New Testament Studies

Gospel of Matthew

(RVS Notes)

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Matthew: Presenting the King

***Introduction*—**Matthew stresses Jesus' fulfillment of the Law and of Messianic prophecy. Matthew has more Old Testament quotes and allusions than any other New Testament source (about 130 instances). That he was writing for a Jewish audience is clear by the emphasis on the Law and prophecy and by the many Jewish features, including typical Jewish designation for God ("Father in heaven"), frequent references to Jesus as the son of David (and thus the Messiah), and several direct references indicating that the Jews were the prime recipients of the gospel (10:5-6; 15:24). Matthew appeals to Jews by linking Jesus to Abraham and David in Jesus' genealogy. However, he also mentions four Gentile women in Jesus' ancestry and specifically includes Gentiles in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Matthew is the only evangelist to explicitly mention the church (16:18; 18:17).

There is an on-going debate of what language in which Matthew originally wrote. We have only Greek copies of the gospel but some claim that it appears to have been translated from a Semitic (either Hebrew or Aramaic) original. The early church understood an ambiguous statement by the second century church father Papias to mean that Matthew was first written in Aramaic and composed in Palestine and later translated into Greek.

***Author and occasion*—**Attributions of authorship of the gospels is generally based on church tradition rather than on evidence in the text itself (since there is little to go on). Church tradition, dating to the second century, recognized the apostle Matthew as the author of the gospel bearing his name. The book was known early and accepted quickly. It was probably written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 from somewhere in Palestine or in Syrian Antioch. With the rise of critical scholarship, Matthew's authorship has been questioned for a variety of reasons:

- Matthew nowhere claims to be the author (but none of the gospels identify their author);
- The material reflects a later period of church history (a very subjective claim);
- It utilizes a gospel written by one who was not an apostle (i.e., Mark), and this would have been highly unlikely;
- It does not have the "feel" of an eyewitness account;
- Some critics claim that Matthew is Q or Quelle, a German word meaning a source of content that critics postulate for the evangelists, and that the apostle's name was mistakenly attached to the account.

Matthew occupied the unpopular post of tax collector in Capernaum. As a publican he was thoroughly disliked by his fellow Jews. When the Lord Jesus called him to follow Him (see 9:9-13; Mk. 2:14; Luke 5:27-28), Matthew's immediate response probably meant that he had been stirred by the Lord's public ministry. He was chosen as one of the apostles (10:2-4; Mk. 3:13-16; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). After being mentioned in Acts 1:13, Matthew disappears from the biblical account. His subsequent life's journey life is veiled in tradition. According to Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, Matthew preached to the Jewish community in Judea, before taking the gospel to other countries. Ancient traditions are not in agreement as to which other countries these are, but almost all sources speak of his ministry in Ethiopia. Some traditions record that Matthew died a martyr's death when he rebuked the Ethiopian monarch for lusting after a Christian nun.

Matthew and the other Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been called the Synoptic Gospels. "Synoptic" means "seeing together" and succinctly summarizes what the reader encounters at the very beginning of the New Testament. These three accounts of Jesus' life and teaching contain similar material and view their subject from a common perspective. Yet they do differ in detail, arrangement of

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material, and in their respective emphases. The reasons for the great similarities and the significant differences have generated much discussion among Bible students through the years. This debate has focused on which gospel was written first and the sources the various writers relied on in writing. Theories have changed through the years. The early church understood Matthew to be the first gospel written and Mark an abridgment of it. However, the most popular current understanding is to see Mark as the first gospel written, with Matthew and Luke written at later dates but close in time, enhancing Mark's account. A good deal of the material in Mark is repeated in Matthew and Luke. There is also significant overlap of material in Matthew and Luke. This has caused scholars to postulate that the latter two gospels used Mark's account and a common collection of the sayings of Jesus that circulated at the time, a mysterious source labeled "Q." "Q" comes from a German word meaning "source."

Guiding Concepts

Kingdom emphasis—The Kingdom of God is coming into and transforming the kingdom of this world. The phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" is unique to Matthew. The Kingdom involves God reigning over the earth with a total restoration of life as God planned it. Matthew takes pains to show that Jesus really is King, fulfilling the various promises concerning Messiah. He speaks extensively of the ethics of this Kingdom (see Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5-7). The Kingdom is now and not yet (see Mt 24-25, the Olivet discourse).

Apocalyptic interest—Here Matthew develops the "not yet" aspect of the Kingdom. He has a strong apocalyptic interest. Matthew alone has the parables of the talents (25:14-30), the wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13), and the sheep and goats' judgment (25:31-46).

Treatment of the Law—Matthew has a nuanced understanding of Torah as evidence by the Sermon on the Mount (focusing on Torah on the heart) and in his fulfillment motifs throughout the gospel.

Fulfillment motif—Virtually every circumstance surrounding the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of prophecy (e.g. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:53-54; 27:9). For example—

- Jesus fulfilled the activities of the Lord as predicted in Old Testament (1:21; 3:3-4; 11:5);
- Jesus as Messianic king (1:23; 2:6, 23; 3:17; 4:15-16; 21:5; 22:44; 26:64);
- Jesus as Servant of the Lord (3:17; 8:17; 11:512:18-21);
- Jesus as the Son of Man (24:30; 26:64; 28:18);
- Jesus as the climactic prophet (Mt 12:39-40; 13:13-15, 35; 17:5);
- Jesus as righteous sufferer (21:42; 27:34-36);
- Jesus as reversing Adam's curse (4:1ff);
- Jesus as ideal Israelite whose personal history recapitulated the national history of Israel (2:15, 18; 4:4, 7, 10).

Teaching discourses—Matthew presents a comprehensive picture of Jesus' teaching ministry. In particular, he records five long and unbroken sections of the Lord's instruction. These five key discourses recall the five books of Moses. Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of prophecy, the coming prophet who was like Moses (Dt 18:15).

- Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:27);
- Instructions to the disciples (10:5-42);
- Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52);
- Terms of discipleship (18:1-35);

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- Olivet discourse (24:1-25:46).

***Person and Work of Christ*—**These carries throughout the gospel in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies relating to Messiah, in Jesus' ministry as prophet, priest, and king, in the attention given to the Cross and the nature of Jesus' substitutionary atonement. Jesus is presented as David's greater son.

***Birth narrative*—**Matthew and Luke both have birth narratives. Matthew relates the nativity from the standpoint of Joseph and his family line. Luke takes the vantage point of Mary's line.

***Summary Outline*—**Matthew was a skilled literary craftsman with many structural pointers making a consensus for the structure of the book an impossibility. A frequently proposed structure for Matthew turns on Matthew's five major discourses and links them to the surrounding narrative. Some have identified five so-called books in Matthew's structure as follows:

Preamble	1-2	
Book 1	3-7	3-4 narrative; 5-7 discourse -- discipleship
Book 2	8-10	8-9 narrative; 10 discourse – apostleship
Book 3	11-13	11-12 narrative; 13 discourse – hiding revelation.
Book 4	14-18	14-17 narrative; 18 discourse – church administration
Book 5	19-25	19-22 narrative; 23-25 discourse – judgment
Epilogue	26-28	

Each of these discourses end with a formula statement found nowhere else in the book: "when Jesus had finished saying these things" or something very much like it (see 7:28-29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

A more thematic approach follows:

Birth and Early Childhood: Perfect Israelite	Baptism and temptation in wilderness	Disciples called; Ministry launched	Teaching & Ethics of the Kingdom	Kingdom Authority Demonstrated	Kingdom Authority Challenged	Parables of the Kingdom	Opposition grows	Cost of Citizenship in the Kingdom	Privileges & Responsibilities in the Kingdom	Disobedient Rulers Exposed & Rejected	Destruction of the temple; Coming of the Son of Man	Passion, Death, & Resurrection	Great Commission
1	3	4	5	8	11	13	14-15	16	18	21	24-25	26	28
King's Preparation & Presentment			King's Identity Revealed					King's Mission Unfolds					
Bethlehem & Nazareth			Galilee					Judea & Jerusalem					

Key Idea: Kingdom of God
Key Verse(s): Mt 4:17; 28:18-20

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Detailed Outline: Matthew—Presenting the King

I. The King Presented: Identity Established by Old Testament Prophetic Fulfillment (1:1—4:11)

A. Birth of the King (1:1-25)

1. Genealogy (1:1-17)
2. Birth of Jesus (1:18-25)

B. The King's early childhood: Identification with Israel in exile (2:1-23)

1. Magi's visit (2:1-12)
2. Flight to Egypt (2:13-15)
3. Herod slaughters the innocents (2:16-18)
4. Return to Nazareth (2:19-23)

C. The King's dedication and preparation: Identification with Israel in the wilderness (3:1-4:11)

1. Ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-12)
2. Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)
3. Temptation in the wilderness (4:1-11)

II. The King's Identity Revealed: Kingdom of Heaven at Hand (4:12-16:20)

A. Disciples called; Public ministry begins (4:12-25)

1. Calling the first disciples (4:18-22)
2. Public ministry begins (4:23-25)

B. The King teaching with authority: Fulfillment of the Law (5:1-7:29)

1. Righteousness: Its nature (5:1-48)
   a. Setting: On a mountain (5:1-2)
   b. Beatitudes; Righteous people's attributes and functions (5:3-16)
   c. Fulfilled law as internalized law (5:17-48)
   - Jesus' coming to fulfill the law (5:17-20)
   - Murder and anger (5:21-26)
   - Adultery and lust (5:27-32)
   - Vows and simple honesty (5:33-37)
   - Retaliation and non-resistance (5:38-42)
   - Loving your enemies (5:43-47)
   - Summary: Divine completion (5:48)
2. Righteousness: Its orientation (6:1-34)
   a. Rejection of hypocritical practice (6:1-18)
   - Alms (6:2-4)
   - Prayer (6:5-15)
   - Fasting (6:16-18)
   b. Treasure and physical necessities (6:19-34)
3. Righteousness: Its requirements (7:1-29)
   a. Judging others (7:1-6)
   b. Persistent prayer (7:7-12)

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c. Warnings mandating decision and commitment (7:13-27)
d. Audience response (7:28-29)

C. The King acting: Authority revealed by his deeds (8:1-16:20)

1. Miracles attest to the King's authority (8:1-9:34)
   a. Healing a leper (8:1-4)
   b. Healing the centurion's servant (8:5-13)
   c. Healing Peter's mother-in-law and others (8:14-17)
   d. Cost of following Jesus (8:18-22)
   e. Jesus calms a storm at sea (8:23-27)
   f. Demoniacs healed (8:28-34)
   g. Healing a paralytic (9:1-8)
   h. Calling of Matthew; Eating with sinners (9:9-13)
   i. Fasting and the dawning of the Messianic age (9:14-17)
   j. Raising a Jewish leader's daughter; Healing a hemorrhaging woman (9:18-26)
   k. Healing the blind and mute (9:27-34)
2. The King's authority delegated to his disciples (9:35-11:1)
   a. Need for workers (9:35-38)
   b. Sending out the Twelve (10:1-42)
   - Disciples commissioned and sent out (10:1-4)
   - Instructions as to audience, message, and ministry (10:5-15)
   - Warning of opposition and persecution (10:16-31)
   - Costly discipleship (10:32-39)
   - Encouragement for a proper response (10:40-42)
3. The King's authority questioned and challenged (11:2-12:50)
   a. John the Baptist questions Jesus' identity (11:2-19)
   b. Unrepentant cities reproached (11:20-24)
   c. Jesus' invitation: Rest for the soul (11:25-30)
   d. Pharisees challenge Jesus' authority (12:1-45)
   - Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-14)
   - Jesus, the chosen servant (12:15-21)
   - Jesus and Beelzebub (12:22-37)
   - Pharisees seek signs: Sign of Jonah (12:38-45)

   e. Family doubts; True spiritual kinship (12:46-50)
4. The King's authority veiled: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52)
   a. Parable of the sower and the soils (13:1-23)
   b. Parable of the wheat and weeds (13:24-30, 36-43)
   c. Parables of the mustard seed and yeast (13:31-35)
   d. Parables of hidden treasure and expensive pearl (13:44-46)
   e. Parable of the net (13:47-50)
   f. Conclusion (13:51-53)
5. The King's authority rejected (13:54-14:12)
   a. Rejection at Nazareth; Prophet without honor (13:54-58)
   b. Representative rejection: Execution of John the Baptist (14:1-12)
6. The King's ministry in withdrawal; Warning against false teaching (14:13-16:12)

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a. Feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21)
b. Walking on water (14:22-33)
c. Gennesaret healings (14:34-36)
d. Clean and unclean: Pharisaic regulations (15:1-20)
e. Faith of a Canaanite woman (15:21-28)
f. Feeding of the four thousand (15:29-39)
g. Warning against the teaching of Jewish religious leaders (16:1-12)

7. The King's identity recognized: Peter's confession (16:13-20)

III. The King's Mission Unfolds: Kingdom Linked to his Death and Resurrection (16:21-28:20)

A. Cost of Kingdom citizenship: Taking up your cross (16:21-17:23)

1. First Passion prediction; Peter's rebuke; Requirements of discipleship (16:21-28)
2. Transfiguration: Glory revealed (17:1-13)
4. Healing a boy with seizures: Lesson in believing prayer (17:14-21)
5. Second Passion prediction (17:22-23)

B. Privileges and responsibilities of Kingdom citizenship (17:24-20:34)

1. Paying the Temple tax; claims of earthly authorities (17:24-27)
2. Greatness and relationships in the Kingdom (18:1-35)
   a. Humility: Principle of greatness (18:1-14)
   b. Discipline and reconciliation (18:15-20)
   c. Forgiveness; Parable of the unmerciful servant (18:21-35)
3. Human desires and concerns submitted to the King (19:1-20:16)
   a. Teaching on divorce (19:1-12)
   b. Let the children come to me (19:13-15)
   c. Earthly wealth: Query of the rich young man (19:16-26)
   d. Kingdom rewards; Parable of the workers in the vineyard (19:27-20:16)
4. Greatness in the Kingdom revisited: Preference requested (20:17-34)
   a. Third Passion prediction (20:17-19)
   b. Preference in the kingdom requested (20:20-28)
   c. Blind men at Jericho healed (20:29-34)

C. Entry into Jerusalem; Debates with and exposure of religious leaders (21:1-23:39)

1. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11)
2. Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17)
3. Fig tree cursed (21:18-22)
4. Religious leaders challenge Jesus (21:23-27); Parables in reply (21:28-22:14)
   a. Parable of the two sons (21:28-32)
   a. Parable of the lawless tenants (21:33-46)
   b. Parable of the marriage feast (22:1-14)
6. Debates with the religious leaders (22:15-46)
   a. Paying taxes to Caesar: Pharisees answered (22:15-22)
   b. Queries about resurrection: Sadducees answered (22:23-33)
   c. Greatest commandment: Lawyers answered (22:34-40)
   d. Messiah: David's on and David's Lord—Leaders baffled (22:41-46)
7. Religious leaders exposed and ejected (23:1-39)
   a. Improper concept of leadership: Preeminence over service (23:1-12)
   b. Woes on leaders: Righteousness and repentance (23:13-36)

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c. Lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39)

D. Olivet discourse: Destruction of the Temple; Coming of the Son of Man; End of the age; Judgment (24:1-25:46)

1. Temple's destruction predicted: Query of the disciples (24:1-3)
2. Conditions of the age; Coming of the Son of Man; End of the age (24:4-35)
3. Day and hour unknown (24:36-44)
4. Watchfulness enjoined; Parables on alertness (24:45-25:30)
   a. Wise and wicked servants contrasted (24:45-51)
   b. Parable of wise and foolish bridesmaids (25:1-13)
   c. Using the interim time: Parable of the talents (25:14-30)
5. Judgment of the King: Sheep and goats judged (25:31-46)

E. Passion, death, resurrection, and commission of the King (26:1-28:20)

1. Betrayal, Last Supper, Denials predicted; Agony in the Garden (26:1-46)
   a. Plot to arrest Jesus (26:1-5, 14-16)
   b. Jesus anointed for burial (26:6-13)
   c. Last Supper (26:17-30)
   d. Peter's denial predicted (26:31-35)
   e. Agony in the Garden (26:36-46)
2. Jesus' betrayal and arrest (26:47-56)
3. Jesus' trials (26:57-27:26)
   a. Ecclesiastical trial before the Sanhedrin (26:57-68; 27:1-2)
   b. Peter's denials (26:69-75)
   c. Judas' remorse and suicide (27:3-10)
   d. Judicial trial before Pilate (27:11-26)
4. Crucifixion and death of Jesus (27:27-56)
   a. Scourging and mocking by Roman soldiers (27:27-31)
   b. Crucifixion and death (27:32-56)
5. Jesus' burial (27:57-66)
   a. Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus (27:57-61)
   b. Guard assigned to the tomb (26:62-66)
6. Jesus' Resurrection (28:1-15)
   a. Resurrection (28:1-10)
   b. Deception circulated (28:11-15)
7. Great Commission of the King (28:16-20)

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Matthew: Presenting the King

I. The King Presented: Identity Established by Old Testament Prophetic Fulfillment (1:1—4:11)—In this first portion of the book, Matthew uses Old Testament prophecy to establish Jesus' Messianic credentials, to identify him with the people of Israel, and to frame the locale of his ministry. The first two chapters constitute an introduction, detailing the Lord's background, birth, and early life. The next two chapters delineate his preparation and launch of his ministry.

A. Birth of the King (1:1-25)— Matthew opened his book with a careful account of the birth of the Lord Jesus, focusing on both his human ancestry (1:1-17) and his divine heredity (1:18-25).

1. Genealogy (1:1-17)—Matthew uses the genealogy to link Jesus with David and Abraham, bringing both the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants into view and stressing the continuity of God's dealings with his people in history. He traces Jesus' lineage through Solomon to his foster father, Joseph, while Luke's account provides Mary's linage through David's son Nathan (Lk. 3:23ff). Since Matthew was presenting one claiming to be a Davidic king, it was important to establish his hereditary, both human and divine. He omits names from his genealogy to provide a systematic summary of Israel's history in three equal parts, each with fourteen generations.

1:1—Jesus is designated as the son of both David and Abraham. Matthew's linking of Christ and the "son of David" here and throughout the gospel (see 9:27: 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45) is an important designation. It brings the Davidic Covenant into clear focus where God promised that one of David's descendants would establish the kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Jesus is also designated the "son of Abraham". The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:7; 22:18), was the seminal covenant of God with his people. Genesis 22:18 had promised that through Abraham's offspring all the people of the world would be blessed.

1:2-17—The genealogy establishes that Jesus is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the messianic promises. The names of the first two-thirds of the genealogy are taken from the Septuagint (1 Chron. 1-3, especially 2:1-15; 3:5-24). After the listing of Zerubbabel, Matthew seems to rely on unknown extra-biblical sources.

1:3-6—Matthew includes four women in his genealogy (Tamar in 1:3, Rahab and Ruth in 1:5, and Bathsheba in 1:6) , unusual for the time. These women had questionable backgrounds: Tamar and Rahab were prostitutes, Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess, and Bathsheba was guilty of adultery. Several reasons for this have been suggested:

- Three were Gentiles, which synchronizes with the focus on a Jewish Messiah who extends blessing to all people;
- Three were involved in gross sexual sin and Jesus is one who will save his people from their sin;
- All four reveal something of the unexpected handiwork of Providence in preparation for Messiah.

1:7-10—The kings, good and evil, are mentioned since they are all in the line of Messiah. However, three names have been omitted between Joram and Uzziah: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. The omission not only secures the pattern of fourteen for this section of the genealogy but are possibly dropped because of their connection with Ahab and Jezebel, renowned for their idolatry and wickedness.

1:17—Matthew groups his genealogical list according to fourteens. It is impossible to get three

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fourteens from the list without counting either David twice or Jeconiah twice. The genealogy is selective, listing only fourteen generations between the main divisions: Abraham to David (1:2-6), David to the Exile (1:6-11), and the Exile to Jesus (1:12-16). Some argue that Matthew uses fourteen generations because the numerical value of David's name in Hebrew is fourteen. Hebrew letters were also used as numerals and the Jews counted the numerical value of words and derived meaning from them. This was a practice called gematria.

2. Birth of Jesus (1:18-25)— The backdrop to this text is the normal Jewish marriage procedure, including engagement, frequently when the people were only children, betrothal which was binding and lasted for a year, and then marriage proper. Matthew relates Mary's conception of the Lord by the Holy Spirit while pledged to be married to Joseph and Joseph's decision to divorce her quietly for adultery (1:18-19). A woman with a child conceived in a betrothal period would be hard pressed to find another husband, leaving her without means of support when her parents died. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream, informs him that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and brings him up to speed about the Lord's identity and redemptive mission (1:20-23). Joseph then takes Mary as his wife (1:24-25). He violated Jewish custom by doing this rather than waiting until the one-year period of betrothal had passed.

The import of the genealogy is established by the reality that in Jesus, God is present with us. Jesus' name (meaning Yahweh will save) becomes a paradigm for the redemptive purposes of his presence on earth. Two matters call for elaboration. First, though countless critics through the ages have questioned the historicity of the Virgin Birth, both Matthew and Luke, the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth, independently attest to its truth. Matthew's point in the birth narrative is that the Lord's birth was most extraordinary and that God was involved in bringing his son into the world, Second, a cluster of concepts flow from this. The concept of his conception is consistent with his pre-existence. Indeed, it is impossible to see how a divine being could become genuinely human without an extraordinary birth. While the disciples were not aware initially of Jesus' miraculous birth, this reality does not negate its truth. Their understanding of Jesus' identity matured and deepened with time and further revelation. Finally, just because the Virgin Birth is not clearly articulated in the epistles is no reason to claim that it was a later invention of the church. The upshot is clear. Matthew is telling us that Jesus is physically Mary's son, legally Joseph's son, and, more fundamentally, God's son.

Distortions abound:

- Some deny this as mere myth. Babies are not born without human fathers.
- Some strain things another way. They insist that Mary gave birth as a virgin, which is true, but remained a perpetual virgin, which is not true, and leaves the impression that sexual love, even within marriage is tawdry, and that God does not want anything to do with it.
- Some point to other stories in antiquity where heroes were conceived by the intervention of a god, without a human father. Would Matthew invent this story, opening Christianity up to the sneers of its opponents? Would he invent it to open the Lord's mother to slanderous suggestions of her premarital misbehavior?

1:18—"Before they came together" clearly affirms that Mary's pregnancy was discovered while Joseph and Mary were still betrothed. The context also presupposes that Joseph and Mary had been chaste.

1:19—The text gives us Joseph's initial reaction to the news and establishes him as a worthy man. He chose a quieter form of divorce before two witnesses, as permitted by the Law, unwilling to expose Mary to the further disgrace of a public divorce. This course left his conformity to the Law and his compassion intact.

1:20—Dreams as a method of divine communication in the New Testament are concentrated in

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Matthew 1-2 (1:20; 2:2, 13, 19, 22).

1:21—"Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua", which means "the Lord is salvation" or "the Lord saves". The angel explains the significance of the Lord's name by referring to Psalm 130:8: "He [the Lord] himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."

1:23— This is the first instance in Matthew of a flood of Old Testament references. This verse makes it clear that Matthew understands Mary as a virgin. The quote is from Isaiah 7:14 from the Septuagint. The Hebrew word *almah* often means virgin but can mean a young woman of marriageable age. The Septuagint renders *almah* here with *parthenos*, which almost always meant "virgin".

1:24-25—Joseph acts like the Old Testament heroes of who obeyed God's call even when it meant going against all human common sense. He could have been and perhaps was mocked as a mindless cuckold. Note that he lives with Mary without consummating the union until Jesus is born. He provides a strong male role model for sexual purity.

B. The King's early childhood: Identification with Israel in exile (2:1-23)—This portion of the text records the homage to the king by the long journey and visit of the Magi (2:1-12), the hostility toward the king in the person of the pernicious Herod (2:13-18), and the humility of the king (2:19-23) relating to Jesus' upbringing in the humble village of Nazareth. Matthew links God's presence with us in the person of Jesus to his presence with his people in exile.

1. Magi's visit (2:1-12)— The identity and the timing of the visit of the Magi is unknown. Joseph and Mary were still in Bethlehem, and the Lord Jesus is described as a child (*paidion* as in 2:9, 11) rather thana newborn (*brephos* as in Lk. 2:12). The Magi were probably Gentiles of prominent position perhaps from Parthia, northeast of Babylon. The study of the stars and planets was a fine art in antiquity. The ancients believed that the entire world was one of a piece, all interconnected, and when something important happened on the earth, it was reflected in the heavens. Tradition has it that there were three Magi, but Scripture does not specify their number. However, there were undoubtedly more. When their caravan entered Jerusalem, they seemed to have caused quite a stir.

Herod the Great was a vile, cruel, crafty, and murderous man. Money, sex, and power defined the arena of his interests. He was not a Jew, but an Idumaean, a descendant of Esau. In his person we see a picture of an old struggle between Jacob and Esau that began when the two boys were born. The interesting reality in this account was that the Magi (foreign Gentiles) were seeking the king. Herod the earthly king was opposing him in a cunning way at first that soon revealed its murderous purpose. The Jewish priests, those allegedly waiting for their Messiah, ignored him. They quoted Micah 5:2, relating to Messiah's birthplace, but could not be bothered to travel a few miles down the road to see the Son of David, the Son of God for themselves.

Matthew records this story here to bring out its significance as fulfilling prophecy, to establish God's providential care of his son, to anticipate the hostility, resentment, and suffering he would face, and to suggest that Gentiles would be included in his saving ministry.

2:1—Bethlehem was the town where David was born and reared and thus a worthy hometown for David's greater son. It was also where the angelic hosts broke the news of Messiah's birth (Lk. 2:8-20), the place where Jacob buried Rachel (Gen. 35:19), and where Ruth met Boaz (Ru 1:22-26).

The Magi cannot be identified with precision. The term loosely covered a wide variety of individuals interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books referring mysteriously to the future. They were pagan astrologers, whose divination skills were highly regarded in ancient cultures. We do not know how many there were. Because Matthew 2:11 lists three gifts they brought, gold, incense, and myrrh, some have assumed there were three of them. They came to Bethlehem spurred on by astrological

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calculations, probably augmented by the perusal of Jewish works. Matthew contrasts the eagerness of the Gentile Magi to worship the newborn king with the apathy of the Jewish leaders and the hostility of Herod's court. The Magi were seeking the king, the Jewish priests ignoring the king, and Herod opposing the king.

2:6—The expectation that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem comes from Micah 5:2.

2:12—Once again, dreams are used to supply divine direction, and the Magi (as well as the holy family) realize their danger while near the clutches of Herod and flee for their lives.

2. Flight to Egypt (2:13-15)—Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt. He did and stayed there until the death of Herod. After Herod's death he is warned in two dreams to go to Bethlehem and then to Nazareth. Joseph's dreams (1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22) provide God's tender guidance of the holy family in their days of being refugees. In three of these, the angel of Lord is specifically mentioned.

Egypt had a large Jewish community in this period. Most of these immigrants were agrarian peasants and extremely poor. Joseph may well have struggled to support his family. Matthew cites Hosea 11:1, plainly referring to the Israelites leaving Egypt in the exodus and applies it to Jesus. The citation is used to establish an event correspondence between Israel's bondage and exodus from Egypt and the holy family's flight to Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath. Jesus is often portrayed as the antitype of Israel in the New Testament, the locus of the true Israel.

3. Herod slaughters the innocents (2:16-18)— Herod is murderously furious about being outwitted by the Magi and slaughters all the infants in the Bethlehem area under two years of age. Matthew cites this incident as the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15. This is once again an Old Testament event correspondence. Jeremiah 31:15, a text concerning mothers mourning their children while in exile in Babylon, is in this text linked to the slaughter of the innocents. Bethlehem's population was small, so this slaughter, though cruelly and unjustly gruesome, involved the death of perhaps ten to twenty children at most.

This slaughter is mentioned only here in the historical record. Even Josephus does not mention this dastardly deed. Sad to say, the death of a small number of infants in an out-of-the-way place would hardly have been a matter of record in such violent times. However, it was certainly in keeping with Herod's character. His infamous crimes were many, including murdering his children and wives because of suspicion that they were plotting against him. The Emperor Augustus reportedly said that it was better to be Herod's sow than his son (or family), for the sow had a better chance of surviving in a Jewish community.

4. Return to Nazareth (2:19-23)— The angel appears to Joseph again after Herod's death and directs him to Nazareth rather than Bethlehem because Herod's son Archelaus was ruling in the territory of Judea (where Bethlehem is located) and he was notorious for his tyranny and instability. Matthew sees the move to Nazareth as once again fulfilling Old Testament prophecy in 2:23.

2:23—The reference to Jesus being called a Nazarene is problematical. No Old Testament text explicitly states this. Various interpretations have been suggested. Perhaps the best one understands Matthew's use of "Nazarene" as emphasizing the Lord's humble upbringing. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, often referred to with a sneer (see Jn. 7:42, 52), not in Bethlehem, with its Davidic overtones. Matthew is saying that the Old Testament prophecies foretold that Messiah would be despised (see Pss. 22:6-8, 13; 69:8, 20-21; Isa. 11:1; 49:7; 53:2-3, 8; Dan. 9:26). In other words, Matthew gives us the substance of several Old Testament passages, not a direct quotation.

Pause and ponder—Think of Joseph's experience. Mary is focal in the early church experience as she should be as the mother of God. Joseph gets lost in mists of time. A simple carpenter, living on a

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frontier outpost of a self-absorbed and far-flung empire, engaged to a young woman discovered to be pregnant during their engagement period. He is a compassionate man, intending to divorce her privately to minimize her public disgrace. He responds by faith to divine dreams, taking Mary into his home immediately, undoubtedly labeled a foolish cuckold by his neighbors in a small village that would be all over a juicy piece of gossip. He probably was an awkward midwife to his own child's birth in a less-than-ideal birthing room. He then flees with his family to a foreign land to escape the murderous rage of a vile, crafty, and overbearing tyrant. Providing for his refugee family in a land known for its very parochial attitudes would have been a nightmare. He is then called back and settles again in the small town that was still cognizant of the dirt on that allegedly scandalous pregnancy.

Joseph responds to God affirmatively and his assignment had to be a tough one. He never saw his divine stepson's ministry, but his faithful and loving presence through his stepson's youth is a touching testimony. Imagine yourself back in your late teens or early twenties given the responsibility of raising the Son of God, Messiah of Israel, Savior of the world, and the Lord of all.

Father, I am just a simple carpenter.
How can I raise Messiah, the very Son of God?

C. The King's dedication and preparation: Identification with Israel in the wilderness (3:1-4:11)—This section records the ministry of John the Baptist as forerunner to Messiah (3:1-12), the baptism of the Lord by John (3:13-17), and the Lord's temptation in the wilderness (4:1-11).

1. Ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-12; see Mk. 1:3-8; Lk. 3:2-17)— This section encompasses John's message (3:1-2, 7-10), his authority (3:3-4), and his baptizing ministry (3:5-6, 11-12). His preaching centered on the necessity of repentance, a radical change of mind and transformation of the entire person, and the coming of the kingdom of God (3:1-2). His baptizing ministry was unique. The Jews baptized Gentile converts but did not see themselves as in need of baptism. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, which the Jews very much needed.

John saw himself as a forerunner, a voice in the wilderness. The messianic age was at hand. His clothes of camel's hair and a leather belt were not only the clothes of poor people but established a link with Elijah. Both men had stern ministries in which austere garb and diet confirmed their message (3:3-6).

John confronted the religious leaders who came "to check him out". The coming of God's reign demanded much more than sanctimonious ecclesiastical surveillance. John's message was clear—a change of heart (*metanoeite* = repent) was necessary before they could qualify for the kingdom. John's message of the need for repentance was fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 with reflections of Malachi 3:1. The Isaiah text cleared the way for the Lord's return as his people returned to Judah from the Babylonian exile. So too John was clearing the way for the Lord Jesus by calling on the people to repent.

However, there were many Pharisees and Sadducees who did not think they needed to repent (3:7-10). They saw themselves as the physical sons of Abraham who automatically qualified for the kingdom. John takes aim at their confidence in their Jewish ancestry. That would not save them. John contrasted his baptism with water for repentance with the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire of the one coming (3:11-12). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a specialized term indicating a particular spiritual experience. Baptism by Spirit and fire will purify and refine those coming to the Lord.

2. Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17; see Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:31-34)—John had trouble baptizing the Lord Jesus. He was a humble man, conscious of his own sin, and saw no sin in the Lord. Why be baptized? The reply was to fulfill all righteousness in that he was confessing the sins of the nation as Moses, Ezra, and Daniel had done on previous occasions. He was identifying with sinners, the guilt of whom he would carry to the cross. We clearly see the Trinity involved in 3:16-17. The Son is baptized, the Father speaks of his love and approval, and the Spirit descends upon the Lord Jesus in the

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form of a dove.

3:17—These words and actions from heaven link Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah 42:1 at the beginning of his ministry, introduces the title "Son of God" used immediately in the next chapter (4:3, 6), sets forth the Lord Jesus as the true Israel, and suggests an ontological sonship (the quote is from Psalm 2:7) which is made most explicit in the gospel of John.

3. Temptation in the wilderness (4:1-11; see Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13)— Satan's first temptation (4:1-4) questioned the love of God and the will of God. If the Father loved the Son, why send him to the wilderness without supply? If the Father will not take care of your needs, Jesus, take care of them yourself. The temptation's focus is on the Lord's own physical need and the use of his power to meet that need independently of the Father. The Lord quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 in response: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God". Satan's second temptation (4:5-7) twists Psalm 91:11-12 to suggest that Jesus put the Father to the test of demonstrating his care for the Son. Jesus replies by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: "Do not put the Lord Your God to the test". The evil one's third temptation is for the Lord to take a shortcut to the kingdom. He bogusly asserts dominion over creation and offers to Jesus if the Lord would bow and worship the dastardly one. The evil one suggests that the cross need not precede a temporary crown. The Lord replies by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."

Note that Satan appealed to physical appetite, to the desire for personal recognition and gain, and to a shortcut to glory, three categories he has reworked in tempting people throughout the ages.

II. The King's Identity Revealed: Kingdom of Heaven at Hand (4:12-16:20)—Jesus begins his public ministry, choosing his base of operation (4:12-16), calling his first disciples (4:18-22), and beginning his healing ministry (4:23-25). In elaborating what "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" means, Matthew establishes Jesus' Messianic identity by the authority of his teaching and his deeds.

A. Disciples called; Public ministry begins (4:12-25)—The launch of the Lord's public ministry is understood as a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2, in the land of Zebulun and Nephtali, in Galilee of the Gentiles. In 4:17, Matthew notes that Jesus' message was the same as John's. It was focused on repentance and the reality that the kingdom of heaven was near.

1. Calling the first disciples (4:18-22; see Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:2-11; Jn. 1:35-42)—The Lord began by calling Peter, Andrew, John, and James to follow him. They were called to repent and believe the good news. The four men respond to the Lord's call without hesitation. John helps us here with the background that Matthew omits by informing us that several months earlier Jesus had met the four men and they had come to trust him (Jn. 1:35-49).

The first disciples were fishermen, in today's language, small businessmen working as families and making a living with perhaps a little left over. Their lives were modestly secure, but certainly not luxurious. Why give it all up to follow a wandering preacher? Jesus was indeed magnetic in presence and personality. And there were his remarkable healings. As the Lord's ministry progresses the only natural explanation for the crowds he drew lay in his remarkable powers of healing and his dramatic personality and teaching.

2. Public ministry launched (4:23-25)**—**This is one of several ministry summaries in Matthew. Its uniqueness is in conveying the geographical extent of the Lord's ministry as well as the Lord's basic activities in teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. Note that in the Lord's healing miracles, dealing with every kind of ailment, Jesus was heralding the kingdom and showing that God was dealing with sin and its effects at its basic level. These great miracles brought Jesus tremendous fame. Large crowds

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throughout the Palestine area began to follow him. People came from Galilee, Syria, probably referring to northern Galilee, the ten cities of the Decapolis across the sea of Galilee, as well as from Jerusalem and Judea. Modern critics who so uniformly discount the miraculous have a tough time explaining the tremendous and immediate appeal of the Lord with the masses.

B. The King teaching with authority: Fulfillment of the Law (5:1-7:29)—Matthew gives us an example of Jesus' preaching on the Kingdom of God. The sermon articulates the righteous demands and ethical guidelines of life in the Kingdom, seeking to reorient people from their own ways to God's ways. Matthew presents the real, historical setting for the discourse, but these chapters are condensed notes rather than the entire sermon verbatim. This session is a composite record of the Lord's teaching, over several days and perhaps in several places. Luke 6:20-49 is a separate report with a somewhat different selection of material.

The Lord deals with the character and circles of influence of the subjects of the kingdom (5:1-16), clarifies the substance of the kingdom's message, fulfilling the law and the prophets (5:17-20), rejecting Jewish traditions in 5:21-48 and hypocritical Jewish practices (6:1-7:6), before issuing a summons to his audience to hear and heed the message (7:7-29).

This is the first of five lengthy discourses in Matthew:

- Sermon on the mount (5:1-7:27);
- Instructions to the disciples (10:5-42);
- Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52);
- Terms of discipleship (18:1-35);
- Olivet discourse (24:1-25:46).

Before we dig in, let us provide a quick overview of the Sermon on the mount:

- Blessed character traits (5:1-12)
    - Poor in spirit
    - Mourn over sin
    - Meek, as in subdued strength
    - Hunger for righteousness
    - Merciful
    - Pure
    - Peacemakers
    - Persecuted
- Calling of disciples (5:13-16)
    - Salt
    - Light
- Christ's standards contrasted with sanctimonious "religious" standards (5:17-6:18)
    - In principle (5:17-48)
    - In practice (6:1-18)
- Conduct of blessed ones (6:19-7:12)
    - Regarding possessions (6:19-34)
    - Regarding judging others (7:1-6)
    - Regarding prayer (7:7-12)
- Four counterfeits to avoid (7:13-29)

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- Wrong way (7:13-14)
- Wrong prophet (7:15-20)
- Wrong attitude (721-23)
- Wrong foundation (7:24-29)

1. Righteousness: Its nature (5:1-48)—Jesus elaborates on true righteousness, what it is (5:1-16), how it comes (5:17-20), and how it works in daily life (5:21-48). His intent in exposing us to the righteousness of God in this passage is to motivate us to repentance.

a. Setting: On a mountain (5:1-2)—At this point in his ministry, Jesus could not escape the growing crowds drawn to his person and teaching. Jesus is nearing the height of his popularity when he delivers a message not designed to win friends and influence people. Note that Matthew records many significant events in the Lord's ministry as occurring on a mountaintop—part of the Lord's temptations (4:8), this sermon, the transfiguration (17:1), the Olivet discourse (24:3), and the Great Commission (28:16).

Matthew says that he went up the mountain (5:1), whereas Luke has him coming down to a level place to give the sermon (Lk. 6:17). The word translated "level place" in Luke's version can mean a plateau or level section in a mountainous area. The sermon was delivered on a more level section of a mountainous area to accommodate the crowds.

b. Beatitudes: Righteous people's attitudes and functions (5:3-16; see Lk. 6:20-23)—Jesus leads us to reflect upon ourselves in relation to the character of God, a process that inevitably draws us to our need to repent. This section details the norms of the kingdom (5:3-12) that are to be worked out in the lives of the kingdom heirs to produce a kingdom witness (5:13-16). These norms represent an outlook radically different than that of the rest of the world.

Commonly referred to as the Beatitudes (from the Latin *beatus* = blessed or happy), this teaching finds its roots in wisdom literature. The Greek word for "blessed" (*makarios*) describes the person who is singularly favored by God and therefore "happy". This person may or may not be one whose circumstances are fortuitous. "Blessed" implied an inner satisfaction that did not depend on outward circumstances for happiness; a joy or happiness that is serene, untouchable, and self-contained. These sayings reveal to us the beauty of living in the transforming power of the grace of God poured out in his Spirit. God inspires, enables, and blesses the human character traits described, approving them in gracious condescension.

This is upside-down teaching for the world we presently live in. This is Torah on the heart, God's law honored in the thoughts and intentions of people. You must be kidding me was my first response when I read this. However, these are not "holy" suggestions. These are not ideals for another age. They will be perfected in another age, but their "bite" starts now in the reborn community of the Lord Jesus. Those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now.

The only person who can claim to live this way is the Lord Jesus himself. And it is he, living in me by the power of the Spirit, that must be engaged in this exalted endeavor. Jesus is saying that with his redemptive work, this is starting to become true. Jesus is beginning a new era for God's people and God's world. Through the Lord Jesus, God is turning things upside down.

5:3—Poor (*ptochos*) in spirit describes people without earthly resources, power, or influence. These people are humble before God, putting their whole trust in Him. It does not refer to a lack of courage or a downtrodden demeanor, but to the ability to see and acknowledge one's true spiritual state and one's need to lean hard into God's grace. Poor in spirit means to be humble, to have a correct estimate of yourself (see Rom. 12:3).

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5:4—"Those who mourn" refer to those who sorrow over human offense to God. We grow to see sin as God sees it. This is in the backdrop of the messianic blessing promised in Isaiah 61:1-3, the passage Luke 4:18-19 records Jesus preaching from at the very beginning of his public ministry. This beatitude echoes Isaiah 40:1—"Comfort, comfort my people", which is God's gracious response to human sin. God brings to his people tender comfort now as well as a glorious future in which all mourning will cease.

5:5—"Meek" (*praeis*) is not weakness, but subdued strength. In contemporary culture, meekness carries the idea of spinelessness and subservience. The Greeks used the word translated meek to describe a horse that had been broken. That is the meaning here. A meek person is far from spineless. He or she is God-controlled. It is not a natural trait, but a quality God works into his people, often through trials and suffering. Meekness also implies freedom from malice and a vengeful spirit. The Lord tells us that it is the meek, not the strong, aggressive, harsh, and tyrannical, who will inherit the earth.

5:6—"Hunger and thirst for righteousness" speaks of a people who love and desire what God wills. These are people with a spiritual appetite, who yearn to be in right relations with God and others. "Righteousness", as used here, refers simultaneously to personal righteousness and to justice in the broadest sense. This is the human desire personally to do God's will from the heart and to see it done everywhere. This trait will only be fully satisfied when the Kingdom is consummated.

5:7-9—These verses speak to our attitude towards the Lord and reflecting his virtues in our own lives.

5:7— Merciful (*eleemon*) is a sympathetic interest and concern, experiencing another person's feelings and pain from their perspective. Merciful people not only embrace forgiveness for the guilty but also compassion for the needy. Christian mercy flows from the mercy we have already received in Christ. That we can be merciful vehicles of divine grace in a hard world is a wonderful privilege.

5:8— Pure (*katharos*) in heart—*Katharos* is unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed. Blessed is the person whose motives are unmixed for they will see God. "Pure in heart" has two interrelated meanings—inner moral purity and singlemindedness. The pure in heart have a single motive and purpose—to trust, love, and serve God. This person is externally pious but also has a heart free from deceit. Inward sham and deceit cannot coexist with sincere devotion to Christ. This beatitude excoriates hypocrisy.

5:9—"Peacemakers" are those deeply concerned with divine-human reconciliation and with reconciliation between people. These are the heirs of the kingdom reflecting something of the character of the Father and becoming channels of grace in a troubled world.

5:10-12—"Persecuted for righteousness' sake" underlines that opposition is the normal experience of a disciple of Jesus (see Jn. 15:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pt. 4:13-14). This opposition and even persecution extends to insults and slander. The appropriate response to this is rejoicing, not a masochistic response to the reality of earthly suffering, but an expectation of heavenly reward.

5:13-16—These verses speak to our witness as kingdom dwellers. We are to function as salt and light. Salt was used in the ancient world to flavor food but preeminently, as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay. The preservative function of salt is the focus of the Lord's meaning in this text. When the Lord speaks of salt losing its saltiness, he was fully aware that sodium chloride is a stable compound and that, strictly speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness. However, in ancient times, most of the salt used was derived from salt marshes and contained many impurities. In this mixture, the actual salt was more soluble than the impurities and would leach out first, leaving a residue of little worth. That is the word picture beyond the Lord's warning to kingdom dwellers concerning their witness. Kingdom dwellers were to be the righteous salt of the earth, and the Lord warns his disciples of the danger of compromise and conformity to the world that would dilute their witness.

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Kingdom dwellers were also to function as light. Jesus himself is the light of the world (see Mt. 4:16; Jn. 8:12; 1 Jn. 1:7) and, derivatively, his disciples were to be lights in the world (Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 2;15). Jesus drives the metaphor of light home. The disciples, by their good works, are to reflect the mind and will of God and positively illumine a sin-darkened world.

5:17-48—Fulfilled law as internalized law—God's character is again in view as Jesus explicitly internalizes the Law, pointing us to the standard of divine completion. The Lord had called Israel to be the salt of the earth, but Israel was behaving like everyone else, with its power politics, its factional squabbles, and its militant revolutions. God had called Israel to be light-bearers amid darkness. But they had become part of the darkness. The kingdom of heaven was now breaking in and those who yearned to be part of this inbreaking must live in ways of covenant behavior that went far beyond anything the scribes and Pharisees ever dreamed of.

5:17-20—Jesus coming to fulfill the law—These verses speak of Jesus coming to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. The Law and the prophets point to Jesus—he is their fulfillment. He presents himself as the end goal of the Old Testament and therefore its sole and proper interpreter. He is the one through whom the Old Testament finds its valid continuity and significance. Thus, in the extended section (5:21-48) that follows these initial verses, Jesus is not primarily extending, annulling, or intensifying the Old Testament law, he is authoritatively showing the direction in which the Law points.

5:20—The Lord's disciples must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law had domesticated the radical demands of the Law for absolute holiness and essentially gutted it in favor of the sanctimonious external compliance with the minute regulation of religious behaviors and pious practices. They thought they were preserving the Law when they were embalming it. Their religion was a dead ritual, not a living relationship, The Lord is telling his disciples and anyone else with ears to hear that that does not measure up. He exposed the false trust in outward observances and revealed the sincere heart of holiness God requires.

5:21-48—These verses comprise six sections beginning with some variation of "you heard it said … but I say to you" (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). This antithetical formula is not a critique of the Old Testament, but an expanded understanding of what the Old Testament truly required. The Lord is explaining how true righteousness works in daily life. This section speaks of Torah on the heart, moving from external compliance to the inner attitudes of obedience.

Matthew	***Old Testament***	***Letter of the Law***	***Spirit of the Law***
5:21-26	Exodus 20:13	Murder	Hatred, anger, contempt
5:27-30	Exodus 20:14	Adultery	Impure thoughts; sinful imaginings
5:31-32	Deuteronomy 24:1	Divorce	Hardness of heart
5:33-37	Deuteronomy 6:13	Oaths	Untruthfulness; exaggeration
5:38-42	Exodus 21;23-25	Injustice	Revenge; lack of love
5:43-48	Leviticus 19:17-18	Hatred of neighbors	Lack of love for neighbors or others

5:21-26—Murder and anger—Murder is linked with anger in this first antithetical section. Not only does the outward act of murder violate the Law, but also the inward choice of bitter anger that generates violence. The word used for one who is anger is *orgizesthai*, describing anger that is long-lived, even nursed in the heart of a person. Its root is *orge* (wrath). This anger is liable to judgment.

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There is a holy anger against sin (Eph. 4:26), but here Jesus takes aim at unholy anger against people. This abiding anger explodes outward in hurtful words and insults. *Raca* is a word of contempt and "You fool" (*moros*) is to call someone as a moral moron. Such anger must be faced honestly and confessed immediately.

Jesus gives two illustrations exposing the seriousness of anger, first in the setting of temple worship (5:23-24) and the second in a judicial setting (5:25-26). Get things right before you worship or before it goes to court. Anger can manifest itself in many ways—envy, contempt, and abuse whether physical or verbal. Malicious anger is so evil, and God's judgment of it so certain (5:22) that Jesus insists that we must do all in our power to quickly resolve it (see also Eph. 4:26-27).

5:22—"Raca" is Aramaic for "empty-headed one".

5:27-32—**Adultery and lust**—Next, adultery and lust are linked. The intent behind God's law of internal purity is to convey the sanctity of sexual union and the degree of sinfulness in the human heart. The person condemned is the one who uses his faculties to awaken his lust and who finds delight in things which stimulate the desire for the forbidden thing. Jesus insisted that this commandment points to a purity that refuses to even lust after any woman. He uses hyperbole in emphasizing the need for disciples to deal radically with sin. The eye and the hand are chosen because they are two primary culprits in sexual sin that must be disciplined. This is not to be taken literally for physical mutilation would not solve the basic problem of lust in thought and in the heart. Taking the Lord's hyperbole to be a literal commandment, this text led the church father Origen to castrate himself.

Sex in our modern world is upon us all over the place. Sexual purity begins with the desires of the heart. Jesus is not saying that lustful desires are identical to lustful deeds and that therefore people might as well commit the deed if they think the thought. What he is driving at is disciplining of our imaginations, taking our thoughts to the throne of grace one by one. To choose to continue to indulge in lustful imaginings is already to have sinned.

5:31-32—The Lord not only insists that the Old Testament makes lust the moral equivalent of adultery, but that divorce does also. The Old Testament text the Lord points to in 5:31 is Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which allowed a man, who "found something indecent" (not further defined) in his wife, to give her a certificate of divorce. This practice prohibited the man from remarrying the woman he divorced if she subsequently remarried and divorced again. Jesus does not elaborate on the 'something indecent' referred to in the Law but insists that the Law was pointing to the sanctity of marriage. The natural way to take the "except" clause in 5:32—that divorce is wrong except in the case of fornication or marital infidelity (*porneias*)—is that where sexual sin has already been committed, divorce is permitted although certainly not mandated. Various views have been offered as to the application of the exception clause:

- A single act of adultery;
- Unfaithfulness during the betrothal period;
- Marriage between near relatives (Lev. 18:6-18);
- Continued promiscuity.

Jesus presents an exalted standard. At the same time, we must accept that sin leaves scars but scars that God can heal and turn into blessing. In divorce, there can be deep wounds, to couples who have done everything they knew to keep their marriage together, to their children, and to their extended families. God's forgiving grace is deep and wide, embracing our situations in redemptive love.

5:33-37—**Vows and simple honesty**—These verses speak to oaths and vows and simple honesty. Within the renewed community of the Lord Jesus, people's character should make oaths completely unnecessary. The truth of one's sayings and the reality of one's promises need no such guarantee.

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The Mosaic Law forbade irreverent oaths, light use of the Lord's name, and broken vows. Jesus again points to the direction of Old Testament teaching—to the fundamental importance of thorough and consistent truthfulness. Jesus teaches that in the new community of his people, our conversation should be so forthrightly honest, our character so true, that we would not need literary crutches or theatrics for people to believe us.

Pause and ponder—The Lord is saying that one's life ought to be sufficient to back up one's words (see Jas. 5:12). Perhaps oaths in the church settings need rethinking. Requiring an oath or similar embellishments to our own forthright statements is like debasing the coinage. Our honest, plain statements are not enough, we need the extra embellishment that the world requires. Really? And exactly why is that? Does it highlight control needs and community suspicion that is unbecoming?

5:38-42—**Retaliation and non-resistance**—These verses speak to retaliation and non-resistance. The Old Testament prescription of *lex talionis* ("an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", see Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21) was not given to foster vengeance, but to provide the nation's judicial system with a ready formula for punishment of wrongdoing, not least because it would decisively terminate vendettas. It was instituted to curb evil because of the hardness of the human heart.

Jeremiah and Ezekiah prophesied a change of heart among God's people, living under a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26). The old system of retaliation in kind has been superseded by the New Covenant age and the new hearts of people it brings. Jesus provides four vignettes of this new ethic for shock value, not a new legal prescription. This is hyperbole, meant to provoke the hearers to seriously consider the radical nature of what they were being told. The law of retaliation was widespread and vehemently held to throughout the ancient Near Eastern culture.

5:39—To take a blow on the right cheek was understood as the most grievous insult possible.

5:40—Giving your tunic and cloak away would mean for the poor giving everything away. The Law forbade a creditor from taking a poor person's cloak, which often served as the person's coat and his only blanket at night. (Ex. 22:26-27).

5:41—Going the second mile was in the context of military impressment. That would raise eyebrows at an example of nonresistance and even extended service to an oppressor.

5:43-47— **Loving your enemies**—These verses deal with loving your enemies. The Lord loved us when we were enemies (Rom. 5:10) and we are to follow in his footsteps. Jesus repeatedly warns his disciples of impending persecution (5:10-12; 10:16-23; 24:9-13). The enemies the disciples are to love (do good to) their persecutors. The disciples have as their example the Lord himself and following that example will prove that the disciples are indeed children of the Father above. The Lord is not speaking of affection here but of doing what is good and right to people opposing you. When we forgive, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who mean us harm, we take the poison out of our own attitude. Loving those who oppose us is a mark of God-like maturity and is a most effective testimony to the transforming power of the Spirit.

5:45-46—The Lord points to God's providential common grace, extended to both the good and the evil. Loving your own goes no further than unrighteous people. The Lord expected more of his disciples.

5:48—**Summary: Divine completion**—This is the conclusion of the matter. The Lord is saying that the Old Testament law pointed beyond mere judicial restraints, concessions arising out of the hardness of human hearts, and still less to the evasions of casuistic reasoning that laws tend to inspire. It pointed to perfection, or more precisely, the completeness, wholeness, and integrity of God himself. The Lord himself exemplified this perfection or completion. In him we see universal benevolence, unconquerable

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goodwill, and seeking after the highest good of others. When that kind of life is reproduced in his followers, it is perfect or complete the way the New Testament uses the term.

2. Righteousness: Its orientation (6:1-34)—Having established what righteousness is, the Lord now focuses on what drives people to act righteously. The righteousness of the Kingdom must be applied in the everyday activities of life. This chapter examines righteousness as it relates to our giving (6:1-4), our praying (6:5-15), our fasting (6:16-18), and our use of and concern for wealth (6:19-34). Religious hypocrisy and external pious promenades are excoriated. Heart devotion to God is posited as the only proper motivation for what we do.

a. Rejection of hypocritical religious practice (6:1-18)—The opening verse (6:1) introduces a warning concerning the three chief acts of Jewish piety discussed in 6:2-18—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Almsgiving (6:1-4) had become a pious show, praying (6:5-15) had become pontifical and meant to impress, and fasting (6:16-18) was done in a manner that drew attention to itself. In each of these situations, the Lord spoke of hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16) receiving their reward in full when their actions were done before people (6:2, 5, 16). Jesus is primarily concerned with the motives behind righteous living. Kingdom dwellers are to act in secret (6:4, 6, 18) and will be rewarded by Father who sees in secret (6:4, 6, 8, 18).The structure of the discussion of these practices is as follows: :

- A warning against piety that seeks human praise;
- A guarantee to those ignoring this warning that they may get what they seek, but no more;
- An instruction for secret piety;
- The assurance that the Father sees and rewards this proper kind of piety.

6:2-4—Alms—These verses deal with the Jewish practice of almsgiving and take direct aim at its ostentatious practice. The great weakness of many of the Pharisees and religious teachers was that they loved human praise and recognition more than they loved God. Jesus says that those whose goal is human approval cannot expect any reward from God. They might receive human plaudits, but that was all. Jesus gives counsel on almsgiving. The way to avoid hypocrisy was not to abandon a practice that had salutary effects, but to avoid the "show". This does not mean that all giving must be secretive to be sincere. However, it does probe us deeply about our motive in and manner of giving.

6:5-15—Prayer—6:5-8 begins the section dealing with prayer. Once again, much of Jewish prayer practice was not about true piety but about one's reputation for it. We are to avoid meaningless, repetitive prayers offered under the misconception that their length or exact articulation make them effective or impressive. Effective prayer is based on intimacy, not some business model where the deity is reminded of the favors done or sacrifices made to get the desired response. Jesus speaks of private prayer as foundational to any public praying we may do, probes us about the sincerity of our prayer, about praying in God's will, and about having a forgiving spirit towards others.

6:9-13—Lord's prayer (see Lk. 11:2-4)—This part of the text moves from a critique of Jewish piety practice to a positive instruction on a central discipline of Christian living. This text is popularly called the Lord's prayer, but more precisely it is the Lord model for the disciples' prayer. The prayer encompasses:

- Worship is the essence of prayer;
- Reverence—God's very name is to be hallowed;
- Spiritual desire for kingdom advance;
- Request that the Father's will be done on earth as in heaven;
- Petition for personal, physical needs;
- Petition for personal spiritual needs (e.g., forgiveness);
- Recognition of personal weakness in requesting deliverance from temptation.

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6:9-10—*Our Father, who art in heaven*—This opening verse establishes the kind of God to whom prayer is offered. He is personal and yet transcendently sovereign. Three petitions are then offered with respect to this personal, transcendent Sovereign:

- That his name would be hallowed (*hagiastheto* = revered; given unique and special place)—That his name and everything about him should be treasured and respected by those who have been created in his image. This is a request to enable us to give to God the unique place that his nature and character deserve and demand.
- That his Kingdom come—A dual request that asks that God's saving, royal rule be extended in the present as people bow in submission to him and cries out for the consummation of the age and realization of his full-orbed Kingdom authority.
- That his will be done in earth as it is in heaven. The prayer explicitly bends our wills to his. This is the prayer that never fails—his will…will be done. Will we recognize that and greet it with welcome and submission or will our posture be different?

6:11-13—The next set of petitions request things for ourselves:

- Our physical human needs—We are to pray for our need, not our greed. "O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes-Benz; my friends all drive Porsches, I must make Amens" misses the heartbeat of this sentiment rather widely.
- Our need for forgiveness of sin—This is connected to our forgiveness of others. It is not that we earn forgiveness by being graciously forbearing, but that having received forgiveness so rich and free, we must model what we have received from our gracious Lord; and
- Deliverance from temptation—the same Greek word renders both the English "temptation" and "testing". To moderns, temptation means to seek to seduce into evil. However, temptation is not designed to make us fall, but to make us stronger and better. God does not entice us to sin. He allows us to be tempted or tested and provides the way out in order that we may grow in righteousness. In the arena of spiritual combat, we are to win our spurs, if you will, not by our own inherent spiritual prowess, but by reliance on God and on prayer.
- **6:14-15**—These verses reinforce the thought of 6:12. It is especially important for the community of God's disciples to be a forgiving one. We cannot walk in fellowship with God and abide in the Lord Jesus and refuse to forgive others. A lack of forgiveness within community inhibits effectiveness of prayer.

Pause and ponder— Consider some different words used for sin in the New Testament:

- *Hamartia* = missing the mark.
- *Parabasis* = stepping across the line between right and wrong.
- *Paraptoma* = slipping across the line; sinning because of some inner impulse.
- *Anomia* = lawless behavior; a person who knows the right but does the wrong;
- *Opheilema* (used in the Lord's prayer)—a failure to pay what is due; a failure of duty.

6:16-18—Fasting—Many Pharisees of the day fasted twice a week (see Lk. 18:12). These voluntary fasts presented marvelous opportunities for outward religious showmanship to gain piety kudos. Jesus tells his disciples not to go there. Like almsgiving and prayer, Jesus assumes that his disciples will engage in these practices. However, there is to be a demeanor to these disciplines. Our seeking of God and his righteousness is not to be diluted by a play for human praise. The disciples are to be reticent to draw attention to themselves and their religious practices.

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Falseness in religious practice robs us of the reality of Christian living, pilfers any spiritual reward, and saps us of real spiritual influence. The first step away from the "show", be it fasting or any spiritual discipline, is honesty before God in our secret life. When our spiritual reputation has become more important than our character, then we have become the kind of hypocrite the Lord is excoriating in this passage.

b. Treasure and physical necessities (6:19-34)—These verses relate to what we treasure as well as to the physical necessities of life. Jesus warns against greed, materialism, and worry that stem from misplaced worldly priorities. If our hearts are properly oriented towards God, we will neither hoard earthly treasure (6:19-24) nor be anxious for our daily necessities (6:25-34).

6:19-21—Jesus tells us to stop storing up earthly treasure but instead to store up treasure in heaven. Jesus is not saying that wealth itself is evil. Nowhere does Jesus magnify "Lady Poverty" as a virtue or criticize the legitimate acquisition of wealth. It is not wrong to possess things, but we need to be aware of the tendency for things to possess us. Jesus warns against the sin of living for the things of this life, pointing out the sad consequences of covetousness and the idolatry of stuff. He is saying that earthly treasure can occupy our concerns and notes that what we treasure in our hearts controls our direction and values.

While the reference to treasure usually brings money first to mind, it does not necessarily have to mean greenbacks. Treasure refers to anything we prize in life, be it physical appearance, particular possessions, pursuits, pleasures, relationships, or talents of which we may be particularly proud. Jesus is saying that the focus of your heart will follow your treasure. He is challenging us here and making a direct claim to that priority in our heart affections as manifested in what we truly value.

6:24—More basic than a choice between two treasures (6:19-21) and two visions (6:22-23) is the choice between two masters: God or money (mammon). Material wealth can provide a dangerously false sense of security. Jesus is warning against that. Mammon is an Aramaic word for money or other possessions. Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol.

6:25-34—Worry (see Lk. 12:22-31)—When the failure to put first things first manifests itself in a spirit of covetousness, aggressive acquisitiveness, or undue ambition—idolatry is easy enough to identify. It is more sobering to realize that it can be manifested in our anxiety. What leads people to hoard material possessions and to give money the supreme position that ought to be God's alone is not only covetousness that is deep seeded in the human heart, but anxiety and fear of not having enough, of not being able to provide necessities (or frills) for us and those we love. To say that I have one Master—a sovereign, all-sufficient, loving Father—and worry like a wart over the minute details of life's provision, is to miss something. Either our God or our faith is impotent, or our heart-treasures are earthbound. The Lord provides three reasons for prohibiting worry and anxiety:

- Because worry and anxiety are symptomatic of not putting first things first;
- Because worry and anxiety are marks of little faith;
- Because worry and anxiety are useless. They just do not do any good at all.

6:26-30—Worry and anxiety are marks of little faith. "O you of little faith" (6:30) is a compound word—literally "little faiths". It is a tender term the Lord uses to chide those caught up in fear and anxiety. In verses 26-30, he gives us little-faiths a practical lesson in observation. To worry about life's essentials is to learn nothing from nature. He argues from God's common providence toward inferior creatures, noting their complete dependence upon that providence, according to their creaturely capacities. Note the verbs in 6:26 and 6:28—"Look" is a word that implies a close penetrating observation. "See" means to note accurately; to consider well.

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We are to carefully observe the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. The point is that God's inferior creation goes about its living in a manner consistent with God's purpose without fretting about it. The birds work diligently at building their nests and obtaining food for their young, but they do not fuss. The lilies direct their energy to producing the bloom which is their glory. Yet so clam and tranquil is their existence that they appear to do nothing at all.

This text does not abrogate human responsibility. It is not that the Lord is counseling the disciples to opt for a lazy idleness and saying that there really is a free lunch for all. We are to live our lives before the Lord and there will be much effort in the living. The Lord's point here is that as we go about the process of pleasing the Father, the Father will take care of us. As we live whole-heartedly to please God, God will make sure that the righteous will not be found begging bread.

6:31-34—Worry and anxiety just do not do any good. To worry over past choices is useless, we cannot take them back. To agonize over tomorrow's possible misfortunes is likewise vain. The truth is that most of the things we worry about never happen.

Illustration—A story is told of Archbishop Trench, a prominent Anglican churchman of the mid-20th century. Although he was not physically disabled, he had a morbid fear of becoming paralyzed. One evening at a church banquet, the woman sitting next to him overheard him muttering to himself "It's happened at last—total insensitivity in the right limb." She leaned over and whispered to the Archbishop: "Your Grace, you will be comforted to know that it's my leg you're pinching."

Far better to view occasions of worry and anxiety as opportunities to lean head into God's grace. Years ago, I read an article in Christianity Today entitled "The Blessings of Anguish". In it, the author cited the great 19th century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon as an example that illustrated the point he was trying to make. He wrote:

> Charles Spurgeon is a well-known example. He suffered from prolonged bouts of depression, as well as anxiety about all sorts of common problems, including finances. Spurgeon's psychological and physical ailments were so debilitating that he was at times confined to bed for weeks. However, Spurgeon came to see these problems as part of God's working in his life. His suffering enabled him to comfort and encourage those who were similarly afflicted. He discovered that his periods of depression invariably preceded a time when God blessed his ministry in a larger way. The depression became a sort of "John the Baptist" moment for him, heralding a new and mighty outpouring of God's Spirit. This psychologically frail man, who died at 57, published over 3,500 sermons, authored 135 books, and was regarded by many as the outstanding preacher of his generation.

3. Righteousness: Its Requirements (7:1-29)—The Lord, having dealt with the nature and orientation of righteousness, now reveals the starting place for effecting it. The Lord speaks to a proper self-assessment (7:1-6), proper attitudes (7:7-12), and issues a call to choose correctly and commit totally by repentance is yourself (7:13-27). The crowds are amazed by his teaching, but even more by its authoritative nature (7:28-29).

a. Judging others (7:1-6; see Lk. 6:41-42)—These verses speak of proper judgment, addressing both the dangers of being judgmental (7:1-5) and the danger of being undiscerning (7:6). This is a stern warning against condemning others. Jesus is referring, not to official lawcourts, but to the judgments and condemnations that occur within ordinary lives, as people set themselves up as moral critics and guardians of one another. The tendency of hardline pressure groups, which is what the Pharisees basically were, is always to create a moral climate in which everybody looks at everybody else to see if they are keeping the standards up. Today, moralism is just as fierce, but its target has changed. The temptation to look down on each other for moral failures is itself a temptation to play God. The

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warning the Lord gives is very apropos. Judgment will bounce back on them. The measuring stick they use for others will be lined up against them. The Lord is not saying there is not such a thing as public morality. He is warning us that the very people who seem most eager to tell others what to do are the people who ought to take a long look in the mirror before they start lambasting others.

7:6—On the other hand, where the disciples have been exhorted to love their enemies (5:43-47) and not to judge others (7:1), many may fail to consider the subtleties of various situations and become undiscerning simpletons. This verse guards against this possibility.

Do not throw your pearls before swine—Seems like a very harsh assessment. However, there are some who will not receive Christian truth. Their minds might be completely shut, perhaps brutalized. They may have lived a life that has obscured their ability to see the truth. They may be unrelenting mockers of all things sacred. The early church used this text to protect itself from threats from the outside (they saw themselves as an island of purity in a surrounding sea of Gentile vice) and threats from the inside (heresy and wandering speculations of early believers).

b. Persistent prayer (7:7-12; see Lk. 11:9-13)—Jesus speaks to the means of practically effecting such a lofty ethic. Until now the sermon has posited the righteousness, sincerity, humility, purity, and love expected of Jesus' followers. These verses assure us that such gifts are ours if sought earnestly through prayer. Persistence is required—ask, seek, knock.

Quote: Archbishop William Temple once remarked: "When I pray, coincidences happen. When I stop praying, coincidences stop happening."

7:12— The Lord's golden rule. Positively, we must actively do for others what we would have them do for us. Negatively, we must refrain from doing to others what we would not want done to us.

c. Warnings mandating decision and commitment (7:13-27)—Four warnings are given, each pairing contrasts: two ways (7:13-14), two trees (7:15-20), two claims (7:21-23), and two builders (7:24-27).

7:13-14—The picture is presented: the narrow gate and road and the broad one. It is the difference between the difficult path and the easy one; the long obedience in the same direction and the short and distracted one; the disciplined way and the undisciplined one; the thoughtful way and the thoughtless one. The entrance and pathway to life is presented as restrictive. The wrong choices have dire consequences.

7:15-20—Jesus warns of false prophets and informs us that we can identify them by their fruit just as good and bad trees can be identified. One's fruit—all that one says and does—will ultimately reveal what one is (Jas 3:12). Living according to kingdom values can be outwardly feigned for a while but not sustained over time.

7:21-23—Next, Jesus contrasts the claims of false followers. The only way to prove one's sincerity is by one's lifestyle. The only proof of love and Kingdom loyalty is obedience to the Father.

7:24-27—Wise and foolish builders (see Lk. 6:47-49)—The final contrast is between two builders, one building on a solid foundation and the other on sand. The wise builder is the one who puts Jesus' teaching into practice. Their life's work can withstand anything. Those who pretend to have faith are foolish builders. When the storms of life come, their false machinations do not sustain them.

d. Audience response (7:28-29)—The long sermon ends with "when Jesus finished these words". Each of the five major discourses in Matthew concludes like this: see 7:28—Sermon on the Mount; 11:1—instruction when sending out the disciples; 13:53—parables of the kingdom; 19:1—teaching about community in the kingdom; 26:1—picture of coming judgment. In each case the conclusion

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prepares the reader for the next section. Note that the crowds were amazed (*exeplessonto* = astounded or overwhelmed) for he taught with authority, not merely citing authority. Matthew uses this term four times in his gospel (7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:23). In this text, the comment on the crowd's amazement on Jesus' authoritative teaching prepares for his demonstration of authority in powerful and liberating miracles.

C. The King acting: Authority revealed by his deeds (8:1-16:20)—Jesus' authority, established by his teaching, is further undergirded by his deeds. This leads to a series of events and controversies in which Jesus' identity is rejected by the Jewish leaders and recognized by his disciples.

This section of the text is replete with recorded miracles of the Lord Jesus. Matthew and the other gospel writers authenticate the authority and claims of the Lord Jesus by documenting his many miracles. This runs against our modern scientific and empirical worldview that does not take miracles seriously. Yet belief in miracles lies at the very heart of authentic Christian faith. Without the miracle of the first Easter, Christianity would have long since passed from the scene.

The ancient world was not suspicious of miracles, presupposing that they could not happen. Miracles were regarded as a possible, if extraordinary, part of life. The creator God could intervene in his creation whenever he wanted in ways that superseded the known natural laws that he had ordained. Augustine understood miracles as running counter to what was known of nature, not as irrational disruptions of nature's pattern. The Bible writers understood miracles as direct interventions by God in natural and human affairs that were linked to his redemptive activity on behalf of humanity that transcended our knowledge. Have there been excesses in miraculous claims through the ages? Yes indeed, and the critics have a field day with those. But that does not prove the skeptical assumption that miracles just cannot happen and were simply figments of ancient ignorance and gullibility. Or that we, who have "come of age" and grown up, must put aside such silliness. No. Miracles represent the use of divine power to restore creation to its proper order, to restore the image-bearers to their proper state, and ultimately to destroy death, that grim intruder resulting from our fallen state.

The central miracle of Christian faith is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Without this miracle, the early church would not have come into being and people living after them would never have heard of the other miracles of the Lord Jesus. The Gospel writers present real-life miracles attesting to the identity and character of Messiah. They are more than wonderful works or phenomenal curiosities, but signs of the in-break of a new reality that will restore humanity and the world to what it should be and indeed, yearns to be.

1. Miracles attest to the King's authority (8:1-9:34)— By word and deed the Lord Jesus had authenticated himself as Messiah in chapters 3 and 4. He announced the standards for entrance into his kingdom and clearly presented the way of access to it in chapters 5 to 7. In chapters 8 and 9, Matthew records a series of miracles to authenticate the king, demonstrating the various realms in which he has authority.

Matthew 8 begins with the Lord Jesus healing a leper (8:1-4), then the centurion's servant (8:5-13), then Peter's mother-in-law and others (8:14-17), before challenging his followers with the cost of following him (8:18-22). He calms a storm at sea (8:23-27) while crossing over to the region of the Gadasenes where he heals two demoniacs (8:28-34). In chapter 9, he crosses the sea again and heals a paralytic (9:1-8), calls Levi (Matthew) to follow him and announces the nature of his mission at a banquet at Matthew's home (9:9-13), fields questions about fasting (9:14-17), raises Jairus' daughter and heals a woman with a hemorrhage en route to that resuscitation (9:18-26), and heals the blind and the mute (9:27-34). Matthew's purpose in recording these miracles is to testify to Messiah's presence and authority.

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a. Healing a leper (8:1-4; see Mk. 1:40-44; Lk. 5:12-14)— The Lord begins this phase of his healing ministry by demonstrating his power over disease. Leprosy was a disease for which the Law prescribed quarantine (Lev. 13:45-46). Lepers were societal outcasts. Jesus touches the leper to heal him and then instructs him to follow Old Testament medical protocol (see Lev. 14:1-32).

Leprosy was used in biblical times to designate a wide variety of skin diseases. Its reference was not limited to what we now know as Hansen's disease. The Lord Jesus met the leper's need with compassion, touching him, which technically violated the Mosaic law. The leper was instantly healed and was told not to tell anyone but to go and show himself to the priest as required by Leviticus 14 so that he could be reintegrated into the social and religious life of society. Showing himself to the priests would also be a testimony to them. In the entire history of Israel there was no other biblical record of a Jew being healed from leprosy other than Miriam (see Num. 12:10-15). This must have had a dramatic impact when the man suddenly appeared at the Temple and announced that he had been cured of leprosy!

Note that leprosy was a physical disease that accurately pictures sin. It is deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3); it spreads (Lev. 13:5, 8); it defiles and isolates (Lev. 13:44-46); and it renders things unfit (Lev. 13:47-50).

b. Healing the centurion's servant (8:5-13; see Lk. 7:1-10)—Capernaum was a customs post that would have warranted some military presence. The centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. They were under authority and exercised authority over the basic fighting units of the army. In this healing account, the centurion comes to Jesus and requests the healing of his paralyzed servant who was suffering terribly. Luke's account describes the servant as the centurion's *doulos* (slave) whereas Matthew describes him as *pais* (boy). Luke's account develops the character of the centurion, a man of the highest caliber, demonstrated by his concern for his slave, his attitude towards the Jews, and his own sense of unworthiness in the presence of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:1-10). Matthew focuses on is the quality of his faith and the Lord's reaction to that faith.

Jesus prepares to go with centurion to heal the servant. The Lord's willingness to go to the centurion's home and heal his servant was to cross an important cultural boundary. Pious Jews did not normally enter Gentile abodes. The centurion requests healing at a distance because he was unworthy of having the Lord under his roof. He was confident that the Lord could command healing at a distance. Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith. This Gentile penetrated more deeply into the nature of Jesus' person and authority than any Jew of the day. Jesus tells the centurion that it would be done as he requested and it was accomplished that very hour.

c. Healing Peter's mother-in-law and others (8:14-17)—Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, perhaps malarial fever. The point of the story is Jesus' authority over sickness and disease. The Lord's healing ministry continues throughout that evening, and Matthew understands it as fulfilling Isaiah 53:4, which emphasizes healing from the ravages of sin. Jesus inaugurates the messianic era, making its physical benefits available as well as its spiritual ones.

This miracle tells us much about the Lord Jesus. Miracles cost Jesus. After the miracles recorded in this chapter, he would have been tired as he came to Peter's house. Instead of a respite, there was yet another demand for healing first from Peter's mother-in-law and then from many others. This also tells us something about Peter's mother-in-law. No sooner was she healed than she busied herself meeting the Lord's needs and those of her other guests. How many of us would have behaved that way?

d. Cost of following Jesus (8:18-22; see Mk. 1:29-34; Lk. 4:38-41)— Jesus goes to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and meets two followers who desire to follow the Lord on their own terms. A teacher of the law claims that he will follow wherever the Lord led, but not into poverty. Another

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wanted to wait until his father died, whenever that would occur. Though the Lord wanted disciples who would follow him and work in the kingdom harvest, he only wanted those who knew and had counted the cost. The first follower's inquiry in this text is met with the reality that the Lord had no permanent home. Fame in following a famous teacher was not going to go the distance. The second follower wanted to return home and wait until his father died before following the Lord, He saw discipleship as something one could pick up or lay down at will.

8:21-22—One of the eldest son's responsibilities was his father's burial. An initial burial occurred shortly after a person's decease, and it would be unlikely that family members would be outside talking to rabbis during the reclusive mourning period. So, this was an indication of discipleship interest in some distant period when this man's affairs allowed it. Some interpreters have read the text this way. Others have seen it referring to the son's responsibilities in the secondary burial process. A year or so after an initial burial, family members returned to the tomb and reburied their loved one's bones in special box and placed it in a slot dug into the tomb's wall. If this is the context, this man was asking for a year's delay in following the Lord.

e. Jesus calms a storm at sea (8:23-27; see Mk. 4:36-41; Lk. 8:22-25)—Jesus and the disciples started across the Sea of Galilee. The sea is situated in a basin surrounded by mountains with narrow ravines in between. These ravines form channels through which the wind can rush down in sudden gusts, making the sea susceptible to sudden, violent storms. To be caught in one of these storms could be traumatic. Such was the experience of the apostolic band one time while Jesus was asleep, probably near the helmsman's seat with a cushion as a pillow. The waves were sweeping over the boat when the disciples awakened the Lord. Jesus arose, rebuked their little faith, and calmed the sea at his command. The apostles are amazed (*ethaumasan* = wonder, marvel, be astonished) at the supernatural character of the one whose rebuke was sufficient to turn a stormy gale into perfect peace. This occasion revealed the majesty and power of the Lord Jesus over nature that they had not experienced before. In addition, Matthew is contrasting the "little faith" of the disciples with the "great faith" of the Gentile centurion (8:5-13).

Pause and ponder—Wherever Jesus is present, the storms of life take on a different hue. When the storms of life shake our souls, let the presence of the Lord Jesus provide a calm that empowers us to proceed and do the next thing.

f. Demoniacs healed (8:28-34; see Mk. 5:1-17; Lk. 8:26-37)—On the other side of the lake, Jesus meets two demon-possessed men. The demons recognize Jesus' identity and authority (8:28-29) and are allowed to enter a herd of pigs who are drowned in the lake (8:30-32). The incident occasions a fearful reaction by the local people, who are more concerned about the regularity of their lives and their economic loss than the miraculous healing and deliverance of an enslaved man (8:33-34). This healing also reveals what the evil one does to humans when he can. He robs them of sanity, self-control, society, and any self-respect.

Matthew mentions two men in this story, while Mark and Luke only mention one (Mk. 5:1; Lk. 8:26), presumably the more violent one and therefore the focal point of the recorded event. Presumably, Matthew had independent knowledge of the second man. The demons address the Lord as the "Son of God", recognizing his power and majesty of his person. The question of why the Lord granted the demons' request to go into the herd of pigs and destroy them is a variant of the problem of evil. The appointed time for the complete destruction of demonic power had not yet come. Indeed, the loss of the herd exposes the real values of the people in the vicinity. They prefer pigs to people, swine to the Savior. This healing shows that Jesus' ministry was not restricted to the Jews and foreshadows the mission to the Gentiles. It also shows that opposition to the Lord was not exclusively Jewish.

Jesus has authority over the shadowy forces of evil. Moderns dispute miracles and sneer at all the

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instances of demoniac activity recorded in the gospels. Modern medicine has suggested alternative diagnoses for the many people in this turbulent demoniac state. We may grant that these suggestions may naturally explain some, but certainly not all these instances. There are modern examples of demoniac possession as well which secularists simply ignore because they know they lack any explanation.

8:28—The locale described is uncertain. The name of the region of Gadarenes comes from the town of Gadara, the capital of the region located approximately eight miles from the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Some think the incident took place at Gergesa (modern Khersa) located lakeside. Luke and Mark wrote of the region of the Gerasenes.

8:31—Jewish hearers would have reacted differently than moderns to the Lord allowing the demons to inhabit the herd of pigs and causing their destruction. That unclean demons would be allowed to inhabit unclean pigs and destroy themselves would not cause consternation. The Jewish contemporary reaction to the destruction of the unclean animals would probably have been: "But of course".

9:1ff—In chapter 9, the Lord Jesus will be accused of blasphemy (9:1-8), of keeping the wrong kind of company (9:10-13), of being slack in piety (9:14-17), and indeed being in partnership with Satan (9:32-34). His sanctimonious accusers, the Jewish religious leaders, were more concerned with the preservation of their own separateness than helping others. They were like doctors refusing to visit the sick because they might become infected. They were more concerned with rendering criticism than encouragement. They practiced a religion that issued condemnation rather than forgiveness and sympathy. Theirs was an outward orthodoxy that rendered little practical help.

g. Healing a paralytic (9:1-8; see Mk. 2:3-12; Lk. 5:18-26)—Matthew records this miracle to illustrate Jesus' authority over sin, the most basic human problem. Mark (2:1-12) and Luke (5:8-26) inform us that the paralytic was brought to Jesus by friends lowering him through the roof of the house. Matthew picks up the story with the Lord recognizing the faith of these friends. He informs the paralytic that his sins are forgiven. The teachers of the law present at the scene think that this is blasphemy. Knowing their thoughts Jesus heals the paralytic, demonstrating that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. The healing not only cured the paralytic but refuted the implicit charge of blasphemy.

h. Calling Matthew; Eating with sinners (9:9-13; see Mk. 2:14-17; Lk. 5:27-32)— Jesus' demonstrated authority over sin naturally leads to his mission of calling sinners into the kingdom. The locale of the Lord's calling of Matthew (Levi) was probably a customs and excise booth on the outskirts of Capernaum at the border between the territories of Herod Philip and Herod Antipas. Mark calls Matthew Levi in Mark 2:14. Jews commonly had two or more names.

Matthew hosts a dinner with Jesus and many of his associates, tax collectors and sinners. These are people with whom the Pharisees would never have table fellowship. The religious leaders take exception, and Jesus challenges the leaders to learn from Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice". This text does not reject sacrifice or ritual but elevates right relations with God and right treatment of those less fortunate. The Lord was not simply telling them that they should be more sympathetic to outcasts but that they were aligned with apostates of ancient Israel in that they were preserving the shell of faith while losing the heart of it. Jesus is demonstrating that his ministry is directed to those who realize that they have a spiritual need.

i. Fasting and the dawning of the Messianic age (9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39)—John the Baptist's disciples ask the Lord about fasting. Why did not his disciples engage in what they and Pharisees saw as a necessary spiritual practice? Jesus answered by comparing the coming of the kingdom to a wedding feast. It would be no more fitting for his disciples to fast while he was with them

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than it would be for the friends of the bridegroom to fast during the wedding festivities. Mournful rites were incompatible with the arrival of the new era of salvation. He uses two additional illustrations in his reply:

- Mending clothes—A new patch on an old garment can be a problem. The new material can shrink and pull away from the old.
- Wineskins—When wineskins are new, there is a certain elasticity. As they age they grow hard and unyielding. New wine is still fermenting and gives off gases. These gases cause pressure. If the wineskin is new it will yield to the pressure. If old, dry, and hard, it will explode. That illustration has an all too human application.

The kingdom inaugurated by the Lord Jesus could not simply be poured into old wineskins of Judaism. To attempt to domesticate and incorporate the kingdom into the matrix of established and stale Jewish religion would only succeed in ruining both Judaism and the Lord's dynamic teaching.

j. Raising a Jewish leader's daughter; healing a hemorrhaging woman (9:18-26; see Mk. 5:22-43; Lk. 8:41-56)—Jesus is met by a synagogue official seeking help for his daughter who had just died (9:18-19). On the journey to the official's house, Jesus is touched by a woman subject to bleeding for twelve years and she is healed. The Lord senses healing power flowing from him and he calls the woman into the open and completes the cure (9:20-22). Jesus then proceeds to the synagogue official's home. The crowd laughs at Jesus when he tells them that the girl is not dead but only sleeping. Their mocking reply is cut short when the Lord raises the synagogue official's daughter (9:23-26).

The two people coming to Jesus in great need in this story could not be more different. The synagogue leader was a man of stature, wealth, and social and religious standing. In the synagogue, he was in charge. The woman would not even be allowed in the synagogue. Her constant issue of blood made her ceremonially unclean. They were at opposite ends of the social and religious spectrum of the day, but both met Jesus in faith and need. The woman, forbidden by the law to have social intercourse with anyone, defies the law in reaching out to touch Jesus. In her desperation, she does not dare to touch him, just his robe. Jesus' stern insistence for the person who touched him to come forward is an act of gracious kindness. It may have taken the healed woman a long time to convince people of her cure had Jesus not announced it. She is instantly healed and restored to an active place in normal society. Jesus then proceeds to synagogue official's home.

In this text, Jesus violates Jewish hygiene regulations by touching a hemorrhaging woman and by touching a corpse. He would have become doubly unclean. We see the odd reversal of the cleanliness laws. Rather than the unclean infecting him, his touch cleanses and raises them.

9:18-19—Mark and Luke give the name the synagogue ruler—Jairus (Mk. 5:22; Lk. 8:41). In these parallel accounts, Jairus believes his daughter was dying, not that she had already died as in Matthew's account. Mark and Luke record that while Jesus was speaking with Jairus, someone came and informed them of the girl's death. Matthew does not mention that detail but incorporates the girl's demise in his account.

k. Healing the blind and mute (9:27-34)—The healing of the two blind men occurs as Jesus is returning from raising the Jewish leader's daughter. This incident is the first time in Matthew's account that Jesus is called the Son of David, a messianic title. The two men appeal for healing and then follow him into a house. They are healed and when leaving, the Lord Jesus also heals a mute man. The religious leaders ascribe this to the prince of demons.

2. The King's authority delegated to his disciples (9:35-11:1)

a. Need for workers (9:35-38)—As 4:23-25 prepares the reader for Matthew's first major

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discourse, the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), so this text prepares for Mtthew's second major discourse, commissioning and instructing the Twelve for their healing and preaching ministry (10:1-42). Matthew speaks in summary terms of the Lord's teaching, preaching, and healing ministry, highlighting his compassion (*splanchnizomai*), a word only used by the Synoptic authors (Mt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mk. 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Lord encourages his disciples to beseech the Lord of the harvest for additional workers for the people were without spiritual guidance, like sheep wandering about without shepherds. This entreaty concerning workers in the harvest is the prelude to the Lord's first missionary assignment for the disciples.

b. Sending out the Twelve (10:1-42)— This passage pertaining to the apostles (*apostellos* = sent one) being sent out follows on the previous text. The Twelve are commissioned and sent out to preach and heal in a ministry modelled after that of the Lord Jesus (10:1-4). The Lord then preached something akin to an ordination sermon, instructing, encouraging, and preparing them for their ministry (10:5-42). He provided instructions relating to their audience, their message, and their ministry activity (10:5-15). He warns them of the opposition and persecution they might face for the disciples will not only share the Lord's authority but also his sufferings (10:16-31). There is a costliness to discipleship, and the Lord reveals that cost (10:32-39). However, there is a reward and a wonderful destiny as well (10:40-42).

Pause and ponder—How would you have felt in the shoes of the Twelve? It is one thing to watch the Son of God perform miraculous healings, to demonstrate power over sickness, over nature, and over the evil one, and to listen to powerful messages that rocked the audience and amazed them. Now, they were sent out by themselves to conduct a New Covenant ministry. He delegated his authority and power to some degree to them! The Twelve were not just a sign and beginning of God's restoration of Israel, they were to be part of the means of the Lord God doing this marvelous thing.

10:1-4—Disciples commissioned and sent out— The apostles were to be brought within close association with the Lord Jesus and learn from him and then to be sent out to preach the Good News of salvation. They were called to model the Lord's ministry, to be heralds, teachers, and healers. There are three other lists of the apostles in the New Testament (Mk. 3:13-16; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). These lists are divided into four sections with Peter heading the first, Philip the second, James, the son of Alphaeus the third, and Judas Iscariot listed alone in the fourth. They were all lay people. None of these men were preachers or biblical scholars. Four were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and one a Zealot. Of the other six we know next to nothing of their backgrounds. Thaddeus in Matthew's list corresponds to Judas, son of James in Luke's list.

The Twelve were his apostles, his ambassadors, if you will. The term apostle (*apostello*) has both a wider and narrower meaning. The wider meaning is simply "sent one." People sent on a mission. The narrower meaning of the term came to identify the group who held leading positions in the church after the resurrection of Jesus. This is the first and only time Matthew calls the Twelve apostles. The number of apostles corresponds to the number of Jewish tribes thereby establishing a correspondence between the Old and the New Testament. Jesus was sending them out a mission modelled after his own ministry. They would continue his work in the power of the Spirit after his earthly ministry was over and would also be able to train others to continue with the ministry after them (2 Tim. 2:2).

10:5-15—Instructions as to audience, message, and ministry—This section details the apostles' modus operandi, instructions for carrying on the work. Their message was identical to that of John the Baptist (3:1) and the Lord himself (4:17). They were to go to their fellow Jews, preach the coming of the Kingdom, and were given healing authority to authenticate their message. They were to preach and heal without cost to those to whom they ministered (10:5-8). They were not to make elaborate provisions for travel or for their own daily maintenance (10:9-10). As workers of the Kingdom, they

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were worthy of their keep but were to shun luxury and merchandising so common among traveling teachers in the Greco-Roman world. As they ministered, they were in turn to be ministered to by their recipients. (10:11-15).

10:6—Galilee was surrounded by Gentile regions except in the south where it shared borders with Samaria. The idea that the mission targeted the Jews did not preclude it later coming to those outside Israel.

10:9-13—Showing hospitality to travelers was an important virtue in Mediterranean activity. It was said that the Essenes expected such hospitality from their fellow Essenes in various cities so that they felt no need to take provisions when they traveled.

10:15—This judgment seems harsh. Perhaps my natural reluctance to host common strangers previously unknown to me reflects a cultural background that does not value hospitality like that of the Near East culture in the first century.

10:16-31—Warning of opposition and persecution—The Lord warns his disciples of the opposition and persecution they might face. The disciples will not only share the Lord's authority but also his sufferings. In this section, Jesus envisions an extended time of witness amid persecution—in short a witnessing and suffering church. The experience of the early Church bears out Jesus' solemn warnings. The early believers were indeed persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and killed. The message of the Lord Jesus did divide families. The opponents envisioned seem to be Jews handing believers over to Gentile authorities (10:17-20). Opposition will arise within family units and in society generally (10:21-22). He counsels strategic withdrawal in the face of intense persecution, but to keep moving and keep preaching because the time is short (10:23). They were to expect this for the Lord himself had been so treated (10:24-25). They were not to fear opposition for the Father values and will care for them (10:26-31). This portion of the text is all about the right and wrong ways to be afraid. To unduly fear human opposition is to get things out of perspective, for people can do no more the kill the body. However, God can destroy both body and soul.

10:32-39—Costly discipleship—This is a stern word on discipleship and paying its cost. They were to acknowledge the Lord Jesus amid opposition (10:32-33), realize that the message will be resisted (10:34-36), and that the disciples must love Jesus supremely and prefer him more than anything else (10:36-39), including family and life itself.

10:35—The Lord cites Micah 7:6. The context of that verse describes the awful evils of the land and the untrustworthiness of even close relatives and friends that would continue until the Lord comes and vindicates his own.

10:40-42—Encouragement for a proper response—This passage returns to the theme of hospitality toward the messengers of the gospel (see 10:11-14). There is an ultimate tie between the treatment of the disciples and that of the Lord Jesus. Rewards will extend to witnessing disciples and those who them.

11:1—Transitional comment—This comment returns attention to Jesus' ministry, focusing on his preaching and teaching ministry in Galilee. He did not send the apostles out to relieve himself of work but to expand the proclamation of the Kingdom. Once again we see Matthew's structural marker after a major teaching passage: "After Jesus had finished instructing …" (see also 7:28-29; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

3. The King's authority questioned and challenged (11:2-12:50)—In presenting the king to this point in the text, Matthew focused on his identity (Mt. 1-4), his principles (Mt. 5-7), and his power (Mt. 8-10). In this section, we see the king's authority questioned and challenged.

a. John the Baptist questions Jesus' identity (11:2-19; see Lk.7:18-35)—Matthew uses the

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episode of John stumbling over Jesus due to his false Messianic expectations to introduce this portion of the text dealing with rising opposition to Jesus due primarily to his unexpected demeanor and message. John may have been in prison for as long as year now. John wants the Lord to announce judgment, but Jesus' ministry was one of mercy, healing, and forgiveness. Jesus' ministerial demeanor was not what John expected of Messiah. His own expectations cause him to question the Lord's identity (11:2-3). Mercy was at the heart of the Lord's messianic mission as it is at the heart of the church's mission today. John only received partial reports of the Lord's ministry while in prison and could not see the total picture. The Lord's reply was tender, pointing to the works of Messiah (11:4-6), before praising John and his ministry as Messiah's forerunner (11:7-15). Indeed, he was Elijah as prophesied in Malachi 3:1 (11:14). But even so, those in the kingdom are greater than John. This is not to demote John but to elevate Jesus' disciples.

The Lord concludes this section by rebuking the present generation (11:16-19). They rejected John as an ascetic demoniac and the Lord Jesus as a glutton, a drunkard, and one hanging around with the wrong crowd. They voiced their criticisms with the lifestyles of both John and Jesus. Their rejection of the two was as predictable as that of spoiled children, whining for something other.

11:2-6—John was probably thinking, if Jesus is the Messiah and I am his forerunner, why am I still in prison? Jesus did not give John a direct yes-no answer but cited the notable signs of Messiah's presence and the preaching of the Kingdom. These signs would indeed indicate that Jesus was the Messiah (see Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1).

11:16-19—As to the Lord's generation and every generation since, when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily find an excuse for not listening.

b. Unrepentant cities reproached (11:20-24; see Lk. 10:13-15)—11:16-19 reveal the Lord's assessment of the Jewish reception of both his and John's ministries. The Lord continues his condemnation by citing the cities located near the Sea of Galilee where some of his most significant miracles were performed. The judgment on these privileged cities (Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum) would be worse than the judgment on evil cities of renown (Tyre and Sodom).

11:21—"Woe" translates a word that expresses sorrowful pity as much as righteous anger.

Pause and ponder—These cities reflect the situation of Christianity in the West today. There is a responsibility of privilege that has been forgotten. There is the sin of indifference. Neglect can kill as effectively as persecution. There is the sin of doing nothing.

c. Jesus' invitation: Rest for the soul (11:25-30; see Lk. 10:21-22)—The Pharisees spoke of carrying the Yoke of the Torah, a heavy burden of commandments and interpretative priestly regulations. Jesus spoke of an easy yoke, born of mercy, forgiveness, and love. He issues a call to all who are weary (*hoi kopiontes* = those tired from hard toil) and burdened (*prephortismenoi* = those loaded down). People's weariness comes from enduring the burden of sin and its consequences. Rather than continue along that path, they should take the Lord Jesus' yoke on themselves for that load is light and not burdensome.

11:29-30—"Yoke" was put on an animal for pulling heavy loads. The Lord uses it here as a metaphor for discipleship. The Lord encourages the burdened people to come to him because he is gentle and humble in heart and they will find rest for their souls, reiterating language from Jeremiah 6:16. Life is simplified and unified around the person of the Lord Jesus.

d. Pharisees challenge Jesus' authority (12:1-45)—This section encompasses challenges concerning the Sabbath (12:1-14), the Lord's withdrawal exhibiting the humble spirit prophesied by Isaiah (12:15-21), the Lord's rebuke to the Pharisees for declaring that his healing of demoniacs was

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done by the power of the evil one (12:22-37), and the Lord's reply to the Pharisees' demand for yet another sign (12:38-45).

12:1-14—Lord of the Sabbath (see Mk. 2:23-3:6; Lk. 6:1-11)—The rest the Lord promised in the previous section (11:28-30) leads into a Sabbath controversy with the Pharisees by way of contrast: Christ's gentle yoke contrasted with the Pharisees' legalistic burdens. The Lord is not saying that Sabbath keeping was a bad idea. Not at all! He is attacking the way it had become so powerful a system that those insisting on strict observance had forgotten whose law it was or what the law was all about. The law, strictly applied, was getting in the way of merciful love, flowing out to heal people in desperate need. People matter more than punctilious compliance; human need takes precedence over religious regulation.

This passage encompasses two incidents of perceived Sabbath violations. The first dealt with the Lord and his disciples walking through a grain field, picking heads of grain (12:1-8). This was allowed by the law (see Deut. 23:25). But to do this and then rub the grain in your hands was considered threshing which Jewish tradition forbade on the Sabbath. It is hard to believe that religious types could be so persnickety. Their regulation undermined the salutary effect of what the Law allowed. There were thirty-nine kinds of work forbidden on the Sabbath under prevailing Jewish oral regulations. The incident highlights these minute and persnickety regulations. They were missing the purpose of the Sabbath rest and putting people into straightjackets.

The Lord points to David and his companions eating consecrated bread when they were hungry (see 1 Sam. 21:1-6). The need justified a technical violation of the law (12:3-4). The law was meant for good—for rest and for the opportunity for worship, not for its finicky enforcement by self-righteous and sanctimonious regulators. The Lord also points to the priests serving in the Temple on the Sabbath without condemnation (12:5-8). Their cultic responsibilities took precedence.

The second incident deals with the healing of a man with a shriveled hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath (12:9-14). The man may well have been a plant, for the text indicates that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. Convinced of his power to perform miracles, they presented him with a test case, wondering if he would break rabbinical tradition that only allowed healing on the Sabbath when life was at risk. Jesus points out the ridiculousness of their regulations. They will rescue a sheep or another animal falling into a pit on the Sabbath, but healing a person is taboo. The same principle is at issue—Jesus is not breaking the Sabbath by doing good to a human being in need. The Pharisees are furious at the flaunting of their Sabbath imperatives and begin plotting the Lord's death (12:14).

12:15-21—Jesus, the chosen servant—In this section, Matthew presents Jesus' healing ministry in terms of the Suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah. He withdrew when opposition became intense as was his custom until the appointed hour and continued his extensive ministry. The quote from Isaiah 42:1-4 is the longest Old Testament quote in Matthew. It portrays a ministry that is gentle and compassionate where the weak are not trampled and crushed.

12:22-37—Jesus and Beelzebub (see Mk. 3:23-27; Lk. 11:17-22)— Jesus heals a demoniac and the religious leaders assert that He performed exorcisms by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons (12:22-24). The title Beelzebub means "Lord of the flies", a possible corruption of Baal-zebul, the local deity of the Philistine town of Ekron (see 2 Ki. 1:2-3). Early Judaism applied the title to Satan. Jesus provides a threefold reply:

- If he was casting out demons by the power of Satan, then Satan was working against himself (12:25-26).
- What of contemporary Jewish exorcists (12:27)? If you grant that they operate by the power of

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God, then why not believe I operate by that same power?
- By driving out demons, the Lord Jesus was demonstrating that he was greater than Satan (12:28-29).

12:30-32—The incident concludes with the Lord's warning the religious leaders against the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:31-32), an eternal and unforgiveable sin. The spiritually blind are the first opponents of Jesus' ministry. This state is a willful one. The early church fathers considered willful ignorance the essence of sin. People watch a healing miracle and immediately attribute the healing to evil. The Bible warns repeatedly that by calling evil good and good evil, we endanger our very souls.

"Blaspheming the Spirit" is opposing Messiah so firmly that one resorts to demonic accusations to confuse the Spirit's signs as to the Lord' identity. To identify the source of good with the embodiment of all evil reveals a moral wreck for which the Incarnation provides no remedy. If people, by repeated refusals of God's guidance, have lost the ability to recognize goodness when they see it, if they have got their moral values inverted until evil to them is good and good to them is evil, then, even when they are confronted with the Lord Jesus, they are still not conscious of sin. They cannot repent and therefore they can never be forgiven. Unforgivable sin refers to people becoming so hard of heart so as never to think of repenting.

12:30—"He who is not with me is against me." This states a challenge from the Lord that we ought to apply to ourselves. Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50**—**"He who is not against us is for us" is a test we ought to apply to others.

12:38-45—Pharisees seek signs; Sign of Jonah (see Lk. 11:24-26, 29-32)—The Pharisees demand yet another miraculous sign (12:38). This was a completely ridiculous request, having seen many miraculous signs already. The Lord responds to the demand by denouncing it and comparing himself with Jonah (12:39-42). Only in the way Jonah (spending three days and nights inside a great fish) was a sign to the Ninevites, would Jesus be a sign to the Jews (spending three days in the heart of the earth, a reference to his coming burial and resurrection). This parallels the resurrection of Jesus to the resuscitation of Jonah and points to the resurrection as the affirmation of the identity and teaching of Lord Jesus. He then brings the contemporary generation to the bar of judgment and assesses their situation to be worse than those going before them (the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba). The people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba responded to the prophetic witness of Jonah (Jon. 3:1) and the wisdom of Solomon (1 Ki. 10:1)) while Jesus' contemporaries refused to respond to a far greater witness.

12:43-45—This generation of sign-seekers stood condemned in the final judgment. To show what their condition would be if they persisted in unbelief, he compared them to a man delivered from demon possession after which he tried to clean up his own life, lacking a genuine conversion. He became subject to possession again far worse than the condition he had been delivered from.

In the immediate cultural context, the Lord seems to be saying that various Jewish reform groups, the Pharisees and the Essenes, were attempting to sweep and clean as best they could according to their understanding, with programs of Torah-teaching, personal piety, and Temple sacrificial ritual. However, they were in danger of being worse off than when they started. Their "reform" was missing the boat—the new things the Lord was doing, the in-break of the Kingdom.

e. Family doubts; True spiritual kinship (12:46-50; see Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21)—Jesus' family sought him out, perhaps thinking that he had lost it. He needed to come home and regain his perspective. The Lord makes it clear that discipleship does not come through physical relationships but only through obedience to the Father. Mere religion (12:43-45) or family connection (12:46-50) does not gain merit and standing before God. Jesus redefines family in this text, identifying them as all who

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obey the will of God.

Allowing ties to the religious community to take precedence over family ties was unheard of in Judaism. However, the Lord is not trashing his physical family. They were not believing at the time, but they would come to believe in their time. His stepbrothers James and Jude were inspired authors of biblical books and James was a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church. The point he is making is to exalt his disciples as true family, having already embraced faith in him.

4. The King's authority veiled: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52)—The hiddenness element of the Kingdom takes on explicit form in the parables following the Jewish leaders' challenge to Jesus' authority. They describe the kingdom of heaven in this present age, its beginning, its opposition, and its outcome. Those who have ears to hear are instructed; those who do not, are not.

The term "parable" comes from *para* and *ballo*, which means "to throw alongside". A parable makes a comparison between a known truth and an unknown one, throwing them alongside each other. They are stories taken from the world in which Jesus lived and are told for the purpose of relating a spiritual truth. They make truth concrete, compel interest, and require people to discover truth for themselves. They were spoken, thus impacting people immediately, and were simple, usually making just one primary point.

Many, perhaps most, of Matthew's parables are introduced as kingdom parables with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is like…" or a kindred expression. If 13:52 is taken as a parable, this chapter breaks down into two parts of four parables each. The first four are addressed to the crowds (13:3-43) and the last four to the disciples (13:44-52).

a. Parable of the sower and the soils (13:1-23; see Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15)—Of the first four, the parable of the sower and the soils stands apart from the other three, separated by discussion on the purpose of parables (13:10-17) and the interpretation of the parable of the sower (13:18-23).

Jesus relates the parable (13:1-9), describes the function of parables (13:10-17), before explaining the parable of the sower (13:18-23). In ancient Palestine, seed was sown in broadcast fashion over a wide area. The sower is the Lord; the seed is the good news of the kingdom. The parable is a simple description of the varying fortunes of seed scattered over a field with various kinds of soil—on the wayside, on rocky soil, among thorns, and on good soil. Only the seeds on good soil produced results (13:4-9). The seed that fell on the hard-packed wayside (13:4, 18-19) represents the hard-hearted who have their minds shut. The rocky soil (13:5-6, 20-21), so common in Palestine, was a thin layer of soil over a shelf limestone. These are shallow hearers who respond initially but fail to follow in faith. They lack roots. The thorny soil (13:7, 22), that soil in which fibrous roots of couch grass and bishop has weed lay underneath and ready to spring up, represents those who allow the cares of life to choke out the concerns of God. Good soil (13:8, 23) represents those who respond and keep on responding. God's word must be accepted with faith and perseverance to produce good fruit in the hearers. The parable of the sower and the soils not only assert that the kingdom advances slowly and with varied responses to its proclamation but also challenges the audience to ask themselves what kind of soil they are.

13:1-2—Jesus speaks to the people on the shore from a boat. Putting out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, one experiences incredible acoustics. The steep banks of various inlets act like a well-designed theatre with perfect acoustics.

13:5-6—Much of the land in Palestine has only a thin layer of soil over rock. If the sower had not plowed first, he would be unaware that he was wasting his seed until after he sowed it.

13:7—The thistles were probably unseen to someone sowing seed. They would have to be pulled out to get rid of the roots from which the tares could grow with the good seed to choke it out.

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13:8—Thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold were supremely excellent harvests. For much of Palestine, tenfold was the average harvest.

13:10-17—The Lord Jesus gives three reasons for speaking in parables:

- To continue to reveal truth to the disciples. He makes them listen intently to perceive that truth.
- To veil truth from unbelievers. Jesus' parabolic instruction carried with it a judgmental aspect. If you are unwilling to listen to and heed the truth, you will cease to receive it at all. Note that if Jesus was intending to truly hide truth from the crowd, he would not have spoken to them at all. He preaches in a way that avoids casting his pearls before swine.
- To fulfill Isaiah 6:9-10, that people would receive but not comprehend the message.

13:18-23—The Lord compares four results of sowing to four responses to the kingdom message (see above). The difference in these results was not due to the seed but the soil upon which the seed fell. The good news was the same. The difference was in the individuals who heard the Word.

b. Parable of the wheat and weeds (13:24-30, 36-43)—Here there is the activity of sowing with a twist. The farmer sows wheat seed but an enemy comes at night and sows weeds or tares. Tares are a poisonous weed, a kind of ryegrass known as darnel (usually translated tares), that looks like wheat in the preliminary stages of growth. When these tares are discovered too late, as in this parable, one would risk uprooting the wheat with the tares. Better to wait to harvest and cut it all down and separate the wheat from the tares. The weeds are gathered and burned and then the wheat is harvested.

In 13:36-43, the Lord explains the parable to his disciples. The sower is the Lord himself; the field is the world. The good wheat seed represents the children of the kingdom, the devil is the enemy, and the weeds or tares are the children of the evil one. At the end of the age the angels will conduct the harvest and separate the wheat from the weeds. It is for the sake of the sons of the kingdom that the weeds are preserved for a time before being unearthed and thrown into the fire.

The good crop will not be immediately separated from the bad. There will be a delay in separation until the harvest. This explains how the kingdom can be present in the world without wiping out all opposition. At the heart of this parable is a message of patience. The Lord wants his followers to live with the tension of believing that the kingdom was indeed arriving and would come not in a single bang but through a process akin to the slow growth of a plant or the steady leavening of a loaf of bread. Today, as we wait for the Lord to put the world to rights, we must remind ourselves that this process has already begun and we are awaiting the full outworking of events that are already in process.

13:36—The house was probably in Capernaum. It provides the setting for Jesus' private explanations of the parables to the crowds (13:10-23, 37-43) and for the parables to the disciples (13:44-52).

c. Parables of the mustard seed and yeast (13:31-35; see Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-21)—The mustard seed was tiny but grew into a sizeable tree-like shrub (13:31-32). While the kingdom of God may look like it has insignificant and weak beginnings, a day will come when its greatness and power will be evident. The word of encouragement here is that, from small beginnings, the kingdom will grow in size and influence.

The parable about yeast presents an issue of focus. Yeast is often a symbol of evil in Scripture. However, that seems out of place in this text. Jesus seems to have the dynamic quality of yeast in mind here. As the introduction of leaven or yeast causes a transformation in dough. So too the coming of the Kingdom causes a transformation of life.

The point of both parables is that the mighty kingdom issues from obscure beginnings. The kingdom begins in obscurity but culminates in glory. Never ignore the occasion of small beginnings.

d. Parables of hidden treasure and expensive pearl (13:44-46)—Both of these parables deal

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with the superlative worth of the kingdom of heaven. The treasure and the pearl are worth every sacrifice. The backdrop to this a peasant working a wealthy landowner's field, finding a treasure in the field, burying it, and then investing all he had to buy the field and uncover the treasure. So too with divers for pearls in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean. Jesus uses these stories to stir his hearers to seek treasure far more valuable than any on earth.

e. Parable of the net (13:47-50)—This parable compares the kingdom to a net let down into a lake and catching a great haul of fish. This was a way of fishing we would call trawling. It did not and could not select and discriminate in what it caught. The fishermen would sort the fish, good from the bad, after the catch. This represents an angelic separation of the righteous from the wicked at the end of the age. This parable is parallel to the parable of the wheat and weeds (13:24-30, 36-43). The kingdom embraces good and bad for a time, but the sweep of final judgment will sort everything out.

f. Conclusion (13:51-53)

13:51-52—I find it difficult to describe this as a parable. Rather it is a saying that the gospel of the kingdom, though new, takes precedence over the old revelation and is the old revelation's fulfillment. The new is not added to the old. However, it does not set it aside but renews it.

13:53—Another transition statement, akin to 7:28-29; 11:1; 19:1; 26:1. It concludes this section on the parables where so many hear but do not understand and introduces the next section of increasing opposition, beginning with the Lord's rejection in his hometown of Nazareth.

5. The King's authority rejected (13:54-14:12)—In this portion, Matthew inserts Jesus' hometown experience of rejection as an example of people stumbling over Jesus' humble background (13:54-58). John the Baptist's fate is placed in its chronological sequence as a foreshadowing of Jesus' final rejection by the Jewish nation (14:1-12).

a. Rejection at Nazareth: Prophet without honor (13:54-58; see Mk. 6:1-6)—Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth and begins teaching in the synagogue. Nazareth was a small village in this period, probably with less than 2,000 inhabitants. Jesus would have been well known to most or all the townspeople. On a previous visit, the populace had rejected him and even attempted to throw him off a cliff (see Lk. 4:16-29). The people were astonished at his wisdom but then started asking questions. They thought they knew him. He had been a neighbor for several decades, just another guy. He had no special breeding or education. Why does he put on such airs now? They were offended by him (literally, stumbled over him). A person is usually better received at home than elsewhere unless one enjoys an elevated position. Then the reverse is true. Familiarity breeds contempt, not among noble souls, but among those baser. The attitude and conduct of the townspeople of Nazareth spoke volumes about themselves!

The experience of rejection, not the least in one's own home district, should never be taken as an indication that one is off-track, that God has withdrawn his blessing.

b. Representative rejection; Execution of John the Baptist (14:1-12; see Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 3:19-20, 9:7-9)— Matthew recounts the sad episode of John the Baptist's execution. He records Herod's perplexity as to Jesus' identity, believing him to be John the Baptist raised from the dead (14:1-2). This Herod is Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's son, brother of Archelaus, and ruler of Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to 39. He was technically a tetrarch, originally meaning a ruler of one quarter of some territory. He had John arrested after John fearlessly denounced him for his adulterous relationship with Herodias, wife of his half-brother Herod Philip (14:3-5). John fearlessly denounced the king for violating the law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). Herodias hated John and waited for her opportunity to have him eliminated. She received it on an evening of revelry for the king's birthday when Salome, her daughter, pleased the lascivious king with her lewd dancing. Herod promised her a gift up to half his kingdom.

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Prompted by her mother, the girl made a most macabre request—the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Because of his oath made before a host of guests, Herod complied (14:6-12). Now, he feared that Jesus was John resurrected. He was haunted by his murder.

Pause and ponder—Strange that we humans can be haunted by both sin and goodness. Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of people "clutching the remnants of virtue in the brothel or on the scaffold." A noted jurist of yesteryear described some of the criminals he had encountered in the following way: "They may seek to escape but they cannot; they are condemned to some nobility, all their lives long. The desire for good is at their heels, the implacable hunter." Herod Antipas was such a man.

14:6-8—Note the moral decrepitude of Herod Antipas. After hitting up on the wife of his stepbrother Herod Philip, he now lusts after Herodias' daughter Salome (probably a young girl in her teens). Herodias' hatred of John was such that she would subject her teenage daughter to the whims of this leech of a king. The promise of the king "up to half my kingdom" was a vain and vacuous one. As a vassal of Rome, he had no authority to compromise or give away any of the territory allotted to him. Herodias and Salome show their colors with the gruesome request for John's head on a platter. That the king granted such a vile request speaks to the man's poverty of soul, as well as that of his wife and her daughter.

The prophet who warned the king and the people is beheaded by a proud, drunk, lecherous creep trapped by his oaths at the instigation and wily connivance of an equally malevolent wife. If this happens to the herald, the prophet who goes before, what will happen to the One who follows? The meaning of the Lord Jesus' life atoning for sin is thrown into sharp focus by this sordid story about Herod, John, Herodias, and a lewd teenage dancer.

Pause and ponder—Herod Antipas is plagued with the voice of conscience (14:1-2), the voice of the prophet (14:3-5), and interestingly, the non-voice of the Lord Jesus (see Lk. 23:6-11), The voice of history goes against him as well. He was defeated by Aretas IV in battle, had his requests to be made a king refused by the Emperor Caligula, was eventually removed from his tetrarchy, and was banished first to Gaul and then to Spain, where he died disgraced.

6. The King's ministry in withdrawal; Warning against false teaching (14:13-16:12)—This section records the Lord Jesus' ministry in withdrawal after John the Baptist's death. This section encompasses the feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21), the Lord walking on water and the Gennesaret healings (14:22-36), a confrontation with the Pharisees concerning the rabbinical regulations on hand washing (15:1-20), the faith of a Canaanite woman in seeking the healing of her daughter (15:21-28), the feeding of the four thousand (15:32-39), and Jesus' warning to the disciples concerning the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (16:1-12).

a. Feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21; see Mk. 6:32-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13)—When Jesus learned of John's death, he withdrew by boat to a remote location along with his disciples. He intended to take the Twelve aside and instruct them and prepare them for his exit. However, the crowds prevented this, following him on foot from various towns. When he and disciples landed, a large crowd had gathered. This was quite a scene for this area. A crowd of five thousand men plus women and children was larger than the villages that dotted the Galilean countryside.

The Lord had compassion and healed the sick. As evening approached, the disciples urged him to send the crowds away to get something to eat. However, Jesus used what was available (five loaves and two small fish) to feed the multitudes. The people are like the new people of God and Jesus is like a second Moses, feeding and transforming them with ample supply left over. This miracle appears in all four gospels, attesting to its importance. When we do what God asks, we can trust him to provide for us. God is urging us to launch out and do what he has called us to do, and he will take care of us.

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b. Walking on water (14:22-36; see Mk. 6:45-56; Jn. 6:15-21)—After the feeding the five thousand, Jesus directed his disciples to go to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowd and then went to a mountainside to pray (14:22-23). Meanwhile the disciples are up against it on the lake. The boat was buffeted by wind and waves. The Lord came to the disciples walking on the water during the fourth watch (between 3 am and 6 am) while they were straining at the oars facing a headwind (6:24-25). The disciples are terrified, but the Lord reassures them that he was not a ghost (14:26-27). Peter sets out of the boat to go to the Lord, but his faith soon recoils requiring the Lord to rescue him (14:28-31). This miracle is also recorded in Mark and John, but only Matthew records Peter walking on water. Climbing into the boat together, the Lord calms the storm and receives the astonished disciples' affirmation that he was truly the Son of God (14:32-33).

14:28-31—Only Matthew records that Peter got out of the boat and began walking on water himself. However, his faith was challenged by the wind and the storm conditions and he began to sink. The Lord rescued him and rebuked his lack of faith. However, Peter's initial response demonstrated faith that none of the other disciples showed, and I certainly would not have demonstrated myself.

Pause and ponder— Peter on the water—the moment we are most strongly tempted to give up is probably the moment when help is, if we only knew, just a step away. We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and our ears open for his encouragement.

c. Gennesaret healings (14:34-36)—Once again, crowds gather and the Lord heals the sick. Those ill sought just to touch the edge of his cloak (the tassels on his garment that he wore as an observant Jew). We tend to forget that the Lord's healing ministry involved constant demand and took power from him (remember his sense of that with the woman bleeding for twelve years, see Mark 5:30). His relentless ministry of preaching and healing must have been exhausting.

d. Clean and unclean; Pharisaic regulations (15:1-20; see Mk. 7:1-23)—The Pharisees confront the Lord with queries about the disciples eating with unclean hands, not following rabbinical hand-washing traditions (15:1-2). The passage moves from the charge of the religious leaders to the accusation of the Lord Jesus that they exalted their traditions over the Law itself (15:3) to an example of that reality in the practice of corban (15:3-9), where the obedience to this practice led one to negate a basic principle in the Law. He concludes by explaining that cleanliness was essentially an internal, not external practice (15:10ff).

This controversy was not about what we would call cleanliness. It was about the ritual practice of ceremonial washings that the rigidly orthodox practiced that went far beyond sensible hygiene. These Pharisees and teachers of law from Jerusalem may well have been a group representing the Sanhedrin to investigate this upstart rabbi. The Pharisees claimed that their traditions were embodying the practical outworking of what the Scripture taught. Jesus points to the tradition around corban to say that in many cases the opposite was true. He begins by quoting the commandment to honor your parents in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 and combining it with the text in the Torah that anyone who cursed their parents was to be put to death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). These texts underlined the serious obligations of children to their parents. Then he describes the Jewish tradition allowing children to easily circumvent their responsibilities to their parents by declaring what they intended to give to their parents' support as "corban," a gift to God instead. This declaration did not necessarily mean an immediate gift to the Temple or even prevent the child's use for himself in some devotional manner. All it really did is legally exclude one's parents from benefitting from what was declared "corban" (15:3-6). Exposing their hypocrisy, he quotes Isaiah 29:13, decrying the exaltation of the traditions of men over the precepts of the Lord (15:7-9).

A sizeable body of Jewish tradition had failed to get to the heart of God's commands. Many of these rabbinical practices were not wrong in themselves, but they did demonstrate wrong attitudes. First,

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those who practiced such outward measures were seen as superior to those who did not. They were "clean" as against those who were "unclean." Tut! Tut! Second, these practices conveyed the wrong idea of sin and personal holiness. The Pharisees thought they were clean because they obeyed the law in an external way and avoided external defilement. People obeying the law externally can violate it internally in their hearts and souls. In addition, external defilement had little to do with the internal spiritual disposition of a person. The crowd gets the Lord's summary explanation (15:10-11), while the disciples receive the longer version (15:12-20).

Matthew records the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus' miracles to reveal their heart problem. Their inordinate concern for the external requirements of the Law caused them to ignore the Law's weightier internal demands and to miss the very presence of their Messiah.

Pause and ponder— Here we have a clash between two views of religion, two views of the requirements of God. For the religious leaders it was fundamentally a ceremonial matter. They thought of religion as the observance of outward rules, regulations, and rituals. Jesus saw that true religion had its seat in a person's heart, issuing in compassion and kindness. The spirit of pharisaism (exaltation of tradition, a narrow legalism, and hypocritical assessments focused on externals) is alive and well. The leaven of the Pharisees is still with us. There are many traditions and man-made rules that some regard as authoritative as the Word. Indeed, these traditions are used as instruments of applying the Word to practical concerns and of controlling people.

15:2—The "traditions of the elders" (see also Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:18) refers to the body of oral teaching commenting on the Mosaic Law and interpreting it in detailed rules of conduct. It was largely oral in Jesus' time. It was codified in the Mishnah in the second century.

15:7-9—Jesus charges them with being hypocrites, play actors. The word "hypocrite" literally refers to someone who wears a mask to play a part. The Pharisees talked a good game, but behind their pious words, their hearts had no intention of really discovering what the Lord wanted. They elevated their customs to the status of divine commands. Do we do the same? Let us be so refreshed by the Scripture that we would be able to distinguish between healthy and hypocritical traditions.

15:12-14—While the Pharisees did not have much political power (the Sadducees were the movers and shakers of the day), the people respected them. The disciples imply that the Lord ought to be more circumspect in his vocal denouncements. The Lord tells them not to fret over the Pharisees' influence. Their day of judgment was coming.

15:16-20—True religion must deal with the inner nature of people and not just with mere externals. The vice list in 15:18-20 details actions and words arising from within one's evil heart. These matters, not whether one eats with ceremonially unwashed hands, reveal spiritual uncleanness.

e. Faith of a Canaanite woman (15:21-28; see Mk. 7:24-30)—Jesus withdraws from Israel, going north to the region around Tyre and Sidon, the Gentile coastal region of Phoenicia. This was a lengthy walk. Tyre was thirty-five miles from Galilee and Sidon was sixty miles. The Lord's hope of a quiet time of retirement is again thwarted by genuine human need. The Gentile woman's daughter was cruelly demon possessed, and she comes pleading for Jesus to heal her (15:22-23). Jesus puts her off with what seems an insensitive reply (15:24), but her persistence and faith are rewarded (15:25-28). The woman exhibits her faith and her demeanor in her reply. Though she was not a child of Israel she could receive the crumbs that fell from the children's table. Her faith stood in stark contrast with the haughty unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

This passage has "cultural bite". The Canaanites were the most morally despised of Israel's Old Testament enemies. Describing the woman as a Canaanite would put Matthew's audience on a racist edge. Sidon had been the home of the evil Jezebel (1 Ki. 16:31). The Canaanite woman persists; she

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would not take no for an answer. She reminds us of the Sidonian woman to whom Elijah came (1 Ki. 17:18-19) and the Shunammite woman with Elisha (2 Ki. 4:28).

15:24-26—Jesus' initial ministry was to Israel. It was inappropriate for him to bring blessings on the Gentiles before blessings on Israel. The Lord's concern is one of precedence. The children get fed first.

15:27—Let us paraphrase this woman's remark: "It is true that we Gentiles do not sit at the table as children and eat the bread of the meal. But even the pet dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall under the table." What a tremendous statement of humble faith. She persisted when everything seemed against her. She was of the wrong race and the wrong gender. The disciples were against her and the Lord's own initial remarks seemed against her (15:24, 26). All these obstacles only seemed to increase her persistence.

f. Feeding of the four thousand (15:29-39; see Mk. 7:31-37; 8:1-10)—Jesus returns to the region around the Sea of Galilee (15:29). Matthew informs us that he lingered on the eastern side of the Sea near Decapolis, a predominately Gentile area. He spent an extended period healing the sick (15:30-31). The crowds had not eaten in three days, and Jesus' compassion is stirred (15:32). The disciples are nonplused. How would they get food for such a crowd in such a remote place (15:33)? Jesus took what was available (seven loaves and a few fish) and feeds the crowd with plenty left over (15:34-39).

Some have attempted to identify this miracle with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. While there are similarities, note the clear differences:

Feeding of the 4,000	***Feeding of the 5,000***
• Near Decapolis, involving Gentiles	• In Galilee, involving Jews
• Seven loaves and a few fish	• Five loaves and two fish
• Had been with him three days	• Had been with him one day
• Twelve baskets (*kophinos*=small wicker lunch baskets) left over	• Seven larger baskets (*spuris*=hamper-type baskets) left over

As the chart above demonstrates, the details are significantly different (locale, loaves, fish, basket leftovers).

Pause and ponder—The reader cannot but marvel at the contrast between Gentiles receiving the Lord and Jewish leaders, learned in the Old Testament text, rejecting him.

- The Gentiles glorified God when healed, the Jewish leaders charged the Lord with being in cahoots with Satan.
- The Gentiles believed the Lord, while the numerous miracles did not cause the Jewish towns and townspeople to repent, by and large. These miracles in the context of the Old Testament witness should have convinced them (see Isa. 29:18-19; 35:4-6).
- Jesus marveled at Gentile faith (the centurion in 8:5-13 and the Canaanite woman in 15:21-28) but only marveled at Jewish unbelief (see Mk. 6:6).

Chapter 15 takeaways:

- Often the enemies of truth are religious people living by their own traditions.
- We must beware of any religious system that excuses sin or produces workarounds of God's Word.
- Beware of worship that does not come from the heart.
- We should focus on the inner person. True holiness comes from within.

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- It is difficult to break from tradition. There is something within us that wants to hold to the past, good, or bad. True conservative spirits hold to what is good of the past and are open to God's new thing.
- We must not limit the Lord Jesus to any one nation, people, or culture.

g. Warning against the teaching of Jewish religious leaders (16:1-12; see Mk. 8:11-21)— Chapter 16 is a dramatic turning point in Matthew's account. The Lord will begin speaking of his coming passion and preparing the disciples for his arrest crucifixion, and resurrection.

Matthew reserves comment on the feeding miracles since the Lord himself uses them to warn the disciples against the teaching of the Jewish leaders. In 15:39, Matthew informs us that Jesus and the disciples returned to the Galilean side of the Sea (near Magadan). The relentless religious leaders once again are there, demanding a sign (16:1). As if all the miracles did not provide that! Jesus demurs, telling them that their own waywardness prevented them from interpreting the signs of the times. They had many spiritual signs relating to the person and authority of the Lord Jesus and had missed them all. He was not a puppet on a string to perform for them. Miracles confirm where there is faith. Nothing will confirm faith in the face of vehement unbelief. Their demand for a sign revealed the sad condition of their hearts. No more signs would be forthcoming for them except for the sign of Jonah (the Lord's own burial and resurrection) (16:2-4).

In 16:5-12, the Lord warns the disciples against the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He describes it as "yeast" and the disciples think he was speaking to them of forgetting to bring the bread along as they crossed the Sea. The disciples had completely missed the point, and the Lord reminded them of his power to physically provide for them (the feedings of the 4,000 and 5,000) and rebuked them for their spiritual dullness.

16:5-6—Yeast was a common symbol for evil, applied to different areas of wickedness. It was always referenced with the idea that a little bit of yeast could have far-reaching, even insidious effects.

7. The King's identity recognized; Peter's confession (16:13-20; see Mk. 8:27-29; Lk. 9:18-20)—Jesus and the disciples once again withdraw from Galilee and go north to Caesarea Philippi. Along the way, Jesus probes the disciples' understanding of his person (16:13-15). Peter speaks up for them and says that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (16:16; see Mk. 8:29; Lk. 9:20). The Lord commends Peter's reply and moves from Peter's declaration of Messiah's person to a declaration concerning Messiah's program (16:17-20).

This is not the first confession of faith in the Lord. When Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus, it was based on having found the Messiah (Jn. 1:41). Nathaniel had confessed Christ as the Son of God and king of Israel (Jn. 1:49). The disciples had declared him God's Son after he stilled the storm (Mt. 14:33). Peter had made a previous confession of faith at the end of the bread of life discourse in John 6:68-69. How then did this confession differ from the earlier ones? First, Jesus asked explicitly for this confession. It was not an emotional response to seeing a miracle or to a long-anticipated expectation, but a studied and sincere statement by one taught of the Lord over a lengthy period. Second, Jesus accepted this confession and built on it. The term for church (*ekklesia*) appears in Matthew, indeed in all the gospels, only twice, here in 16:18 and in 18:17.

This paragraph concludes the second major section of the book with Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the type of faith upon which the Kingdom is built. This confession is foundational to the last major section where Jesus instructs his disciples concerning his mission and purpose. Peter recognizes Jesus as Messiah. The recognition leads to the Lord's self-disclosure as the suffering Messiah (16:21-23).

16:18-19— The Lord states: "You are Peter (*petros (masc.)* = a stone or small rock), and on this rock

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(*petra (fem.)* = large rock) I will build my church." Interpretations vary:

- Many see this as stating that the church is built on Jesus himself as the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) and as the cornerstone of that foundation with the witness of the apostles and prophets as the foundation built out (see Eph. 2:20);
- Some see this asserting that the church is built on Peter and the other apostles as the building's foundation stones (see Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21;14);
- Some see the church built on Peter's testimony;
- Roman Catholics understand this text as teaching that the church is built on Peter and that authority (keys of the kingdom in 16:19) and preeminence extends by apostolic succession in the bishopric of Rome which they assert Peter founded.

Jesus is making a pun on Peter's name. The word for Peter (*petros* = rock) is masculine the first time used. In the Lord's follow-up statement, he uses the feminine version (*petra* = large boulder). The gender change has led many Protestants to avoid identifying Peter as the rock on which the Lord builds his church, usually interpreting *petra* to refer to Peter's confession of faith. If the Lord spoke in Aramaic here, he would say "*Cephas*" in both instances without any gender change. However, recognizing Peter as the referent here does not endorse the heavy-handed assertion of Rome's monarchial authority over the church. The text says nothing about Peter's connection with Rome, nothing about his successors, does not verify the divine approval of subsequent bishop lists, and does not prove the doctrine of apostolic succession. It does not grant Peter monarchial powers or even exclusive authority in the early years of the church. What this does show is that Peter was the first to make a formal confession of the Lord Jesus which was the basis of his status as first among equals in the apostolic group. The authority that is granted to Peter in 16:19 is later extended to the other church leaders in 18:18. The idea of the church as built on the Lord Jesus and his apostles is reiterated in Ephesians 2:20.

The word "church" (*ekklesia*) occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17 in the gospel accounts. However, the term is used over one hundred times in the New Testament, usually referring to a local church. Here, the universal church is in view. It is derived from the verb *ekkaleo* (to call out) and refers to independent congregations of people redeemed (called out) by the Lord or to the entire body of people redeemed by Christ. Behind this is the idea of the populace of a Greek city-state called out and called together to assemble in the agora, or meeting place of the city.

16:18—Gates of hell speak of the organized power of the evil one and of death. By his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus conquered death so that death cannot hold any of his people. This glorious truth is more fully proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 15:50ff and Hebrews 2:14-15.

16:19— The "keeper of the keys" was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold. Keys refer to the authority to admit into the kingdom (see 23:13), based on knowledge of the truth about the Lord Jesus. That authority is extended to Peter and later to the apostolic band (Mt. 18:18). Peter had the privilege of proclaiming the good news to Jewish people at Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff), to the Samaritans (Acts 18:14ff), to the Gentiles in the incident involving the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:34ff) as well as shutting the door to unbelieving Jews (Acts 4:11-12) and religious charlatans (Acts 8:20-23). This authority was not exclusive (see Mt. 18:17-18) and not extended to his supposed episcopal successors at Rome.

In the reference to binding and loosing, Jesus is not saying that God would obey whatever they decided on earth, but that they would know and should do what God had already willed. The church does not get the will of human beings done in heaven; she obeys God's will on earth. Matthew 16:19 refers to Peter, but in Matthew 18:17-18, the Lord includes all the apostles in the significance of this phrase. As representatives of the Lord, the apostles would exercise authority according to his Word. Note that

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"binding and loosing" were terms used for rabbis' authority in interpreting Scripture.

Pause and ponder—Note one commentator's paraphrase of 16:18-19: "Peter, your name means rock, and your destiny is to be a rock. You are the first man to recognize me for who I am, and therefore you are the first stone in the edifice of the fellowship of those who are mine. Against that fellowship the embattled powers of evil will no more prevail than they will be able to hold me captive in death. An in the days to come, you must be the steward who will unlock the doors of the Kingdom that Jew and Gentile may come in; and you must be the wise administrator and guide who will solve the problems and direct the work of the infant and growing fellowship."

III. The King's Mission Unfolds: The Kingdom Linked to his Death and Resurrection (16:21-28:20)—Matthew shifts the emphasis of this section from Jesus' identity to his destiny. The purposes of Jesus' teaching in this section are to reveal his death as foundational to the establishment of the Kingdom, to correct the disciples' false notions concerning the Kingdom, to prepare the disciples for his absence, and to gently lead the disciples to willingly embrace his destiny as their own.

A. The cost of citizenship in the Kingdom: Taking up your cross (16:21-17:23)—This section of the text, encompassing the Lord's rebuke of Peter (16:21-23), an elaboration of the requirements of discipleship (16:24-28), the Transfiguration (17:1-13), and the healing of a young boy with seizures (17:14-21), is bookend by the Lord's first two Passion predictions (16:21; 17:22-23). The cross precedes the crown for Messiah and for his followers.

1. First Passion prediction; Peter's rebuke; requirements of discipleship (16:21-28; see Mk. 8:31-9:1; Lk. 9:22-27)—Jesus stuns the disciples with this Passion prediction (16:21). Steeped in Jewish traditional interpretation, they were unable to understand how Messiah could suffer and die. But there was also a terrifying practical problem as well. The Lord Jesus had called them to follow him, and they knew that whatever happened to the Lord could happen to them. If there was a cross in his future, would there be one in theirs?

True to character, Peter blurts out the concern the disciples shared. He rebuked the Lord (16:22). One minute he is confessing the Lord Jesus as Messiah and the next minute he is rebuking God incarnate. His protest was born of a love of the Lord and a deep ignorance of the divine will. That the cross precedes the crown, that suffering leads to glory was not on his radar screen. In his rebuke of the Lord, he moves from being the rock confessing Christ, to the mouthpiece of the evil one and a stumbling block. Jesus recognizes in Peter's rebuke the same temptation that he encountered from Satan in Luke 4:1-10 (see 8:23).

The Lord moves on from his rebuke of Peter to a description of the cost of discipleship (16:24-28). Discipleship did not mean enjoying glory immediately. There was a call to deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow him. That could well be a path of sorrow and suffering. True discipleship meant following the Lord obediently wherever that path might lead. Nevertheless, reward would be there in the end (16:27).

In challenging the disciples to take up the cross, the Lord is contrasting two approaches to life:

• Deny yourself	Live for yourself; fulfill yourself
• Follow the Lord	Make your way in the world
• Lose your life for his sake	Save your life for your own sake
• Forsake the world as an end-all	Find your place in the world as a be all
• Keep your soul in patient endurance	Lose your soul in many distractions
• Share the Lord's crown after the cross	Make a name and fortune for yourself.

To take up your cross is to identify with the Lord Jesus in the full range of his redemptive ark. His

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rejection, his suffering, and his death is a prelude to sharing in his glory.

16:21—The "must" of the Lord's suffering lies not in some passive bow to determinism, or to heroic self-sacrificial determination, but to his willing submission to the Father's will.

16:22-23—Peter quickly transitioned from a rock to a stumbling block. The reference to stumbling block is a figurative one for things that lead people to sin or to shipwreck in their faith. He and the other disciples just could not get their heads around the concept of a suffering Messiah. Peter's impetuous reply is placed here since the self-preserving instinct to which he gives expression is the topic the Lord addresses throughout this section.

16:24-28—Matthew uses Peter's rebuke as a springboard into a short discourse on cross-bearing. The human instinct of preserving one's own life must be reversed if one is to align one's ways and destiny to the Lord's. Disciples must be prepared to do three things:

l. Deny themselves—that is to dethrone self as central to your being and enthrone God. It means to replace our natural self-centeredness with the Lord God as the ruling principle of life.
m. Take up your cross—the Christian life is to be one of sacrificial service.
n. Follow the Lord Jesus—this is a radical call to obedience.

The person who plays safe will lose his life; the one who ventures forth will find it.

2. Transfiguration; Glory revealed (17:1-13; see Mk. 9:2-13; Lk. 9:28-36)—The revelation of the Lord Jesus in his glory, promised in 16:27, is given to Peter, James, and John, most likely on Mount Hermon, located near Caesarea Philippi (17:1-2). The term "transfigured" describes Jesus changing into another form. The word is later used to denote the believer's progressive change into the moral likeness of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The disciples are dazzled to see the Lord Jesus in the company of Old Testament superstars, Moses, and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets (17:3). The voice of the Father himself echoes from a cloud underlining the Lord's identity (17:5). The glorious transfiguration of the Lord is the most significant event between his birth and his passion. This event contains several motifs of significance: the mountain, Moses and Elijah, Jesus' impending departure, and the cloud. The presence of Moses and Elijah on the Mount draws attention to

- the place of Jesus in continuing the redemptive work of God from the Exodus to the future eschatological consummation;
- the appropriateness of Jesus' association with heavenly figures; and
- the superiority of Jesus over even these great and divinely favored heroes of Israel's past as revealed by the voice from the cloud informing the disciples that Jesus "is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him".

The Transfiguration revealed to the three disciples

- the glory of the Lord's person.
- the glory of his kingdom. Here the presence of Moses and Elijah was significant for they represented the Law and the prophets pointing to their fulfillment in Christ (Lk. 24:27; Heb. 1:1).
- the glory of the cross. Moses and Elijah were discussing with the Lord Jesus his exodus and what he would accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31).
- The glory of his submission. It taught the disciples that the Lord is glorified in their submission when they denied themselves and took up their crosses and followed him.

17:1—The time interval between the Lord's first Passion prediction and the Transfiguration recorded here (six days) differs from the one recorded in Luke 9:28 (eight days). Luke's number is inclusive of the day of the Passion prediction and the day of the Transfiguration. Perhaps Matthew uses six days

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because he is building a parallel between God revealing his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Ex. 24:16) and the Lord Jesus' self-revelation to the apostles.

17:2—The strongest Old Testament allusion to human appearance transformed by glory is Exodus 34:29, where Moses' face radiated glory because of God's self-revelation to the lawgiver.

17:4—Peter's suggests building temporary shelters, such as used at the Feast of Tabernacles. His suggestion of three shelters puts Jesus on a par with Moses and Elijah. Peter once again blurts out something before thinking through things.

17:5-6—The cloud symbolizes the glorious presence of God (see Ex. 19:16). The cloud of glory recalls the cloud over the mountain in Exodus 24:15 and over the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34. The awesome voice is that of the Father expressly declaring Jesus to be the unique Son of God. The Father's authentication of the Son terrified the disciples, and they fell on their faces. The supreme person and glory of Jesus is focal throughout the Transfiguration.

17:10-13—The Lord answers the disciples' query about Elijah. The Jewish people believed that Elijah would return before the end to make matters right. The Lord tells them that Elijah had come, indicating that prophecy was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist (see Mt. 17:13).

Where did the idea that Elijah would precede Messiah come from? The prophet Malachi declared that God would send Elijah to prepare the people "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5-6). Elijah did not die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and would return one day. Some later Jewish rabbinical texts repeated this expectation in various forms. One was from Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Ben Sirach (circa 200 BC) which speaks of Elijah restoring the tribes of Jacob. From this the scribes developed a kind of eschatological timetable, detailing how events would proceed in the end.

Pause and ponder—Note the stark contrast between the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion:

Transfiguration	***Crucifixion***
On a mountain, revealed in glory.	On a hill, hung in shame.
Clothes shining white	Clothes stripped and gambled for
Moses (Law) and Elijah (prophets) with him	Flanked by two brigands
Bright cloud overshadows the scene	Darkness covers the land
Peter blurts out how wonderful this is	Peter hiding in shame after denying the Lord Jesus
Voice of the Father confirming the Son	Centurion's unexpected declaration that the Lord was the son of God

3. Healing a boy with seizures; Lesson in believing prayer (17:14-21; see Mk. 9:14-28; Lk. 9:37-42)—The Lord moves from the mountain of glory to the valley of need. The boy's physical situation is described to the Lord as well as the disciples' inability to heal him (17:14-16). The way the ailment is described, it would seem the lad was suffering from severe epilepsy. 17:17 is directed at the disciples and expressing Jesus' disappointment for their lack of faith. They believed that the power to heal was inherent in themselves and they did not prayerfully depend on God (17:19-21).

17:20-21—The phrase "removing mountains" was a figure of speech for that which was incomparably difficult. The reference to mustard seeds was used to define a proverbially small quantity. The Lord Jesus is telling the disciples that nothing God asks them to do will be impossible if they trust him.

Pause and ponder—We derive special inspiration from mountaintop experiences, but we do not live there. We are made for the valley, for the regular stuff of life, and it is there where the Lord tests and refines us.

17:22-23—Second Passion prediction—Once again the Lord tells the disciples that he would be

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betrayed, wicked men would kill him, and he would be raised from the dead. The disciples are silent but described as filled with grief.

B. Privileges and responsibilities of Kingdom citizenship (17:24-20:34)—This portion of the text is loosely organized around the attitudes, privileges, and responsibilities of citizens of the Lord's Kingdom. Voluntarily submitting to human authority in paying the temple tax (17:24-27), humility, discipline, forgiveness in our relationships (18:1-35), and the submission of our natural desires to Kingdom dictates (19:1ff) are examined.

1. Paying the Temple tax; Claims of earthly authorities (17:24-27)—By custom, every adult Jew was required to pay a temple tax to help support temple operations. The tax collectors approached Peter about the Lord's payment of the tax. Affirming that the Lord would pay the tax, Peter brings the matter to Jesus. In the discussion that followed the Lord basically said that as King he should be tax-free as well as his servants, the disciples. However, to avoid giving offense, the Lord Jesus sent Peter fishing. A special catch of a fish would have a four-drachma coin (called a stater) to cover the Lord's and Peter's tax payment. Some fish in the Sea of Galilee had mouths large enough to hold staters. One such fish is now called *chromis simonis* (after Simon Peter).

A king too poor to pay the annual temple tax? This miracle of Peter catching a fish with a coin in its mouth is only recorded in Matthew, the only miracle the Lord did to meet his own needs, the only miracle resulting in the production of cash or its equivalent, and the only miracle where the results are not recorded. Peter obviously used the money to pay the tax, but Matthew did not record that fact.

Pause and ponder—This was one of many miracles the Lord performed for Peter's individual benefit—

- Healing his mother-in-law (8:14-15);
- A miraculous catch of fish (Lk. 5:1-11);
- Enabling Peter to walk on water (14:22-23);
- Catching a fish to pay a tax (17:24-27);
- Healing Malchus (26:47-56);
- Delivering Peter from prison (Acts 12:1ff).

When Peter later writes "Casting all your anxieties upon him for he cares for you", it was written from deep and grateful experience.

2. Greatness and relationships in the Kingdom (18:1-35)—This section deals with the characteristics and practices of Kingdom dwellers, including humility as a basic principle (18:1-14), discipline and reconciliation in community (18:15-20), and the challenge of forgiving one another (18:21-35).

a. Humility: Principle of greatness (18:1-14; see Mk. 9:33-37; Lk. 9:46-48)—The disciples needed to change the way they were thinking about the Kingdom. They come essentially asking the Lord: "Who among us is 'da man'". The Lord specifies the need for humility (18:1), points to an example of humility (18:2-5), and the cost of humility (18:6-9).

Jesus had just revealed to them his destiny of suffering and death for the second time (17:22-23), and they occupy themselves with self-centered concerns about greatness. The disciples were thinking of Messiah as a triumphant ruler and wanted their privileged positions assured. In response, Jesus speaks to them of a little child. Little children in that society had no status apart from love and no power and privileges apart from those received from their parents (18:2-4). Greatness in the kingdom was not based on great works or words, but on a childlike humility of spirit. An unspoiled child has the characteristics that make up humility—trust, dependence, the desire to make others happy, and the

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absence of boastful strutting. Welcoming young children and people without status and not being a stumbling block to them is underlined. (18:5-6).

Someone has defined humility as that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it. The petty pride, the aggrandizing strut, the essential selfishness that the lack of this virtue has caused among the Lord's people through the ages is a scandal of the Christian faith.

18:6-9—Avoid being a stumbling block—"Stumbling" was often used to refer to sinning or falling away from the true faith. The Lord's description of a millstone tied around one's neck and being drowned in the sea is truly terrifying. The term used for millstone refers to the heavier kind that was turned by donkeys in grinding meal. Jewish people regarded the punishment described by the Lord as the awful sort that pagans might carry out. The Lord is concerned that these "little ones" not be rejected or ignored with a stern judgment declared against those who prove to be stumbling blocks.

In addition, the Lord is concerned about people stumbling themselves by tolerating sin in their lives. The Lord was not teaching self-mutilation, cutting off your hand or foot, or gouging out your eye. These commands are not to be taken literally. Mutilating yourself would not remove the source of the offense which is the heart. The Lord is referring to parts of our personality which may cause us or others to stumble in our spiritual living.

18:10-14—Parable of the lost sheep (see Lk. 15:4-7)—The Lord illustrates his point of a caring, welcoming attitude in the citizens of the kingdom extended to children with the parable of the lost sheep. The shepherd goes in search of one lost sheep who wanders off and leaves the other ninety-nine. Heaven rejoices at the redemption of those on the margin. This short parable highlights the love of God, which is patient, seeking, rejoicing, and protecting.

b. Discipline and reconciliation (18:15-20)—The Lord had spoken of offenses and now speaks of what is to be done when known sin occurs in the group (18:15-20). When offense between believers occurs, the parties involved should discuss the matter. It is best for the complaining party to phrase the complaint in words as clear and concise as possible. If the offending person refuses to listen, two or three witnesses should be taken along to establish a clear testimony. If the offending party is still recalcitrant, then the matter should be taken to the whole church. If still recalcitrant, the offender should be treated as a pagan or a tax collector (a persona non gratis). The restorative, forgiving nature of discipline serves as a bridge to the following paragraph on forgiveness and the parable of the unmerciful servant (18:21-35).

This is a bedrock passage for basic principles in taking reconciliation seriously. Reconciliation is needed on the macro-level—wars, oppression, ethnic cleansing, campaigns of terror, heavy-handed repression all over the world. But it is also so needed closer to where we live—broken marriages, shattered families, neighborhood feuds, church divisions, and feuds. Where there is severe harm, aggressive bullying, dishonesty, consistently demeaning cuts, nothing is gained by reconciling gestures without direct confrontation.

18:18-20—This corporate action of binding and loosing is entrusted to the entire apostolic group, not to a single individual. All the "you" pronouns are plural.

c. Forgiveness; Parable of the unmerciful servant (18:21-35)—Peter wants to know the boundaries of forgiveness. Should he forgive up to seven times? That was being very generous by Jewish cultural standards for traditional rabbinical teaching specified forgiving an offending person up to three times. Jesus uses a metaphor to indicate that there should be no limits to forgiveness in the case of genuine repentance (18:21-22). The Lord proceeds to relate the parable of the unmerciful servant (8:23-35).

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A king was settling accounts with his servants and began with a servant who owed him an immense amount. The servant was unable to pay, and the king was about to have all the servant owned sold to repay the debt. However, the king took pity on the servant's plea for mercy and cancelled the entire debt. That servant then went out and accosted another servant who owed him money. The other servant was unable to pay but the first servant did not have mercy on his fellow and had him thrown into prison. When this was reported to the king, he recalled the servant with the immense debt the king had forgiven and took him to task, requiring that he pay back all that he owed.

The numbers here are astronomical underlining the message of forgiveness. Ten thousand talents at this juncture of history has been estimated at as many as fifteen to twenty years' worth of an average daily wage. Crazy amount of debt that would never be allowed to accumulate in the real world. One hundred denarii on the other hand is a rather small amount, making the difference in sums staggering. The contrasts in the parable are ridiculously extreme in their proportion and are effective in bringing home the message.

If we have received forgiveness but have not really experienced it deep in our hearts, we will be unable to share forgiveness with those who have wronged us. If we only live by justice, always seeking to get what is ours or perceived to be ours, we will put ourselves into a prison of our own making. In the *Count of Monte Cristo*, Alexandre Dumas puts into the mouth of a wise old priest a profound word: He who seeks revenge, must first dig his own grave.

The Lord was teaching that we should forgive to the degree that we are forgiven. We are servants with an immense debt who have been forgiven all. Likewise, we should forgive all. We ought to be willing to forgive from the heart no matter how many times offense occurs (see Eph. 4:32).

18:25—Enslaving the debtor's family was a Gentile practice that Jewish people found abhorrent. The horrifying details of debt slavery accentuate the Lord's point forcefully.

3. Human desires and concerns submitted to the King (19:1-20:16)

a. Teaching on divorce (19:1-12; see Mk. 10:1-12)—The Pharisees come with a question to test Jesus, attempting to get him to say something that would get him into trouble (19:3). The reason the Pharisees asked this question at this point was that Jesus was in Judea in the territory of Herod Antipas, the ruler who put John the Baptist to death because he had denounced Herod's relationship with Herodias, the former wife of Herod's brother, Herod Philip. Would the Lord repeat John's outspoken criticism and suffer the same cruel fate as John?

While Jewish laws of marriage and purity aimed exceedingly high, the actuality was quite different. In the eyes of Jewish law, a woman was a thing, chattel property if you will. She was the possession of her father, her husband, or the eldest male of the household. On the question of divorce itself, the Jews were not in agreement. The Mosaic law allowed divorce for something deemed indecent (Deut. 24:1). The stricter school of Shammai understood this to mean something morally indecent, namely adultery. In the Qumran community, divorce was forbidden in all circumstances. The more lenient school of Hillel interpreted this very loosely. Anything about a wife that a husband found not to his liking were suitable grounds for divorce.

In his reply, Jesus first appeals to the law, not to question it but to put it in perspective. Moses allowed for divorce as an accommodation to human weakness (see Deut. 24:1ff). But that is not what God intended in marriage. The Lord Jesus went back to the ideal of creation (see Gen. 2:21-24). Marriage was the total union of two personalities, a sharing of all the circumstances of life. In the Lord's good intention, marriage was to be a lifelong union, not a temporary arrangement terminated at the will of the husband. The Lord posits a general principle forbidding divorce and remarriage except for cases of marital unfaithfulness (*porneia*).

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19:4-9—Jewish scribes appealed to the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2 to argue against polygamy. Jesus uses this text to argue against divorce. The Lord posits a general rule forbidding divorce and remarriage except in cases of marital unfaithfulness. This stern word is not the only word in the New Testament on divorce and remarriage. Like many wisdom sayings of ancient Jewish teachers, this saying is a general rule. The word is hyperbolic; it is exaggerated to give it "bite." Here, the Lord allows divorce (and remarriage) for adultery. Paul allows it from the abandonment of the marriage by an unbelieving partner (see 1 Cor. 7:12-16). The church has also allowed divorce for physical and emotional abuse. The overall takeaway is how Jesus underlines the need for his followers to be faithful to their marriages and their families.

19:9—There are various view of the "exception clause" in this text:

- Some think that the Lord uses *porneia* (relentless, greedy sexual unfaithfulness) here as a synonym for *moicheia* (any act of adultery). Some see adultery, however frequent or infrequent, as the only ground for divorce.
- Some see this in the context of Jewish betrothal practices. *Porneia* here refers to sexual offense in the betrothal period when a couple was regarded as married, but the union had not been consummated. Divorce was allowed in such a case of unfaithfulness and the marriage contract abrogated.
- Some see *porneia* referring to illegitimate marriages within the prohibited degrees of kinship specified in Leviticus 18:6-18.
- Some see *porneia* in this text as referring to a relentless, persistent, and unrepentant lifestyle of sexual unfaithfulness, different from a one-time act of illicit relations. In the New Testament, *porneia* describes a broader range and degree of sexual activity than *moicheia*.

19:10-12—The disciples are nonplused. If that is the standard they say, then it is better not to marry at all. Jesus neither affirms nor rebukes this statement. Those who could live celibate for kingdom purposes should do so. Those who impose celibacy upon themselves must remember Paul's conclusion on the matter: it is better to marry than to burn (see 1 Cor. 7:9).

b. Let the children come to me (19:13-15; see Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15-17)—The Lord rebukes his disciples for hindering the access of the children to him, implying that they were unimportant and bothersome. He says that the kingdom belongs to such as these. We enter God's kingdom by childlike faith: helpless, unable to save ourselves, and dependent on the grace and mercy and of God. Being childlike can be a great protection in life. It means we can receive God's unconditional love and live thankfully into it.

c. Earthly wealth: Query of the rich young man (19:16-26; see Mk. 10:17-30; Lk. 18:18-30)— This story proceeds in three parts: Jesus' encounter with a young man (19:16-22), a comment on the difficulty of wealthy people entering the kingdom of God (19:23-26), followed by Peter's statement about leaving all to follow the Lord and the Lord Jesus' reply to it (19:27-30). The young man was wealthy (19:22) and a ruler and possibly a rising star among Jewish religious leaders (Lk. 18:18). This teaching underlines the impossibility of wealth, status, and human effort as a means of gaining the kingdom. The rich young man wanted to do something to merit eternal life whereas Jesus taught that eternal life is a gift to be received.

19:16-22—An earnest young man asks a very direct question: What must I do to inherit eternal life (19:16)? Jesus answers in the traditional Jewish way, speaking of keeping the commandments, especially those of the second part of the Decalogue that could be evaluated (more or less) by a person's outward behavior (19:17-19). When the young man claims to have done that (19:20), Jesus gets to the pith of the matter. The young man was wealthy and his personal well-being and his wealth, not God, were at the center of his affections. Jesus commands a radical cure (sell all he owns and

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follow the Lord Jesus) that drives the young ruler sadly away (19:21-22).

19:21—As with the Lord's comments about singleness in 19:10-12, the challenge to the rich young man is not to be applied to everyone who desires to be a disciple. The Lord knew that the young man in question had made an idol of his possessions. His possessions had possessed him. He did not have an idea of his own sinfulness nor of how he had made an idol of his wealth.

19:22-26—The Lord's interaction with the wealthy young man amazed the disciples, reflecting their Jewish background. That background placed great emphasis on the privileged position of wealth. Wealth was a sign of having pleased God. Jesus was undermining the Jewish attitude about the significance of riches. Indeed, it turned the attitude on its head. Salvation was totally the work of God. Dependence on wealth can get in the way of human receptivity born of a sense of spiritual need. Kingdom priorities are not extra baggage tagged onto a comfortable life.

Pause and ponder—Note the danger of earthly wealth:

- Riches encourage a false independence and security;
- Riches shackle people to this earthly reality;
- Riches tend to make us self-absorbed.

d. Kingdom rewards; Parable of the workers in the vineyard (19:27-20:16)—The disciples are nonplused with the Lord's dealing with the rich young man. Peter reminds the Lord that the disciples had left everything to follow him (19:27-30). This leads into the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:1-16).

19:27-30—Peter's query—Jesus does not rebuke Peter's inherent desire for reward. Those forsaking things for the Lord Jesus—

- Will be exalted when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne. The disciples will have a special place in the kingdom, sitting on thrones and judging their fellows.
- All those who leave their homes and relatives for kingdom concerns will receive a hundredfold return on their "investment." They will receive physical and relational blessings that will more than compensate for their sacrifices (19:29).

20:1-16—Parable of the workers in the vineyard—This parable continues the discussion relating to ;the grape harvest ripens towards the end of September, and the rains come close on its heels. If the harvest is not gathered in before the rains come, then much of it is ruined. Thus, the harvest is a race against time. Workers are welcome. Thus, the owner's frequent visits to the marketplace. The marketplace was something of a labor exchange. To be hanging around the marketplace was not to be lazy, but to be seeking employment.

A landowner went out early in the morning and hired workers to work in his vineyard at an agreed price of a denarius, the typical daily wage. He went out at the third hour (9 am), the ninth hour (3 pm) and the eleventh hour (5 pm) hired additional workers without specifying the wage (20:1-7). He paid all the workers the same wage (20:8-10). Those who agreed to work the entire day for the typical daily wage took issue with the landowner's generosity toward those workers who had worked quite a bit less (20:11-12). The landowner replied that he had the right to do what he chose with his money and that the workers should not be envious of those who worked a shorter time and received the same wage (20:13-16). The Lord was teaching that the matter of rewards is under the sovereign control of God. God is the one before whom all accounts will be settled.

20:1-7—The references to hours in the text would be from 6 am to 6 pm. So, the third hour was 9 am; the sixth hour was noon; the ninth was 3 pm; eleventh hour was 5 pm.

20:13-16—The point is that God's great gifts are distributed not because they are earned but because he

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is gracious. In God's kingdom, the driving force is grace, not merit, faithful service, not worldly status.

The landowner suggests that the day-long workers were envious (an evil eye or stingy eye) because he was a generous benefactor. This is quite a humiliating dismissal for what seems to moderns to be a fair-minded complaint. It needs to be said that this parable is not a commentary on labor law policy. The wealthy landowner here represents God, not a rich person doing whatever he wants because of his advantageous economic position.

Pause and ponder—The lesson for the Lord's disciples is forthright. We should not serve him for an expected reward. Dangers lurk here. The ever-present danger of pride. The danger of watching other believers in their work and comparing and measuring yourself with them. The danger of criticizing God for not doing for us what we expect, or the danger of feeling left out and ignored.

4. Greatness in the Kingdom revisited; Preference requested (20:17-34)—This section encompasses the Lord's third Passion prediction (20:17-19), James and John's request for kingdom precedence (20:20-28), and the Lord healing the blind men at Jericho (20:29-34).

a. Third Passion prediction (20:17-19; see Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-33)—On the road to Jerusalem the Lord once again (see 12:40; 16:21; and 17:22-23 for other times) tells the disciples that death awaited him in that city. This prediction gets more specific, speaking of his betrayal, mocking, flogging, crucifixion, and resurrection.

b. Preference in the kingdom requested (20:20-28; see Mk. 10:35-45)—The mother of James and John comes to the Lord and requests that her sons be granted preeminent places in the kingdom (20:20-21). Jesus directs his reply to the two sons, indicating that they had put Mom up to the request. James and John are confident that they could share the cup of suffering and death with the Lord (20:22-23), but they had no idea what was involved for them in the fulfillment of such a request. Their attitude lacked a heavenly direction. They wanted to "lord it over" others, selfishly asking for glory for themselves. The rest of the apostolic band was indignant with James and John for their power grab (20:24). This account demonstrates again that the disciples did not understand Jesus' teaching about humility or the nature of the kingdom. Greatness in the Lord's kingdom does not come from position and status but through service. Service is the incubator of kingdom greatness; we gain our lives by giving them away. Those most highly esteemed will be those who serve with humility (20:25-28).

c. Blind men at Jericho healed (20:29-34; see Mk. 10:46-52; Lk. 35-43)—Each of the Synoptics repeat this story but with differences. Matthew wrote of two blind men, Mark and Luke only one. Mark includes the name of one of the beggars—Bartimaeus. Probably there were two men, with Bartimaeus being the more noticeable. Matthew and Mark have the men being healed when Jesus left Jericho, Luke when he approached the city. There were two Jerichos at the time, an old city and a new one. Jesus was leaving the old city (Matthew and Mark) and approaching the new one (Luke).

Bartimaeus, when he hears of Jesus coming into the town, starts shouting "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus stops, calls for him, asks what he wants, and heals him with a word. Bartimaeus' insistent calling highlights his faith and his receptiveness to receiving God's grace. He recognized a moment of opportunity and seized it. He broke the rules of polite society and created a scene. Matthew specifically points to Jesus' deep compassion as he heals these beggars and that both men immediately followed the Lord Jesus.

C. Entry into Jerusalem: Debates with and exposure of religious leaders (21:1-23:39)—This portion of the text encompasses the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), the cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17), the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22), the Lord's authority challenged by the religious leaders (21:23-27) followed by three parables, the parable of two sons (21:28-32), the parable of the tenants (21:33-46), and the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14). The Lord then deftly

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replies to three queries by the religious leaders: paying taxes to Caesar (22:15-22), marriage in the resurrection (22:23-33), and a query concerning the greatest commandment (22:34-40). Then he stumps them with his own question concerning whose son is Messiah (22:41-46).

1. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11; see Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:28-44; Jn. 12:12-19)—The fulfillment formulas for Zechariah 9:9a and Psalm 118:26 indicate that this scene is a formal presentation of the Messiah to the Jewish nation.

The Lord approached Jerusalem from the east up the road from Jericho, on the side with the Mount of Olives. He sends two of the disciples to a nearby village (probably Bethphage) with instructions to find and bring a donkey and its colt to him (21:1-3). All four evangelists include the triumphal entry, but only Matthew mentions the donkey along with the colt. A simple explanation may be that when Jesus rode the colt, the mother donkey naturally went along. This act fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which spoke of Israel's king coming in a gentle manner on the foal of a donkey (21:4-7). The Lord entered the city on a colt, a symbol of peace, not a warhorse used by conquering generals. In fulfilling this prophecy, Jesus was declaring himself to be king and Messiah and was deliberately challenging the Jewish religious leaders. The crowd spread their cloaks on the road and waved palm branches. The crowds sang songs with the words of Psalm 118:25-26 as the Lord Jesus entered the city. When Jerusalem was retaken from Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century before our era, the Jewish people celebrated their deliverance and sang Psalms, almost an exact description of the crowd's welcome to Jesus coming into Jerusalem. The Lord was implicitly declaring himself to be Messiah, albeit the master of a spiritual kingdom at present and not a political one (21:8-11). The Lord's entry was vastly different than previous royal entries, an object lesson of the mismatch of expectations and God's agenda. The Hosannas were justified, but not for the reasons the crowds supposed.

21:1-2—The Roman military road from Jericho to Jerusalem was about seventeen miles long and climbed in elevation about three thousand feet. This was not a typical morning stroll.

21:8-11—Because of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, the donkey was considered the beast of the Messiah. The response of the people underlines that while they did not fully understand the significance of this event, they acknowledged that this promised son of David had come to bring that deliverance. They shout "Hosanna," meaning "save now" and quote Psalm 118:26, a customary religious blessing pronounced on pilgrims entering Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

2. Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17; see Mk. 11:15-18; Lk. 19:45-47)—Jesus' action in 21:12-13, overturning tables and benches and chasing out vendors and buyers, must have created quite a scene! He quotes Isaiah 56:7, a text predicting that non-Jews would be allowed to worship in the Temple, and Jeremiah 7:11, emphasizing the Temple as a place of prayer (21:13). Instead, the Jewish practice had turned it into a place of heartless merchandising full of the noise of bargaining and the stench of animals being sold. Initially, these practices were instituted for the convenience of pilgrims. The dealers in livestock and the moneychangers set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles, selling animals for sacrifice and changing the pilgrim's money into the currency required to pay the Temple tax and its ritual practices. Exorbitant prices were charged for sacrificial animals and for changing money into the proper currency. This was done under priestly authorization and lined the pious pockets of Jewish religious leaders. The Lord was angry at the exploitation of devout pilgrims and at the desecration of God's holy place. Jesus further demonstrates his authority by healing the blind and the lame who came to him at the Temple (21:14). The religious leaders are indignant at Jesus' acts, works of mercy, and the children's praise, shouting Hosanna to the Son of David (21:15-16)

The Synoptics record this event as occurring during Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem just before his death (see Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-46). John records it early in Jesus' ministry. Explanations vary around two general approaches: (1) John transplants the account for topical or theological reasons

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(John's writing is theologically, not chronologically, driven); or (2) there were two such occasions, one of which was recorded by John and the other by the Synoptics. Mark and the other Synoptics only record one visit by the Lord to Jerusalem. So naturally they recorded the cleansing of the Temple upon that visit.

The presence of this religious market would have turned many sincere Gentiles away from any witness from the commercial honchos of Israel. What did God want in his house?

- **o.** Prayer among his people;
- **p.** Help for his people;
- **q.** Spiritual power operative to change his people;
- **r.** Praise for the Almighty God of the ages.

The commercial bazaars of Annas, de facto high priest at this time, were hardly that.

21:15-16—The quote from Psalm 8:2 underlines that humble folk perceive spiritual truth much more readily than those deemed sophisticated. The Lord is criticizing those who use the Temple service and their positions to dictate its procedures to make huge profits and who at the same time stifle the legitimate praise of children. There are truths which only the simple in heart can see, hidden from the wise, learned, and sophisticated. George MacDonald placed no value on the faith of a man at whose door or garden gate the children were afraid to play.

21:17—Matthew seems to imply that Jesus entered the Temple immediately after entering the city. He then records that the Lord Jesus returned to Bethany, about a two-mile walk over the Mount of Olives, where he spent the night, probably at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The other Synoptics record his return to Bethany after the triumphal entry and his brief investigation of the Temple activities. They place the cleansing on the following day.

3. Fig tree cursed (21:18-22; see Mk. 11:12-14; 20-25)—Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem from Bethany. Hungry, he approached a fig tree. It was in leaf but without any figs. He pronounces a curse on the tree—no one would ever eat fruit from it again (21:18-19). The disciples were amazed that the fig tree withered so quickly. In the parallel account in Mark, the disciples heard the Lord curse the fig tree but did not notice the withered condition of the tree until they returned to Jerusalem the next day. Jesus used the tree as a lesson in faith. Whether withering a tree or telling a mountain to throw itself into the sea, believing prayer taps God's power to accomplish the humanly impossible.

What is the upshot of the cursing of the fig tree? The Lord is cursing those who make a show of bearing fruit and are spiritually barren. He is lambasting the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leadership. He is condemning profession without practice.

21:19—This verse is problematical. The tree was leafed out but did not show fruit because it was not yet the season for figs. Fig trees around Jerusalem usually leaf out in March and April, but do not produce figs until June. Why then is the Lord declaring a curse on the tree for not producing fruit prior to the season for fruit? The fig tree represents a nation long fruitless in the eyes of the Lord and judgment is at hand. We too must be wary of the peril of fruitlessness.

21:21— As for the reference to mountain and sea, Jesus was standing on the Mount of Olives, from which the Dead Sea is visible on a sunny day. He is using hyperbole to say that the greatest possible difficulties can be removed when a person has faith.

4. Religious authorities challenge Jesus (21:23-27; see Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8); Parables in reply (21:28-22:14)—Beginning here and through the next few chapters, the debate methods of antiquity are reflected: questions and answers (you wanted to be the one asking the question), witty responses, and attempts to trap opponents in their own words. The Lord had just walked into the

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Temple and acted like he owned the place. He did of course, but the religious leaders were not going to buy that. How dare he intrude on their operation! Who does he think he is?

The chief priests and the elders of the nation challenge Jesus' authority to cleanse the Temple and teach as he did (21:23). Jesus met their question with a question of his own (21:24-25). Was John the Baptist's ministry from heaven or from men? John had clearly testified to the divine source of Jesus' ministry. If they acknowledged divine authority in John's ministry, they would logically need to recognize the same for that of the Lord Jesus. They certainly did not want to do that, but they did not want to antagonize the Jewish people who saw John as a prophet from God. They weasel out of the question and plead ignorance for fear of the crowd, the cowardly silence of political expediency (21:25b-27). Lord's termination of this discussion underlines a basic principle of Christian living: we cannot learn new truth if we disobey what God has already told us. The religious leaders had rejected the truth preached by John. Jesus was not going to impart new truth to such people.

The next three parables grew out of the demand of the religious authorities for Jesus to explain his authority for cleansing the Temple. The parable of the two sons, of the lawless tenants, and of the wedding banquet (21:28-22:14) follow this challenge to the Lord's authority and show that those who thought they were in the kingdom (indeed ruling it) are the very ones to be excluded from it.

a. Parable of the two sons (21:28-32)—Jesus follows the religious leaders' unsuccessful challenge to his authority with his own challenge. He tells a parable about two sons who are instructed by their father to go into the vineyard and work. The first son refuses but reconsiders and goes to work in the vineyard (21:28-29). The second son says that he will go but then does not (21:30-31). Which son did his father's will? The answer is obvious—the first son. Jesus then applies the parable to the religious leaders. The tax collectors and prostitutes responded to John's message of the kingdom and repented, while Israel's leaders did their level best to ignore both John and the Lord's message (21:32). Those repenting will gain access to the kingdom, but the unrepentant leaders stood condemned. When Jesus draws the application to the Jewish religious establishment and says that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom ahead of the religious honchos, he could not have chosen a more offensive comparison.

b. Parable of the lawless tenants (21:33-46; see Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19)—A landowner prepared a vineyard and rented it to tenants and went on a journey. This reflected the situation in Galilee at the time. Much of the land was in the hands of absentee landlords. Wealthy foreign landlords owned large estates which they leased to tenant farmers to cultivate as vineyards. Contracts typically designed a portion of the crop to be paid as rent. At harvest time, the owners would send their agents to collect the rent. In the Lord's parable, the owner sent his agents to collect what was due and they were denied, mistreated, and even killed (21:34-36). The allusion to the Israel's prophets was clear to the audience. Finally, the owner sent his son and heir, thinking that surely they would respect the son (21:37). However, the lawless tenants thought very differently. In Palestine at that time, a piece of land could be possessed lawfully by whoever claimed it first if it were "ownerless property." Kill the son and take the land was the tenants' agenda (21:38-39). The Lord knew the leaders were plotting against him and he quotes Psalm 118:22, warning them of the severe consequences that attended such a vile plan (21:40-44).

This parable draws its imagery from the song of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7). It tends toward allegory more than most parables do. The vineyard was a familiar symbol for the nation of Israel. The owner of the vineyard is God; the son is Jesus; the tenants are the religious leaders of Israel charged with cultivating the religious life of the people; and the servants are the prophets. The rulers immediately recognized that Jesus had spoken the parable against them. They continue their plotting, seeking an opportune moment to rid themselves of one who they regard as an insolent upstart (21:45-46).

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21:42-44—The stone testimony at the end of the parable combines Psalm 118:22—the headstone that the builders rejected; Isaiah 8:14-15—the cornerstone and sure foundation; and Daniel 2:34, 44-45—a stone that breaks the enemies of God. The Lord Jesus is the foundation stone upon which everything is built, the cornerstone that holds everything together. To defy him is to be crushed in the end.

21:45-46—Instead of taking the warning and repenting, the religious leaders immediately begin hunting for ways to arrest and be rid of him. Their arrogant hostility is only tempered by their cowardly fear of the people who accept Jesus as a prophet.

Pause and ponder—Jesus is speaking to a basic problem in the church. To whom does the vineyard belong? The church belongs to the Lord, but we tend to forget that. We function as if it belongs to us or to our faction. Deep-seated vested rights lurk just below the surface in many communities of faith.

c. Parable of the marriage feast (22:1-14; see Lk. 14:16-24)— Jesus follows that scene with the parable of the marriage banquet. Jesus raises the question of what kind of people will be at the banquet. The great banquet of the kingdom is set, and a servant is sent with the invitations (22:1-2). He meets wall-to-wall excuses for not coming (22:3-6). More than just excuses, the invitees mistreat the servants and the king renders retribution (22:7). The guests give such lame excuses and behave in such a vile fashion that the audience must have realized that this was how, in Jesus' eyes, they were treating God's invitation to them. The servant is sent out again and instructed to invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (22:8-10). The story moves to show how God invites those with no social standing, just as Jesus took the gospel to sinners and tax collectors. However, when some appear in inappropriate attire, they are excluded from the banquet (22:11-13). Invitations to the great banquet of the heavenly kingdom are matters of grave concern and necessitate a proper response (22:14). The point is whether you have accepted the heavenly invitation and come appropriately. Are there allusions to the Gentile inclusion here with the Jews portrayed as the original guest list who declined to come? Theirs were the advantages of heritage but could be forfeited by their failure to respond positively. If the parable of the tenants exposed the religious leaders neglect of the covenant duties, this parable condemns their contempt of God's grace.

22:1-2—Coming to a wedding feast required commitment of valuable time. A wedding feast typically lasted seven days and a king would expect the guests to remain throughout the feast. The honor of a royal invitation and the fear of displeasing the king would have motivated intelligent invitees to accept and attend. In the cultural backdrop, the invited guests would be aristocratic landowners, with abundant leisure to attend such an event.

22:5-6—Ignoring an invite was scandalously rude. Mistreating the messengers was an affront to the king, indeed outright treason where the messengers were killed or physically harmed. This was indeed the treatment Israel displayed to the Lord God's prophets repeatedly.

22:11-13—In our modern society, we want to be inclusive. That tends to mean that everyone is accepted just as they are. Indeed, God's love reaches us where we are, but it refuses to let us stay there. Our lives need to be transformed, healed, changed. That is the point of the wedding guest who was improperly clothed and excluded from the feast. God's love wants us to change into what he created and recreated us to be.

5. Debates with the religious leaders (21:15-46)—What follows is a series of three questions by the religious authorities and one follow-up question by the Lord. The Lord will deal with the relation between religion and government, between this life and the next one, and between God and neighbor, before challenging the authorities with a Messianic query. Matthew uses these debates to show the authority of the Lord Jesus. The fallacy of arguing with the Lord is seen in the ease in which he disposes of the leaders' questions while baffling them with his own query concerning the Messiah's

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origins.

a. Paying taxes to Caesar: Pharisees answered (22:15-22; see Mk. 12:13-17; Lk. 20:20-26)—The Pharisees and the Herodians, unlikely allies, thought they had the ultimate entrapment question for the Lord Jesus. Introducing their query with sycophant flattery (22:15-16), they ask about paying the tax imposed on the Jews by the Romans (22:17). An annual poll tax (head tax) had been required by the emperor since the year 6. The Roman taxes were burdensome and were bitterly resented by the Jewish people. Either way Jesus answered, they figured they had him. Speak about a duty to pay taxes and lose the people. Speak otherwise and get reported to the Roman authorities. The leaders were sure that Jesus' answer would alienate either the Roman authorities or the pious people and zealots who opposed foreign domination.

Jesus called out their hypocrisy. He asked them to bring him a denarius; a common coin used for payment of the tax (22:18-21). Note the Lord's deft handling of this attempt at entrapment by the religious authorities. If Jesus' entrapping sycophants were so concerned about paying Roman taxes, how was it that they produced so easily the coin that gave such offense to Jewish zealots? Repartee that put one's interrogators in a bad light was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions.

Jesus elaborates. He notes that a denarius bore the image of Caesar and therefore belonged to Caesar. Human beings have God's image upon them and therefore belong to God. If the priests and the people used Caesar's coinage, they were under obligation to pay back what was owing to him. But they were not to forget that they were made in the image of God and must live under God's authority as well. The Lord was not fostering disloyalty to the State, nor did he countenance overreaching demands by the State.

Jesus does not define the respective spheres of God and Caesar, church, and state here. His point is simply that people who benefit from Caesar must pay him for it. To give what the government legitimately requires is part of one's religious duty. Today, we may not agree with the way all our tax dollars are used and should express our views by voice and vote. However, God has established human government for our good (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 1 Pt. 2:13-17) and we must respectfully render our duties to it.

b. Queries about resurrection: Sadducees answered (22:23-33; see Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-40)—The Sadducees were the urban, wealthy, sophisticated class in Judaism, centered in Jerusalem. The name "Sadducee" is usually traced back to Zadok, high priest during the time of David. The Sadducees were a small group numerically but exerted major influence politically and religiously. They accepted only the material world and denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits (see Acts 23:8).

They present the Lord with a hypothetical (22:25-28) based on the custom of levirate marriage (see Deut. 25:5-10). When a man died childless, his brother was to marry the deceased's widow, and the first son of that union was to be given the name of the deceased brother and be considered his son. This was meant to prevent the extinction of a family line and thereby keep a family land inheritance intact, vital in an agricultural society. The Sadducees offer a hypothetical involving seven brothers marrying the same woman and all dying childless. At the resurrection, whose wife would the widow be?

Jesus replies by pointing out their basic error—thinking of heaven in terms of the earth and of eternity in terms of time. First, conditions in the resurrection are not like those on earth (22:29-30). Since there is no death and hence no need to replenish the race, there is no need for procreation. This may mean that earthly relationships like marriage will end or that all human relationships will be lifted to such an elevated level in heaven that the exclusiveness of marriage will not be the kind of factor in heaven as it is on earth. Second, Jesus gave an argument for the resurrection based on the law of Moses (22:31-32).

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In Exodus 3:6, God describes himself in the present tense as the God of Abraham centuries after the patriarch died. The implication is that Abraham was still alive and able to worship God. God was Abraham's God during his lifetime and would not let death interrupt that relationship but would resurrect the patriarch. Believing in the resurrection does not just offer the best hope for our ultimate future, it gives to the present created order its full value. What God made, he will remake. His response puts an end to entrapping type questions.

22:25-28—The Sadducees borrow the story line of this text from the Jewish book of Tobit.

c. Greatest commandment: Lawyers answered (22:34-40; see Mk. 12:28-31)—Hearing that Jesus had silenced (the word could be translated "muzzled") the Sadducees (22:34), one of the Pharisees tested Jesus with the question of which was the greatest commandment (22:35-36). Rabbinical tradition counted 613 legal precepts, 365 negative precepts and 248 positive precepts. Can you imagine the burden of taking this type of hairsplitting legalism seriously? One of the favorite exercises of the religious teachers was to discuss which one was the greatest commandment, to differentiate between "great" and "little" commandments and to formulate principles central to the whole of the law.

The Lord replies (22:37-40) by quoting two passages from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. The first is the Shema, a confession of faith recited by pious Jews every morning and evening, affirming the unity of God and the covenant relationship of God with the Jewish people. The second speaks of loving your neighbor, which is the natural and logical outgrowth of love for God.

d. Messiah: David's son and David's Lord—Leaders baffled (22:41-46; see Mk. 12:35-37; Lk. 20:41-44)—Jesus had deftly managed the insincere and entrapping questions of the religious leaders. Now he takes the initiative and poses his own question. The Jews awaited the coming of an earthly deliverer who would be a king descended from David. The Davidic sonship of Messiah was a firm Jewish belief based on numerous Old Testament texts (see 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:15-17, 22; Ezek. 34:23-24; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11). Jesus noted that it was equally true that Messiah was David's Lord, quoting Psalm 110:1. How can Messiah be both David's Lord and his son.

The Jewish notion of a father's superiority to his son is inherent in this argument. The implication is that Messiah is more than an earthly descendant of David. Paul will flesh this out in Romans 1:3-4 where he declares that Jesus was a descendant of David as to his human nature but the Son of God by his resurrection. The Jewish leaders were stumbling over Christ's identity. What the Lord does here is synthesize the concept of a human Messiah in David's line with a divine Messiah who transcends human limitations.

When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both disparate texts were true. Unable to answer, the Jewish teachers failed at their alleged forte. The result of the dialogue was silence on the part of the religious teachers. They were so blinded by tradition, position, status, and selfish pride that they could not, and would not, see the truth and receive it. We dare not make the same mistake today.

7. Religious leaders exposed and rejected (23:1-39)—The hypocrisy of the religious leaders, pointed out so vividly in chapters 21 and 22, prompts the Lord Jesus to issue a stern warning to the multitudes concerning the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees.

a. Improper concept of leadership; Preeminence over service (23:1-12)—The Lord tells them to recognize their authority, but not to follow their hypocritical practices and their arrogant attitudes (23:1-3). They burden people with their rabbinical traditions, make a show of their devotion, and love and assiduously cultivate the honor and recognition that comes with religious status and position (23:4-

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7). The Lord calls the multitudes, as he did his disciples, to recognize that humble service drives the boat, not spiritual pretense and religious status and recognition (23:8-12).

23:4-5—Phylacteries (*tefillin*) are small boxes affixed by a leather strap to one's head or left-hand during morning and evening prayers. Outsized tassels on their garments called attention to themselves.

23:6—Seating was seen as critical at banquets and those seated in lower-status places frequently complained. This was a very status-oriented community.

23:7-8—Greetings were so important socially that specific rules were developed on how to greet specific people and when to greet them. Not to hail a superior in the understanding of the law was a grievous insult.

b. Woes on leaders: Righteousness and repentance (23:13-36; see Lk. 11:37-54)—Then the Lord directly addresses the religious teachers and leaders, pronouncing a sevenfold woe on their attitudes and practices. His first denunciation related to their preventing people from entering the kingdom (23:13-14). Their failure to accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah had placed a stumbling block in the paths of the Jewish people. The second woe addressed their zeal for their rabbinical traditions and external restrictions that prevented people from seeing the truth (23:15). Their converts were more sons of hell than they were. The third woe condemns the minute distinctions relating to religious practice made by the leaders which were essentially deceptive and dishonest (23:15-22). To swear by the Temple was not a binding oath, but to swear by the gold of the Temple was binding. The same kind of thing was done with the altar and the gifts on the altar. The fourth woe targeted their meticulous and showy tithing of all their possessions (23:23-24). They kept the trifles of the law and forgot the things that really mattered, to manifest justice, mercy, and faithfulness demanded by the law. They were straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. The fifth and sixth woes exposed their hypocritical concern for external cleanliness when their hearts were full of greed and self-indulgence (23:25-28). While they may appear beautiful on the outside in all their religious conformity, they were white-washed tombs on the inside, full of hypocrisy and wickedness. In the seventh woe, the Lord reemphasizes their hypocrisy (23:29-32). They were quick to say that they would not have persecuted the prophets in past times, yet they were already planning his death, an act which would demonstrate that they were just like the former generations who murdered the prophets.. The finale (23:33-36) condemns the religious leaders and teachers in most severe language. They were snakes, broods of vipers, whose destiny was hell. Like their forebears, they will have the blood of faithful martyrs on their hands.

Aside—By some estimates, there were about six thousand Pharisees in Jesus' day and many more followers. They were mostly middle-class businesspeople. The name Pharisee comes from a word that means "to separate". The Pharisees separated themselves from Gentiles, from unclean Jews (publicans and sinners), and from those who opposed the elaborate traditions that governed their lives. Certainly not all Pharisees were hypocrites. Nicodemus (Jn. 3; 7:50-53), Joseph of Arimathea (Jn. 19:38ff) and the unnamed man in the previous chapter (22:34-40; Mk. 12:32-34) come to mind. The teacher Gamaliel showed a great deal of tolerance toward the newly formed church (Acts 5:34ff). However, many Pharisees used their religion to promote themselves and for their material gain. These were the focus of the Lord's scathing critique.

Jesus' seven woe pronouncement on the Jewish religious leaders fits a chiastic pattern:

A: First woe (23:13): failing to recognize Jesus as Messiah.
  B: Second woe (23:15): superficially zealous yet doing more harm than good.
    C: Third woe (23:16-22): misguided use of Scripture.
      D: Fourth woe (23:23-24): failure to discern the thrust of Scripture.

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C: Fifth woe (23:25-26): misguided use of Scripture.
B: Sixth woe (23:27-28): superficially zealous yet doing more harm than good.
A: Seventh woe (23:29-32): heirs of those who failed to recognize the prophets.

Some commentators contrast the woes of this chapter to the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-12:

- The poor in spirit enter the kingdom (5:3) while the proud keep themselves and other followers out (23:13-14).
- Mourners will find comfort (5:4) while destructive teachers will not. Instead of mourning over their sins and with needy widows, many Pharisees took advantage of them (see 23:14 in footnote). They used their religion as a cloak of covetousness.
- The meek will inherit the earth (5:5) while the proud will send themselves and others to hell (23:15).
- Blessing on those who hunger for righteousness (5:6); many Pharisees postured righteousness while greedy for gain (23:16-22).
- Blessing on the merciful (5:7) while the Pharisees unmercifully focused on minute rules that burdened the people (23:23-24).
- Blessed are the pure in heart (5:8) whereas the Lord compared the Pharisees to unclean cups and whitened sepulchers (23:25-28).
- Blessed are the peacemaker and those persecuted for righteousness (5:9-12). The Lord declared the religious teachers the descendants of those who killed the prophets, pretending now to honor their tombs and decorate their graves. He describes them and snakes and vipers and denunciates them in a most robust way (23:29-33).

23:29-31—This section relates to the final woe. The Jewish community in this era built tombs as monuments for the prophets and righteous martyrs. Jesus' point was an in-your-face one—like father, like son. Corporate sin and guilt continued among the descendants of the wicked unless they repented. He describes them as snakes and broods of vipers. That last phrase is particularly offensive.

23:35— Abel was the first of the faithful martyrs mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures (Gen. 4:8) and Zechariah the last (2 Chron. 24:20-22). In the traditional ordering of the Hebrew Old Testament, Genesis is the first book and 2 Chronicles the last.

c. Lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39)—In the Lord's final lament over Jerusalem, he states his heartfelt desire for the nation. He chooses a tender image, a mother hen and her chicks. There are recorded instances of mother hens, faced with a fire, gathering her chicks under her wings to keep them safe. Jesus closes this stern passage of denouncement with this tender wish. Israel had been called to be God's chosen people and light to the rest of the world. Jesus longed to protect them from the fiery judgment that was necessarily coming, but they refused. He longed to gather them to himself, but they were unwilling. They would not see him again until his return to establish the kingdom reflected in the quote of Psalm 118:26 (23:39). This text shows the patience of God, the appeal of Jesus, the deliberate rejection of people, and the terrible consequence of that rejection.

D. Olivet discourse: Destruction of the Temple; Coming of the Son of Man; End of the age; Judgment (24:1-25:46; see Mk. 13:1-37; Lk. 21:5-36)—The disciples think of Jerusalem's destruction and the end of the age as a single complex of events. Jesus warns that there will be a delay before the eschatological end, characterized by tribulation and persecution of his followers (24:4-28), with a particularly violent judgment of Jerusalem (24:15-21). Immediately after a sustained persecution comes the second coming (24:29-31). The warning in 23:32-35 describes the entire period from the Ascension to the Second Advent. However, the exact time of the Lord's return, only the Father knows (24:36-44). The chapter concludes with a parable of wise and foolish servants, those ready for the Lord's second coming (*parousia*) and those who are not (24:45-51).

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The Lord Jesus then speaks of the coming judgment by relating the parables of the ten virgins (25:1-13) and the talents (25:14-30), before speaking of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge in what has been described as the sheep and goats' judgment (25:31-46).

The Lord's teaching in this discourse provides a realistic warning about future events with a strong encouragement to persevere and to be watchful. While there is disagreement on this point, the prophetic perspective Jesus portrays involves two perspectives: a near event, the destruction of the Temple in 70, and a far event the return of the Son of Man at the end of the age. The former local event is the prelude to the latter universal event. The near event opens on to the distant event. The text is full of imperatives, warning and exhorting the disciples. They are exhorted to be on their guard at several significant junctures of this discourse.

This composite vision of the future has several strands that are tangled together.

- The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem (24:1-2, 15-22);
- Characteristics of the terrible Day of the Lord ((24:6-8, 29-31);
- Persecution, betrayal, and slander of believers (24:9-10);
- False prophets/false Christs will arise and mislead many (24:4-5, 11, 15, 23-24);
- Threats to the purity and life of the Church (24:4-5, 11-13, 23-26);
- Second coming (*parousia*) of the Lord Jesus (24:3, 14, 27-31);
- Judgment and righteous justice rendered (25:31-46).

Note the practical exhortations:

- Do not follow false leaders (24:4-5, 11, 15, 23-24);
- Do not be awed by events associated with the end; the crescendo of evil must not discourage the faithful believers (24:6-8);
- Expect opposition and persecution (24:9-12);
- Persevere when all turn against you (as they will) (24:10-13);
- Be on your guard, be watchful (24:4, 42).

Also note what to expect:

- Religious deception;
- Wars and rumors of war;
- Famine and economic dislocation;
- Natural disasters and many deaths;
- Persecution and martyrdoms;
- Preaching of the gospel throughout the world.
- Christ triumphant and history gloriously concluded.

1. Temple's destruction predicted; Query of the disciples (24:1-3)—Matthew links the Olivet discourse closely to the woes in chapter 23. He ties the prediction of desolation (23:37-39) to the destruction of the Temple (24:1-2), which in the disciples' mind is connected to the end of the age. They want to know when this will happen and what will be the sign for the end of the age (24:3).

2. Conditions of the age; Coming of the Son of Man; End of the age (24:4-35)—They were not to be deceived by the claims of false Messiahs (24:4-5) or by wars and natural disasters (24:6-8). These will be the beginning of the birth pains. Persecution, betrayal, and hatred may be their lot, but God would be with them enabling their testimony. They were called to stand firm (24:9-13) for the gospel must be preached to the entire world before the end would come (24:14).

When they saw the abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place, they were to flee to the mountains without delay (24:14-18). That will be a time of great distress (24:19-22). The disciples

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were advised to remain vigilant for false Christs will appear (24:23-26) and they were not to be taken in by false assertions or shaken by the distress of those days (24:27-28). The Lord Jesus then describes the coming of the Son of Man (24:29-31), advising them to learn the lesson of fig tree (24:32-33). The Lord affirms that these things will occur, his words will endure rather than things as they are (24:34-35).

This is the discourse of the *parousia* (used here and in 24:27, 37, 39), which can refer to "presence", "arrival", and "coming"). The word does not necessarily have end times overtones in the New Testament (see 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10) or in common usage (it was commonly used for a monarch's visit to a city). However, the word is often closely tied with Jesus' glorious appearing or coming at the end of human history.

24:4-8—The things referred to in this text are signs that Jesus is coming back and they all will be manifest before the generation Jesus was addressing had died. There will be many deceivers and false Christs, but their manifestation will just be the "birth pains" of Messiah. The effect of these verses is not to curb enthusiasm for the Lord's return but to warn against false claimants.

24:9-13—Persecution will characterize the age, and many will turn away from faith. However, despite persecution and even because of it (see Acts 8:1, 4), the good news of the gospel will be preached to all nations.

24:15-21—This is the particularly stressful period centered around the "the abomination that causes desolation". The expression occurs four times in Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), with the third one clearly referring to the desecration of the Temple under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. That king erected an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offering, sacrificed a sow on it, and made the practice of Judaism a capital offense. Jesus is identifying Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 with certain events about to take place, but what precisely they are seems ambiguous.

Daniel was an extremely popular book in first century Israel. It describes, in a series of stories and dreams, how God's kingdom will triumph over the kingdoms of the world. First century Judaism downloaded many nationalistic expectations out of this book. Daniel 2 speaks of a stone which smashes a great statue. Jesus alludes to this in 21:44. Daniel 3 and 6 are how God delivers his faithful ones from suffering and death. Daniel 7 is about those enemies who wage war on humanity and how God vindicates a human figure (one like the Son of Man) and destroys the enemies. Daniel 9 speaks of some abominable, blasphemous, and sacrilegious object placed in the Temple itself. Daniel 12 predicts the eventual resurrection of God's people.

24:15—The pagan insolence that would debase the Temple itself has had many suggestions:

- In 40, Caligula tried to place a huge statue of himself presented as a god in the Temple. He was assassinated before the order could be carried out.
- Some say the activities of the Zealots in the Temple in 66 defaced it and fit the referend.
- Others say the Roman destruction of the Temple and the encampments built over its location fits the reference.
- Others point to Antichrist at the end of the age.

24:16-19— The Lord Jesus advises his people to flee to the mountains. These instructions seem so specific that they must relate to the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. By the time the Romans had surrounded and laid siege to Jerusalem, the Temple had been defiled by Zealot excesses (including murder and the installation of a false high priest). A reliable tradition has it that the Christians abandoned the city around 68, halfway through the siege of Jerusalem.

24:22-28—These warnings against false messiahs during the time of the "birth pains" seem to relate to

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both the near-term situation of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 and the far-term situation of the end of the age.

24:29-35—It seems to me that this text pertains to the Lord's *parousia* at the end of the age and not the events of 70. The things described in 24:4-28 will occur before the Lord's *parousia* (24:29-31). The *parousia* is the next major step in God's redemptive purposes but the period of distress, in which we are still in, does not pinpoint the time of the Lord's coming.

3. Day and time unknown (24:36-44)—Since no one knows the day or time of his appearing except the Father, the disciples are exhorted to be alert and be watchful. The Lord references Noah's day and the surprise of the destructive flood as a parallel to the coming of the Son of Man and the end of then age (24:37-41). He reiterates his warning to remain alert and ready. The day will come like a thief in the night (24:42-44).

24:36-41—These verses refer to the Second Coming. God alone knows the time and hour of this event. The *parousia* will come with shattering suddenness upon a world immersed in materiality. It will be a time of separation and judgment.

24:40-41—These two vignettes, two men working in the field and two women working at their hand mill, stress the unexpectedness of the event of the Lord's coming. Regardless of the closeness of the human relation, at the *parousia*, one is taken and the other is not. The seriousness of the matter addressed by the Lord is duly underscored.

4. Watchfulness enjoined: Parables on alertness (24:45-25:30)—The parable of the wise and foolish servants (24:45-51), of the ten virgins, five of whom were ready when the bridegroom came and five of whom were not (25:1-13), and the parable of talents (25:14-30) all underscore the necessity of watchfulness and readiness.

a. Wise and wicked servants contrasted (24:45-51; see Lk. 12:42-46)— Wise servants will attend to their duties (24:45-47) while wicked ones will be discovered in their neglect and judged (24:48-51). The parable emphasizes that more than passive watchfulness is required. There must also be behavior acceptable to the Lord and the discharge of allotted responsibilities. The Lord was leaving the disciples work to do. They were to take the gospel to all the nations (24:14; 28:18-20). The contrast here is those workers who kept the watch and did the work and those who did not. This is the difference between wisdom and errant folly. Wisdom means applying yourself to the Lord's concerns and being ready at any time.

b. Parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids (25:1-13)— A Jewish wedding at that time had two parts. First, the bridegroom and friends would go to the bride's home and claim her from her parents. Then the bride and groom would return to the groom's house for the marriage feast. The context here is waiting for the bride and groom to return to the groom's house. The kingdom of heaven is pictured as ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom. Five wise virgins took extra oil while the foolish ones did not (25:1-5). The bridegroom was delayed and the foolish ones ran out of oil. The bridegroom arrived while the foolish virgins were buying oil (25:5-10). The parable stressed the need for readiness and watchfulness for Messiah's return in the face of a longer than anticipated delay.

25:2-7—These lamps were probably torches, which were sticks wrapped with oil-soaked rags. They did not burn for long and therefore needed to be wrapped with new oil-soaked rags regularly. Not having an oil supply in such a situation was indeed foolish.

25:11-13—The foolish bridesmaids missed the entire procession of the wedding party back to the groom's abode along with the accompanying festivities, singing, and dancing.

c. Using the interim time: Parable of the talents (25:14-30; see Lk. 19:12-27)—A master went

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away and entrusted three servants with specific amounts of money, the first with ten talents, the second with five, and the third with one (25:14-15). The first two were faithful in caring for the master's money and showing an ample return (25:16-17). The third buried the talent and only had that one talent to show for his stewardship. There was no return on the investment at all (25:18). The master complimented the resourceful servants and judged the third one, excluding him to the outer darkness (25:19-27, 30). His talent was given to the most resourceful servant (25:28). The principle is that integrity in smaller matters qualifies one to prove one's integrity in larger matters.

The idea of taking from one who has little and giving it to one who has much more strikes the modern reader as unfair. However, modern readers would not entrust their money to an incompetent money manager when a skilled one was at hand. The point here is one of stewardship. This parable goes beyond the others in that it expects the watchfulness of the servants to manifest itself in the master's absence, not only in the performance of their duties even in long delay, but in the improvement of the allotted talents until the day of reckoning. As stewards of our own lives and resources, are we increasing in fruitfulness?

25:15—Modern English uses the word "talent" for skills and mental abilities God has entrusted to people. In New Testament times, "talent" was a monetary unit of exchange. Estimates of its value differ according to material involved (gold, silver, or copper), to its weight, and to the period referenced (inflation was real then as now). Thus, it is more sensible to compare the idea of talent in this text with our modern currency in terms of earning power. The parable emphasizes the principle "from the one who has been entrusted much, much will be required". But it also emphasizes that an accounting is due and owing from all of us, from the "rich" (those given ten talents) and from the less fortunate (those given one talent).

5. Judgment of the King: Sheep and goats judged (25:31-46)—When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will judge all the nations, separating the righteous (sheep) from those who are unrighteous (goats) (25:31-33). He will address the righteous, commending them for good deeds to less fortunate people (25:34-36). When questioned by the righteous as to when these deeds were done, the Lord replies that whatever they did to one of the least of his brothers, they did for him (37-40). He then addresses the unrighteous noting their lack of good deeds to those less fortunate. When asked how they avoided doing good to him, the Lord replies that they avoided it when they avoided others in need (25:41-45). Eternal reward and eternal punishment are then rendered (25:46).

The upshot is that true disciples love one another and serve the least of the brethren with compassion and in so doing they unconsciously serve the Lord Jesus. Those without sympathy for the gospel of the kingdom will remain indifferent to others and in so doing reject the Messiah. Note that neither the sheep nor the goats are surprised by the place assigned but by the reason for it. The surprise of the righteous makes it clear that works of righteousness do not gain salvation. The sheep do not express love to gain a final reward. The parable's posture eliminates hypocrisy. If the unrighteous had thought that their treatment of the less fortunate would win them salvation, they might well have acted righteously out of self-interest. However, the Lord in the parable is interested in the whole person and the relative interest of the righteous and the unrighteous in those less fortunate reflected that whole-orbed rightness of person.

25:35-36—Except for the visiting the imprisoned, the deeds Jesus listed are standard righteous deeds in Jewish ethics. Providing for the poor, giving hospitality to strangers, and visiting the sick were basic to Jewish piety.

E. Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Commission of the King (26:1-28:20)—Matthew has recorded how Jesus prepared the disciples for his voluntary departure since Peter's great confession in Matthew 16. The predictions are used to prepare the disciples for his death and to show that his death is

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essential for the establishment of the kingdom. This section unfolds the plot to kill the Lord (26:1-5, 14-16), his anointing for burial (26:6-13), the Last Supper with his disciples (26:17-30), his prediction of Peter's denial and the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (26:31-46), his betrayal and arrest (26:47-56), his trials (26:57-27:26) and crucifixion (27:27-56), his burial (26:57-66), his resurrection (28:1-15), and his commissioning of the disciples (28:16-20).

For chief priests and elders, the death of Jesus was a political necessity. Their self-preserving political goals and their completely hypocritical religiosity, unadorned with any sense of justice, are constant features of the story.

The Passion week probably unfolded as follows:

- Arrival in Bethany on Friday (Nisan 8);
- Sabbath rest on Saturday (Nisan 9);
- Triumphant entry on Sunday (Nisan 10);
- Cleansing the Temple on Monday (Nisan 11);
- Day of controversy and parables on Tuesday (Nisan 12);
- Day of rest on Wednesday (Nisan 13);
- Last Supper on Thursday (Nisan 14);
- Crucifixion, death, and burial on Friday (Nisan 15);
- In the tomb on Saturday (Nisan 16);
- Resurrection and initial appearance on Sunday (Nisan 17).

1. Betrayal; Last Supper; Denials predicted; Agony in the Garden (26:1-46)—This section records the plot to kill the Lord (26:1-5, 14-16), his anointing for burial (26:6-13), the Last Supper with his disciples (26:17-30), his prediction of Peter's denial and the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (26:31-46), his betrayal and arrest (26:47-56), his ecclesiastical trial (26:57-65), and Peter's denial in the High Priest's courtyard (26:69-75).

a. Plot to arrest Jesus (26:1-5, 14-16—see Mk. 14:1-2, 10-11; Lk. 22:1-6)—This section begins with another example of the phrase "when Jesus had finished saying all these things" which marks transitions in Matthew (26:1-2; also see 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). Jesus reminds the disciples at the conclusion of the Olivet discourse that he would be handed over to the authorities to be crucified during the celebration of the Passover. In the palace of the high priest Caiaphas, the Jewish leaders plotted to arrest and kill the Lord Jesus. The main problem was to do so without creating an uprising among his supporters (26:3-5). Passover and the feasts of Tabernacles and Pentecost were pilgrimage feasts on the Jewish calendar. Great throngs of people descended on Jerusalem to celebrate them, vastly swelling its population. The chances of the authorities unobtrusively arresting and ridding themselves of the Lord Jesus without insider help were nil. Judas' offer to betray of the Lord (26:14-16) presented them with the opportunity to arrest Jesus quietly. The Lord's popularity with the people was a deterrent to pursuing this dastardly scheme openly, so Judas looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus when no crowds were present.

26:1-2—This passage opens with Jesus once again predicting his own death (see also 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). Jesus is providing the disciples with a framework to interpret his death when it occurs.

26:3-5—Matthew records the plot of the Jewish leaders. Caiaphas is called high priest in the accounts of Matthew and John (Jn. 11:49), while Luke specifies Annas as high priest (Acts 4:6). Annas was high priest until 15 when the secular authorities deposed him. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Caiaphas (15-36) and then by several of his sons until the mid-40s. Annas was the power broker in Jewish ecclesiastical circles for decades after his ouster. He and his followers would have justified this from the Old Testament where the high priest occupied that position until death.

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b. Jesus anointed for burial (26:6-13; see Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12:1-8)—During the Passion week, the Lord spent the evenings in Bethany. Matthew records an event that took place one evening at the home of Simon the Leper. A woman poured a costly perfume on the Lord's head as he reclined at table (26:6-7). John, in his account, identifies the woman as Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (Jn. 12:3), the man Jesus raised from the dead, and notes that she anointed his feet. The disciples protest this expensive waste out of alleged concern for the poor (26:8-9). John fills out this account by naming Judas Iscariot as the protesting disciple and noting that Judas was the keeper of the apostolic money bag and regularly pilfered from it (Jn. 12:4-6). Judas was not interested in donations to the poor. Mary's loving and extravagant devotion (26:7) is sharply contrasted with Judas' miserly and hypocritical criticism (26:8-9). Jesus is quick to countermand Judas' rebuke by commending Mary's act as preparing his body for burial. Her act would be long remembered (26:10-13). This is the second time Jesus was anointed (see Lk. 7:36-50). This text is often used in preaching on extravagant worship.

26:7-9—This perfume, undoubtedly imported from the east, was expensive and probably worth a year in a common laborer's wages. It may have been a family heirloom.

26:11—The contrast here is not between Jesus and the poor but between having the poor always around but not having Jesus always around. We are called to minister to the poor and never use this episode as an excuse not to. However, the motives of the critics (namely Judas) were entirely bogus.

26:14-16—Matthew transitions from this scene of lovely devotion to Judas' infamous betrayal that the craven religious leaders were so delighted to receive. The price of this treacherous agreement is thirty pieces of silver, the going rate for a slave (see Ex. 21:32), as prophesied in Zechariah 11:12. Mary gave her best in faith and love. Judas gave his worst in unbelief and hatred.

Pause and ponder—Why did Judas follow the Lord for three years, listen to his word, share his ministry and hardships, only to turn traitor? What were Judas' motives for this infamous betrayal? Like most human motivation, it was probably a mixed bag—avarice, jealousy, combined with a profound disappointment that Jesus was not acting like the Messiah Judas was expecting. He completely missed or more likely dismissed the idea of a suffering Messiah. His hopes rested with a political Messiah who would bring freedom from Rome. But more than human psychology is involved in this betrayal. John informs us that Satan prompted Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2) and possessed him while he performed the deed (Jn. 13:27).

The figure of Judas is one of the darkest in the gospels and indeed in all literature. Up to this time Judas was something of a common name; royal and revolutionary heroes bore the name. Who would name a child "Judas" now?

c. Last Supper (26:17-30; see Mk. 14:12-26; Lk. 22:7-30; Jn. 13:1ff)—Lord sends his disciples ahead to confirm arrangements for the Passover meal (26:17-19). At the meal, Jesus predicts his own betrayal (26:20-25) and institutes the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper (26:26-30). The Lord's inauguration of the New Covenant, promising new hearts to believing people, is juxtaposed between his predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, events that pointedly illustrate the need for new hearts.

26:17-19—The instructions to the two disciples at the outset suggest that Jesus had already made the arrangements. Because the Passover was to be eaten within the city of Jerusalem, most homes in the city included guests during the night of the Passover feast. Besides finding the location and the individual the Lord designated, the two disciples would have prepared for the Passover which probably took all day, including purchasing and preparing the food. For the Passover feast, several things were necessary: :

- The unleavened bread and paschal lamb had to be prepared;
- A bowl of salt water was set on the table to remind those at the feast of the tears shed while

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enslaved in Egypt;
- Bitter herbs were prepared to remind them of bitterness of slavery;
- A paste called the *charosheth*, a mixture of fruit and nuts, to remind them of the clay from which they were compelled to make bricks;
- Four cups of wine to remind them of the promises of Exodus 6:6-7.

Luke identifies the disciples as Peter and John (Lk. 22:8). The room may have been the one mentioned in Acts 1:13, located in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (see Acts 12:12).

The typical Passover celebration began after sunset on 15 Nissan when the household gathered in a home to eat the Passover lamb, which was roasted with bitter herbs. The head of the household would begin the feast by praying over the first of four cups of wine. A preliminary course of greens and bitter herbs was followed by the Passover *haggadah*. A younger male would ask the head of the household the meaning of the feast and the head would explain the symbols in terms of the exodus from Egypt. This was followed by the singing of the first part of the Hallel (Pss. 113-114). A second cup of wine introduced the main course of the feast, which was followed by a third cup, known as the "cup of blessing" and accompanied by another prayer of thanksgiving. The household then sang the rest of the Hallel (Pss. 115-118) and drank a fourth cup of wine.

26:20-25—The words of the Passover meal tell the story of how God's people came out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, leaving behind their slavery and going on to freedom in the promised land. The food and drink symbolize and express aspects of the great series of events described as the Exodus. What the Lord did was draw the whole meaning of the meal unto himself. He took the Passover to its culmination in himself.

Matthew focuses on Jesus' announcement of his betrayal (26:20-25) and his institution of the Eucharist after the meal (26:26-30). He omits the Lord washing the feet of the disciples and his instruction to them about humility (Jn. 13:1-20). Matthew moves directly to the Lord's prediction of his betrayal to the stunned dismay of the disciples (26:20-22). This creates a buzz among the group as the significance and enormity of the betrayal sinks in. To betray a friend after eating a meal with him was regarded as the worst kind of treachery. Men who had debated which one of them was the greatest now queried the Lord as to which one of them was the vilest. Judas compounds that sense when joining in with the rest of the apostles and exclaiming "Surely not I?"

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both involved in Judas' treason. God accomplishes salvation and brings redemption history to its fulfillment, even while Judas answers the promptings of an evil heart with the most infamous betrayal in history.

26:20—The usual posture at meals was sitting, but reclining on couches (originally a Greek practice) was customary for feasts.

26:23-25—Such a sobering word concerning Judas' betrayal. Ancient readers saw the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond and would have been horrified by the deceit of Judas in this text. Matthew does not record that Judas left the room. However, John does record his exit (Jn. 13:27-30).

26:26-30—The original Passover feast consisted of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and a dish of bitter herbs. The lamb reminded the participants of the blood applied to the doorposts of the Jewish homes in Egypt to save their firstborn from the angel of death. The unleavened bread reminded them of the forefathers' haste in leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:39). The bitter herbs spoke of the suffering of the Jews as Pharaoh's slaves.

After predicting his betrayal, the Lord took bread and wine, gave thanks, and gave them to disciples, declaring them to be his body and blood broken and poured out for many. The bread was a thick

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unleavened bread typically used at Passover. The cup referred to in 26:27 may be the first of the four traditional cups taken during the Passover meal or the third cup mentioned in connection with the Passover setting and again in connection with its place in the Eucharist. This cup signifies the new covenant in Jesus' blood. That new covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8) carried with it the assurance of forgiveness through Jesus' blood shed on the cross and the inner working of the Holy Spirit in motivating and enabling us to respond and fulfill our covenant responsibilities. Thus, he instituted the Eucharist (from *eucharisteo* = to give thanks (26:26)), also commonly referred to as the Lord's Supper and Communion). Christian practice has made this a central ordinance or sacrament commemorating the supper shared by Jesus and his disciples (Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 1:23-26).

26:26-27—The Lord' apostles would not have taken "This is my body" literally. They did not take literally the standard Jewish interpretation spoken over the bread at Passover: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt". If taken literally, every household celebrating the Passover would be declaring the bread they ate that night to be centuries old and even already eaten by their forbears.

"Take and eat; this is my body". These words begin the institution of the Eucharist, the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his disciples (Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 1:23-26). The last four words of this segment has occasioned enormous and divisive debate. What exactly does "is" mean? What exactly is the significance of a believer partaking of these elements? Christians have differed in their understanding of the nature of the Eucharist:

- Transubstantiation (Roman Catholics)—The elements (bread and wine) change and become the body and blood of the Lord;
- Consubstantiation (Luther)—Christ is bodily present in, under, and with the elements of bread and wine. The elements do not become the Lord's body and blood but, nevertheless, participants in the sacrament do "eat and take to [themselves] Christ's body truly and physically";
- Memorialism (Zwingli)—The sacrament or ordinance memorializes Christ's sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is primarily an occasion to remember the spiritual benefits purchased by Christ's death;
- Spiritual presence (Calvin)—There is a real reception of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament only done in a spiritual manner.

Whatever one's view, the Lord's Supper gives us some vivid pictures of spiritual truth. The bread speaks of his human bodily life broken for us. The wine is a picture of his blood poured for our redemption. All our sins, past, present, and future, have been judged in full at the cross. In addition, the Supper looks forward to the consummation of the kingdom and the Lord's return (26:29). Worship while celebrating the Lord's Supper is a rich one. We eat the bread and drink the wine in faith, reaffirming God's amazing forgiveness and love.

d. Peter's denials predicted (26:31-35; see Mk. 14:27-31; Lk. 22:31-34)—Jesus and the disciples probably sang the second part of the Hillel (Pss. 115-18) on the way to the Mount of Olives, a walk that took at least fifteen minutes. The intimacy of the evening was shortly replaced by betrayal, denial, and abandonment. Zechariah 13:1-6 pictures a day when, owing to prevailing apostasy, the shepherd is cut down and the sheep are scattered. Jesus' quotation of Zechariah 13:7 presupposed this context, with the disciples themselves among the sheep scattered. Peter most emphatically denied that he would abandon the Lord. He vehemently protested his loyalty unto death. Jesus then predicts that Peter himself was within hours of disowning the Lord. His overconfident reply would come back to haunt him (26:75).

The prediction that they would "fall away" does not suggest that the disciples lost their faith in the

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Lord, but that their courage would fail and they would forsake him.

e. Agony in the Garden (26:36-46; see Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:40-46)—Garden of Gethsemane was at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Taking Peter, James, and John with him, the Lord withdrew and prayed that, if possible, the cup of suffering and wrath be averted. Nevertheless, not his will, but the Father's will be done (26:36-39). Returning to the disciples, he found them asleep on three separate occasions (26:40, 42, 45), doubtless exhausted by sorrow and emotional strain. The weakness of the disciples is described, not excoriated. However, their rest was in stark contrast with the Lord's agony and exhaustion. The Lord prays in great distress and, while he is supernaturally strengthened (Lk. 23:43), he learns that the cross is unavoidable if he is to obey the Father's will. The Lord was experiencing deep sorrow (*lypeisthai* = to be grieved or sad to the point of extreme distress). In this hour of his extreme need, the Lord desired those with a sympathetic understanding to be praying with him.

The Lord's anguish in the Garden is not lightly to be passed over. The Lord Jesus was in a waking nightmare. The cup of unimaginable suffering was before his very eyes like a burning brand. It was the cup that he spoke of to James and John (20:22-23), the cup of God's wrath of which the prophets spoke. He did not want to drink it. He was in meltdown mode. In agonizing prayer, he begged the Father that the cup might be taken from him. For the second time in the gospel narrative (the temptation narrative in 4:1-11 being the first), Jesus is fighting in private the spiritual battle he needed to win if he was to stand in public and speak, live, and die for God's kingdom and his people. Jesus' agonizing prayer in Gethsemane rooted him once more in his biblical vocation.

The shocking lesson of the disciples is that they left him entirely alone in his hour of agony. His disciples are no solace but fell asleep amid his suffering. His death was unique and so was his anguish. Our best response is hushed worship. Jesus, who had never experienced guilt, now bore the guilt and shame of the sins of the world alone. The Lord endured loneliness and utter abandonment so that we can enjoy unbroken communion with him and the Father forever. We, his disciples now, must in his stead kneel in the Gethsemane of the present beside people dying in hospital, or being tortured for their faith, or told they are redundant in the job market in gracelessly unkind ways, or hearing a report of a terminal illness. And we ourselves will have a Gethsemane, when we find the ground giving way beneath our feet, and we will find the Lord there having gone before us.

As the Jewish crowd approaches (26:45-46), Jesus arises poised and advances to meet his conniving betrayer. However, the disciples, in their slumber, have not been strengthened to meet the onslaught of evil.

26:36—Gethsemane means press of oils, a press for crushing oil out of olives. An apt name for the Lord's crushing experience in the Garden.

2. Jesus' betrayal and arrest (26:47-56; see Mk. 14:43-50; Lk. 22:47-53)— Judas leads the Jewish multitude to Jesus to arrest him (26:47-49). It is sad to witness the tawdry conclusion to Judas' story. He leads Jesus' enemies to a known retreat of the Lord and accomplishes the dark deed with a kiss, a sign of brotherly affection. Judas appears as the most contemptible of traitors. The tragedy of Judas is that he refused to accept the Lord Jesus as he was and tried to make him what Judas wanted him to be.

The crowd with Judas seems to have been a motley crew composed of priests, elders, Pharisees, temple police, and even some Roman soldiers (Lk. 22:52; Jn. 18:3). Peter rushes to defend the Lord with characteristic courage and impetuousness (Lk. 22:50). The Lord undoes the injury Peter does to Malchus (Lk. 22:51; Jn. 18:10-11), probably saving Peter's life for his impetuous act. Peter comes off being cowardly in his later denials, but at the time of Jesus' arrest, he is the one that resists. Matthew

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does not name the people involved. We glean the details from John's account. Luke alone tells us of Jesus' healing the ear of the high priest's servant (Lk. 22:51). Forbidding violence, the Lord faces his Passion without resistance, even though he could summon overwhelming power at any moment (26:53). Those apprehending the Lord could have done so at any time, without secrecy and violence. That they chose this manner of arrest revealed much more about themselves than it did of the Lord (26:55-56a). As he had warned them, all the disciples deserted the Lord and fled (26:56b).

3. Jesus' trials (26:57-27:26)—Matthew uses this section to emphasize Jesus' innocence and to focus on his identity as the suffering Messiah. Jesus was confronted by two different authorities in his trials. The ecclesiastical trial was before the Jewish priests; the judicial trial before the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. Each of these trials had three stages.

Ecclesiastical trial:

- Before Annas (Jn. 18:12-14, 19-23);
- Informal trial by Caiaphas and part of the Sanhedrin before dawn (Mt. 26:57-68; see Mk. 14:53-65; Lk. 22:54-65; Jn. 18:24);
- Formal trial after dawn (Mt. 27:1; see Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66-71).

Judicial trial:

- First appearance before Pilate (Mt. 27:2, 11-14; see Mk. 15:1-5; Lk. 23:1-5; Jn. 18:28-38);
- Before Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-12);
- Final appearance before Pilate (Mt. 27:15-26; Mk. 15:6-15; Lk. 23;13-25; Jn. 18:39-40).

a. Ecclesiastical trial before the Sanhedrin (26:57-68, 27:1-2; see Mk. 14:53-65; Jn. 18:12-13, 19-24)—John records that Jesus was first brought to Annas (Jn. 18:12-14), the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. Annas served as high priest from 6-15 before being deposed by the Romans. Several of his sons succeeded him as high priest as well as his son-in-law Caiaphas, who served from 18-36. Although others served as high priest, Annas may have been the power behind the throne.

26:57-58— Here, the Sanhedrin holds a secret night meeting without advance notice and in the high priest's home, rather than the normal meeting place, the Chamber of Hewn Stone. Well-to-do Jewish homes were often built in a square shape with an open, central courtyard. Annas may have had rooms on one wing of his son-in-law's home and interviewed Jesus there, while portions of the Sanhedrin were assembling in the other wing. It was a capital trial that was required to be performed during the day, and only after a day had intervened was the court permitted to render a verdict. This meeting , trial, and de facto decision were illegal on all these grounds. The priestly aristocracy paid little attention to these concerns of justice. They had to hurry and keep this secret or the crowds at Passover might demand the Lord's release or worse yet, make him a hero.

The charges against Jesus when brought before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin were twofold: threatening to destroy the Temple and blasphemy. The hasty night trial was deemed necessary because the Romans held their legal trials shortly after sunrise, so the Sanhedrin needed a binding verdict by daybreak. They wanted to get rid of this petulant preacher as soon as possible. What follows is a parade of false witnesses that failed to deliver tangible evidence of offense (26:59-61). Finally, the high priest began illegal personal interrogation and in the face of the Lord's silence to this, asked the Lord directly whether he was the Messiah (26:62-63). When the Lord affirmed that he was (26:64), the Sanhedrin condemned him and let loose with their pent-up hostility against the Lord, spitting on him, hitting him, and mocking him (26:65-67).

Pause and ponder—Attention to ritual detail was emphatically required when it related to what to do with blood money, or outrage when healing on the Sabbath, or breach of dietary etiquette, or with

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whom you could share a meal. But concerning a minor thing like justice? Come on! Get real! Their positions and status were at risk. The incredible pettiness of these people is positively nauseous! Matthew captures it so succinctly.

Peter is excoriated for his denials and his cowardice. But let us give the guy some slack. Trespassing on the high priest's private property, especially that of people as ornery and dangerous as Annas and Caiaphas, required courage from a Galilean fisherman.

26:59-64—The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy members, the leading priests, teachers of the Law, and elders of Israel. One-third of the group's total membership constituted a quorum. Two witnesses were brought (two were required in capital cases), who twisted what Jesus had said while cleansing the temple—"destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". The High Priest, frustrated by the inconsistencies in the witnesses' testimony and by Jesus' silence, puts Jesus on solemn to answer whether he was the Messiah. In his affirmative answer, the Lord quotes two passages—Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13.

The high priest Caiaphas and the Lord Jesus lived in different worlds. Caiaphas was a religious practitioner of realpolitik. Political power, keeping the Romans happy, keeping the mobs at bay and the troublemakers away, and negotiating with the inflated egos on the Sanhedrin was the stuff of his world. Maintaining his power and place in the Temple hierarchy, not justice, was his concern. Jesus was doing a new thing, a new thing that would upstage the Temple and its religious hierarchy.

26:59-60—Once the witnesses had contradicted one another, they should have been declared false witnesses and the case against the Lord Jesus regarded as fabricated. Even more so, false witnesses in a capital case, were required by Jewish law to be put to death (see Deut. 19:16-20). A stern measure to be sure, but one meant to severely punish conniving deceit that seriously undermined the due process of law. Granted, the Sanhedrin did not have the power to put anyone to death in this era, but the law they all professed to honor was completely ignored. They did not even discipline these guys. It is difficult to read this account and not have your contempt well up!

26:62—This is the crescendo of deceit! The high priest is completely out of line. As the chief judiciary officer attending to this trial, he had no business interrogating the defendant. Furthermore, he could not legally force the Lord Jesus to convict himself out of his own mouth. Once again, the priestly aristocracy conveniently ignores the rules when applicable to themselves. They needed to convict the Lord Jesus and do it quickly. Whatever it took!

26:65-66—The high priest rent his garments in indignation, and the assembled group rendered the verdict for blasphemy, namely death, seemingly by acclamation.

26:67-68— The post-verdict scene is a sad one. The Sanhedrin demonstrates that it has devolved into something considerably less than a wise council of the elders of the land. They should have been above reproach in their judicial demeanor and behavior but instead behave like cruel, oafish, small-souled political goons. They spit on the Lord, slap him, and strike him with their fists, sneeringly demanding that he prophecy for them. Their behavior here mimics the cruelty of the Roman execution squad (see Mk. 15:16-20).

27:1-2—Concluding ecclesiastical trial—Since Jewish law required trials to be conducted during the day, the Sanhedrin realized that an official trial was necessary to affirm the verdict arrived at a de facto trial conducted at an illegal time with procedures that violated ecclesiastical custom and arrived at without adequate evidence or any evidence at all. What a shabby demonstration of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

b. Peter's denials (26:69-75; see Mk. 14:66-72; Lk. 22:54-62)—When Jesus was taken first to

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the high priest's residence, Peter followed at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest (26:58). His denials were threefold: first, in response to a servant girl in the courtyard; second, to a servant girl in the gateway; and third, to a group identifying Peter as a Galilean and an associate of the Lord Jesus by his accent. Peter's denials on this third occasion were with oaths and curses. A rooster crowed upon the third denial. Luke tells us that at that time, the Lord looked at Peter (Lk. 22:61) the moment when Peter's cursing and swearing still hung in the air. That piercing gaze must have been heartbreaking. Peter remembered the Lord's prediction and broke down and wept bitterly. The story of Peter's denials presents a sober and utterly realistic picture of the apostle and offers a deep spiritual lesson about humility and spiritual conflict. After his Resurrection, Jesus met privately with Peter and restored their broken fellowship (Mk. 16:7; 1 Cor. 15:5) and then met publicly with Peter and other disciples and restored Peter's place within the fellowship of faith (Jn. 21:15-19).

Pause and ponder— It speaks volumes both for the accuracy of the gospels and the humility of the leaders in the early church that this story about Peter appears in all four gospels in its stark and graphic detail. The account of his failure says something profound about Peter, the person that emerged from the fires of sorrow. Peter was the source of this account of his abject failure. He used his own shame as a magnet to draw others to Christ. The story of his shame became a tale of glory.

26:74—Peter was not being vulgar here but placing himself under the curse of God if he was lying, which he most certainly was. He was placing himself under a courtroom-type oath to confirm the veracity of his denial and perjuring himself in the process.

26:75—Only one rooster crowing is mentioned in the accounts (Mt. 26:74; Lk. 22:60; Jn. 18:27) other than Mark. Mark's main source is Peter, and his account is simply more specific than the other gospels, reflecting Peter's vivid memory of this incident. Some commentators suggest that this was a reference to the earlier crowing of the Palestine rooster between 12:30 am and 2:30 am.

Pause and ponder—It is easy to get high and mighty and judge Peter. But seriously, how many times have we denied the Lord in less dramatic ways? How many opportunities have we lost in not stepping up or speaking up? Are we not a lot like Peter, talking when we should listen, arguing when we should obey, sleeping when we should pray, and fighting when we should submit. Peter wept bitterly over his sins. After his resurrection, Jesus will meet privately with Peter (see Lk. 24:34) and then publicly restore Peter to the apostolic number (Jn. 21:15-19). That restoration was an intense moment. The Lord's questioning enabled Peter to realize that he did love the Lord Jesus more than anything, and that it went to the core of his being to have failed the Lord so miserably in the Lord's hour of need. Peter's mission was clear (feed my lambs, tend my sheep) and that was tied inextricably to his heart's orientation. He would love his Lord right to the end of his days, and that meant serving his church. Tradition has it that Peter met a martyr's death by crucifixion. He requested that he be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died.

c. Judas' remorse and suicide (27:3-10)—When Judas realized the outcome of the Sanhedrin's deliberations, he was filled with remorse and went back to the religious officials (27:3-4). They were unconcerned that they had convicted an innocent man and that the man they paid to betray Jesus and be their star witness was telling them that he had betrayed innocent blood. The money he received was apparently a grim reminder of his guilt, so he threw the money into the Temple into the *naos*, the Holy Place itself. The strange thing about sin is that people can come to hate the very thing they gained by the sin.

Alone, broken and brooding over his terrible crime, Judas hung himself (27:4-5). Acts 1:18-19 supplements our understanding of Judas' terrible death. Apparently, his body was not immediately discovered. It became bloated and falling headlong off the tree, it burst upon impact and his bowels gushed out on the ground. What an awful picture of a terrible end.

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Once again you see the pettiness of these religious leaders (27:6-10). They are concerned with what to do with blood money, evidence of a conniving and cowardly betrayal, an illegal ecclesiastical trial that garnered a verdict without proper evidence, leading to the gruesome execution of their Messiah. What kind of lies do you tell yourself and others to make this look good? Buying a field to bury foreigners was a grand benevolent act to disguise the fact that the Jewish hierarchy and their cronies were playing the blackguard.

Matthew sees this as fulfilling a prophecy by Jeremiah (27:9). However, the language Matthew quoted was primarily from Zechariah 11:12-13, although there are similarities between the quote and Jeremiah's thoughts in Jeremiah 19:1, 4, 6, 11. Perhaps Matthew had both prophets in mind but only cited the "major" prophet by name. The same kind of situation is found in Mark 1:2-3, where Mark names the prophet Isaiah but quotes both Isaiah and Malachi.

Pause and ponder—The priests remained aloof in this, without remorse for their part of this shameful incident. Little did they know that this was the beginning of the end of the Temple regimen that they sought to defend by any means available. Jesus was doing a new thing, a new kingdom work, and the old was passing away. Within a generation, the Temple would be in ruins, the sacrificial cultic suspended, and many of the priests murdered by their revolutionary countrymen. The official custodians of the Temple complex were so busy looking after their own interests that they failed to see how the Temple cultus was failing.

d. Judicial trial before Pilate (27:11-26; see Mk. 15:1-15; Lk. 23:1-25; Jn. 18:28-19:16)—Taking the gospels in stereo, the probable order of the judicial trials was as follows:

- First appearance before Pilate (Mt. 27:2, 11-14; see Mk. 15:1-5; Lk. 23:1-5; Jn. 18:28-38);
- Proceeding before Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-12);
- Final appearance before Pilate (Mt. 27:15-26; see Mk. 15:6-15; Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:39-19:16).

The passage unfolds with Pilate's initial query as to whether the Lord Jesus was the king of the Jews, to which the Lord replied in the affirmative (27:11). The chief priests and elders then jump in with other charges before which Jesus remains silent. The Lord's silence left Pilate amazed (27:12-14). The Lord did not need to reply to the trumped-up charges of the religious authorities. They were not offenses cognizable before a Roman court. Pilate recognizes that the Lord Jesus was no threat to Roman rule and that the Jewish authorities handed him over because of envy. In addition, Pilate's wife had sent him a note asserting Jesus' innocence and urging him to stay clear of this situation.

It was custom for the Roman authority to release a prisoner at Passover and Pilate suggests that Jesus be that prisoner. The chief priests stir up the crowd to seek the release of Barabbas, a known murderer and insurrectionist, and have the Lord Jesus put to death (27:15-23). Pilate finally gives to the Jewish demands to crucify the Lord Jesus, washing his hands of responsibility for this outrage of justice (27:24-25). The response of the people to Pilate's disclaimer of responsibility is chilling: "Let his blood be on us and our children."

The real saga of this trial is the difficulty the Jewish authorities had in trying to convict an innocent man. The authorities did not want justice; they wanted the sanction of law in disposing of an inconvenient troublemaker. The condemnation of Jesus is done in a way that everyone can rationalize. The priests do it for the good of the nation (in their eyes), Pilate to avoid a ruckus on Passover, the crowd wanted someone who was really going to fight Rome (Barabbas) rather than some spiritual Messiah (Jesus). There are really two struggles going on here. One is a struggle between Jesus and his accusers—the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the people. But the deeper struggle is between principalities and powers. All the primordial forces are here as God and Satan act out this drama on a puny stage in a distant corner of a self-absorbed empire on earth. God takes all of Satan's ploys and weaves them into a

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gloriously redemptive act. He uses evil to accomplish his purposes.

27:15-18—Pilate had offended the Jews at the initiation of his procuratorship and was in a tight corner. He needed to avoid trouble with the Jews at all costs. He allowed Roman troops to kill innocent and unarmed civilians, and he used Temple funds for his own purposes (building an aqueduct). This trial probably occurred before the autumn of 31, when Pilate's main advocate in the imperial court at Rome, a man by the name of Sejanus, was executed for treason by the Emperor Tiberias. After that, Pilate was in serious trouble. He ruled in Palestine for ten years (26-36), was recalled in disgrace, and committed suicide after the recall.

4. Crucifixion and death of Jesus (27:27-56)—Matthew structures his narrative around Jesus' identity as Israel's rightful King to press home to us the enormity of the crime. His account relates the scourging and abusive treatment of Jesus by the Roman soldiers (27:27-31), the crucifixion of the Lord and the insulting mockery of the Jewish leaders and crowd (27:32-44), the setting and account of the Lord's death (27:45-50), and the immediate aftermath of his death (27:51-56). Psalm 22 runs throughout the Crucifixion narrative: His cry of abandonment (27:46; Ps. 22:1-2), the mocking (27:27-31, 38-44; Ps. 22:7-8), casting lots for his garments (27:35; Ps. 22:18), and his soaring triumph (27:51ff, 28:1ff; Ps. 22:25ff.).

a. Scourging and mocking by Roman soldiers (27:27-31; see Mk. 15:16-20; Jn. 19:1-3)—The scourging of Jesus took place in the Praetorium, which usually designated the governor's residence in Jerusalem. However, there is disagreement whether the scourging and mocking of the Lord Jesus occurred at Pilate's residence in the Castle of Antonia or Herod's residence in the Upper City. In this scene, we see humanity at its worst. The soldiers stripped the Lord, put a scarlet robe around him and a crown of cruel thorns crushed into his head, in mockery of his claim to be a king. The Lord would have been tied to a post and beaten with the *flagellum,* a leather whip with metal pieces knotted into its thongs. The scourging bloodied the victim's back, leaving strips of flesh hanging from bloody wounds. They struck his head repeatedly, driving the thorns into his skull, doubtless with copious bleeding. They spit on him, struck him, and bowed before him in spiteful mockery. It is difficult to imagine a greater demonstration of cruel insensitivity. When finally done, they led him out to be crucified.

Undoubtedly the soldiers were tired of policing such a tumultuous place, far away from their homes, having to keep the lid on a volatile and dangerous situation with unscrumptious rebels ready to ambush and murder them. So here is one claiming to the king of the motley crew. They show him what they think of his royal claim and of his kingdom. The Lord is terribly beaten, mocked, demeaned, and treated reprehensibly.

b. Crucifixion and death (27:32-56; see Mk. 15:22-41; Lk. 23:33-49; Jn. 19:17-24)—This passage encompasses compelling Simon of Cyrene to carry the Lord Jesus' cross (27:32), the grisly scene of the actual crucifixion (26:33-36), the insults and mockery from the robbers he was crucified with, from those passing by, and from the chief priests and teachers of the law (27:38-44), the death scene itself (27:45-50), the rending of the Temple curtain (27:51), the earthquake and emptying of the deceased from tombs (27:52-53), the observation of a Roman centurion (27:54), and the presence of the Lord's faithful women followers (27:55-56).

27:32-44—Crucifixion was a gruesome way to die. The victim carried his own cross to the place of execution where nails were driven through his wrists and feet to fasten him to a wooden cross. The victim was stripped of his clothing, exposed naked to mocking people, and was subject to the heat of the day and the chill of the night. The tension on the victim's arms caused by the weight of the body prevented normal breathing and caused the lungs to fill with fluid. Thirst, exposure, loss of blood, and impaired breathing due to slow affixation contributed to a lingering, painful death.

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Among the Jews, the horror of the cross was greater still because of Deuteronomy 21:23: "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." A judicially executed criminal was hung up for public exposure that branded him as cursed of God. The Jewish leaders' demand that Jesus be crucified rather than banished was aimed at arousing maximum public revulsion toward the Lord. Winning (for that is what they thought they had done) was not enough for their tidy, sanctimonious small-mindedness. They must utterly crush him and ruin his memory among the people.

Simon of Cyrene, a visitor to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, was pressed into the humiliating duty of carrying the cross of a convicted criminal. This experience seems to have resulted in Simon's salvation and that of his family. Mark refers to Simon as though people reading Mark's gospel would know him and recognize him as the "father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mk. 15:21). Simon came to Jerusalem to sacrifice a Passover lamb and met the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for him.

The execution occurred at Golgotha, which Matthew tells us means the Place of the Skull (27:33). It was a hill outside the city walls that resembled a skull, either the present site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or at Gordon's Calvary. It was customary for victims to be given a mixture of wine and myrrh to deaden the pain, but the Lord Jesus refused this (27:34). Myrrh allegedly had narcotic effects. The Lord chose to drink to the dregs the cup the Father appointed to him. The soldiers gambling for the Lord's clothes (17:35) unwittingly fulfill prophecy of Psalm 22:18: "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." That comment about fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22 may not have been in Matthew's original account but added in later Greek manuscripts. This portion concludes with the charge against him (27:37) and that he was crucified between two robbers (27:38). The word translated "robbers" is the same one that Josephus used for insurrectionists or revolutionaries. The two men crucified at on either side of the Lord Jesus may have been colleagues of Barabbas and originally meant to be crucified along with that insurrectionist.

The scene was one of continued mockery and taunting. The passersby (27:39-40), the chief priests and scribes (27:41-43), and the bandits crucified with him (27:44) joined in this sorry chorus. The public execution offered opportunity for shaming and maligning the Lord. Their taunts call to mind the derision in Psalms 22:7 and 109:25. However, the irony of this scene revealed more than the mockers knew. Jesus was indeed King of the Jews (26:37), Savior of humanity (26:42), King of Israel (26:42), and the Son of God (26:43).

27:45-50—Death of Jesus (see Mk. 15:33-41; Lk. 23:44-49)—Matthew records that darkness came over the land from noon until 3:00 pm. The cosmic darkness suggests the depths of the judgment that was taking place. The sins of the world were being atoned for. Matthew records only one of seven phrases uttered by Christ from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Some thought he was calling on Elijah (27:47-49). Jewish tradition held that Elijah was sent like an angel to rescue famous teachers. With a final cry, the Lord Jesus gave up his spirit (27:50).

Pause and ponder—Many Christian congregations hold Tenebrae services on Good Friday where believers gather to reflect on the events of Jesus' death. These reflective services focus on the Lord's seven last words of phrases made from the cross. These include:

- "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34);
- "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk.23:34);
- "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk.23:43);
- "Dear woman, here is your son" … "Here is your mother." (Jn. 19:26-27);
- "I am thirsty." (Jn. 19:28);
- "It is finished." (Jn. 19:30);
- "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Lk. 23:46).

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27:51-56—In these verses, Matthew relates the immediate impact of the Lord's death. Three noteworthy events occurred (27:51-53), a significant comment from one of the execution team (27:54), and the faithful presence of women following the Lord Jesus was noted (27:55-56).

The three events recorded included the curtain of the Temple torn in two from top to bottom, the occurrence of a strong earthquake splitting rocks, and the opening tombs of righteous people who had died raised to life and appearing to people after the Lord's resurrection. The curtain referred to in 27:51 was the one that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Temple. Matthew does not develop its theological significance. However, Hebrews 10:19-22 explains that the veil and the prescribed cultic rituals which had separated the people from the awesome, holy presence of God, were no longer barriers. Believers in Jesus now had perfect access to God's presence.

The centurion in command of the soldiers at the cross was deeply impressed with the manner of the Lord's death (27:54), a telling difference from the earlier distain and mockery. From his pagan background he probably viewed the Lord Jesus as an extraordinary man, the way a Roman emperor was acclaimed "son of God." Perhaps Matthew quotes him as speaking more truthfully than he knew in a way similar to John quoting Caiaphas in John 11:49-50.

The faithful women were Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and Salome, the mother of James and John. These were the same people who discovered the empty tomb a couple of days later. They were the last at the Cross on Friday and the first at the tomb on Sunday.

27:52-53—These verses are problematical. The best explanation would seem to be that the earthquake opened the tombs of saints long sealed. However, their resurrections coincided with Jesus' own. These types of occurrences supposedly happened after the deaths of pious rabbis or even prominent philosophers of the day. The events narrated here would have communicated the importance and significance of the Lord Jesus' death to ancient observers and readers.

5. Jesus' burial (27:57-66)—This text confirms the death of the Lord Jesus, identifies the place of burial, highlights a big step of faith by Joseph of Arimathea (27:57-61), and describes how the tomb was secured (27:62-66).

a. Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus (27:57-61; see Mk. 15:42-47; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42)—Under Roman law, the release of a crucified person's corpse was only by an imperial magistrate. The Romans typically left the bodies of crucified criminals on the crossbar and then cast them into a common grave. Joseph of Arimathea, a dissenting member of the Council, takes quite a chance in requesting the body of Jesus. It was dangerous to be associated with a person executed for treason. In addition, as a member of the Sanhedrin, this act was tantamount to an open confession of personal loyalty to one convicted of blasphemy by that very council. He also incurred ceremonial defilement in handling a dead body at Passover. One should not belittle Joseph's courage and social standing in making this request and getting permission to properly bury the Lord Jesus.

Matthew's account of the burial makes it sound like Joseph buried the Lord by himself. However, John informs us that Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus (Jn. 19:39-40), also a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus had come to Jesus privately (Jn. 3:1-21) and had defended the Lord before the council (Jn. 7:45-53). These men did not suddenly decide to bury the Lord on a sentimental whim. A burial required much preparation and this one had to be done quickly. Because of Deuteronomy 21:22-23, Jesus' body could not remain on the cross overnight. Preparing the tomb, getting permission to take the body, and preparing the body for burial such as they could before Passover began, required a sound plan efficiently executed to be accomplished in the fleeting time the two men had to bury the Lord. All this had to be done without the Sanhedrin's knowledge and at a time when the shops were closed for Passover. Had these men not acted boldly, the body of the Lord Jesus might have been disposed as

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rubbish. Matthew notes that Mary Magdelen and another Mary listed in 27:56 accompanied Jesus' body right up to the time of the burial. These two women were the first to go to the tomb after the Sabbath (28:1).

The account of the Lord Jesus' burial lays to rest many of the explanations of the empty tomb. Theories abounded—

- He was not dead and revived in the tomb, rolled the rock, and disappeared and was never discovered;
- The disciples or someone else stole the body;
- The women went to the wrong tomb that first Easter morning.

Matthew makes several points in counteracting these sneering theories:

- The tomb was new, readily recognizable by its owner, Joseph of Arimathea, and others.
- It was sealed with a large stone, requiring more than one strong, healthy person to move it.
- Pilate's consent to Joseph's request required that he have confidence that the victim was indeed dead;
- The disciples are hiding, undone in their grief and in their abandonment of their Lord. They were hardily ready to overwhelm a Roman guard and steal the body.
- Matthew is careful to note that the women who came to the tomb that first Easter morning were there on Friday evening and saw exactly where it was.

27:60— Moderns are unfamiliar with Jewish burial customs in the first century. Many people in Palestine were buried in caves. The bodies were not placed in coffins, or burnt to ashes, but wrapped in cloths long with perfumes and spices. The body would then be placed in the cave. About a year later, when the flesh had decomposed, friends or relatives would collect the bones and neatly place them in a bone box, known as an ossuary. These bone boxes would then be placed in openings in the sides of the cave. Many caves had more than one bone box in it. Thus, Matthew takes pains to note that Joseph of Arimathea buried the Lord Jesus in his own new and unused tomb. The tomb was located near the site of the crucifixion. There is archaeological evidence that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the traditional site for Jesus' burial, was indeed a cemetery during the first century of our common era.

b. Guard assigned to the tomb (27:62-66)—It is surprising that the unbelieving religious leaders would remember Jesus' prediction that he would rise again on the third day, while the believing disciples whiffed on that hope. The religious leaders went to Pilate and requested a guard to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and telling the people that the Lord had been raised from the dead. Pilate complied with their request and ordered that a guard be posted. Only Matthew records this detail and does so to heighten the impact of Jesus' resurrection in the next section. The request for a guard certainly did not mean that the enemies of Jesus believed Jesus' prediction of rising from the dead. They were afraid of fraud and were guarding against it. Interesting how God uses the fears of those who murdered his Son to provide evidence for the Resurrection.

27:65-66—Was the guard at the tomb a Roman guard or one consisting of the temple police? If 26:65 reads "You have a guard of soldiers" then it could be read as Pilate's refusal to use his own troops and tells the Jewish authorities to use the police force that they had at their disposal. Perhaps this explains why, after the Resurrection, the guards report to the Jewish chief priests and not to Pilate (28:11). At any rate, the guards were posted and the stone sealed with an official wax seal.

6. Jesus' Resurrection (28:1-15)—Because the Resurrection is central to Christian theology, each of the evangelists relate the event in detail, but do not elaborate on its theological implications. Matthew relates the reality of the empty tomb (28:1-7), the first encounters with the risen Christ (28:8-10), and the first of many denials of the Resurrection and attempts to explain it away (28:11-15).

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Even though Matthew records Jesus' predicting his own death on four separate occasions, the Lord's bodily resurrection came to the disciples as a bombshell, completely unexpected. His predictions and preparatory teaching just did not seem to make their radar screens until after the fact. When it did, its truth was transformational.

a. Resurrection (28:1-10; see Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1ff)—The four gospel accounts of the Resurrection contain differences in the recorded details. None of the writers reported all the data. They were free to summarize, particularize, and emphasize various aspects of the same event. The differences reflect the natural effect of this unique event on different eyewitnesses.

After the Sabbath, the women went to the tomb to complete the burial. They had witnessed Jesus' death and burial (27:55-56, 61) and brought spices and aromatic oils to complete the anointing Jesus' body. They were unaware of the official sealing of the tomb or of the posting of a guard (27:62-66). Their chief concern approaching the tomb was how to roll away the large stone at its entrance (Mk. 16:1-3). There was a violent earthquake, an angel of the Lord rolled back the stone and was sitting on it as if waiting for them. The guards of the tomb were terrified (28:2-4).

The angel informed the women that the Lord Jesus had risen and to go and tell his disciples that he was going ahead of them to Galilee and they were to meet him there (28:5-7). The angel's words allay their fears of foul play. As women left the tomb, the Lord Jesus himself met them. The truth of Jesus' Resurrection relayed to the women would be corroborated by numerous personal appearances of the Lord to his followers in the days that followed. With mingled joy and fear, the women rush to tell the news to the disciples (28:8-9). Jesus' command for his disciples to go to Galilee prepares the scene for the great Commission (28:10).

That the women are chosen as the first witnesses of the Resurrection is highly significant. It fits the Lord Jesus' counter-cultural and counter-status ministry and certainly runs counter to what outsiders then would have valued and anything the later church would have chosen to fabricate.

People who try to spiritualize this account are doing violence to the text. Of course, we can and do meet Jesus in spirit but to say that this account and the others of the gospel writers is that sort of experience is mealy-mouthed nonsense. Matthew and the other gospel writers are reporting what happened.

So, what is the significance of the Resurrection?

- It is proof of Christ's divinity. He had authority to lay down his life and authority to take it up again (Jn. 10:17-18).
- It assures us of our own resurrections (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- It is proof that there will be a future judgement (Acts 17:31).
- It is the basis for Christ's heavenly priesthood (Heb. 7:23-28).
- It is the source of power for Christian living (Rom. 6:4).
- It assures us of our future inheritance (1 Pt. 1:3-5).

b. Deception circulated (28:11-15)—The guards overcame their fear and reported the resurrection to the religious authorities. The chief priests and elders devised a lie to cover for the situation. The guards were to report that the disciples came and stole the body while the guards slept. How did they know the body was stolen and who stole it while they were sleeping? Why would they admit to sleeping while on guard? Wasn't that a capital offense? And the disciples, who had run away and hid themselves at the time of the Lord's arrest, where did they suddenly find the courage and the wherewithal to pull off such a heist? But hey—none of the Sanhedrin chums and toadies would dare ask the obvious questions. Even if the questions were asked, they would be stonewalled and stared

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down. As to the Roman authorities, the ecclesiastical honchos would grease the palms of the right people and take care of things. Pilate himself was known to be susceptible to that form of persuasion.

This story was widely circulated and lie was piously swallowed. The truth is often harder to believe than a lie even for religious types, especially such reverently "correct" ones. Matthew inserts this paragraph to rebut certain false information concerning Jesus' resurrection and to give the reader a parting look at the nature of unbelief. Once again the concern of the Jewish leaders is not for truth, but for political expedience and calculation of public reaction.

This was the first of many false naturalistic theories explaining away the Lord's Resurrection. A sampling of these theories is offered below:

- Unknown tomb—Jesus' body was buried in a common pit grave. The Resurrection is a tale born of the ignorance of the whereabouts of the body. But—
    - Not all criminals were buried in common pits.
    - Joseph of Arimathea witnessed the burial in a family tomb.
    - The women saw the body prepared and knew the tomb's location.
    - The Romans knew where it was and had posted a guard.
- Wrong tomb—The women went to the wrong tomb. They found an open tomb where a young man denied that Jesus' body was buried there. They mistakenly took the dude for an angel and fled. But—
    - The women would have been seeking a sealed tomb not an open one.
    - The man told them more than "He is not here" but also "He is risen".
    - The women had noted the tomb's location just three days earlier.
    - The Jews and Romans knew where the tomb was and could have quashed the boo-haha by simply pointing it out.
- Legend (early form critics)—The Resurrection was a fabrication that gained traction, evolving into a legend over time. But—
    - The resurrection stories date exceedingly early in the mid-1st century,
    - Paul states the resurrection as a fact and that there were 500 witnesses, many still alive.
- Spiritual resurrection (Gnostics)—Jesus' spirit was resurrected, but his body was dead. But—
    - Jewish understanding of resurrection was a bodily one, not spiritually.
    - Christ ate and was touched and handled.
    - The Jews could easily disprove by simply pointing out the occupied tomb.
- Hallucination—The disciples were so sold on messianic expectations that they projected sightings of the risen Lord. But—
    - Over 500 different people, in different situations, with differing degrees of commitment to Jesus, with different understandings of his teaching and claims, all hallucinated in the same way at the same time?
    - Many appearances occurred to more than one person, who all hallucinated simultaneously in a similar fashion?
    - The disciples were not anticipating the resurrection. They were trying to come to terms with Jesus' death.
    - Why did not the Jews or Romans merely point to the occupied tomb in rebuttal?

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- Passover plot—Jesus planned to fulfill Old Testament prophecies of both the suffering servant and the coming king through a mock death and resurrection, Joseph of Arimathea and a mysterious "young man" were his co-conspirators. The plot went south when the soldier speared Jesus and killed him. The risen Lord was the co-conspiring "young man". But—
    - The plot ignored the soldiers who were involved in crucifying the Lord.
    - The guard at the tomb is also ignored in this theory.
    - How does such a plotted "resurrection" account for the dramatic change in the demeanor and attitudes of the disciples?
    - How about the witnesses at the tomb and over 500 people who saw the resurrected Jesus?
    - The whole idea of a plot to endure crucifixion to deceive your own followers is both ridiculous and extraordinarily demeaning.
- Resuscitation (swoon theory)—Jesus did not die on the cross, he fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. He revived in the tomb and somehow got out of there. But—
    - The accounts of the death scene are noticeably clear that Jesus died.
    - How did a nearly dead Jesus revive and recover in a tomb and then move the boulder sealing the tomb, and escape without being noticed by the guard?
    - How did this nearly dead Jesus get around for forty days and make numerous appearances that so effectively deceived and energized his followers?
- Body stolen by the disciples—The disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping and then spread the false tale of the Resurrection. But—
    - If the guards were sleeping, how did they know the disciples stole the body?
    - The guards would not have confessed to sleeping, the penalty for that negligence was death.
    - The disciples overwhelmed armed and trained guards?
    - Would the disciples die for a lie that they had created?
- Existential resurrection (Bultmann)—An historical resurrection will and can never be proven, but that is irrelevant. The Christ of faith need not be bound to the historical Jesus. Christ is raised in the hearts and minds of his followers. But—
    - The early disciples were convinced by historical events not theological psychology.
    - They were initially disbelieving and downcast, not hell-bent to make something up.

For post-Resurrection appearances of Christ, see Gospels Introduction.

7. Great Commission of the King (28:16-20)—Matthew does not record the meeting of Jesus with the ten disciples (the Twelve minus Judas and Thomas) later that same day (Jn. 20:19-23) or his appearance to the eleven eight days later (Jn. 20:24-29). He records the appearance to the eleven on an unknown Galilean mountain somewhat later (28:16-17).

The Father had given Jesus all authority (*exousia* = official right and power) and he charged the disciples with the task of taking the message to all the world and making disciples of all nations or ethnicities, going, baptizing, and teaching. As the disciples are commissioned to continue Christ's ministry, with full knowledge that they will share his destiny, they are assured of his continuing presence. Christianity is a missionary faith. Note that the scope of the commission is universal and not in any way restricted to the house of Israel as seen earlier in the gospel.

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28:17—The verse related that "some doubted" without further elaboration. The move from unbelief and fear to faith and joy was a hesitant one, both by the Lord's inner group disciples and among his larger following. Jesus' Resurrection did not instantly transform people of little faith and faltering spiritual understanding into giants of the faith. Another thing was necessary—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

28:18-20—These verses are commonly referred to as the Great Commission. The Lord assured them of his power, gave them a commission, and promised them a presence. The dawning of this new age of messianic authority impels the disciples to a universal ministry beyond the scope of the earthly ministry of Christ and assures his followers that they can go in confidence that their Lord is in sovereign control and present with them to the end of the age.

The commission is to make disciples. The rest of the verbals in these verses are participles—going, teaching, baptizing—characterizing the disciples' empowered activity. The scope of the commission is universal. The blessings promised to Abraham and through him to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:3) are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

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