in which this Gospel was produced, the resuscitation of martyrs was expected to be a sign that the longed-for messianic age had begun (2 Maccabees 7; see also Dan 12:2; Ezek 37:12-14; Zech 14:4-5). (Powell, p. 11)

² As opposed to *the kingdom of God* in Mark and Luke. What does this phrase mean? Powell writes, *The phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” refer to the reality of God’s rule or God’s reign, the sphere of influence within which God’s will is accomplished.* (Powell, p. 8)

³ See also 8:11-12.

Thus Matthew's focus shifts from Israel to the church (16:18; 18:17).¹ *In the first gospel, then, we have Jewish Christianity breaking out into the wide world of the Gentiles.* (Gundry, p. 9) The church is all-inclusive. It consists of the poor, the outcasts, the persecuted, the young, and of those with physical disabilities. The church is what Jesus came to build (16:18), and nothing will thwart his plans.

All in all, Matthew writes his gospel to keep persecution of the church from stymieing evangelism. He reminds true disciples of their duty to obey Christ's law and make it known despite persecution. (Gundry, p. 9)

The Gospel of Jesus

Matthew is a book about Jesus. All 28 chapters focus on him and him alone. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, raised as a carpenter's son in working-class Nazareth. He moves to Capernaum and begins preaching, teaching and performing miracles. After gaining significant notoriety he deliberately journeys to Jerusalem in order to suffer and die. Jesus rises again and gives his disciples the commission to make disciples of *all nations*.

Who is this Jesus? Matthew presents Jesus in paradoxical tension. On the one hand Jesus is strong, almost harsh. If one is not *for* Jesus, he is *against* Jesus (12:30). His teaching is absolutely authoritative and will endure forever (24:35). The unsaved will mourn when he comes in glory (24:30). The unforgiving will be unforgiven (6:14ff.). Matthew's gospel alone presents the parable of the unmerciful servant who suffers incarceration due to his unwillingness to show mercy (18:23-35). Jesus doesn't hesitate to exercise his authority over both Jewish law and custom (chapters 5-7; 9:6). He calls the most religious people of his day *blind guides, hypocrites, snakes and vipers* (23:16, 23, 33).

And yet, Jesus claims to offer an *easy yoke* and a *light burden* (11:30). The *Son of David* claims to be *gentle* (11:28) and he is! Jesus is moved to *compassion* when the blind men ask for their sight (20:32-34). Jesus' heart breaks over the unbelief of Jerusalem (23:37) and he utters no condemnation when Judas betrays him with a kiss. Instead, he says, *Friend, do what you came for* (26:50). When he enters Jerusalem he does so on the *foal of a donkey* (21:5), instead of the horse of a king.

A Gospel for Our Lives

If we study Mathew rightly we will be changed. We will walk with this rabbi through the cities of Galilee. We will witness his miracles, hear his teaching, feel the sting of his rebuke and the balm of his gentle touch. Finally we will go with him to Jerusalem and be witnesses to his arrest, conviction, death and resurrection. And with the women who met the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem,

¹ These are the only two times the word *church* occurs in any of the four Gospels.

we too will fall down at his feet and worship (28:8-10). May God bless us as we study the first Gospel.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study One

Roots

Matthew 1:1-17

When we meet a person for the first time we often ask about that person's identity. *Who are you? Tell me about yourself? Where do you come from?* The response usually begins with both geography (*I come from Denver. . .*) and genealogy (*My mother was from Russia and my father grew up in Goleta. . .*).



Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus. He wants us to know where Jesus came from. Twenty-first century readers of Matthew's Gospel might be tempted to skip these lists of names and *get to the good part*. But Jesus' genealogy would have been far from dull to first century Jewish readers. In fact, this genealogy is loaded with theological significance! These three lists of fourteen names each provide a summary of the Old Testament and a brilliant study of God. In these lists, Matthew tells us much about the ancestry of Jesus, about the Old Testament that promised the appearance of Messiah, about the character of the God we worship and about God's sovereign control over history in bringing his gracious purposes to fruition.

Take a few moments and look over the first few pages of the four Gospels. Make a note of how each writer begins his story of the life of Jesus. What similarities do you find? What differences stand out? What, in particular, is unique to Matthew's Gospel?

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

1:1 In Greek this verse reads, *The book of Genesis of Jesus Messiah (biblos geneseôs)*. From verse 1 Matthew is speaking in lofty terms. With the coming of Jesus, history has a new beginning.

Matthew's genealogy is far more than a simple list of names linking Jesus to the patriarch Abraham. One of the accomplishments of Matthew's genealogy is to link Jesus to the two key figures in Israel's history: Abraham and David (vss. 2 and 6).

Abraham: Read Genesis 12:1-3. Who was Abraham? What were God's specific promises to this Chaldean? Why would it be important for Matthew to link Jesus to Abraham?

David: The son of Jesse was the greatest of Israel's kings. He was *a man after God's own heart*.¹ It was from the line of David that God's salvation would spring.

Read the following passages. Notice the importance of the link between Jesus and David.

2 Samuel 7:12-16. Notice the context. This is the *word of the Lord* to the prophet Nathan. It was given for King David. Of course the immediate fulfillment of these words concerned King Solomon. But notice verse 13: *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

Isaiah 9:6-7. Notice, again, the eternal throne of David.

D.A. Carson explains that

Matthew's chief aims in including the genealogy are hinted at in the first verse, [that is] to show that Jesus Messiah is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the messianic promises, the one who brings divine blessings to all nations.² (Carson, p. 63)

Fredrick Dale Bruner adds:

¹ See 1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 15:3; Acts 13:22.

² Matthew makes much of David in his Gospel. The title *Son of David* comes up again and again: 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45.

The two great baskets of saving promise in the Hebrew Scriptures are the promise to David of a son who would be a Forever King and the promise to Abraham of a seed who would be an All Nations Blessing—a temporal promise (forever) and a spatial promise (all nations), a promise meeting Israel’s deepest longings for another David, and a promise meeting the gentile’s deepest longings for a universal savior. The name, “Son of David” says, “Israel, behold your Messiah!”; and the name “son of Abraham” says, “Nations, behold your hope!” Jesus is both in one. (Bruner, p. 2)

Place Matthew 1:1 in the context of the New Testament. In what ways is Jesus the *hope* of the nations? Compare the following verses.

- Matthew 12:18-21
- Romans 15:8-12
- Colossians 1:27
- 1 Timothy 4:9-10

Let us examine Matthew’s three lists of fourteen generations. The first thing we notice is that these genealogies are far from complete. Matthew adopts the common practice of skipping generations.¹ For example, in the generations of Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab we have about 400 years covered (Matthew 1:3-4).² In the second set of fourteen names, Matthew omits three kings between Joram and Uzziah.³ His genealogy is simply not complete.⁴

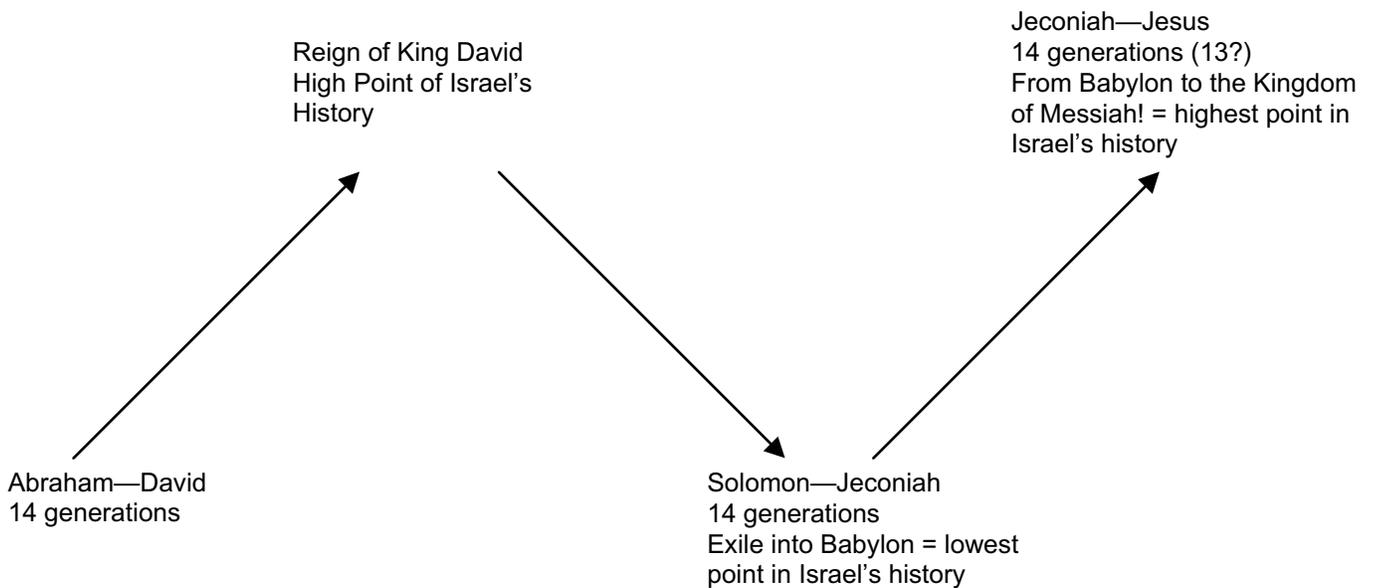
¹ The rabbis had a saying: *The sons of my sons are also my sons.*

² See Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40.

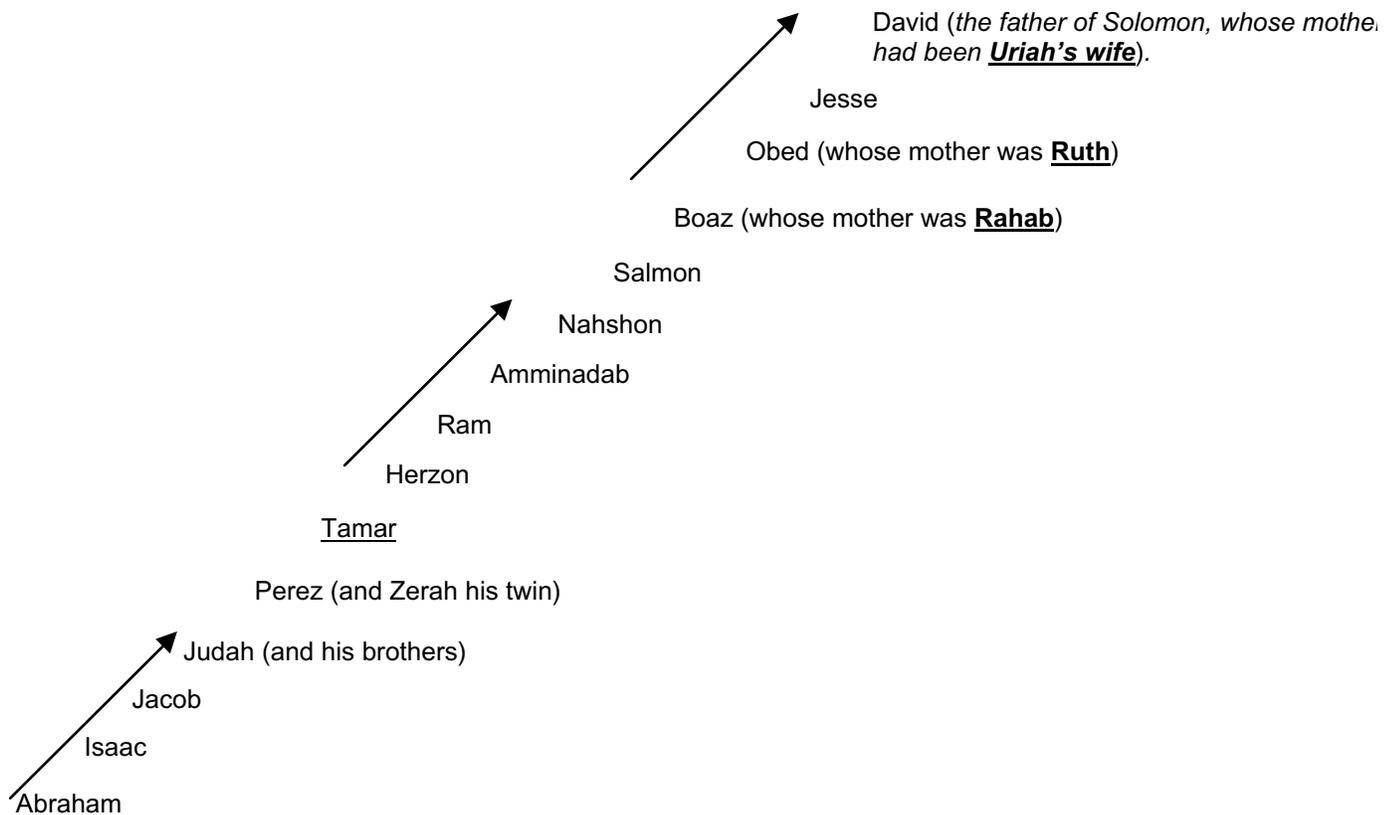
³ Between Joram and Uzziah were the kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.

⁴ Another *problem* in the genealogies is that the third list only has thirteen names. Various solutions have been proposed: 1. Matthew counts Jeconiah twice (first as a cursed exile without children and then as a redeemed father of Shealtiel), 2. Matthew counts Mary and Joseph, 3. Matthew got confused and counted incorrectly. Carson adds his own solution to the above: *The simplest explanation—the one that best fits the context— observes that the numerical value of “David” in Hebrew is fourteen. By this symbolism Matthew points out that the promised “son of David” (1:1), the Messiah, has come. And if the third set of fourteen is short one member, perhaps it will suggest to some readers that just as God cuts short the time of distress for the sake of the elect (24:22), so also he mercifully shortens the period from the Exile to Jesus the Messiah.* (Carson, p. 69)

What, then, is Matthew doing with these lists of names? He is showing God's sovereign grace in bringing Messiah out of the family of Abraham. Notice the topsy-turvy history of Israel which is expressed in these three lists.



The first set of fourteen names moves from Father Abraham to the highpoint in Israel's history, the reign of King David. But Matthew throws the reader a few unexpected surprises.



What stands out in this list? The most startling feature is that four women are mentioned, each of them is a Gentile¹ (in some sense) and each is marked by some sort of sexual sin.

Tamar played the role of a prostitute (Genesis 38) to trick her father-in-law. The fruit of that union, Perez, became one of the great-grandfathers of Jesus!

Rahab was the prostitute who helped the spies in Jericho (Joshua 2). She is referred to as a model of faithfulness in Hebrews 11:31. She is one of Jesus' great-grandmothers.

Ruth was a Moabite and a descendant of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughter (Genesis 19). She would have been viewed with scorn by many Jews in the time of Matthew.

The wife of Uriah refers to Bathsheba. Bathsheba participated in the most scandalous sexual liaison of the Old Testament when she was, presumably, victimized by King David himself. By calling her the *wife of Uriah*, Matthew draws attention to the fact that Bathsheba had become a Gentile by marriage and to the fact that she was not David's lawful wife. Yet she too is one of the great-grandmothers of our Lord!

Bruner comments:

Most genealogies in the late Old Testament period have the purpose of showing that a line has been kept pure *from* gentile contamination. But this first genealogy in the New Testament has the surprising office of teaching us that the line that led from Abraham to Jesus, the Son of David, was intersected again and again by gentile blood. . . . Matthew wants the church to know that from the start. . . God's work has been interracial, and that God is not a narrow nationalist or racist. (Bruner, p. 6)

What does the inclusion of these four women into Jesus' genealogy teach you about how God might use you to accomplish his purposes? Do past sins disqualify a person from becoming a part of God's plan in history?

¹ Tamar was a Canaanite, Rahab a Jerichoite, Ruth a Moabite and Bathsheba a Hittite.

The second set of names, from Solomon to Jeconiah (vss. 7-11), moves in the opposite direction. We move from the highpoint of Israel's history (the reign of King David) to the exile into Babylon).

The third set of names shows God bringing order out of chaos. Messiah has come at last!

Bruner summarizes:

I believe that the most important single fact for Matthew in the composition of his genealogy was what the genealogy chronicled as a whole: that God keeps his Word (though outwardly, and for some time, it does not look this way). God had promised Abraham and David something big, and though it took a long time, God delivered. (Bruner, p. 12)

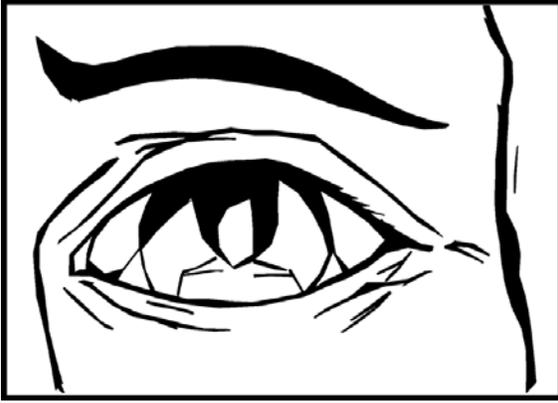
The point of this study is intended to be pretty simple. God delivers on his promises. God guided Israel through all of her history and kept His promise to bring a redeemer. How have you seen God act in this same way in your life? How has God fulfilled his promises to you?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Two

Birth

Matthew 1:18-25



Read the verses listed above. Before you begin, make a few mental notes of what we learned in our last study about Matthew's presentation of Jesus' genealogy.

Make a few notes of your initial impressions from these verses. What stands out? What questions does your reading provoke?

Compare Luke's version of Jesus' birth to Matthew's version. Read Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7. What are the different emphases?

Before going on in this study consider the following questions:

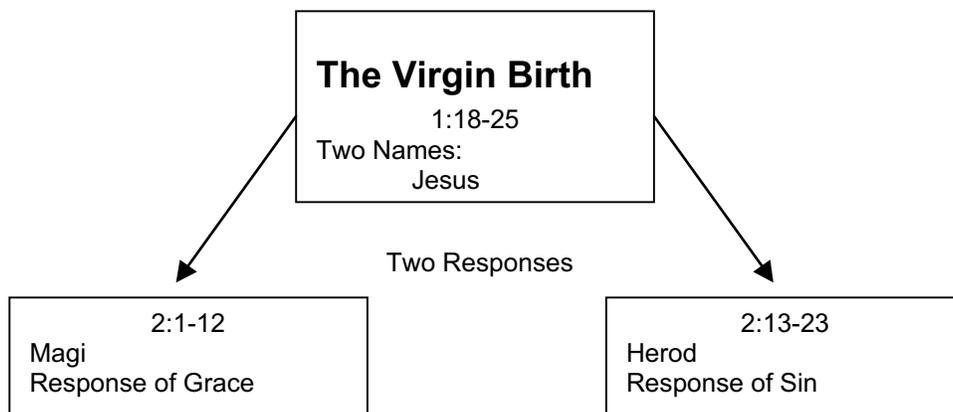
How did God tell Joseph of Mary's pregnancy? Matthew is very concise in this story. What do you think happened to Joseph's emotions after he woke up? Do you think he was anxious or happy? What was Joseph's response?

What details does Matthew give us concerning the *Magi*?

Share with your group a few sentences about your own search for Jesus.

What are Matthew's purposes as he introduces the reader to Jesus? It would seem he wants us to know, from the outset, that Jesus is not an ordinary child. His conception and his names testify to his identity. Immediately after the child is born we see two startling responses to his existence.

Consider the following outline of Matthew 1:18-2:23.



1. The Conception of the Child

1:18-19 Read these verses very carefully. Reconstruct the story from Joseph's perspective. Again, how did Joseph learn of Mary's pregnancy? What does the verse say? What emotions would Joseph have felt?

The story of the virgin birth (actually, virgin conception¹) has provoked controversy for generations. Perhaps, in all the Bible, the virgin conception is the

¹ The story of the virgin conception has no parallel in Jewish literature. But many of the Greek heroes were supposed to have been conceived by the gods. Hercules, Osiris, Bacchus, Mithra, Hermes, and Prometheus, for example, were all believed to have had gods for their fathers. But the gospel stories are decisively different from these pagan stories in that they present a virgin

miracle most challenged by those who cannot accept the notion of God's supernatural intervention in our lives.

Thomas Jefferson, for example, stated,

The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.

In other words, the virgin birth, Jefferson thought, would become regarded as mere myth.

Why is the virgin birth important to our faith? Why do Matthew and Luke make Mary's virginity such an important part of this story?

What would you say to someone who was interested in becoming a Christian but said he couldn't believe in the virgin birth? Consider the following quotation as you formulate your answer.

The significance of this event should not be minimized. It indicates not merely that Jesus was God's Son through the Holy Spirit, but that Jesus was a unique person who was the product of both the divine and the human in a manner unlike any others before or since.¹

Take a moment and compare the two birth stories we find in the Gospels. In Luke (1:26-2:7) the emphasis is on Mary. It is Mary who meets an angel and hears of her pregnancy. It is Mary who wraps the child in cloths, etc.

conception. . . . [W]hat we find in Matthew and Luke is not the story of some sort of sacred marriage or a divine being descending to earth and, in the guise of a man, mating with a human woman, but rather the story of a miraculous conception without aid of any man, divine or otherwise. The Gospel story is rather about how Mary conceived without any form of intercourse through the agency of the Holy Spirit. As such this story is without precedent in either Jewish or pagan literature, even including the Old Testament. B. Witherington, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP, 1992, p. 70.

¹ B. Witherington, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP, 1992, p. 72.

In Matthew, however, the emphasis is on Joseph. How many details can you find about Joseph in our passage? Why would Matthew place his emphasis on Joseph (Hint: Think back to the Jewish nature of Matthew's Gospel.).

2. The Names of the Child

Two names are given to this miraculously conceived baby: Jesus and Immanuel.

1:18 refers to the birth of *Jesus Christ*. Literally this should read, *Jesus Messiah*.

Jesus (*Iesous*) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Yeshua* (Joshua).

Yeshua is an abbreviation of *Ye-ho-shuah* = *Yahweh is the one who saves*, or, *God saves*.

1:21 *You are to give him the name Yeshua, because he will save the people from their sins.* The Greek is a bit more complex than the NIV. Literally this reads, *because he himself will save his people from their sins.*

Compare the following verses. What do they say about "Yeshua?" What would first-century Jewish readers have understood by the name Yeshua? Remember, when we come across the word *Lord* in the Old Testament we are reading the English equivalent of the Hebrew name *Yahweh*.

- Psalm 3:8
- Psalm 130:8
- Jonah 2:9

Notice the scope of Jesus' saving work. As Matthew's story unfolds *his people* takes on a much wider scope than simply the family of the Jews. Who are Jesus' *people* in this Gospel?

Compare the following:

- 3:9
- 8:11

How does this fit into God's grand scheme of salvation? See Genesis 49:10.

1:23 The second name for the child is *Immanuel*. The Greek name is *Emmanuel* = *with us God*. When Matthew interprets this name he says, literally, *which is being interpreted, with-us-the-God*. Matthew calls Jesus *The With-Us-God*.

Brunner points out the significance of this name:

In the Old Testament, God was supremely The Above-Us-God (though he often visited here "below," most prominently in the Angel of the Lord. . .). And in Islam, Allah is, by definition, *always* The Above-Us-God. However the glory of the New Testament revelation is that the great Above-Us-God *came down and became one of us*. In Islam. . . Allah *sends*—angels, prophets, books—but he is too holy to *come*. For God to touch earth is, in Islam, called *shirk*,¹ and anyone who claims that God has a son or became a human being or anything like a human being commits *shirk*, makes God gross, blasphemes God's glory.

But in the gospel we have learned to think of God in another way. The gospel's God is precisely so great that he *can* come down. He is not

¹ *Shirk* refers to idolatry or blasphemy against Allah.

trapped in heaven above us. And this God's love is so immense that he *wants* to come down. And he has proven his love by the fact that he *did* come down and touch our ground. Indeed, he even allowed himself to be "shirked" by men, condemned, and nailed to wood. (Bruner, 30-31, emphasis is in original)

What does it mean to you that God is with you? What does it mean that He has sent Jesus to bring salvation to you? How have the names Jesus, and Immanuel changed your life?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Three

Response

Matthew 2:1-23

How one responds to the person of Jesus-Immanuel is the most important question of life. Jesus provokes decision. One is either *for* Jesus or *against* Jesus (Mark 9:40). The person of Christ is so decisive that he turns a son against his father, a daughter against her mother (10:34ff.). Matthew wants his readers to see this from the outset, so right after we meet the baby Jesus he interweaves two stories that exemplify two responses to Jesus.¹ These are the stories of the Magi from the east (probably Persia) and Herod who was a Roman King.



Read Matthew 2 before going on in this study. Make a few notes on what you learn from this chapter about both the Magi and Herod. Jot down as many details as possible. Make a list of any questions the chapter brings to mind. What similarities are shared by both Herod and the Magi? What is the difference in their response to Jesus?

The Magi

King Herod

¹ See the chart of the pattern of Matthew's Gospel.

Why is it important that the reader know Jesus was born in Bethlehem? What is the significance of Bethlehem in the old Testament? Consider the following verses.

- Genesis 35:16-20
- 1 Samuel 16
- Micah 5:2

Herod

In Matthew 2 we meet Herod the Great who was born in 73 B.C. and probably died the year Jesus was born.¹ Herod was half Jewish and half Idumean. He became King of Judea in 40 B.C. and was known for his ruthless ways. Upon gaining the throne Herod crushed all opposition to his authority. He imposed heavy taxes and began several stunning building programs. With his tax money Herod built amphitheaters, hippodromes, palaces, aqueducts, roads and shrines. His most impressive achievement was the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The finished product was one of the wonders of the ancient world.²

King Herod had ten wives. Each wife, of course, felt her son was the rightful successor to the throne. This led Herod to make a series of five wills (each modifying the one that came before). In his fifth will, Herod bypassed his older sons and left his throne to his youngest son, Antipas. The situation proved to be chaotic and brutal. Herod ended up killing three of his own sons in his efforts to protect the throne. Caesar Augustus said, *It is better to be Herod's pig than his son.*³ It is against the backdrop, after Herod's fifth will, that the Magi show up in Jerusalem looking for a child-king.

The Magi

We don't know for certain very much about these visitors to Bethlehem. Are they good men or evil? How many are there? How long did their journey take? What are their names?

¹ Herod died between 4 and 1 B.C.

² Ironically Herod's temple, completed long after his death, was thoroughly destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., only a few years after it was finished.

³ The murdered sons were Aristobulus, Alexander and Antipater. Herod's ruthlessness shocked even the Roman world. At one point he executed 300 court officers. He had one of his wives, Mariamne, killed along with her mother. Herod even arranged for many to be executed after he had died (see Green, p. 71).

Matthew presents the Magi in a positive light. They seek and worship the baby Jesus. But their inclusion into the story of Jesus must have shocked many readers.

Astronomy is the study of the *movement* of the stars and planets. Astrology is the study of the *meaning* of the stars and planets. The Magi were probably both astronomers and astrologers. The Jews of Matthew's era were convinced that the Magi were idolaters. And the rest of the New Testament shares this conviction.¹

Brunner comments:

Matthew wishes to say by the inclusion of the magi in the heart of the Christmas story, as he had by the inclusion of the women in the heart of his genealogy, that God surmounts racial or moral barriers to his saving work and makes the church interracial and merciful by calling to the Son precisely those persons whom many of the people of God consider unworthy. The magi are walking illustrations of God's catholicity and grace. (Brunner, p. 44)

2:11 Michael Green explains the possible significance of the gifts the magi offered:

Gold is the gift fit for a king—and the king in baby clothes was there. Frankincense was in constant use by the priests in the temple, and the ultimate priest, the one who was to make final reconciliation between God and humankind, lay before them. Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. The man born to be king was the man born to die. In those three gifts we see who he is, what he came to do, and what it cost him. (Green, pp. 69-70)

The Magi and Herod have dramatically different responses to the Christ-child. What factors do you think contributed to these responses?

Most of us who are working through Matthew's Gospel have followed the way of the Magi. We have decided that Jesus is worthy of our worship and our

¹ Usually the magi are referred to in a negative sense in the New Testament. Simon Magos (singular, *magi* is plural) tried to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9-24). In Acts 13:6-11 we meet Bar-Jesus or Elymas who is a *magician* (NIV), or a *magos* in Greek. Elymas is a false prophet.

adoration. The Magi followed a star. What were the external factors that led you to Jesus?

What gifts have you offered to Jesus in response to his presence in your life? In 2:11 we read of the Magi bowing down to Jesus. Where does this posture appear in your life as a disciple?

2:13-23 Matthew is drawing a parallel in this story to the Exodus story. What are the parallels?

Matthew's Use of the Old Testament

One of the so called *problems* in Matthew's Gospel is his use of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew understands the entire Old Testament as a book that is about Jesus. Accordingly he will sometimes lift a prophecy out of its original context and apply it to Jesus.

Green explains,

[Matthew] sees the authoritative revelation embodied in the Old Testament as being predictive of Jesus through prophecy, analogy, type and even verbal allusions. This would have been entirely understood by his Jewish readers. It was their own interpretative method. (Green, p. 72)

Notice three of the *prophecies* in this chapter.

2:15 reads, *Out of Egypt I called my son*. This comes from Hosea 11:1. In its original context it referred to God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. From the mouth of Hosea the prophet it was not a prophecy at all, but a recollection of history.

Matthew takes these words and sees in them a deeper reference to the work of Christ.

2:18 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:15. What would be the obvious cause of the *weeping* Matthew refers to in 2:18?

But Matthew does not appear to be too interested in the details of Herod's slaughter of the babies of Bethlehem. By quoting Jeremiah 31 he moves us back once again to the Babylonian exile (1:11-12). The *tears* in Jeremiah 31 are for those being taken away to Babylon. What is Matthew doing with this quotation?

Carson explains:

Matthew has already made the Exile a turning point in his thought (1:11-12), for at that time the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the Exile are now being "fulfilled"—i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne had come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (Matt. 26:28) promised by Jeremiah.¹ (Carson, p. 95)

2:23 says that Jesus *went and lived in a town called Nazareth* to fulfill what the prophets said: *He will be called a Nazarene*.

The problem is that none of the prophets in the Old Testament ever said this. Nazareth isn't even mentioned in the Old Testament. What is Matthew saying?

Nazareth was not a town of notoriety. Perhaps Nazareth was Palestine's equivalent of Mojave, or Lodi. To come from Nazareth was an embarrassment. When Philip told Nathanael that he, Andrew and Peter had found the Messiah Nathanael's response was, *Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?* (John 1:46).

What Matthew seems to be saying is that the prophets predicted the Messiah would be a despised person, the victim of slurs such as this. He would not be known as "Jesus of Bethlehem," with its many honorable Davidic overtones, though he had been born in Bethlehem. Instead he would be called "Jesus the Nazarene." (Boice, p. 42)

Indeed the prophets foretold this dark reality.

- Isaiah 53:3

¹ Jeremiah 31 promises the inauguration of a new covenant.

- Psalm 22:6-8; 13; 17
- Isaiah 49:7

King Herod tried to kill the Messiah. The Magi bowed and worshipped. They offered him precious gifts. Spend time as a homegroup doing the same!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

The Defining Moment

Matthew 3:1-17

First-century Judaism was pregnant with expectation. There was a hunger and thirst for Messiah. The rabbis taught about Messiah. People debated what Messiah would be like, when Messiah would appear and what Messiah would do. The Romans were in control of Palestine. The Jews wanted relief. They yearned for salvation, for freedom, for release. It had been 400 years since the time of the great prophets. With John the Baptist's appearance the hopes of the Jews were kindled afresh.

Each of the Gospel writers begins their story in different ways. Mark begins abruptly, skipping any description of Jesus' birth. Luke includes lengthy descriptions of the pregnancies of both Elizabeth and Mary. John opens with the bold proclamation that Jesus is the eternal God of the universe. Matthew, as we have seen, begins with Jesus' genealogy.



But the four Gospels converge with the story of John the Baptist. Each Gospel writer sees John as a pivotal figure. Each includes the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3. There is good reason for this. The Old Testament looked forward to a Next-to-Last-Man,¹ the one who would prepare the way for Messiah!

Read Matthew 3:1-16 What stands out to you about John's:

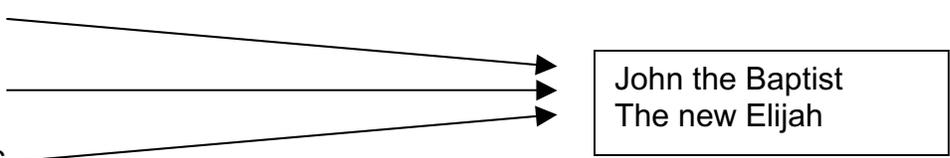
- Message
- Appearance
- Rebuke to the religious leaders
- Prophecy
- Acceptance of his ministry by Jesus

¹ See Brunner, p. 72.

What questions does this chapter provoke?

Examine a few of the prophecies which looked forward to the Next-to-Last-Man:

- Isaiah 40:3
- Malachi 3:1
- Malachi 4:5-6
(see also 2 Kings 1:8 for a description of Elijah)



John the Baptist
The new Elijah

John the Baptist is introduced, abruptly, in 3:1-2. How many things can you say about John from these two verses alone?

Consider 3:4-12.

- Who was John's target audience when he preached?
- What was the essence of John's message?

3:3 As noted above, each of the Gospel writers quotes Isaiah 40:3. The context of this verse, which would have been very familiar to Jewish readers, speaks of

relief from punishment. Isaiah encouraged his listeners with the marvelous truth that the exile in Babylon would come to an end.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling. . . (Isaiah 40:1-3a)

John is saying, *The years of silence are over! God is coming! Get ready!*

Compare Isaiah 40:3 with Matthew 3:3:

Isaiah	Matthew
A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.	"A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

What is the subtle change in the quotation? What is Matthew (or John) saying to the reader with this change?

3:9 Explain this verse. How does this fit with the message of Matthew?

3:11 Matthew's account of John's preaching leaves out a detail included by both Mark and Luke. In those Gospels we read that John was *preaching a baptism of repentance into forgiveness of sins*. (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). What is the difference in Matthew's telling of the story? Why would Matthew leave out the words Mark and Luke include?

At the heart of John's message is the word *repentance*. The word does not mean to *feel sorry*. The Greek noun or verb refers to both a change of mind and a change of direction. Carson explains:

What is meant is not merely intellectual change of mind or mere grief, still less doing penance. . . , but a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turnaround involving mind and action and including overtones of grief, which result in "fruit in keeping with repentance." Of course, all

this assumes that man's actions are fundamentally off course and need radical change. (Carson, p. 99)

Whom does John call upon to repent? What does this teach us about *repentance*?

Is repentance a one-time act of a believer, or an ongoing disposition? What was (is) repentance like in your life?

John is speaking to *good people*. He is preaching to Pharisees and Sadducees. Both groups of Jews were devout followers of God. The name Pharisee means *separate*. This group of Jews was a lay movement devoted to keeping the law of God. The Sadducees were a more secular group of Jews who, nevertheless, were earnest in law keeping. With this in mind, what do you think John wanted them to repent of?

Apply your answer to people in our church. What does *repentance* look like for people who have grown up in the church? What does it look like for people who have been Christians a long time?

3:11-12 What is the primary difference between John's baptism of repentance¹ and Jesus' future baptism?

¹ The fact that John was baptizing Jews (Pharisees and Sadducees) would have been shocking. Jews baptized Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism. This was essentially a bath with the function of cleansing a Gentile from being a Gentile.

When John said that Jesus would baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit he taps into a major teaching of the Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel, Jeremiah and other prophets foretold of the coming age of the Spirit. Compare the following verses:

- Ezekiel 36:25-27
- Ezekiel 37:14
- Joel 2:28-32

John is saying that the age of the Holy Spirit is just around the corner. Indeed, John was right. When Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) he cites the Joel prophecy as having been fulfilled. The Spirit has come. To be a follower of Christ is to be baptized by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9).

How do you think the living of your Christian life is different from a man or woman who followed God before the time of Jesus? What is the active role of the Spirit in your life?

3:13-17 John's message points to the coming Messiah. John's baptism marks the turning-point in the life of a Nazarene named Jesus. When Jesus is baptized his ministry begins. When the Apostles are choosing a replacement for Judas, Peter points out the significance of this moment.

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22)

But why is Jesus baptized at all? As the sinless God-man he had nothing of which to repent. Indeed, John protests when Jesus makes his appearance.

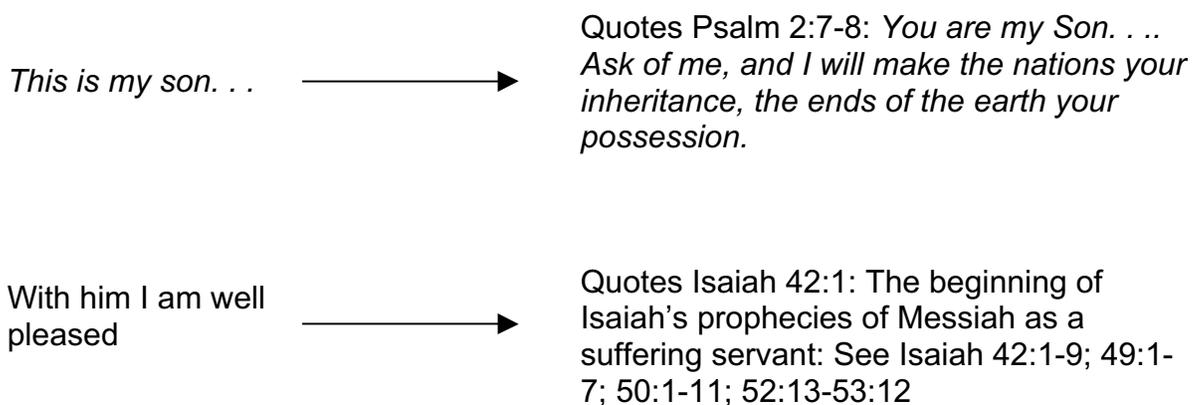
Jesus himself answers our question: *It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.* But what does this answer mean?

Some see Jesus' submission to baptism as the anticipation of his own death on the cross. His baptism *fulfills all righteousness* insofar as it points to the cross where Jesus provided atonement for sin.

James Boice argues for a more popular view:

In Christian baptism we are identified with Jesus in his death and resurrection so that his death becomes our death and his resurrection our resurrection. In Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus identified himself with us in our humanity, thereby taking on himself the obligation to fulfill all righteousness so that he might be a perfect Savior and substitute for us.

3:17 The voice from heaven combines two Bible prophecies.



Spend a few minutes looking over these Isaiah prophecies. How does this voice from heaven anticipate the life and ministry of Jesus?

Boice ends this section of his commentary with a paragraph worthy of our attention

Do you love Jesus? And are you well pleased with him? The father certainly is; that is what these words state clearly. If the Father is pleased with Jesus, shouldn't you be? If you are not, you are far from being a true Christian. If you are, surely you will want to follow Jesus in faithful obedience and point others to him, as John the Baptist did. (Boice, p. 51)

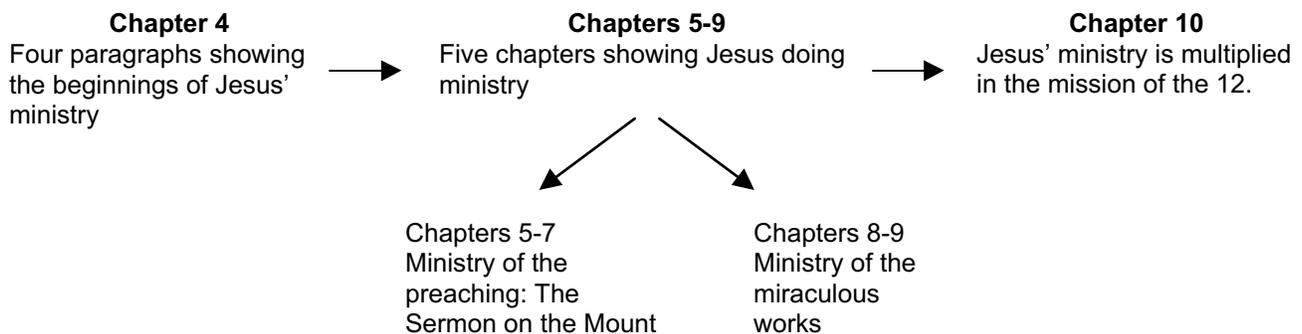
Study Five

From Solitude to Syria

Matthew 4:1-25

Matthew Chapter four introduces the reader to the ministry of Jesus. In 25 verses we see Jesus move from being a solitary figure who is hungry and tempted in the wilderness to a nationally known rabbi and miracle worker proclaiming a message about the Kingdom of God.

Consider this chapter in the context of Matthew's Gospel.



Read Matthew chapter four. What details stand out as you read? What questions come to mind?

Temptation:

Each of the first three Gospels includes an account of the temptation or testing of Jesus.¹ And each Gospel writer mentions the role of the Holy Spirit in that temptation. Compare Luke 4:1 and Mark 1:12 (Compare translations since the

¹ The Greek word translated *tempted* in the NIV and other translations can, and possibly should, be rendered, *tested*. At least three reasons are offered for the alternative translation. First, the Greek word *peirazô* (*peirazw*) in Matthew seems to always mean *test*, and not *tempt*. Second, we know from James 1:13 that God tempts no one. How then could Holy Spirit send Jesus into the desert *to be tempted by the devil*? Third, in English we think of temptation in the sense of being tempted to do evil. But Jesus is enticed by Satan to produce, by alternative means, the Kingdom of God.

NIV is fairly tame.) with Matthew 4:1. Why do you think each Gospel writer wants the reader to know it was the Spirit who led (or drove) Jesus into the wilderness *to be tempted*?

4:1-2 As we have seen in the introduction (p. 1), Matthew presents Jesus as a second Moses. What parallels do you see in these verses to the life of Moses? Compare Exodus 34:28. Where is Moses geographically? Where is Jesus?

The NIV may be a bit misleading when it says Jesus was *in the desert*. The Greek text says, specifically, Jesus was *led up into the wilderness*. While Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, well below sea level, the wilderness most likely refers to higher mountains west of the Jordan.



As with Matthew's report on the baptism of Jesus, we wonder why Jesus needed to be tested at all. Leon Morris explains:

The temptations proceed from the fact that he is the Son of God, and that accordingly he must live as the Son of God. . . . Is he to be a wonder-worker, using his powers to meet his own needs (and possibly those of others, too)? Is he to do spectacular but pointless miracles? Is he to establish a mighty empire ruling over the whole world? Matthew tells us that right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus looked at each of these and rejected them as temptations of the devil. (Morris, p. 70)

4:3, 6, and 9 describe the three temptations of Jesus. How do you think these temptations came to Jesus? Did he actually see the devil, or were these temptations more subtle?

Compare these *tests* with John's description of temptation in 1 John 2:16. How are these parallel to one another?

To which temptation are you most prone? Think of a specific example you might share with your homegroup. How do you fight this temptation?

Notice how these three temptations are directly related to the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism (3:6). Review the chart at the end of Study 4. The voice from heaven quotes both Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. In those passages we have both the assurance that the kingdoms of the world will worship Messiah and a hint that the suffering of Messiah will bring this to pass.

Tasker explains:

Jesus' temptations in the wilderness were temptations to rely upon the first part of the message spoken by the heavenly voice at his baptism ['This is my son, whom I love'] to such an extent that he might be able to avoid treading the way marked out for him in the second part [the way of the suffering servant]. (Tasker, p. 52)

How does Jesus respond to the three temptations of the devil? What can you learn about your own response to temptation from Jesus?

Michael Green says, *Temptation builds spiritual muscle*. (Green, p. 82) Do you agree? Why? Describe the value of temptation for the believer? How has this played itself out in your life?

Galilee

4:12 is a transitional verse. John the Baptist is fading from view (he's in prison¹), Jesus takes center stage. But where is that stage? Perhaps we would expect Jesus to begin his ministry in Jerusalem. Instead he goes to Capernaum, a city on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

¹ Matthew will fill us in on the details of John's arrest, incarceration and execution in 14:3-12.

Galilee is Gentile territory. The area was a center for pagan worship and Greek ideas. The region was both fertile and well-populated. Nine cities are situated on the Sea of Galilee, which is a freshwater lake fed by the Jordan River. The lake is fourteen miles long and about seven miles wide. According to Josephus the province of Galilee (50 by 25 miles) had no fewer than 204 villages, each with a population of at least 15,000. *So Jesus began his work in the most densely populated area he could have found anywhere in the Middle East.* (Green, p. 85)

He also begins his ministry in the least likely place one would have expected.

4:13 What is Matthew's reason for Jesus' choice of geography?¹ How does this fit into the overall emphasis of Matthew? What does this choice of geography tell us about God?

4:17 What is the content of Jesus' preaching? Of what, or of whom, does this remind you?

Disciples

Jesus will not accomplish his purposes in a vacuum. Matthew 4:18-22 shows the call of Jesus on the original four disciples.

- What is his call?
- What will the disciples be doing if they follow Jesus?
- What will it cost these men to follow Jesus?
- What was their response?

Describe in a few sentences Jesus' call to discipleship on your own life. Be prepared to read these sentences to your group.

¹ The region is called the land of *Zebulun and Naphtali* because when the Jews took the land under the leadership of Joshua, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali settled in this area. Interestingly, the discussion in vss. 13-16 is not found in Mark or Luke, but is found in Matthew, the so-called Jewish Gospel.

Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John (two sets of brothers) to leave their nets and follow him. What did he call you to leave behind?

Ministry

4:23 What are the three main thrusts of Jesus ministry?

Respond to the quotation below from Green. What can SBCC learn from this last paragraph of Matthew 4?

Kingdom ministry embraces preaching, teaching and healing. When the church exercises this ministry, she will often lack the power, immediacy and effectiveness of Jesus; he shared God's nature in a way the church does not. But wherever the church is truly carrying out the work of the kingdom those three strands—challenging preaching, clear teaching and healing (of physical disease, inner hurts and grip by dark forces)—will be seen. (Green, pp. 86-87)

How have you experienced this in your own life? Name an area of your life where you have yet to experience the work of Christ.

4:24 Jesus fame spread *all over Syria*. The reference is surprising insofar as Syria is only mentioned here in the Gospels. Matthew could be saying that Jesus' reputation spread north to *Syria*. Or, perhaps he is saying that Jesus was becoming well-known in all of Palestine (what we would call Israel). *Syria* was the Roman name for the province where Palestine lay (see Luke 2:2; Acts 15:23, 41). Either way the point is the same. The gospel of the kingdom of God is near. The small beginnings in Galilee will soon spread to *all nations* (28:19-20).

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Six

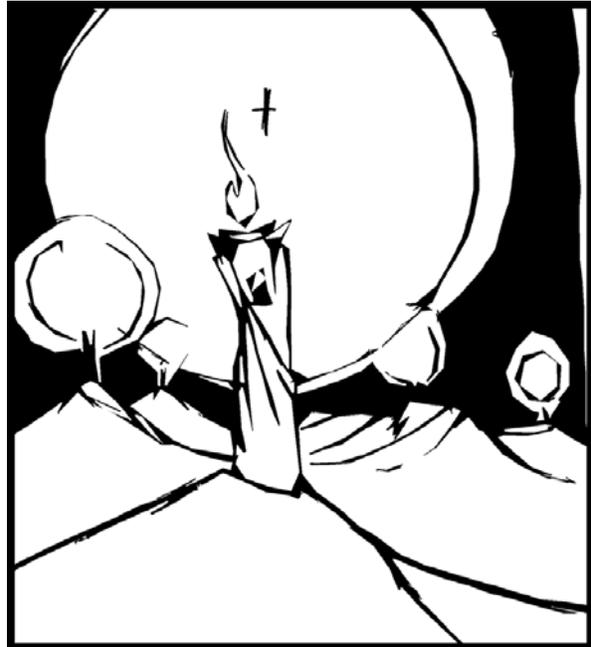
Blessing

Matthew 5:1-16

Matthew 5-7 contains history's most famous sermon. Volumes have been written about this sermon. In 1629 John Donne preached on this sermon saying:

All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, and all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity, is in these three chapters, in this one Sermon on the Mount.¹

The Sermon on the Mount contains 107 verses and takes about ten minutes to read. Before going on in this study read these three chapters. Jot down a few of your initial thoughts, feelings and questions as you read. What do Jesus' words do to your heart and mind?



¹ Quoted by Stott, p, 9.

Introducing to Sermon on the Mount

Matthew ends the first section of his Gospel with Jesus teaching his disciples. Notice the context. Our Lord moves away from the crowds to be alone with his disciples. Matthew collects a selection from Jesus' teaching and presents this sampling to the reader. This is the first of five sermons in Matthew's Gospel.

What are we to make of this sermon?¹ What is Jesus up to? Are his words "beautiful" as Gandhi claimed? C. S. Lewis *loved* the sermon, but worried for those who *enjoyed* it:

As to "caring for" the Sermon on the Mount, if "caring for" here means "liking" or enjoying it, I suppose no one "cares for" it. Who can *like* being knocked flat on his face by a sledge-hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of the man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.²

Again, What are we to make of this sermon? Consider several approaches.

- Luther, the father of the Protestant reformation, saw in these chapters the *law* before the *gospel*. Jesus' words are meant to drive us to despair with regard to our potential for self-righteousness. The sermon's strictness (*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. 5:48*) leads us to cry out for the grace of God.
- Dispensationalists see the sermon directed primarily toward Israel. Jesus is describing the ethics of Israel as he makes his offer of the kingdom of God to the Jews. Thus, the sermon doesn't really apply to the church. I. M. Haldeman, for example, writes:

This sermon. . . cannot be taken in its plain import and be applied to Christians universally. . . . It has been tried in spots. . . but it has always been like planting a beautiful flower in stony ground or in a dry and withering atmosphere.³

- Classic Liberalism sees this sermon as a road map for social progress. The *Social Gospel* movement, popular at the outset of the 20th century, believed in *progress* and in the *perfectibility* of humankind. The kingdom of God was attainable through hard work.⁴

¹ One scholar claims there are 36 different interpretations of Jesus' words.

² *Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger* in C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (1958), p. 182.

³ I.M. Haldeman, *The Kingdom of God* (1931), p. 149.

⁴ Non-Christian thinkers as diverse as Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi embraced the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.

Each of these views falls short. Surely the Lutheran and dispensational interpretations miss the instructional value of Jesus' teaching. Jesus wants his disciples to do more than despair their own shortcomings. He calls them to a higher standard of life! He urges them to practice what they have heard (7:21-27). At the end of the Gospel of Matthew the Lord tells his followers to *make disciples* of all nations, and to *teach* these disciples to *obey everything I have commanded you* (28:20). On the other hand, the Liberal interpretation sets us up for disappointment in that it *urges Jesus' ethics on those who [don't] possess Jesus' life*. . . . (Boice, p. 73)

How then should we view this sermon?

The nature of the kingdom (1) drives us to despair of ourselves and our morality in order that (2) we might turn in faith to Jesus Christ and that, as a result of finding new life in him, we might (3) live as Jesus himself lived when he was in this world. In other words, the sermon is about how we are to become and also live as God's new humanity. (Boice, p. 73)

The sermon calls those who follow Christ to be different. Disciples are called to be *light* in a dark world (5:14), they are not to worry in a world of anxiety (6:25ff.), they are to be truth-tellers in a milieu of mendacity (5:33-37), they are to stay married in a divorce culture (5:31-32). The key thought, perhaps, is expressed succinctly, *Do not be like them*. (6:8).

Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different—different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation of the Christian counter-culture. (Stott, p. 19)¹

We will spend four weeks in this great sermon. Keep the following outline in mind as we swim in the challenging surf of Jesus' teaching.²

1. A Christian's Character (5:3-12)

Eight marks of Christian character expressed in the beatitudes.

2. A Christian's Influence (5:13-16)

Salt and Light in a tasteless and dark world.

3. A Christian's Righteousness (5:17-48)

¹ Stott's book *The Message off the Sermon on the Mount* (1978, IVP) is probably the best treatment of this sermon available.

² This outline is based on Stott, pp. 24-26.

The Christian's *greater than* righteousness when compared to the righteousness of the Pharisees.

4. A Christian's Piety (6:1-18)

Authentic Christian living as opposed to the outward piety of the hypocrites.

5. A Christian's Ambition (6:19-34)

A different view of wealth and possessions.

6. A Christian's Relationships (7:1-20)

The Golden Rule.

7. A Christian's Commitment (7:21-27)

Putting the sermon into practice.

A Christian's Character

Re-read 5:3-12. Compare translations.

Blessed means, *made happy by God*.¹

It is as if Jesus is saying that life in the kingdom with him is a life of profound joy, a joy that no person and no circumstance can take away. And this blessedness is not reserved for some nebulous future. It is for now. It is the mark of those who have really surrendered to the King and tasted his grace, although of course there is a future to rejoice into.

(Green, pp. 89-90)

Who are those whom Jesus calls *blessed*?

Write your own synonym or paraphrase for each of the beatitudes. The verses provided in the parentheses may help you with your paraphrase.

¹ The Greek word for *blessed* is *makarios*. It means, essentially, *happy*. J. B. Philips translates these verses literally, *How happy are. . .!*

- *Poor in spirit* (Revelation 3:17-18)
- *Those who mourn* (Romans 7:24-25)
- *The meek* (Matthew 11:28-29)
- *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* (Hebrews 11:6)
- *The merciful* (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 4:32)
- *The pure in heart* (Psalm 24:3-4)
- *The peacemakers* (James 3:17-18)
- *The persecuted* (John 15:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:2)

Do these beatitudes compete with one another? Is it possible to have, for example, poverty of spirit but not purity of heart?

Who do you know that best exemplifies each of these beatitudes?

Are people who exhibit these character qualities *weak* or *strong*? Explain.

What do you make of Jesus' description of the *happy life*? How would these character-qualities produce happiness?

In what ways does the pattern of your life reflect or not reflect these beatitudes?

Which is your *least* favorite beatitude? What is the corresponding happiness you are forfeiting as you avoid this beatitude?

A Christian's Influence

Re-read 5:13-16.

How do you think a first-century Jew would understand the imagery of *salt* and *light*? How would this understanding differ from our 21st century perspective?

What do these two word-pictures teach with regard to the Christian's role in society?

How do the images of *salt* and *light* flow from the beatitudes?

Who is the *saltiest* Christian you know? Whose *light* shines most brightly?

How do you function as *salt* and *light*? How can you grow in these areas?

Study Seven

Every Jot and Tittle

Matthew 5:17-48



For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (5:18 KJV)

I like the teaching of Jesus, but I have a difficult time with Paul. . . Jesus is so gentle, while Paul is so harsh. These comments are heard, here and there, as if to say the teaching of Jesus is easy while Paul's teaching comes down hard.

The *Jesus* of contemporary sentiment is vastly different from the Jesus of the New Testament. In 5:17-20 we find an

astounding section of our Lord's teaching. Two statements in this paragraph command our attention. First, Jesus says he came not to replace the law but to fulfill the law (literally, to *fill the law*). In 5:18 when Jesus says, *not the smallest letter not least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished* (*jot* and *tittle* in the KJV), he is referring to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*yod*) and to one of the tiny flags or hooks on some Hebrew letters which distinguish them from others. (Stott, p. 73)

Second, Jesus tells his disciples that their righteousness must *surpass* that of *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law*, or they won't enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20). The qualification is shocking insofar as these groups of Jews were steadfast in their devotion to righteousness. The Jews studied the law of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) with devotion. They counted, for example, 613 commands to be obeyed.¹ But then the rabbis began to ask what these laws meant. What does it mean, for example, to *keep the Sabbath*? The rabbis came up with literally thousands of laws defining the laws of the Old Testament,² and

¹ 248 positive and 365 negative. See Morris, p. 106-107

² Michael Green writes, [*On the Sabbath*] *a new lamp can be moved from one place to another. . . , but not an old one; hot food may be kept warm by covering with clothes, feathers or dried flax, but not by covering with damp herbs or straw—which could engender fresh heat (and thus 'work') on the Sabbath day. An ass may go out on the Sabbath day wearing its saddle cloth if this was fixed on before the Sabbath, but may not wear a bell even if it is plugged (that would be work for the ass). Goats may go out with a protective cloth on their udders as it is fit to keep them dry, but not if it is intended to collect the milk. . . , and so forth.* (Green, p. 93)

made every effort to keep these laws. And Jesus says his disciples' righteousness must exceed the righteousness of these law keepers!

As we begin this study, keep in mind what we learned about the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount on pp. 36-36. Jesus is not advocating a righteousness attained by works. His disciples are those who are saved by faith and then invited to live as people who have been saved. Michael Green clarifies this point when he writes,

The standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable nor totally unattainable. To put them beyond anyone's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon. To put them within everyone's reach is to ignore the reality of human sin. They are attainable, but only by those who have experienced the new birth, which is the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom. (Green, p. 111)

Read Matthew 5:17-47. Keep the following outline in mind:

5:17-20 A Superior Righteousness Prescribed

5:21-47 Six Examples of Superior Righteousness

5:48 A Superior Righteousness Reaffirmed

5:17-20 A Superior Righteousness Prescribed

The Old Testament contains doctrinal, ethical and ceremonial teaching. In other words, Old Testament writers taught their readers about God (doctrine), about morality (ethics) and about Israel's religion (ceremony). With these distinctions in mind, how did Jesus *fulfill* the *Law and the Prophets*?¹ How did Jesus fulfill each of these spheres of the law (the doctrinal, the ethical and the ceremonial)?

¹ By speaking of the *Law and the Prophets* Jesus means the whole Old Testament. The *Law* refers to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the *Prophets* refers to what the Jews called the *former* prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings) and the *latter* prophets (Isaiah through Malachi).

What is the difference between the righteousness Jesus prescribes and righteousness of *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law*? Use the six examples to inform your answer.

How would this section of Scripture challenge someone who said, *The Old Testament teaches law and the New Testament teaches grace*.

How do these verses challenge you and the way you are living the Christian life?

5:21-47 Six Examples of Superior Righteousness

The teaching of Jesus is both obvious and strong in these verses. Jesus chooses six areas of behavior, well known to the Pharisees, and makes a contrast between external and internal righteousness. In each example he moves from outward behavior to the root cause of that behavior. Look at each of these and identify the root cause behind each outward sin.

Outward Behavior	Root Cause
Murder	Hatred
Adultery	
Divorce	
Oath taking	
Law of retaliation	
Love for neighbor	

Each of Jesus' examples flow directly from the Old Testament.

1. 5:21-26 Murder (The Sixth Commandment: Exodus 20:13)

How should you apply verses 23-24 to your life today? Compare 1 Corinthians 11:23-33.

What is the practical wisdom Jesus imparts in verses Matthew 6:25-26?

2. 5:27-30 Adultery (The Seventh Commandment: Exodus 20:14)

What do Jesus' words teach you about the use of pornography?

How is it possible to live in our image-laden, and sexually saturated society and keep Jesus' instructions in these verses?

Where is the dividing line between noticing someone's beauty and lust?

Read Job 31:1, 7 and 9. How does one keep such a *covenant* with his eyes?

John Stott clarifies the strength of Jesus' remedy to lust:

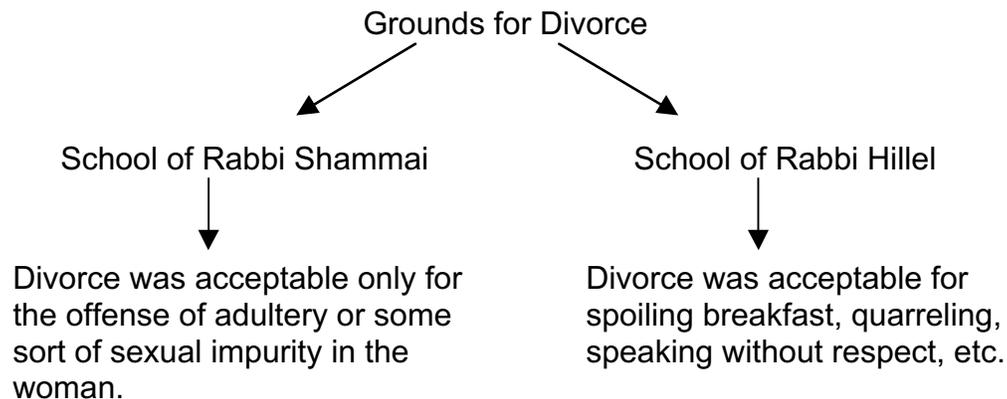
The command to get rid of troublesome eyes, hands and feet is an example of our Lord's use of dramatic figures of speech. What he was advocating was not a literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial. Not mutilation but mortification is the path of holiness he taught, and 'mortification' or 'taking up the cross' to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we die to them or put them to death. (Stott, p. 89)

3. 5:31-37 Divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

The Jews and the Greeks of Jesus' day lived in an era of easy divorce. In the Greco-Roman portion of society a man could divorce his wife with a note or simply by excusing her from his presence.

The Jews took marriage more seriously. A man had to find some *indecenty* in his wife (Deut. 24:1) before he could divorce her.¹

But how did the Jews define *indecenty*? At the time of Jesus there were two distinct schools of thought.



We need not ask which school of interpretation was most popular with the men in Jewish society.

Where does Jesus line up relative to the schools of Shammai and Hillel? Compare Matthew 19:3-9.

¹ In neither Greco-Roman nor the Jewish society did a woman have the prerogative of divorce.

In a single sentence, summarize Jesus' teaching on divorce from these two passages.

How does this compare with your observation of divorce in our North American setting?

4. 5:33-37 Taking Oaths (Numbers 30:2)

The Jews had an elaborate system of oath taking which contained the idea that if a person making an oath did not use God's name, he could break that oath without violating God's law. Hence the Jews would swear by *Jerusalem*, or by their *head*, etc., always being careful not to mention the covenant name of God.

What is Jesus' emphasis in this section?

How has truth-telling been lived out in your Christian life? How comfortable are you with *little lies*? What can you do to grow in this area?

5. 5:38-39 The Law of Retaliation (Exodus 21:23-24)

The Old Testament law was not to permit revenge, but was given to restrict retribution. What does Jesus do with this command? His teaching is startling. Instead of a measured response (Exodus 21:23-24) Jesus commands the opposite.

What is your *gut* response when you read these verses?

If we lived out these verses, how would those who watch our behavior respond? What would they think of our actions and reactions?

Give an example of this upside-down style of living that you have observed in our church life.

6. 5:43-47 Loving Your Enemies (Leviticus 19:18)

Read Leviticus 19:18. How does Jesus' teaching go beyond the Old Testament law?

5:48 A Superior Righteousness Reaffirmed

Compare this verse with Leviticus 19:2.

How does this verse summarize all that we have studied in this section?

Carson's comment on this verse is helpful:

Jesus is saying that the true direction in which the law has always pointed is not toward mere judicial restraints, concessions arising out of the hardness of men's hearts. . . nor even to the "law of love". No, it pointed rather to all the perfection of God. (Carson, p. 161)

Of course, this side of the second coming of Christ, we will never be without sin. But the invitation of our Lord invites us to strive for a very high standard. Spend time as a homegroup praying for one another to grow toward this standard.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eight

Devotion and Desire

Matthew 6:1-34

The *Sermon on the Mount* is not just a series of scattered teachings randomly grouped together by Matthew. When we read it carefully we see the unfolding of a plan. In last week's study we found Jesus putting forth a demand for a righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (5:20). After giving six examples of a deeper righteousness, Jesus tells his listeners to settle for nothing less than perfection in their discipleship.



Matthew 6 continues Jesus' thought. The followers of Christ are to beware of religious hypocrisy as they pursue this higher path.

Read Matthew 6 before going on in this study. What thoughts and questions come to mind? What are the emphases in Jesus' teaching. Keep the following outline in mind as you read:

- 6:1-4; 16-18** The practice of true religion.
- 6:5-15** The pattern of genuine prayer.
- 6:16-34** The pursuit of the King's program.

6:1-6; 16-18 The practice of true religion.

6:1-4 What is the main point of these verses? What principle is Jesus teaching?

How do you reconcile 6:1 with 5:14-16? How does your life line up with these two different passages?

6:1-4 What is Jesus' assumption in these verses? What does this tell us about the Christian's use of money? Compare Deuteronomy 15:1-11 for the Old Testament background to this section.

One of the ways we can encourage one another in the practice of giving is to share with one another our giving habits, and encourage one another by example. How does Jesus' emphasis on secrecy in giving inform the call in SBCC to *talk* about our giving?

Respond to the following quotation:

The way to avoid hypocrisy is not to cease giving but to do so with such secrecy that we scarcely know what we have given. (Carson, p. 164)

Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why?

6:16-18 What is the assumption of these verses? Share your experience of fasting with your homegroup. Has this been a neglected discipline? If not, what has fasting produced in your Christian life?

Consider and respond to the following quotation:

In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly from drink as well. This discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating. It may also bring to mind how we are using food pleasure to assuage the discomforts caused in your bodies by faithless and unwise living and attitudes—lack of

self-worth, meaningless work, purposeless existence, or lack of rest or exercise. If nothing else, though, it will certainly demonstrate how powerful and clever our body is in getting its own way against our strongest resolves. . . . Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food.¹

6:5-15 The pattern of genuine prayer.

This often misnamed prayer (really it is *the Disciple's Prayer*²) sets a pattern for how we ought to pray. Read these verses.

6:5-8 How many statements can you make about genuine prayer (positive and negative) from these verses?

Read the Disciple's prayer carefully.

Notice at the outset the prayer is addressed to *Our Father*. The Greek word Jesus used is *Abba* and would have shocked his disciples. It drips with intimacy and familiarity unknown to devout Jews in the time of Jesus. Jews were simply not accustomed to addressing God in this way.

The word for "Father" used by Jesus, *abba*, was the intimate term used by little children with their fathers, and it comes close (as the sounds *ab-ba* themselves suggest) to the child's reference to a father in all languages: *papa, fatie, tatay, daddy*, etc. (But *abba*, unlike its English equivalents, . . . remained in use during adulthood," Grund, 105) *Abba* is a word of love and affection. It is the most warm of the Aramaic words for father. (The modern "Our Parent" simply will not do.) (Brunner, p. 239)

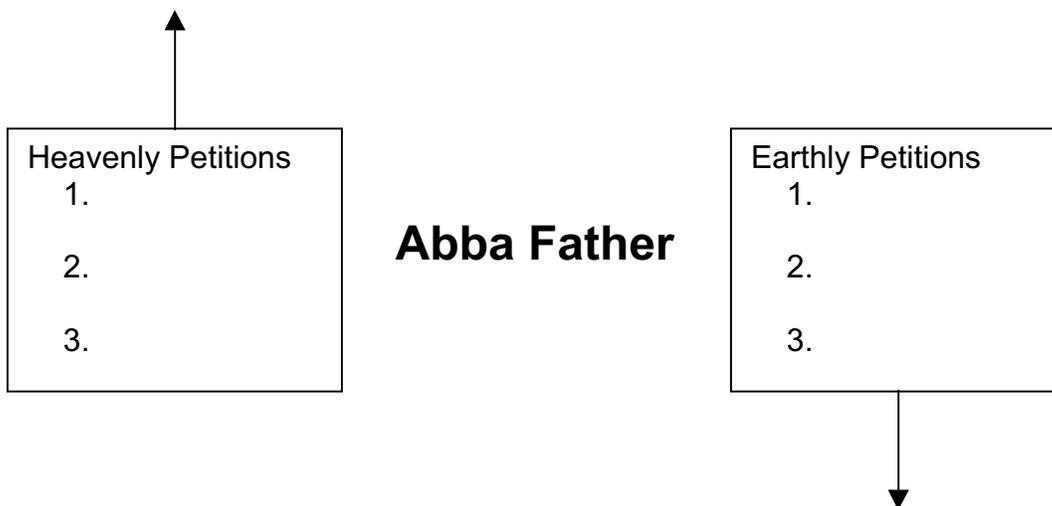
How should this introduction to prayer inform our prayer lives?

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 1988, p. 166.

² What should be called *the Lord's Prayer* is found in John 17.

How could the praying of this prayer provide healing for those who have suffered under an abusive or otherwise undesirable father? How can such a person kindle a trusting relationship with God as the loving *Father*?

Make a list of the specific requests Jesus teaches the disciples to pray.



Again, how should these petitions shape the way in which we pray? Think of how you pray together as a homegroup. Would someone listening to a tape recording of your prayer time be able to discern this pattern of prayer?

6:16-34 The pursuit of the King's program.

Read these verses again. How do they form a single unit? What is the main point of this section of Jesus' sermon?

What is the connection between the way in which we spend our money and the passion of our heart? Respond to the quotation below. How have you seen this to be true in your own life?

As surely as the compass follows north, your heart will follow your treasure. Money leads hearts to follow. . . . Giving jump-starts our relationship with God. It opens our fists so we can receive what God has for us.¹

People who give their money to the purposes of God worry less than those who don't. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Jesus has four criticisms of hoarding things on earth. What are they?

1. (vss. 19-20)
2. (vs. 21)
3. (vss. 22-23)
4. (vs. 24)

6:33 What does it mean in your life to *seek first God's kingdom and righteousness*. Spend time praying for one another in these comprehensive areas of the Christian life!

¹ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, 2001, p. 42.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Nine

Redeemed Relationships

Matthew 7:1-29

This is our fourth week in the Sermon on the Mount. We have pondered Jesus' strong teaching as we have sat with the disciples at the feet of our Lord. Jesus has called us to adopt the standards, attitudes and character of people who have been transformed by the Messiah. The Sermon does not, as we have seen, ask us to attain righteousness by being good. Instead it calls those who have experienced new birth in Christ to live as new people.



[T]he righteousness described in the Sermon is an inner righteousness. It is the very [opposite] of the inner evil that mars our hearts. There is only one solution. The tree must be made good if the fruit is to be good. Only belief in the necessity and possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon with foolish optimism or hopeless despair. It is all of a piece with the ethical teaching of the whole of the New Testament, which can be summed up in the phrase, 'Become what you are.' Disciples are called by their master to become in practice what they already are in the election and calling of God. . . . You cannot have the fruit of righteousness without the root of relationship with the Righteous One. (Green, p. 111)

How does Jesus conclude this Sermon? What is the unifying thread in these apparently unrelated paragraphs? It would seem that Jesus turns his attention to the redeemed relationships his disciples will enjoy as they live their lives according to the principles of the kingdom of God.

Read Matthew 7 keeping the following outline in mind as you read.¹

Redeemed Relationships:

1. to our brother whom we should help and not judge (7:1-5).
2. to *dogs* and *pigs*, those hardened to the wonder of the gospel (7:6).
3. to our heavenly Father who hears our prayers (7:7-11).

¹ This outline is based on Stott, pp. 174-175.

4. to everyone in general (The Golden Rule) (7:12).
5. to the wide road of false religion versus the narrow road of Christ (7:13-14).
6. to false prophets (7:15-20).
7. to Jesus and his teaching on righteousness (7:21-27).

Before going on in this study note your initial reactions to this chapter. What questions come to mind from these verses?

7:1-5 Judging and Being Judged

What do we find in these verses that should make us laugh?

What is Jesus warning against in these verses? What is the difference between *judging* another and, as is often said in SBCC, *holding one another accountable*? Compare Romans 2:1 and 1 Corinthians 4:4-5. How do these verses mesh with 1 Corinthians 5:1-5?

Give an example of an instance of inappropriate *judging* that you have either observed or received. What were the consequences in the relationships of those involved?

How can we apply these verses in our community life and not fall into the opposite error of everyone *doing what is right in his own eyes* without any accountability?

7:6 The Dogs and Pigs

This verse is nothing less than shocking. Jesus warns his disciples against wasting their time on those hardened to the truth of the gospel (Green, p. 106).

John Calvin writes,:

It ought to be understood that *dogs* and *swine* are names given not to every kind of debauched men, or to those who are destitute of the fear of God and of true godliness, but to those who, by clear evidences, have manifested a hardened contempt of God, so that their disease appears to be incurable.¹

What does this verse teach us about evangelism and missions?

What does the warning Jesus gives at the end of the verse mean in practical terms?

7:7-11 Asking the Father

Review these verses. List those things we learn about prayer from this section.

Compare 7:11 with Luke 11:13. What does this teach us about how God answers our prayers? What is the force of this brief parallelism? Is Jesus emphasizing the similarity or the difference between earthly fathers and our heavenly Father? What should this teach us about how God answers our prayers?

¹ Cited in Stott, p. 182.

How does this relate to your practice of prayer? What changes would you like to make this month?

7:12 The Golden Rule

This verse is arguably the most famous statement Jesus ever made. And perhaps it is the strongest. Confucius stated the same ethical principle in the negative, *What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others*. Many of the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' time summarized the law in a similar way. Hillel, for example, said the sum of the law is, *What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary. Go and learn*.

Jesus' positive command is much more rigorous in its demand. William Barclay calls this *the Everest of Ethics*. (Barclay, p. 272)

Describe the differences between the negative and the positive versions of this command? Give several examples.

Enjoy and respond to J. C. Ryle's¹ following comment on the Golden Rule.

This is a golden rule indeed! It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and overreaching: it does much more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and man; it prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases; it sweeps the whole debateable ground with one mighty principle; it shows us a balance and measure, by which every one may see at once what is his duty. Is there a thing we would not like our neighbour to do to us? Then let us always remember that this is the thing we ought not to do to him. Is there a thing we would like him to do to us? Then this is the very thing we ought to do to him. How many intricate questions would be decided at once if this rule were honestly used! (Ryle, p. 66)

¹ John Charles Ryle was the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool in the mid-19th century. He was a prolific writer and a dedicated pastor. Many of his books are still in print and are well-worth reading.

7:13-14 Two Roads, Two Gates

Ponder this brief parable.

What does it teach about salvation?

What could we learn about our evangelistic techniques? Should becoming a Christian be presented as an *easy* endeavor?

What does it say about the ultimate destiny of humankind?

7:15-20 False Prophets and Bad Fruit

What is the assumption of verse 15?

How are we to evaluate *prophets*; that is, teachers of the things of God? What does this mean practically?

James Boice sees in this section a call to devote ourselves to sound biblical teaching. We can evaluate a *prophet* (a biblical teacher) by the fruit produced in us. Respond to the following:

Does the teaching you are receiving satisfy your soul? Does it bring you closer to God? Does it equip you to live for Jesus Christ at home and in your place of work? Does it make you less selfish? Does it prompt you to help and serve other people when you have an opportunity to do so? If it does not, find teaching that does. Find a place where the teaching takes root and flourishes in growth and spiritual satisfaction. The only instruction that will ever satisfy you in this way is accurate Bible teaching. (Boice, p. 114)

7:21-27 Empty Words and a Firm Foundation

Read this section of the Sermon again.

What is the emphasis of Jesus' conclusion to this powerful sermon?

7:24-25 What does it mean to you to build your life on the *rock*? Be prepared to share with your group some of the *foundation-building* habits of your life.

Study Ten

Six Miracles of Authority (Part 1)

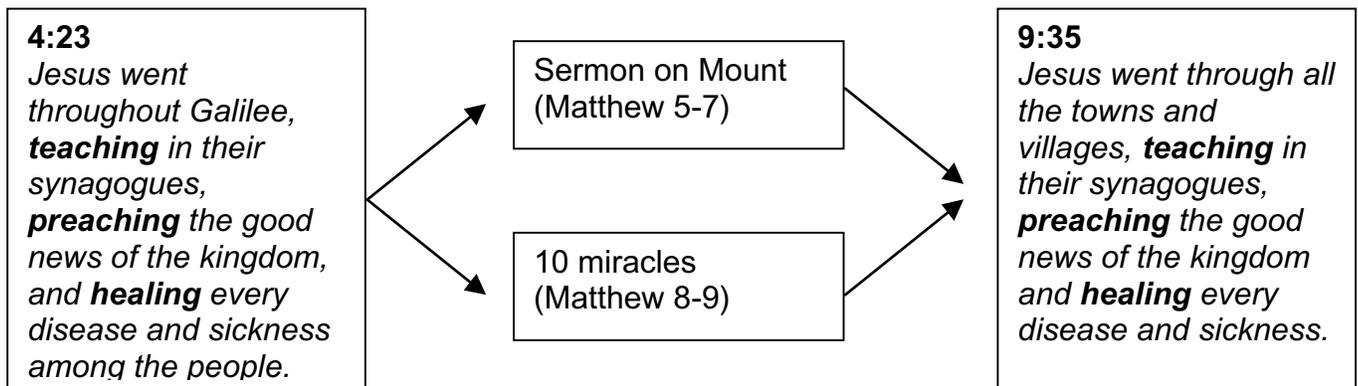
Matthew 8:1-9:8

The purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to provide assurance for Christian readers (Jesus really is Lord) while compelling decision for those uninitiated in the kingdom of God.

To this point we have seen the beginnings of the gospel story. Jesus was born (of the right lineage), adored by the Magi, heralded and baptized by John and tempted by the devil. When John the Baptist was imprisoned Jesus began his preaching ministry. The kingdom of heaven was near!

Notice how 4:23-9:35 form a unit. Matthew wants the reader to see the breadth and depth of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry.

Accordingly, Matthew groups the miracles and the teachings of Jesus together.¹



¹ In Mark and Luke both the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and the miracles of Matthew 8-9 spread out over longer periods of time. The miracles occur in a different order (compare Mark 2 with Matthew 9:1-8 for example).

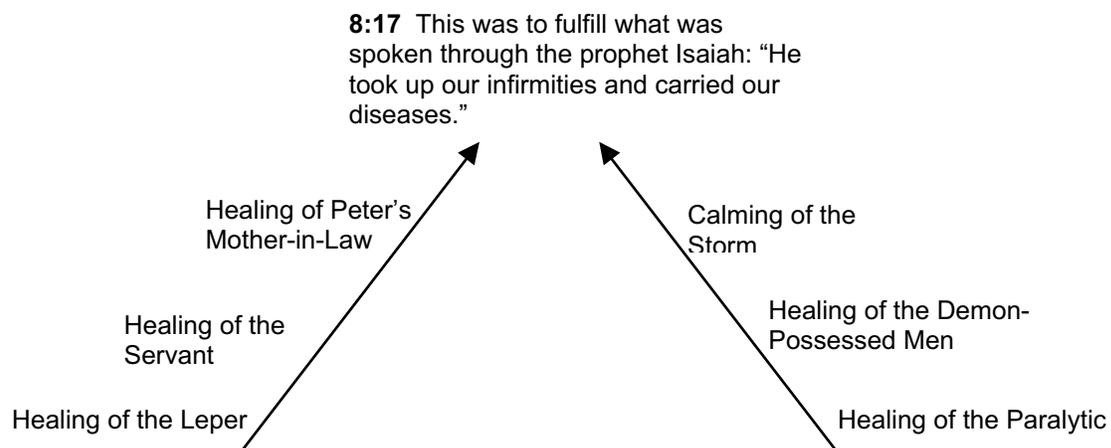
SIX MIRACLES OF AUTHORITY (PART 1)

Read Matthew 8-9. Make an outline of these chapters. You should find ten specific miracles described along with several other stories of Jesus' growing ministry.

8:1-9:8 Six Miracles of Authority

Notice how this section develops. After the first three miracles, we find a strong call to discipleship (8:18-22). Then we read of three more miracles which are followed by Matthew's own call to discipleship.

At the center of these six miracles of authority is a theological statement of interpretation. Matthew wants us to see Jesus' miracles in light of his death on the cross. Physical healing, Jesus' authority over the storm and his casting out of demons are signs of the greater miracle of forgiving people their sins.



1. Healing from Leprosy (8:1-4)

Leprosy was to the first-century what AIDS was to the 1980s in America. This was the disease that made one *untouchable*. Leprosy caused the body to waste away and led, slowly, to death. Because leprosy was contagious, those with the disease were among the most isolated people in society (see Leviticus 14:45-46).

With the above in mind, what is intriguing in this miracle story?

What do we learn about God from this story?

What lesson is there for us in this story?

Why didn't Jesus allow the cleansed leper to tell of his healing (see Mark 1:34-38)?

Do you ever feel diseased and untouchable before God due to past sin? What does this passage say to you?

2. The Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)

This miracle is loaded with theological significance. Here we find a *Gentile* with unparalleled faith, when the disciples, a few verses later, have very little faith. Notice the use of the word *authority* in verse 9.

All "authority" belonged to the emperor and was delegated. Therefore, because he was under the emperor's authority, when the centurion spoke, he spoke with the emperor's authority, so his command was obeyed. . . . This self-understanding the centurion applied to Jesus. Precisely because Jesus was under God's authority, he was vested with God's authority, so that when Jesus spoke, God spoke. To defy Jesus was to defy God; and Jesus' word must therefore be vested with God's authority that is able to heal sickness. (Carson, p. 201)

Jesus teaches with authority (7:29), and now he heals with authority.

How does Jesus interpret this miracle (vss. 11-12)?

What could this miracle teach us about how we should pray?

How does your faith measure up to that of the centurion? Describe a time in your life when you had centurion-like faith.

3. Peter's Mother-in-Law (8:14-15)

What do we learn about Peter from this story?

How does the faith of Peter's mother-in-law differ from the faith of the leper and the centurion?

These three miracles, along with the three that follow, are interpreted by Matthew in terms of Isaiah 53:4. Isaiah 53 is one of the most explicit Old Testament prophecies of God's Servant (Messiah) coming to bear our sins. Notice how Matthew changes the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

Isaiah 53:4 *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.* . . . Matthew 8:17 *"He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."*

Boice notes,

When [Matthew] supplies his own translation of the Hebrew text. . . he is making the point that Jesus' healing of our sicknesses is evidence of a far more important healing of our sins, which is what these stories are actually about. (Boice, p. 125)¹

Each of these miracles record Jesus' encounter with someone who is stricken with a near-death sickness. The point is clear: spiritually we are in need of Jesus' healing touch. The stakes are high. The options are life or death, and faith, large or small, is necessary for our salvation.

¹ The sixth miracle (9:1-8) makes this explicit. Jesus' healing of the paralytic demonstrates his authority to forgive sins.

With which of the following statements do you agree (you may choose as many as you like)? What do these three miracles teach us about faith and healing? If you can, note a verse beside those you choose to support your agreement.

- Jesus heals everyone.
- Jesus heals only those who have great faith.
- It takes great faith to be healed.
- We should ask Jesus to heal us.
- Television preachers are the only way to be healed.
- We should use medical help available to us.
- We should exercise and eat healthy foods.
- We will all die of something that is not healed.

8:18-22 The Call to Discipleship

These verses tell two discipleship stories. What is the different emphasis in each?

What has it cost you to follow Christ? Would your life be easier or more difficult if Jesus were not your Lord?

Respond to the following quotation:

It is not open sin, or open unbelief, which robs Christ of his professing servants, so much as the love of the world, the fear of the world, the cares of the world, the business of the world, the money of the world, the pleasures of the world, and the desire to keep in touch with the world. This is the great rock on which thousands of young people are continually making shipwreck. They do not object to any article of the Christian faith. They do not deliberately choose evil and openly rebel against God. They hope somehow to get to heaven at last, and they think it proper to have some religion. But they cannot give up their idol: they must have the world. And so after running well and bidding first for heaven while boys and girls, they turn aside when they become men and women and go down the broad way which leads to destruction. They begin with Abraham and Moses and end with Demas and Lot's wife.¹

¹ J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion: Being Plain Papers on the Daily Duties, Experience, Dangers and Privileges of Professing Christians*. Cited in Boice, p. 134.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eleven

Six Miracles of Authority (Part 2)

Matthew 8:1-9:8

In our last study we saw Jesus' miracles against the backdrop of our Lord's death on the cross. In a very real sense these miracles point to the climax of the gospel story.



These miracles (ch. 8) have been framed to emphasize Jesus' authority. This authority was never used to satisfy himself (cf. 4:1-10). He healed the despised leper (vv. 1-4), a Gentile centurion's servant who was hopelessly ill (vv. 5-13), other sick (vv. 14-15), no matter how many (vv. 16-17). Thus when he gave his life a ransom for many (20:28), it was nothing less than an extension of the same authority directed toward the good of others. (Carson, p. 206, emphasis added)

Re-read 8:1-9:8. What details stand out after reading and discussing this section in our last study?

4. The Calming of the Storm (8:23-27)

What is the connection between this miracle and the preceding verses? Notice the first sentence of our passage. Compare 4:20, 22; 9:9.

SIX MIRACLES OF AUTHORITY (PART 2)

With the above in mind, Matthew is asking the reader: which kind of disciple are you? Are you in the boat with Jesus despite the danger? Have you left your other loyalties to follow the Master? (Reflect on these questions as a group.)

Jesus and his disciples are in a small boat crossing the *sea* (NASB; *Lake* in the NIV softens Matthew's word choice¹). Commentators point out that in the Jewish mind the *sea* represented danger and chaos.² God's strength in creation allowed him to both *form the mountains* and *still the roaring of the sea* (Psalm 65:5-8).

Notice the parallel between our passage in Matthew and Psalm 89:9-10.

*O LORD God Almighty, who is like you?
You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
You rule over the surging sea;
when its waves mount up, you still them.*

What point is Matthew making with this fairly obvious comparison?

The disciples are forced to trust Jesus to conquer one of their great fears. What fear (or fears) in your life have you submitted to Jesus? What was the result?

What fear (or fears) are you having a difficult time giving over to Jesus?

¹ Matthew and Mark, both Gospels with very Jewish concerns, use the word *sea*. For Luke, who seems to write for a Gentile audience, this is the *lake of Galilee* (Luke 5:1).

² It is interesting that in the book of Revelation, a prophecy which casts the future with imagery drawn from the Old Testament, the coming kingdom of God is seen as a time when there will be no *sea* (Revelation 21:1).

Respond to Matthew Henry's comment on 8:26.

He does not chide them for disturbing him with their prayers, but for disturbing themselves with their fears.¹

5. The Healing of Two Demon-Possessed Men (8:28-34)

When the boat lands Jesus and his disciples are in the area of Decapolis,² Gentile territory. The presence of a herd of pigs, a highly unclean animal to the Jews, confirms this.

What about *demons* and demon-possession? Michael Green offers a helpful comment:

The story . . . of the demoniacs shows Jesus' absolute authority over the forces of evil. It was universally believed, in both Jewish and pagan circles, that there are forces beyond what we can see and hear, and that some of them are good (angels) and some evil (demons). This is not a dualistic³ belief, at least not in Judaism, which acknowledges God as sovereign: Satan and his demonic forces were originally made to know and enjoy God, but have rebelled. They have great power, but not unlimited power. God is still in ultimate control. And here are two men, eaten up by these dark forces in their lives, driven berserk and living in the tombs (frequently associated with the occult, both then and now). The Jews knew well that when the day of judgment arrived God and his Messiah would utterly destroy all demons. (Green, p. 120)

With the above in mind, what lessons is Matthew teaching the reader in this story?

¹ Matthew Henry was a 17th-century puritan commentator who wrote voluminously and is still in print in today.

² This is an area of ten cities and many other villages. Josephus says each city and village had no fewer than fifteen thousand residents.

³ Dualism would teach that there are equal and opposite forces in the universe; good and evil, angels and demons, God and Satan. The Jewish-Christian world-view teaches that God has complete authority over everything, and every creature.

Notice the irony in this story. When Jesus calms the storm the disciples ask, *Who is this man?* When they get to the shore the demon-possessed men give the answer.

8:29-31 Examine the words recorded from the mouths of the demon-possessed men. What do we learn about Jesus from their statements?

8:32 Why do you think Jesus granted the demons' request to be cast into the pigs?

8:34 Why do you think the people of the town wanted Jesus to leave after this incident? What does this tell us about the people of the area? What are some of the reasons people today don't want to be near Jesus?

What is your response to acknowledging the presence of demons in the world? Some Christians find a demon behind every undesirable circumstance. Others never think about the minions of Satan. Where are you in this spectrum?

6. The healing of the Paralytic (9:1-8)

Matthew presents this miracle in a more succinct form than Mark (2:1-12) and Luke (5:17-26). It would seem Matthew wants us to concentrate, again, on the authority of Jesus. Read these verses and compare either Mark or Luke's version of the event.

What would you have been thinking as the man was let through the roof? Why does Jesus forgive the paralytic's sins?

When Jesus claims the ability to forgive the man's sins the *teachers of the law* are aghast. Why? Compare Mark 2:7.

In the Jewish mind sickness and suffering were the direct result of personal sin (see John 9:2). Rabbi Ami said, *There is no death without sin, and no pains without some transgression.* Rabbi Alexander said, *The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven.*¹

What is the relationship between sin and suffering? Between sin and sickness?

Does the forgiveness of sin always lead to physical healing? We might say, yes, *but not yet.* Consider the following.

It is . . . quite correct to say, for instance, that there is healing in the atonement—a slogan in many Christian circles. But in the same sense, there is also a resurrection body and a new heaven and a new earth in the atonement. That does not mean I can expect to claim my resurrection body now, simply because it has been paid for. Though secured by Christ's cross and resurrection, our resurrection bodies come to us, according to the New Testament, only when Christ returns. And the same may be true, in many instances, of healing. God may bestow healing now, but he has certainly not pledged himself to do so. But one day all true believers will be perfectly healed.²

Share with your group what it means to you that Jesus has forgiven your sin. In what ways have you experienced his healing touch?

Think back over the six miracles we have studied in this lesson and in study ten. Notice the role of *faith* in these miracles. Faith is usually present (except in the miracle of the exorcism, unless we want to call the request of the demons an expression of faith), but it is never absolute. The leper and the centurion had great faith. We're not even sure Peter's mother-in-law was awake when she was healed. The disciples had, seemingly, no faith (*Wake up! We're gonna drown!* etc.). The point Matthew is making is that Jesus doesn't need our faith to work his powers. This is the Lord. The authority of his teaching (7:29) is matched by the magnitude of his power.

Our appropriate response is praise! We worship the sovereign God of the universe!

¹ Cited in Barclay, p. 327.

² D.A. Carson, *God With Us: Themes From Matthew*, 1985, p. 52.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twelve

New Wineskins

Matthew 9:9-34

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, *When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die*. The grace of Christ, Bonhoeffer writes:

is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.¹

Matthew 9:9-34 celebrates the cost and the reward of following Christ. Here is the Messiah who will not be boxed in. He offers new wine which requires new wineskins. But the cost of discipleship, as we will see, is high.

Read these verses without looking further in this study. Make a point-by-point outline of the action presented. What questions arise as you read?



We can think of Matthew 9 as a chapter showing the newness of the work of Christ. Matthew himself is called to dramatically new life. His conversion and the subsequent party which follows provoke a query by John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees about that which is old (*Why do we fast?*) and that which is new (*Why don't you fast?*). This leads to four more miracles all dominated by the

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1959, p. 47. Bonhoeffer wrote this book in 1937 and practiced what he preached. The pastor-theologian was executed two weeks before the end of WWII.

theme of newness (new life, new health, new sight, new tongue). The new wine of Jesus' parable in 9:16-17 requires the new wineskins of the new covenant.

New Life for Matthew (9:9-13)

Tax collectors were what we would call *upwardly mobile*. They made a good income. Matthew was a tax collector in a cosmopolitan town which gave him access to taxing all goods entering or leaving Herod Antipas' territory. From the perspective of a devout Jew Matthew had compromised his Jewish heritage and made peace with the occupying forces from Rome. Because of this compromise Matthew would have been forbidden to enter the synagogue or have any contact with the orthodox Jews (Pharisees). In our day we might have applied adjectives such as *slimy*, *dicey*, or even *disgusting* to this tax collector named Matthew.¹ Jesus himself uses the title *tax collector* to refer to the lowest persons on the social index (5:48).

With the above in mind, what are the two shocking surprises in these verses?

We have discussed this before, but again, how can you follow Jesus' example of reaching out to the untouchables in our society? What progress have you made in this area since our study began? What is one specific area in which your homegroup can pray for you in this area?

Explain Jesus' quotation from Hosea 9:13: *I desire mercy, not sacrifice*. What can you learn from this in your appropriation of the Christian life?

¹ Mark and Luke call this man *Levi*. Possibly Matthew (*gift of God*) was Jesus' nickname for Levi (see Carson, p. 223). There is an interesting change in this account when compared to Luke's more flattering version of Matthew's conversion. Matthew 9:9 says, . . . *and Matthew got up and followed him*. Luke says Matthew . . . *got up, left everything and followed him*. This is one of those marks of authenticity. Matthew blushes a bit. He softens the cost of his discipleship and the radical nature of his obedience. Another such mark is found in 10:3 when Matthew lists the twelve disciples. When it comes time to refer to himself he writes, *Matthew the tax collector*. Neither Luke nor Mark includes this detail. *Others might like to forget that an apostle was once engaged in this despised work, but Matthew himself never ceased to wonder that a social outcast such as himself should have been selected by Jesus for this high office.* (Tasker, p. 106)

New Wine, New Wineskins (9:14-17)

The parallel version of this story (Mark 2:18-22) says that the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were in the midst of a fast when they asked their question. Think about this. The religious folks are hungry, and yet they see the miracle-working rabbi having a great time at Matthew's conversion party.

What three illustrations does Jesus use to answer the question of the Pharisees and John's disciples?¹ Find the hint of the coming cross of Christ in this passage.

Green probes the exhilaration contained in these verses:

There is something very typical and ironic about this enquiry. Here are the disciples of John and the Pharisees wondering why on earth they fast! Typical of religious people. They engage in all sorts of actions and ceremonies and have not the least idea why they do it. But Jesus is clear that his coming marks a discontinuity with all that. The old skins cannot contain the new wine he is bringing. Old regulations about ceremonial defilement cannot stand before the joy of forgiveness, fellowship, excitement and new direction which the coming of the kingdom inaugurates. (Green, pp. 124-125)

In what ways are you experiencing the *new wine* of Jesus? Describe the joy of your Christ-following life?

New Hope for the Hopeless (9:18-34)

After the discussion about fasting, Matthew gives the reader a record of four more miracles which testify to the newness of the ministry of Jesus. We see the *new wine* of Christ offered to those we would least expect. The dead girl and the woman with the menstrual hemorrhage are both *unclean* and therefore, outside the social circles of the Pharisees. The blind and mute, as we have seen previously, would have been viewed as those suffering because of one sin or another. They are outsiders.

¹ Luke 5:39 contains a fourth illustration.

The condition of the dead girl and the woman with the menstrual flow was hopeless. The girl is, to state the obvious, dead. The woman has been suffering for twelve years. What Matthew implies, Luke states explicitly: *no one could heal her* (Luke 8:43).

Has Jesus ever been the healer in your life in a situation which seemed hopeless? How did he bring healing to your life?

What is the role of faith in these two miracles? What was the role of faith in the situation you described in the above question? Compare the faith of the father and the woman with that of the Pharisees in 9:34.

9:27 Read Isaiah 35:5-6, which looks forward to the time of Messiah. How does this explain the title by which the blind men address Jesus? What are they saying with this title?

9:30 Jesus commands the two formerly blind men to keep their healing (or the source of their healing) a secret. The verb Jesus uses is strong. It conveys strong emotion (Carson, p. 233).¹ Why would Jesus want to keep such miracles quiet? See John 6:14-15.

There is an irony in this story. Jesus tells the formerly blind men to be quiet, and they speak. He tells his disciples (28:18-20) to speak, and Christians, in our time

¹ We find similar prohibition in 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20 and 17:9. Mark records these prohibitions much more frequently.

at least, have a difficult time opening their mouths. Why would this be the case? Why do we often have a difficult time sharing our faith?

9:34 By the time we get to this verse we have witnessed a string of ten stunning miracles.¹ Each miracle establishes, in some way, the sovereign authority of Jesus. Most of these wonders have some link to the faith of those involved. But notice the bitter conclusion to these miracle stories. After all Jesus has done Matthew ends with a dark comment: *But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."*

What does this response teach us about the role of faith in our response to Jesus? What does it teach us about the value of the miraculous with regard to evangelism? What should we say to the comment: *If only I could see a miracle, I'd believe?*

¹ 1, the healing of the leper (8:1-4); 2, the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13); 3, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15); 4, the stilling of the storm (8:23-27); 5, the exorcisms of the two men in Gadarene (8:28-34); 6, the healing of the paralytic (9:1-8); 7, the healing of the woman with a flow of blood (9:20-22); 8, the raising of the synagogue ruler's daughter (9:18-19, 23-26); 9, the healing of two blind men (9:27-31); and 10, the healing of the dumb man (9:32-34).

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Thirteen

Mission

Mathew 9:35-10:42

Every man is a missionary, now and forever, for good or for evil, whether he intends or designs it or not. He may be a blot radiating his dark influence outward to the very circumference of society, or he may be a blessing spreading benediction over the length and breadth of the world. But a blank he cannot be: there are no moral blanks; there are no neutral characters.

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)¹



With these verses we come to the end of the second section of Matthew's Gospel (see chart before introduction). Jesus wants his disciples to see, very early on, that they are to replicate his ministry in the world. They are called to mission. Notice verse 2: *These are the names of the twelve apostles. . . .* The word *apostle* means *sent ones*. No sooner are the disciples designated as *apostles* than they are sent out to the towns of Galilee.

Before turning to Matthew's Gospel, read Ezekiel 36:1-16. Here we find the Old Testament background to Jesus' commissioning of the disciples.

Now read Matthew 9:35-10:42. What points from Jesus' second sermon in this Gospel stand out? Why? Keep the following outline in mind as you read.

1. The Shepherd's quest for shepherds. (9:35-38)
2. The Commissioning of the twelve. (10:1-42)
 - Designating the twelve (10:1-5)
 - Travel instructions (10:5-15)
 - Trouble instructions (10:16-25)
 - Trust instructions (10:26-39)
3. The Shepherd's promise to the sheep (10:40-42)

¹ Thomas Chalmers was a pastor-evangelist in Glasgow Scotland.

9:35-36 What three things was Jesus doing at this point in his ministry. Compare 4:23? What prompted Jesus' concern for the lost sheep of Israel? What lesson is there for us in this?

9:37-38 How do these verses anticipate the purpose of the church? Compare Matthew 28:18-20.

10:1-4 probably doesn't startle 21st century western readers of Matthew's Gospel, but this list of names should. Jesus assembles a brood of unlikely partners in ministry. This is anything but a collection of men who already see life from the same perspective.

Included in this little band was Peter the optimist (Matt. 14:28; 26:33, 35), but also Thomas the pessimist (John 11:16; 20:24, 25); Simon the one-time Zealot, hating taxes and eager to overthrow the Roman government, but also Matthew, who had voluntarily offered his tax collecting services to that same Roman government. (Hendrickson, p. 455)

What united these men? What lesson can our church glean from this diverse list of names?

How are you at uniting with Christians of a different social or political viewpoint? What are the categories of life or thought that are hardest for you (old—young, middle-class—poor, educated—non-educated, black—white)? What can you do to grow in this area?

10:5-6 may surprise some readers. Jesus says, essentially, *Stay in Galilee!* Literally, verse 5 reads, *Do not go away on the road of the Gentiles.* Samaria was to the south, and was populated by people despised by *pure* Jews. Why this prohibition?

Jesus stood at the nexus in salvation history where as a Jew and the Son of David he came in fulfillment of his people's history as their King and

Redeemer. Yet his personal claims would offend so many of his own people that he would be rejected by all but a faithful remnant. Why increase their opposition by devoting time to a Gentile ministry? His mission, as predicted, was worldwide in its ultimate aims¹. . . ; and all along he warned that being a Jew was not enough. But his own people must not be excluded because premature offense could be taken at such broad perspectives. Therefore Jesus restricted his own ministry primarily (15:24), though not exclusively (8:1-13; 15:21-39) to Jews. He himself was sent as their Messiah. The messianic people of God developed out of the Jewish remnant and expanded to include Gentiles. (Carson pp. 244-245)

10:11-16 What are the specific instructions Jesus gives to the twelve for their mission?

What specific tasks are the disciples to perform?

What is the content of the disciple's message?

What do you think was the intent behind these instructions? What principles might we glean for our own missionary endeavors?

10:16 Consider the images Jesus uses. What is pictured when Jesus says his disciples are *sheep among wolves*?

What does it mean to be *shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves*? What should this teach us about evangelism?

10:16ff. Notice how the concern of Jesus' discourse to his disciples moves to a larger stage. His sermon begins with instructions for a small mission in Galilee.

¹ See, for example, 2:1; 3:9-10; 4:15-16; 5:13-16; 8:1-13; 10:18; 21:43; 24:14; 28:16-20.

But as the sermon progresses it becomes obvious that Jesus has the mission of his future church in mind. Notice the broadening scope.

10:5-6 Mission to the Jews:
Mission to the towns of Galilee (not to the Gentiles)



10:17ff. Broader mission to the world:

1. expect severe persecution (10:17, 21-23)
2. expect to witness to the Gentiles (10:18)
3. expect to find your final help in the second coming of Christ (10:23)

10:23 This section of Jesus' instruction turns on how we interpret this verse. What does Jesus mean? Scholars have spilt a fair amount of ink trying to interpret Jesus' prediction of the coming *Son of Man* which will occur before *you have finished going through the cities of Israel*. Carson lists several options (pp. 250-251):

1. Jesus is speaking literally, and refers to the immediate near future. The *coming* Jesus refers to is Jesus himself catching up with the twelve before their mission is complete.
2. The *coming* Son of Man refers to the return of Jesus at the end of the age (Matthew 24:30; 25:31; 26:64). But how could the *cities* of Israel fail to be evangelized in at any time since Jesus made this prophecy?
3. Jesus expected the end to come immediately. He thought he would rule and reign in Israel with the disciples.

The first option doesn't fit with the gospel story. There is neither indication that the disciples suffered persecution on this missionary journey, nor indication that Jesus tried to catch up with his disciples.

The third view suffers the deficit of seeing Jesus as one who is ignorant of the future. It also fails to take into consideration the enormous amount of material in the Gospels which shows Jesus setting his view toward the cross (16:21 for example).

In 10:23 Jesus is referring to his second coming. Boice adds a helpful comment:

I think it is [best] to see verse 23 as stating a general principle: We will always have work to do and we will never get to all the places we ought to go before Christ's second coming. Reference to "Israel" here would be an application to the principle to this particular setting. The disciples would not get to all the world's cities in our day, but we should get on with the

Great Commission anyway. We need to keep moving. The second half of chapter 10 contains instructions about what we can expect while we wait for the Lord to come. (Boice, pp. 179-180)

10:17-42 Notice the balance between the promises of persecution and promises of protection/reward in these verses. Make a list of these. Circle those you have experienced in your Christian journey.

Promises of persecution

Promises of protection/reward

Obviously Jesus does not promise his disciples a *free lunch*. Following Christ will prove to be a costly endeavor because it will require true disciples to be like their Lord. *A student is not above his master*. Reflect on your own life of discipleship. What has it *cost* you to follow Christ?

It is very common to find Christians who rarely, if ever, share their faith with anyone. Reflect on the quotation below. Is Andrew Murray right?

As we seek to find our way, with such millions of Christians, the real army of God that is fighting the hosts of darkness is so small, the only answer is—lack of heart. The enthusiasm of the kingdom is missing. And that is because there is so little enthusiasm for *the King*.¹

¹ From Andrew Murray, *Key to the Missionary Problem*, 1979, p. 133, cited in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 1993, p. 37.

With all of the above in mind, respond to the quotation at the beginning of this study. Are you a *blot* or a *blessing*. Explain.

Spend time praying for, challenging and encouraging one another to continue the mission of the twelve.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fourteen

The Greatest and the Least

Matthew 11:1-19



In Matthew 11 the reader begins a new section of the first Gospel. In 11:1 we find the transitional words: *After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples.*¹ The next section of Matthew's Gospel is tied together by the thread of *disappointment*. John the Baptist is disappointed with the way Jesus' ministry is turning out (11:1-19). The cities of Galilee haven't repented (11:20-24). Jesus' miracles are

even attributed to the power of Satan (12:22ff.), and formal opposition to Jesus begins (12:14).²

Read Matthew 11:1-19 before going on in this study. Make a few notes as you read. What questions do these verses bring to your mind?

What is John's question for Jesus?

Why do you think he asks this question?

What is Jesus' answer?

By the time of John there had been, roughly, 400 years without prophetic voice in Israel. Along comes this very gutsy preacher named John who is, evidently, filled with the Spirit of God! His message is one of judgment, deliverance, the day of

¹ See 7:28-29; 13:53-54; 19:1; 26:1-2. These words mark the transitions in Matthew's presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus (see chart before the introduction).

² This pattern is followed in each of the Gospels. After an initial welcome of Jesus and his message Jesus is rejected (see also Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11; and John 5:1-16). Interestingly, the opposition in each Gospel has to do with Jesus' casual attitude toward observing the Sabbath.

the Lord and the baptism of the Spirit! It should come as no surprise that John attracted a sizable following (3:1-12).

But, like most prophets, John wasn't able to be polite when in the presence of the aristocrats of society. John challenged the immoral lifestyle of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, and was thrown into prison. Matthew will explain this in 14:3-5. John challenged Herod because the latter seduced and then married his sister-in-law. John was in prison in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea¹, and only caught bits and pieces of Jesus' ministry we've been reading of in Matthew 1-10.

11:2 Why would John send this question to Jesus? Why does John doubt? Compare John's message in 3:1-12.

Have you ever asked a similar question of Jesus? What led to your doubts?

Why doesn't Jesus condemn John for his doubts? Can you think of other examples of doubt in the Bible? How does God respond to doubt and doubters?

What would diminish your doubts about who Jesus is and what he has done?

11:4-5 What is behind Jesus' answer to the Baptist? Compare the following passages.

- Isaiah 35:5-6
- Isaiah 61:1-2
- Luke 4:18-19

¹ We know this from Josephus.

Notice where Jesus stops reading from the scroll of Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:19). How does this help explain John's disappointment?

11:6 What is the meaning of Jesus' last words to John: *Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me?*

11:7-12 These verses are both perplexing and awe inspiring. Jesus and John stand at the vortex of history. What specific statements can you find that Jesus makes about John the Baptist?

Jesus makes a stunning comment about this desert preacher, namely, that John was the greatest of all the prophets. Greater than Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah and Elisha. John was greater than Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah! How could this be?

What made John so special is that he had the privilege of actually pointing out the Messiah, which none of his predecessors had done. John did no miracles (John 10:41), but he was greater than any of the earlier prophets (or anyone else who had come before him) simply because he had the job of announcing and then actually identifying Jesus as the Christ. (Boice, p. 191)

The second half of 11:11, therefore, should take our breath away:

yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (NRSV)

John the Baptist, and everyone else who ever lived, looked forward to the coming of Messiah. But even the lowliest *Christian* is *greater* in the sense that he or she lives on this side of the finished work of Messiah. Believers after the coming of Christ share the blessings of the kingdom and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even the littlest person in this completely new world stands higher than tall John. A difference of kind and not only of degree has entered history. The kingdom of heaven is the invasion of a new world into this old one: people in it are qualitatively different. (Brunner, p. 416)

Describe the *qualitative* difference Christ has made in your life.

What does this verse teach us about our spiritual resources? How *should* this verse inform your spiritual self-image?

The implications of 11:11 for church life are profound. How would the *church* in America change if we acted on the truth of this verse? Respond to the following quotation:

So often Christians want to establish their “greatness” with reference to their work, their giving, their intelligence, their preaching, their gifts, their courage, their discernment. But Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed that even the least believer is greater than Moses or John the Baptist, simply because of his or her ability, living on this side of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, to point him out with greater clarity and understanding than all his forerunners ever could. If we really believe this truth, it will dissipate all cheap vying for position and force us to recognize that our true significance lies in our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.¹

11:12 lends itself to several interpretations. The Greek grammar is not entirely clear. The verb translated *forcefully advancing* in the NIV (*biazetai*) can be in either the middle voice (*forcefully advancing*) or the passive voice (*being forcefully advanced into*). In other words Jesus could be speaking of the powerful advance of the kingdom of God (as in the NIV), or he could be speaking of the strong opposition to the kingdom of God (as in the NASB).²

Each translation (interpretation) has supporting evidence. Translating the verb in the middle voice (NIV) seems to fit the context of Matthew’s Gospel. The kingdom is growing, and it has been *advancing forcefully* insofar as Jesus has been preaching, healing and casting out demons.

On the other hand, the immediate context is that of John’s doubts and questions concerning Jesus. John is in prison; the kingdom of God *suffers violence*. Persecution is to be expected for the followers of Jesus.

¹ D.A. Carson, *God With Us: Themes From Matthew*, 1985, p. 62.

² Matt. 11:12 “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” (NASB)

11:14 is yet another possibly confusing verse. Notice the Old Testament background for this verse.

- Malachi 3:1
- Malachi 4:5

Jesus is not saying that John is the reincarnation of Elijah (compare John 1:21). John is a prophet who is very much *like* Elijah.

“And [John the Baptist] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Luke 1:17

11:16-19 Jesus shows the contrast between his own ministry and John’s ministry. In many ways the two are opposites, yet the crowds (compared to children) don’t like either. What point is Jesus making in these verses?

Boice offers a fitting summary of this section of Matthew.

Jesus says in the last verse of this section, “Wisdom is proved right by her actions.” This is as true today as it ever was, and it is as true in spiritual matters as in the mundane matters of daily life. If you are a wise person, you will act rightly, and acting rightly means to turn from sin and follow Jesus. (Boice, p. 193)

Spend some time as a homegroup prayerfully acknowledging who Jesus is. Pray for one another’s increasing faith and understanding of what Christ has done in his or her life.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fifteen

The Condemned and the Accepted

Matthew 11:20-30

Matthew's Gospel is written, at least in part, to provoke the reader to decision. Up to this point the message of Jesus has been largely positive. Jesus has preached the *good news* of the Kingdom of God (4:23; 9:35; 11:5).¹ He has been busy healing, offering mercy, proclaiming the way of salvation. We have not yet met *Jesus the judge* too often in Matthew's Gospel.

But here the lines are being drawn. In 11:20 the reader learns from the lips of Jesus that the options are stark in their contrast. What will it be? Judgment or acceptance? Salvation or perdition? Heaven or hell?

Read 11:20-30 from whatever translations you have available. What thoughts and questions does your reading bring to your mind?



¹ After 11:5 we don't find the *good news of the Kingdom* referred to again in Matthew.

11:20-24 The Condemned

The language Matthew employs in this passage is strong. Jesus *began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed.*

The verb *to denounce* is strong and refers to severe indignation. In 27:44 the same word is used for *insults*. Jesus is aghast that the very cities in which most of his miracles were performed had few who repented and followed the master.

What do we know about these cities?

Korazin is only mentioned here and in Luke 10:13 in the New Testament. It was probably a city excavated two miles northwest of Jesus' headquarters in Capernaum.

Bethsaida is the home-town of Peter, Andrew and Philip (see John 1:44; 12:21). Bethsaida was the location of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17) and the town where Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 8:22-26).

Tyre and Sidon were coastal cities just north of Israel.¹ Their pagan worship of false gods was, of course, deeply offensive to Israel.

Glance over Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26 and read Amos 1:9-10. What do you think Jesus' listeners in Galilee would have thought when they heard the words of 11:20-22?

Capernaum is, as we have seen, Jesus headquarters in Galilee. It was also the town in which many of Jesus' miracles were performed.²

Notice 11:23. Capernaum will not be *lifted up*. Instead it will *go down to the depths*. Carson explains how shocking these words would have been to listeners from Capernaum:

[T]he allusion to Isaiah 14:15 is unmistakable. The favored city of Capernaum, like the self-exalting Babylon, will be brought down to Hades. The OT passage is a taunt against the wicked and arrogant city, personified in its king; and Capernaum is lumped together with Babylon, which all Jews regarded as the epitome of evil (cf. Rev 17:5). (Carson, p. 273)

¹ Tyre was a city on an island just off the coast of Israel.

² See 8:5-17; 9:2-8, 18-33; Mark 1:23-28; John 4:46-54).

11:20-24 What do we learn from this paragraph on the judgment of God? James Boice finds five lessons from Jesus' teachings (Boice, pp. 197-198). Interact with four of these. Look up the pertinent Scriptures. Discuss them as a homegroup. How does (or should) the Bible's teaching of the coming judgment affect your Christian life?

1. There will be a judgment and it should be feared. Compare:

- Matthew 10:15
- Matthew 12:41
- Acts 24:25
- Romans 2:2-5
- 2 Corinthians 5:10
- Hebrews 9:27
- Hebrews 10:26-27

2. There are degrees of punishment. Notice what Jesus says about Tyre and Sidon relative to the cities where he had performed his miracles. The people of these cities will face a lesser judgment than the people of Korazin and Bethsaida. The people of Sodom will have an easier time of it than the people of Capernaum. To whom much is given much is required. Compare:

- Matthew 23:14
- Mark 12:38-41
- Luke 12:42-47

3. God's judgments take account of his contingent knowledge. This is another way of saying that God's judgment takes into account a person's opportunity (Carson, p. 273). Or, as Boice writes, *God's judgments are based not only on what the people have done but also on what they would have done if the conditions under which they had lived had been different.* (Boice, p. 198) The all-knowing God of the universe understands these contingencies.

In light of the above, how do you think God will treat Americans at the Day of Judgment? Respond to the following:

At the final judgment God will take into account not only North America's and every North American's moral standing and response to Jesus Christ and use of opportunities, as compared with, say, every Cuban's use of the same—but also what both parties would have done if their roles and advantages had been reversed.¹

4. God is not obligated to save anyone.

This is the final hard lesson of these verses. Although the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom would have repented and been saved if Jesus had done the miracles in those cities that he did in Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, he did not do them, and the people perished justly for their sins. We think God owes us mercy, but if mercy were owed, it would not be mercy. The only thing God actually owes us is justice, and we will get it if we do not commit our lives to Christ. God *is* merciful to many, but God *owes* mercy to none! (Boice, p. 198)

What new insights have you gleaned from the above four lessons on the judgment of God?

Why is the biblical teaching of God's judgment spoken of so rarely?

¹ D.A. Carson, *God With Us: Themes From Matthew*, 1985, p. 66.

11:25-30 The Accepted

Read this section carefully. If the above paragraph allowed us to make four statements about the judgment of God, what statements can we make about the salvation of God from this paragraph? Share these with your homegroup.

11:25 Compare the verses below. Who are the *little children* who are ready to receive God's salvation? What does this tell you about your own conversion?

- Isaiah 66:2
- Isaiah 57:15
- Proverbs 3:34
- 1 Peter 5:5

Brunner writes:

[B]oth the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles agree in God's great plan: to bless the little people. We have found this plan everywhere in Matthew's Gospel: from the genealogy's aliens through the Beatitudes' poor and the miracles' outcasts to our present text. "No one is so great that God needs him, no so little that God cannot reach him" (Schlatter). (Brunner, p. 431)

11:28-30 What is your own experience with respect to these verses? How have you experienced Jesus' gentleness? His easy yoke? His light burden?

In 1678 John Bunyan wrote what is possibly the greatest piece of literature in the English language, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan tells the story as if it came to him in a dream. *Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegorical story of the conversion and heavenly pilgrimage of *Christian*, who represents every believer. At the beginning of the story *Christian* carries a heavy burden on his back (symbolic of his sins). The passion of his life is to get rid of his burden. Finally, after some missteps and detours we read:

He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a Sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the Sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it now more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death. Then he stood still a while to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his burden.

Spend time as a group *looking* and *wondering* at the marvel provoking salvation Jesus has offered to us.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Sixteen

The Turning Point

Matthew 12:1-21



To this point in Matthew's Gospel Jesus has enjoyed *success* in ministry. Jesus is becoming known as the unique preacher that he is. He speaks on his own authority (7:28-29) and the crowds are impressed. His healings and exorcisms have attracted no small amount of attention. Often he has to escape their presence simply to find solace.

But, disappointment and now even rejection is in the air.¹ The jealousy of the Pharisees is provoked to the extent that they begin plotting the murder of Jesus. Jesus' teaching, as we will see in chapter 13, changes dramatically.

Read all of Matthew 12. Much of the chapter involves Jesus' interaction with a group of Jews called the Pharisees. The name Pharisee means *separate*. This group of devout Jews were separatists. While still living in society, they devoted

themselves to the things of God, to keeping the law and the oral tradition which had grown through the centuries. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had been in existence for about 200 years. Their roots went back to the *hasidim* (the godly Jews) who were faithful to God during the time between the Old and New Testaments. The Pharisees were a lay movement of non-priestly Jews. By the time of Jesus there were probably about 7000 Pharisees.²

Consider the following outline as you read. Make a list of questions this chapter brings to your mind. What don't you understand? What is the main point of the chapter?

¹ See 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:25; 11:19.

²The other group of Jews often mentioned in the Gospel is the Sadducees. This group was much less religious, very secular (they denied the resurrection), and very political.

1. The False Religion of the Pharisees (12:1-45)
 1. The Pharisees and the Sabbath (12:1-14)
 - Plucking grain (12:1-8)
 - Healing (12:9-14)
 2. Jesus seen to be the suffering servant of Isaiah (12:15-21)
 3. The Pharisees and the power of God (12:22-37)
 4. Jesus and the Sign of Jonah (12:38-45)
2. The True Religion of the Family of Jesus (12:46-50)

The Pharisees and the Sabbath 12:1-14

Notice where this story falls in Matthew. It comes right after Jesus speaks of his *easy yoke* and his *light* burden. The Sabbath, for the Pharisees, was anything but a *light* burden.

First, note the command itself:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 20:8-11

This is the fourth of God's Ten Commandments and the longest. What is the purpose of the Sabbath in Exodus 20? Why did God instruct the Jews to keep the Sabbath?

Scholars point out that Sabbath observation was the one religious symbol unique to the Jews. Other religions offered sacrifices, had temples, written laws, and some even practiced forms of circumcision.¹ But Sabbath observation had no parallel.

The Pharisees were, perhaps, exceedingly vigilant in Sabbath keeping because of Israel's history. It was the failure to keep the Sabbath that led to the Babylonian exile. Read the following Scriptures:

- 2 Chronicles 36:20-21
- Jeremiah 17:27

So important was Sabbath observation that history records the Jews losing decisive battles if the enemy attacked on this day because of their refusal to violate the fourth Commandment by fighting.²

2:2 The Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the *law* on the Sabbath. Note, according to Deuteronomy 23:25³ it was permissible to pick the grain. The disciples were not stealing. But, were they violating the Sabbath?

Jesus has three responses to this charge.

1. The case of King David. Read 1 Samuel 21:1-6 for the Old Testament background. The great king of Israel eats bread set aside for the priests.

On the one hand, David ate; on the other, it was unlawful for him to do so. Jesus' point is not simply that rules admit of exceptions but that the Scriptures themselves do not condemn David for his action; therefore the rigidity of the Pharisees' interpretation of the law is not in accord with Scripture itself. (Carson, pp. 280-281)

2. The case of the priests working in the temple. Jesus' point is that every Saturday the priests *worked*, and thus *desecrated* the Sabbath. *Yet they are innocent.*

3. The quotation of Hosea 6:6 which testifies to God's desire for heartfelt worship rather than outward conformity.

¹ G. C. Morgan, cited in Morris, p. 299.

² 1 Maccabees 2:31-38 records the slaughter of men, women and children who will not defend themselves on the Sabbath. Josephus gives an account of Pompey taking Jerusalem without a fight because he attacked on the Sabbath (*Ant.* 14.63). See Morris, p. 299.

³ Deut. 23:25 If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.

12:9-14 This second Sabbath incident took place on another day according to Luke 6:6, but Matthew groups it here with the grain eating offense. The Jews held that healing was permissible on the Sabbath only if a person's life was at stake. Other, lesser, healings needed to wait until Monday.

Read these verses carefully. What is Jesus' specific response to the charge of the Pharisees?

12:14 When the Pharisees see the power of God in Jesus they want to kill him. Note, the real issue is not Jesus' interpretation of Sabbath law. The topic never comes up when Jesus is on trial in Jerusalem. The issue is Jesus' messianic authority. This Messiah is not acting in concert with the Pharisees' expectations, and they want to get rid of him.

The response of the Pharisees to the work of God is animosity and hatred. Have you seen this in the lives of those around you? Give an example of someone you know who has responded with hostility to the work of Christ.

Sabbath observance is one of the Big Ten. It is on an equal plane with not murdering and not committing adultery. Yet Sabbath-keeping is increasingly a lost art in the evangelical church of our time. Does this section of Matthew teach us anything about our observance of a day of Sabbath rest? What is your practice of Sabbath keeping? Do you tend toward the rigidity of Pharisees, or the neglect of contemporary evangelicals?

When the Protestant Reformers articulated what it means to be a Christian, they grappled with the notion of Sabbath keeping. They agreed that the legal necessity of Sabbath observance was abolished in Christ.¹ But, nevertheless,

¹ John Calvin said: *There is absolutely no doubt that this [Sabbath commandment] was a foreshadowing, and enjoined upon the Jews during the era of ceremonies, in order to represent to them under outward observance the spiritual worship of God. Therefore at the coming of Christ, who is the light of shadows and the truth of the figures, it was abolished, like the remaining shadows of the Mosaic law, as Paul clearly testifies (Gal 4:8-11; Col 2:16-17).* (Cited in Brunner,

they saw the value of seeing *The Lord's Day* as a day consecrated for corporate worship, for the church, for family and friends and to the Lord. Respond to one of the questions and answers from the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). Do you practice a Sabbath in this sense? What can you learn from this answer?

103. Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and Christian education be maintained and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God to hear God's Word, to participate in the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

12:15-21 At this crucial juncture when the plot to kill Jesus begins, Matthew gives us his longest quotation from the Old Testament. It serves as a summary of Jesus' ministry and his ultimate mission. It comes from Isaiah 42:1-4 and is the first of four *Servant Songs* in Isaiah.¹ These *songs* prophesy of the coming Messiah who will suffer for the sins of the people of God. The Pharisees plot to kill Jesus and Matthew tells us with this quotation that everything is going according to God's plan.

What do we learn about Messiah from this quotation?

What does this quotation from Isaiah say Messiah will do? (You should be able to find at least four accomplishments he will achieve.)?

pp. 450-451) Martin Luther, always colorful in his viewpoints adds: *Keep it holy for its use's sake -- both to body and soul! But if anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day's sake, -- if anywhere anyone sets up its observance upon a Jewish foundation, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it— to do anything that shall reprove this encroachment on the Christian spirit and liberty.*

¹ See Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12.

Which of these prophecies were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus? Which will be accomplished when he comes again?

What is your emotional response to the fulfillment of these prophecies?

Praise God with your homegroup for God's purposes and plan!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Seventeen

Blasphemy!

Mathew 12:22-50

Blasphemy. Do you know the definition of the word? According to Webster's New International Dictionary the word means: 1. *disrespect for God or sacred things*, 2. *something done or said that shows disrespect for God or sacred things*.

In the Old Testament blasphemy is the *direct or indirect detracting from the glory and honor of God*.¹ Blasphemy in Israel was punishable by death.² Nations could commit this sin. The Assyrians blasphemed God by putting him on a par with their pagan gods and were, therefore, subjected to Yahweh's wrath.³

In the New Testament the word takes on a wider usage. It can refer to slandering another person or slandering God. While such slander is serious, it is forgivable. There is a sin of blasphemy, however, which God will not forgive. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.



The verses in Matthew 11-12 spiral downwards as they gain momentum. Matthew is showing us the negative responses Jesus' ministry is provoking. First, John the Baptist questions Jesus: *Are you the one?* (11:1-19). Then, because of their citizens' failure to repent, Jesus denounces the cities where he had performed most of his miracles (11:20-24). The Pharisees question Jesus and then plot to kill him (12:1-21). Finally, they commit the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Before going on in this study review the outline of this chapter on p. 98.

¹P. H. Davids in *Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Walter Elwell, 1984, p. 160.

²Leviticus 24:10ff.

³See 2 Kings 19:4, 6, 22; Isaiah 37:6, 23.

12:22-37 The Pharisees Blaspheme

Read these verses carefully. Make note of the following questions:

12:22-23 What provokes this dramatic confrontation with the Pharisees?

12:24-29 Pharisees attribute the work of Christ to the power of Satan.¹ Carefully examine Jesus' response. It is very logical. Explain, point-by-point, Jesus' reply to this charge.

12:29 What is the specific analogy Jesus is making here? How does this very brief parable summarize the entire work of Christ? Can you think of any other verses that make this same point?

12:31-32 are among the most controversial and troubling of any in the New Testament. What is Jesus saying? Is there a sin we might commit which would exclude us from the possibility of salvation?

At the outset we should take care to understand what this sin is. Carson explains:

The distinction between blasphemy against the son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit is not that the son of Man is less important

¹The Pharisees use the term Beelzebub (NIV). The title appears to be something of a general term of derision for pagan deities. Morris points out that the god of Ekron was called *Baalzebub* (2 Kings 1:2-16) and means *lord of flies*. It is possible that a Hebrew pun was being used to poke fun at a Philistine God. *The Jews may have further corrupted this into "Baal-zebul," "lord of dung," which would be a way of further insulting the heathen deity. . . . Taking all this into consideration, it seems likely that the Hebrews took the name of a heathen deity that they could interpret contemptuously as "lord of flies" or "lord of dung" and that they applied to evil beings. In time it came to signify a very important demon, probably the being we call Satan. To apply this name to Jesus was to give him as deadly an insult as they could.* (Morris, pp. 259-260)

than the Spirit. . . . Instead, within the context of the larger argument the first sin is rejection of the truth of the gospel (but there may be repentance and forgiveness for that), whereas the second sin is rejection of the same truth in full awareness that that is exactly what one is doing—thoughtfully, willfully, and self-consciously rejecting the work of the Spirit even though there can be no other explanation of Jesus' exorcisms than that. For such a sin there is no forgiveness. (Carson, pp. 292-293)

Could a Christian commit such a sin? Absolutely not. By definition a Christian is one who has already attributed the work of Christ to the power of God. He or she trusts that in Christ, God has provided for his or her salvation. This is the very opposite of blasphemy.¹

It could be tempting to read the above and surmise that this unforgivable sin has no application to the church. Fredrick Dale Brunner, a pastor-scholar, makes a practical observation. Respond to this observation:

The church use[s] Jesus' teaching on the sin against the Spirit as a warning to those who hear *her* message with hostility too, for in the church's message of Jesus the Holy Spirit actively works to make persons Christians. Defiant resistance to the wooing of the Spirit is in danger of becoming an unpardonable impenitence. In the final analysis, Jesus' teaching about the unpardonable sin is no different from all his warnings of judgment—rejection of Jesus invites damnation. (Brunner, pp. 462-463)

12:33-37 What is Jesus' point in these verses? How do they relate to the charge of blasphemy?

12:37 How should Christians be instructed by this verse? What practical lessons can you glean from this section of Matthew?

¹Boice writes, *These are frightening words. They are intended to be. But they have also been unnecessarily alarming for some people. Most ministers have had people come to them wondering if they have committed the unforgivable sin when they have done nothing of the sort. In fact, the fear that they might have sinned unforgivably is the best possible proof that they have not.* (Boice, p. 214)

12:38-45 Jesus and the Sign of Jonah

12:38 The request from the Pharisees is not for just another miracle (as in the NIV) but for a definitive sign from Jesus which would prove he is Messiah. The more accurate NASB reads:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Essentially they are saying, *You say you are Messiah? Prove it! Give us the definitive sign!*

How would you have answered the Pharisees at this point if you had been Jesus?

12:42 What is *the sign of Jonah*? What are the similarities between Jesus and Jonah? (Hint: You may want to look over the four chapters of Jonah to find some similarities.)

12:42b Notice Jesus' claim to be greater than Solomon. Have you observed the *greater than* theme in this chapter? To whom is Jesus compared?

12:4	Greater than David
12:6	Greater than the Temple
12:41	Greater than Jonah
12:42	Greater than Solomon

There is nothing in the spiritual history of the world than which he is not greater. (Green, p. 148) The Pharisees were so close, yet they missed the greatness of Christ.

What causes you to miss the greatness of Jesus? How is this similar or dissimilar to the impediment the Pharisees faced?

12:43-45 brings us back to the exorcism of verses 22ff. Jesus' point is the same as in 12:30. There is no neutral ground. One is either for Jesus or against him.

Hendrickson observes that the parable of the house swept clean ought not to be pressed too closely:

“Why is this demon described as wandering through waterless or desert places?” “How is it that it does not find rest there?” “What exactly is meant by these seven other spirits worse than itself?” Etc. Three facts must be borne in mind: a. Scripture tells us very little about the peculiarities and customs of demons, and to speculate too presumptuously about such matters would serve no useful purpose. b. The Lord is not giving us a discourse on demonology. He wants us to think not so much about these demons as about “this wicked generation” (verse 45, cf. Verse 39), as symbolized by the man who was first possessed by one demon, then delivered, and finally repossessed, only this time not by one but by eight demons. (Hendrickson, pp. 539-540)

Why do people often like to claim neutrality with regard to their view of Jesus? What should your response be to such a person?

The *empty house* of a nice life, Jesus tells us, is a dangerous place. When our *house is swept clean* and everything is in order we should be on our guard. The question before us is not: *Will my house eventually be filled?* Rather, the question is: *With what will it be filled?* There is no neutral ground in the kingdom of God.

What competition does Jesus face in *filling your house*? Has there ever been a time when you *cleaned your spiritual house* only to have it refilled with worse things?

12:46-50 This *grim* chapter ends with Jesus being rejected even by his family members. This is more clear in Mark 3:21. There we learn they have come to take Jesus away because, *He is out of his mind*. Such were the nature of Jesus’ stunning claims. Someone who claims to be greater than Solomon is either the Son of God, very puffed-up, or deluded. *Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.* (11:6).

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eighteen

From Synagogue to Seashore

Matthew 13:1-23



Matthew 13 forms a bridge from Jesus' ministry in Galilee to his long-march to Jerusalem and the cross. He was ministering in the *synagogue* (12:9), but now we find him on the *seashore*. After chapter 12 Jesus never again teaches or preaches to the Jews per se. From this point on in Matthew the reader will notice a broader picture. The emphasis is now on the world.¹

With this chapter we come to the third major teaching of Jesus. But this time, instead of the bold teaching of the Sermon on the

Mount (5-7) or the predictions of persecution given to his disciples (10), Jesus teaches *incognito*. He teaches in parables.

What is a parable?

A parable is not a fable. The latter does not describe a real-life situation. In a fable, animals talk and trees sing.

A parable is not an allegory. In an allegory the details are analogous to something else. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, is an allegory of the Christian life. In that masterfully told story we follow *Christian's* journey through life toward heaven. The people he meets (Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, Obstinate, Pliable) and the places he goes (The Slough of Despond) are analogous to our own Christian lives.

A parable compares two subjects in order to teach a simple point. The word itself means *a throwing together*. A parable throws together two things to make a point, to create a surprise, to show a contrast. But it does so in such a way as to stimulate the curiosity of the listener. Parables are clever teaching tools.

C.H. Dodd writes:

[A parable] is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind

¹ Peter becomes more prominent in the second half of Matthew as well (14:28-31; 16:16-23; 17:1-5, 24-27; 18:21-22; 19:27; 26:31-46, 58, 69-75).

in sufficient doubt about its precise application to rouse it into active thought.¹

Parables, as we will see, have the dual function of teaching the disciples and confusing the hard hearted.

According to Bernard Ramm: [Jesus used parables]

as a method of teaching the responsive disciple. . . [P]arables were used by our Lord as instruments of his revelation to those who had ears to hear. Parables contain much that every Christian servant needs to know about the kingdom of God. (Ramm, pp. 277-278)

But parables also confuse. As Ramm states: [Jesus' intent in his parabolic teaching]

was to hide the truth from the unresponsive and so aid in the hardening of their heart as they continuously rebelled against God. This is the special import of the citation from Isaiah 6 [cf. Mark 4:11-12]. The truth taught in a parable is veiled and so is a test of a person's spiritual responsiveness, of whether he has the spiritual intention to follow through and learn its meaning. (Ramm, p. 278)

The Gospels record twenty-seven different parables from the mouth of Jesus. Matthew 13 contains seven parables,² each teaching something about the kingdom of God.

Glance over the 58 verses of Matthew 13.

Notice how each parable begins. What is the common theme of this chapter?

- 13:24
- 13:31
- 13:33
- 13:44
- 13:45
- 13:47
- 13:52
- 13:11

Various outlines of the seven parables have been proposed. This study will follow the outline of Fredrick Brunner who sees in Matthew 13 three sets of two parables followed by a *somber seventh*. Brunner's break-down is as follows:

¹ Cited in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 1970, p. 276.

² Some would argue the chapter has eight parables counting the very brief comment in 13:52.

Two Field Parables

Sower 13:3-9

Weeds 13:24-30

Two Little-Power Parables

Mustard Seed 13:31-32

Yeast 13:33

Two Gem Parables

The Hidden Treasure 13:44

The Fine Pearl 13:45-46

The Warning Parable of the Net 13:47-50

With the above in mind, read these parables of the kingdom. Make a list of insights you glean regarding the kingdom of God. What is this kingdom *like*? Write a one-sentence summary of the main point of each parable. Be prepared to read these seven sentences to your group. Make note of anything that is unclear in these parables.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

When looked at as a whole, how do these parables speak to your Christian life? Does any one parable stand out in particular? Why?

13:3-9; 18-23 The Parable of the Sower

List the four kinds of soil, the effect on the seed and the interpretation Jesus gives in vss. 18-23.

	Soil	Seed	Interpretation
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Notice what it takes for the possibility of someone coming to know Christ.

The kingdom comes when the soil and the seed get together. It is a marriage of seed and soil. The seed is the word of God proclaimed by the Sower of God. And the kingdom begins to come in a life when the 'soil' receives the seed of the word for itself. Then it begins to germinate and shoot. (Green, p. 156)

What does this parable teach us about the essentials of evangelism? How will our friends and neighbors be won to the cause of Christ?

James Boice sees in this parable four conditions of the heart that affect how one will receive the good news of the gospel. He sees in the four soils a picture of the *hard* heart, the *shallow* heart, the *strangled* heart and the *open* heart.

From one vantage point this parable is comforting to those who have been around the church for any number of years. It teaches us that we should expect some to profess response to the word of God and then fall away.

Think about people you have seen during the seasons of your Christian life. What kinds of *hearts* have you observed in the church?

What can you do, specifically, to protect yourself from the pitfalls of the *hard, shallow* and *strangled* heart?

What are the *hard paths, rocks* and *thorns* in your life?

Look again at 13:23. What happens when the seed falls on good soil? A crop is produced, fruit is borne, and the harvest is brought in. Share with one another the *crop* you see in each other's lives.

13:10-17 Why Speak in Parables?

With this new form of teaching the disciples ask Jesus: *What's going on here? Why have you changed your teaching style?*

Jesus' response is troubling: It sounds as though he says, *I speak in parables to hide the truth from those who need it most.*

The bulk of his answer is lifted from the commissioning of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah was sent to preach to the people of Israel he was told, literally, to: *Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see.*¹

Understanding the context of Isaiah's commission will help us understand what Jesus wanted his disciples to hear in this quotation.

The backdrop of Isaiah 6:9-10 was the hardheartedness of the people of Israel. Their hearts had grown hard to the Lord in the same way that the hearts of Jesus' listeners had grown hard.

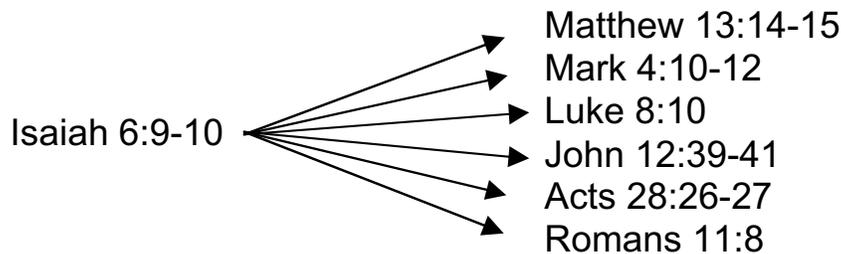
Isaiah's strange commission includes both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the people he has made. God was going to use Isaiah's message to further harden the hearts of people whose hearts are already hard. The people of Israel have been in rebellion as the rest of the book of Isaiah shows. God's judgment is just. As one commentator on Isaiah put it:

¹ Isaiah 6:10.

Isaiah's ministry was to preach to stony soil, so that it might be apparent that the people were no longer the theocracy (people ruled by God), and that they were rightfully ripe for banishment from their land. God's work of hardening therefore attests to the fact that the time for banishment from Palestine was at hand.¹

Just as the people of Israel were at a crucial crossroads in Isaiah's time, so also were they in Jesus' time. The kingdom of God was at hand, and the Jews have now plotted to kill the King (12:14).

It is fascinating how often Isaiah's commission is cited in the New Testament. Both Jesus and Paul refer to it to describe the rejection of Christ.



So why did Jesus speak in parables?

It is naïve to say Jesus spoke them so that everyone might more easily grasp the truth, and it is simplistic to say that the sole function of parables to outsiders was to condemn them. If Jesus simply wished to hide the truth from the outsiders, he need never have spoken to them. His concern for mission (9:35-38; 10:1-10; 28:16-20) excludes that idea. So he must preach without casting his pearls before pigs (7:6). He does so in such a way as to harden and reject those who are hard of heart and to enlighten—often with further explanation—his disciples. (Carson, p. 309)

With the above in mind, is your heart growing harder or softer during this season of your life? What evidence would you give to support your answer?

Think about the seasons of your life as a believer. What causes your heart to grow hard? What helps keep your heart soft to God?

¹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., 1969, vol.1, p. 259.

Study Nineteen

The Quiet Kingdom: Weeds, Seeds and Yeast

Mathew 13:24-43

What is the kingdom of God? Put succinctly, the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. But when does the kingdom of God come? In the Old Testament the prophets looked forward to the sudden appearance of God's kingly rule. Messiah was to usher in the new age of the King!

For the day of the LORD is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.
Obadiah 15

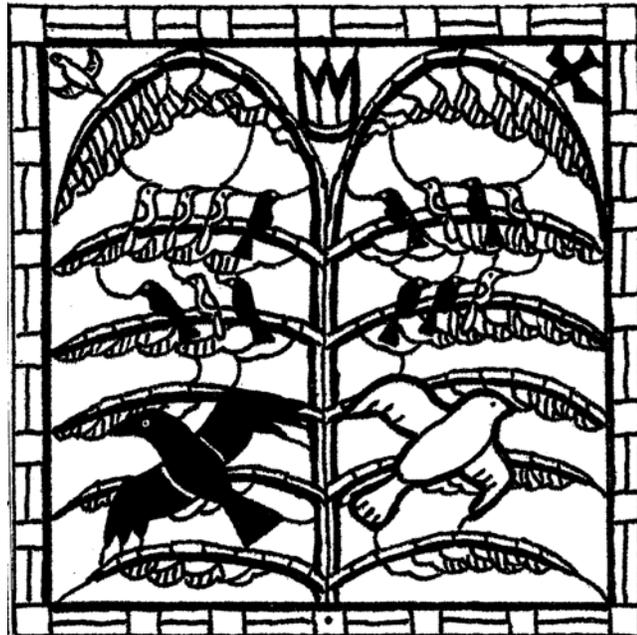
The coming of the kingdom would see the wrath of God poured out upon the godless, and the Spirit of God upon the faithful.

See, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it.

Isaiah 13:9

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

Isaiah 44:3



When Jesus begins his ministry the kingdom of God is at the heart of his message.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Matthew 4:23

But what was the content of Jesus' message about the kingdom? Jesus' teaching on the kingdom can be found in the seven parables of Matthew 13. For

those steeped in the Old Testament Jesus throws a curve ball. He doesn't teach that the kingdom will come suddenly, in one fell swoop. Instead, Jesus teaches about the *secrets* (NIV) or the *mysteries* (NASB, etc.) of the kingdom. The *secret* of the kingdom is this: what the Old Testament writers expected to occur suddenly will take place in stages.

The kingdom *is* yet to come in the form prophesied by Daniel when every human sovereignty will be displaced by God's sovereignty. The world will yet behold the coming of God's Kingdom with power. But the mystery, the new revelation, is that this very Kingdom of God has now come to work among men but in an utterly unexpected way. . . . It has come quietly, unobtrusively, secretly. It can work among men and never be recognized by the crowds. . . . The Kingdom is now here with persuasion rather than with power.¹

Each of the seven parables in Matthew 13 illustrates this mystery in some way. As we look at three kingdom parables notice the mystery of the quiet kingdom. What Jesus began in Galilee he will one day complete in the whole world.

13:24-30; 36-42 The Weeds and the Wheat

The parable of the weeds and the wheat is unique to Matthew's Gospel. If nothing else, this parable shows the followers of Christ that neither the church nor the world will be perfect until the very end comes.

Read both the parable and Jesus' interpretation. How does Jesus identify the following?

- The Sower
- The Enemy
- The Good Seed
- The Weeds
- The Harvest
- The Harvesters
- The Final Destiny

¹ George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1959, p. 55.

What summary statements can you make about *the sons of the kingdom* (13:38)? How do they become *sons*? What is their final destiny, etc.?

What summary statements can you make about *the sons of the evil one* (13:38)?

What does this parable, along with its interpretation, teach us about the *secrets* (13:11) of the kingdom? What does it teach us about what we should expect before Jesus returns?

13:31-35 The Seed and the Yeast

There is an irony with regard to the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. While the parables are very brief, occupying only a few verses, they have been the subject of strong debate as to their meaning. Two schools of interpretation have achieved popularity.

First there are those who see these parables as a prophecy of the corruption of the church before the end of the age. These interpreters take their cue from the fact that *yeast* is often used as a symbol of evil in both the Old and New Testaments. (see, 16:12; Mark 8:15, Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6).¹

Most, however, take these parables in a more natural sense. Jesus is teaching about the *mystery* of the kingdom. Jesus is encouraging his disciples (and Matthew is encouraging his readers) with a profound truth. What looks puny and small will one day be great and glorious.

Michael Green makes an interesting observation about the mustard seed parable:

The image of the birds coming to roost would have been eloquent—if rather ominous—to those reared on the Old Testament. They found it in Ezekiel 17:23 and Daniel 4:12, 20-22. It is the Gentiles who are in mind. Jesus is hinting not only that this apparently tiny seed will grow to a

¹ During Passover, for example, the Jews had to remove all yeast from their homes. See also Matthew 16:12; Mark 8:15, Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6. Verses such as these lead Arno Gaebelein to write: *All these parables show the growth of evil, and are prophecies extending over the entire age in which we live.* (cited in Boice, p. 241)

remarkable size, but that it will spread beyond the narrow confines of Judaism and provide a home for the Gentiles. (Green, p. 158)

Green ingeniously brings together both interpretations of these parables. Because of their Old Testament background Jewish listeners would have been surprised to find Jesus using yeast as a symbol of the kingdom of heaven. Yet, Jesus' followers must have seemed like yeast to the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Common, uneducated fishermen and farmers, carpenters and women, tax collectors and disreputable characters—it would all seem rather distasteful. But God is like that. He takes distasteful characters and transforms them, and then transforms society through them. Despite its appalling failures and sins, it is beyond question that down the ages the church has had an amazing record in medical care, social work, education, liberation of women and slaves, and the defense of prisoners, the aged, the helpless, and those whom society neglects. (Green, p. 159)

Read these parables again. How would they encourage a believer who is suffering persecution? How do they encourage you in the trials you face?

What is the difference in emphasis between the two parables?

What dreams and goals might these two parables inspire in our church? What dreams do you have for God to accomplish through the *mustard seed* of Santa Barbara Community Church?

Look at four parables we have discussed in this lesson and in study 18. How do they answer some basic questions a 1st century or a 21st century believer might ask?

- Why is the response to the gospel so mixed?
- Why does evil prevail?
- Why is the kingdom of heaven so insignificant and hidden?
- Why is the message of the kingdom of heaven a matter of life and death?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty

The Joy and Judgment of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:44-58



Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French mathematician and philosopher said:

All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal however different the means they use to attain it. . . . They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal. This is the motive of all the actions of all men, even those who contemplate suicide.¹

Similarly, C.S. Lewis said in a letter to a friend: *It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*²

The remaining three parables of Matthew 13, each unique to this Gospel, teach both the joy and the terror of the kingdom of heaven.

13:44-45 The Treasure and the Pearl

Read these two very brief parables. Both involve men who find something valuable and do whatever it takes to possess the object of desire. Before going on in this study compare and contrast these two parables.

The Treasure in the Field The Beautiful Pearl

1. How was the object found?
2. What did each man see in the object?
3. What did it cost to acquire the object?
4. What is the motive for the purchase?

¹ Pensées, 113.

² From Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, 1977, p. 189.

One man finds a treasure by accident. He is, we suppose, plowing in a rented field and his plow strikes a buried treasure. He wasn't looking for anything, but finds something of great value.¹ In the second parable a man searches intently for a pearl of great value.

With these two stories the point is made that the gospel of the kingdom is available for everyone who recognizes its value. It is there for those who stumble on to it almost by accident (the Gentiles), and for those who have spent their life in a spiritual quest (the Jews). The only requirement is to recognize the value of what is found.

How was it that you came to know Christ? Did you stumble on to the Christian faith? Or did you find Jesus and his kingdom after a long, careful search?

The two men are more than happy to pay the price for the treasure and the pearl. They make the transaction because of their *joy* in finding the desired objects. What part did joy play in your coming to know Christ?

Some Christians recoil at the notion that we come to God to fulfill our happiness or joy. But the idea is thoroughly biblical. Consider the place of joy/happiness in the life of a believer from the verses below.

- Hebrews 11:6
- Psalm 16:11
- Acts 20:30
- John 15:11

¹ We ought not read into this parable any question of the man's ethics. In Jewish law his action is permissible. In a country torn by centuries of war and foreign domination it was permissible to buy a field in order to own the contents it contained.

Respond to the quotation below. How does the way you live your Christian life reflect (or not reflect) these words?

The desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed, and if you abandon the pursuit of your own joy, you cannot love man or please God.¹

Brunner summarizes these two parables as follows:

The moral is clear: Preach the gospel! And a negative moral is corollary: It is not by telling people to make sacrifices that they make sacrifices. In theological language, it is not first of all by preaching God's law that people do God's law; it is first by telling people of God's treasure that people make the sellings that are necessary in the following of God. (Bruner, p. 511)

What are the *sellings* of your Christian life? What was the cost of the treasure or the pearl to you?

13:47-50 The Judgment of the Net

Read these verses. This is a very brief parable of the last judgment.² At first glance this parable looks very much like the first parable in the chapter. But there the emphasis was on the long period during which the weeds and wheat grow together. The parable of the net places its emphasis on the end: the final judgment of God. The Hebrew word for judgment means *to separate*, or, *to discriminate*. The Greek word for judgment (*krisis*) means, literally, *to divide* or *to separate*.³

James Boice finds four truths about God's judgment in this parable.⁴ Discuss these among your group. How should these truths affect the way in which we

¹ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, 2002, p. 45.

² Matthew 25 contains the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats, which is a much longer description of the last judgment of God.

³ The word may mean *to distinguish*, *to give preference*, *to approve*. See *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, 1976, p. 364ff.

⁴ These quotations come from Boice, p. 250.

live the Christian life? How should our conversations reflect our conviction that these things are true?

1. God's judgment is thorough. There are only two kinds of fish, *good and bad*. In the end, all human beings will find themselves in one camp or the other. *Either they will be with the blessed in heaven, having been cleansed from all sin by the redeeming work of Christ, or they will be in hell without Christ and without hope. No one will be partially in one camp and partially in the other.*

2. God's judgment is determined. *[T]he grounds for separation between those who are saved and those who are lost will already have been established on earth. It will be determined by whether we have received the good seed of the gospel, whether we have believed in Christ, whether we have laid everything else aside to gain the hidden treasure or purchase the pearl.*

3. God's judgment is permanent. The judgment described in this parable is final. There is no second chance for the *bad fish*. *In that day the opportunity for repentance will be over. The day for trusting in Jesus Christ will be past.*

4. God's judgment is dreadful for the wicked. The wicked are thrown into the *fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

As you read these four truths about God's judgment, what is your emotional response? Why?

The parables of the treasure and the pearl see *joy* as a primary motivation for coming into the kingdom of God. Does the parable of the net use the coming judgment of God as a motive for becoming a Christian? Is Jesus saying, in effect: *Follow me or else you're in terrible trouble?* Would you ever include this in your presentation of the gospel to an unsaved friend? Why? Why not?

13:51-52 The Eighth Parable?

Notice the whole of this chapter. Jesus spoke four parables to the crowds (13:1-35) and then three to his disciples. But what are we to make of verse 52? Is this the eighth parable (thus making an even balance of four and four)? More importantly, what does this cryptic sentence mean?

Jesus is most likely referring to his own disciples as *teachers of the law* (NIV) or as *scribes* (NASB). In light of the context of the chapter this seems far more likely than taking the word in its usual meaning of a Pharisaic teacher of law. But what is Jesus' point to his disciples? What is the reference to the *old* and the *new* coming out of the storeroom?

The twelve disciples are Jesus' students. He has been teaching them the *secrets* of the kingdom of God. When they go and make disciples of all nations (28:19) they will be teaching both the *old* and the *new*.

It is *new* in the sense that only with the coming of the Messiah has it been clearly revealed; it is *old* because it is concerned with *mysteries* that have been present in the mind of God but *kept secret from the foundations of the world* (13:35). Moreover, while the Pharisaic scribe interpreted the Mosaic law as an end in itself, the Christian 'scribe' interprets it in light of the fulfillment it has received in the life and teaching of Jesus. (Tasker, p. 140)

13:53-58 Rejected at Home

Matthew 13 ends with a final note of disappointment. Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth and is rejected yet again. Even his friends and relatives *will be ever hearing but never understanding. . . ever seeing but never perceiving* (13:14).

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Matthew 13:17

Reflect back over the past twenty studies in Matthew's Gospel. How has this look into the life of Christ shaped your view of Jesus? How have you been challenged? How have you changed?

Sermon Notes. . .