

The Gospel of Matthew

Who is this Jesus?

New Testament Survey – Lesson 5

In the prior lesson on Mark, we discussed the gospels as portraits of Jesus, rather than photographs. We emphasized that portraits are painted to convey more than a simple reproduction of how things are. Portraits seek to convey nuance and character. Rembrandt repeatedly painted self-portraits, not simply to see how he was changing over the years, but to try and capture different aspects and phases of who he truly was. In this sense, the gospels present differing aspects of Jesus, his ministry, and work. Like Rembrandt's self-portraits, each is the same historical Jesus, but the authors wrote the events to convey their particular message about our portrait of Jesus. With this approach, last week we considered Mark's gospel; this week we consider Matthew's. Our overarching question: what picture does Matthew paint of Jesus?

As this lesson was being prepared, I had an occasion to walk in on a group of ten preachers and their wives. These godly people had gathered in our library facility to strategically plan their work in mentoring pastors and churches in need of special wisdom and guidance. Before the group finished their meeting, they gathered around one family in prayer of special needs. As the prayer came to a close, the group broke out in full voice, singing a capella Helen Lemmel's 1922 chorus,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His Glory and Grace.

This chorus echoes the first level of analysis on any of the four gospels. Before we sort into problems with this passage, or difficulties with that, we should first simply turn our eyes to the entire gospel, seeing the portrait of Jesus and looking *fully* upon the portrayal as we let it wash over our souls in the Glory and Grace of the Lord.

MATTHEW: BACKGROUND

Mark joins Matthew and Luke as the three books scholars label "the synoptic gospels." They get this label because of the similarities in the stories they tell as well as the language they use. These three gospels are distinguishable from the Gospel of John in that they "see things together," which is the root meaning of "synoptic." The accounts in these gospels merit focused study, as do issues of

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overlap, similarity, and distinction. The starting point, however, is an overview that provides context for any further study. Matthew is a book of patterns and flowing themes. It is not limited for a narrow audience, even though it was written from a Jewish perspective for readers conversant with Judaism. It is also written with a broad vision. As John Nyland emphasized, Matthew “recognizes the comprehensive significance of Jesus for the world.”¹

Matthew tells a story, and the storyline is worthy of its own lesson. Other matters get scrutiny later (and some along the way in footnotes), but first, we digest Matthew’s sweeping viewpoint as he unfolds the answer to the question: Who is this Jesus?

MATTHEW: CONTENT WHO IS THIS JESUS?

Matthew’s gospel sets out the many facets of Jesus, in name, title, role, responsibility, purpose/mission, and as the focus point of reactions by others. We see this beginning in the very first chapter all the way through to the end. Let’s consider the book in Matthew’s order, pausing to note the content in reference to its answering the critical question: Who is this Jesus?

Chapter 1 – Jesus as Messiah/Christ, Son of Promise, of David, and of Abraham, conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Savior, God with Man

Matthew sets out his answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” front and center at the beginning of his gospel. It starts with Jesus’ genealogy, and in the process, begins with different titles for Jesus.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt. 1:1).

In this first verse, we have Jesus set out as “Messiah” (the Hebrew for the Greek “Christ” or “Anointed”), as son of David, and as son of Abraham. David and Abraham are both key Old Testament persons to and through whom God promised birth of the Messiah (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:1-18; Gal. 3:8; 2 Sam. 7:12-17). Matthew then carefully constructs the genealogy working forward from Abraham to Joseph, identifying him as “the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus is born, who is called Christ” (Mt. 1:16).²

¹ Nolland, John, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, (Eerdmans 2005), at xvii.

² Uniquely, Matthew sets his genealogy into 3 segments of 14, pointing out the “significance” of the sections at 14 each (1:17). To do that, he has to eliminate 4 known kings between Joram and

Matthew finishes genealogy³ and then proceeds to the events of Mary's pregnancy as he explains that Mary was not pregnant by Joseph. Before Mary had any physical intimacy with Joseph or any other, Mary was pregnant with a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told to name the child "Jesus," which is "Joshua" or "Jehoshua" in Hebrew and means "he will save." This name is proper because, as Isaiah prophesied,

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (Mt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14).⁴

This is Jesus the Savior; he is God, with us!

Chapter 2 – Jesus as King of the Jews, Ruler, Shepherd, A New Moses, Prophetically called a Nazarene

Matthew continues to show us Jesus in the nativity scene. After Jesus was born, the Jews had a king named Herod, but some Magi ("wise men") from the East came looking for Jesus understanding that he was King of the Jews even upon birth!

Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? (Mt. 2:2)

Uzziah (Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, and Amaziah). Why is 14 so important to Matthew and his largely Jewish readers? The Hebrews developed an area of writing known as Gematria, where the letters and their numerical values had symbolic representation. Under this system, 14 is the number for David (Hebrew spelling "D-W-D": D-4, W-6, D-4 = 14! The number 14 seems to stress David as the key to the genealogy!

³ Nolland finds similarities between the Gospel of Matthew and the Old Testament stories of David and Solomon, as each are critical people in the flow of God's history with humanity:

Through them God was achieving something fundamental for his people...and these biographies are embedded in the larger story of the people of Israel and of God's dealings with his people. The story of Jesus is told as a continuation-indeed, as some kind of culmination-of the long story of God and his people (at 19).

Matthew does seem to write in the flow of Old Testament history, and not simply in the genealogies. Matthew quotes the Old Testament as least 60 times (over twice more than any other gospel). Additionally, according to the UBS Greek New Testament, Matthew uses the Old Testament 262 times by allusions or verbal parallels.

⁴ Here is the first of ten Old Testament quotations by Matthew where each one opens with a similar formula: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet..." (See also, Mt. 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). These again tie in Matthew's gospel as a culmination or fulfillment of the story of God and his people. On Matthew's theme of fulfillment, see France, R. T., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*, (Eerdmans 2007), at 10ff.

The stars reacted to the birth of Jesus, and the wise men brought gifts, traveling a great distance to worship him. Herod did not see this as good news, and he understood the import. He called the wise men, chief priests, and scribes, asking where the Messiah was supposed to be born. They knew the answer from the Old Testament prophet Micah, and gave it,

And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel (Mt. 2:6; Mic. 5:2).

Jesus was not only Messiah, but was also ruler and King. He was the answer to the prophet's promise!

The story took different turns for different people. King Herod took the information and laid a trap, lying to the wise men to try and get them to reveal the whereabouts of Jesus. The wise men went to Bethlehem to worship the child king, and the "scholars" who knew where Jesus was born, just went home and ignored the whole thing! Meanwhile, after receiving the gifts and worship of the wise men, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt both to flee the coming terror of Herod, and to fulfill the prophetic comparison of Jesus to Israel, as God called each forth from Egypt to prepare the way to the Promised Land (Mt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1).⁵

When Herod saw his trap foiled, he had the male babies in the region of Bethlehem murdered. Once Herod died, Jesus was brought by his family from Egypt to Nazareth, where he grew up, fulfilling yet another prophetic idea in the Old Testament of the Messiah as a branch in the lineage of David, son of Jesse.⁶

⁵ Scholars are quick to point out the many parallels Matthew points to between Jesus and Moses. Moses, of course, was the prophetic leader called out of Egypt, leading the twelve tribes into the Promised Land. Moses did so after surviving a childhood massacre of male sons by the Pharaoh. Jesus likewise survived the childhood massacre of male sons ordered by King Herod. Moses was in the wilderness and was sent by God back into Egypt to lead the people after "all the men who are seeking your life are dead" (Ex. 4:19). Matthew used almost identical language as the Greek version of the Exodus passage (the "Septuagint") in speaking of Jesus' return to Judea when he wrote, "those who sought the child's life are dead" (Mt. 2:20). Throughout Matthew's gospel, we will see running parallels between Jesus and Moses. For example, Moses went up on Sinai to receive the law; Jesus stood on a mountain to deliver his teaching on the law (the Sermon on the Mount). Moses was accorded the first five books of the Bible as the books of Moses; Matthew grouped Jesus' teachings into five clearly marked discourses. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness; Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness.

⁶ Matthew 2:23, "And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene," is not referencing the "Nazarene vow, which is spelled different. Nor is he referencing a specific prophecy, unless one reckons the fact that the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be despised (*e.g.*, Ps. 22:6), a contemporary perspective of anything coming out of Nazareth (See, Jn. 1:46). More likely,

Chapter 3 – Jesus as the Bringer of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Way of the Lord, the Most Worthy, the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, the fulfiller of all righteousness, and God’s Beloved Son

Matthew fast-forwards to the start of Jesus’ ministry, giving us details of who Jesus is by examining the actions of the prophet John the Baptist. With Jesus about to launch his ministry, John proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2).⁷ God was about to establish his rule among people in a new format and kingdom. John was the harbinger Isaiah promised as one who would cry in the wilderness,

Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight (Mt. 3:3; Isa. 40:3).⁸

John knew the difference between Jesus and the power structure of the Jewish religion. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a “brood of vipers,” but Jesus was one whose sandals John was “not worthy to carry” (Mt. 3:7, 11). John explained that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit!

When Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John, John tried to prevent it, because Jesus was the one who should have been baptizing John! Jesus insisted, “for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). As Jesus came out of the Jordan River, the Spirit of God descended on him and God declared in a voice from heaven,

Matthew’s Jewish readers would recognize the word play of Nazareth off of the Hebrew *nצר* (נצר) translated “shoot” in Isaiah 11:1, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

⁷ Matthew used “kingdom of heaven” in 33 different verses, but used “kingdom of God” in only five. Some cite this as indicative of the Jewish preference to avoid speaking of God, finding alternate expressions. See, e.g., Towns, Elmer and Gutierrez, Ben, *The Essence of the New Testament: A Survey*, (B&H Academic 2012), at 52. Regardless of that suggestion, it is readily apparent that Matthew writes of the popular Jewish desire for an earthly Jewish kingdom. No Davidic king had set on a throne since the Babylonian exile (587 BC). Jesus was readily acclaimed as a legitimate son of David, and he was set to rule. While the people thought his reign would be an earthly kingdom, the truth was always that his kingship was over a heavenly one. The kingdom is a core theme in Matthew. Of the 162 usages of “kingdom” in the New Testament, over one-third (55) are found in Matthew.

⁸ Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3, but we should note that Isaiah, which is in Hebrew, speaks of preparing the way for YHWH. Here, Matthew must either be equating Jesus with YHWH or is noting that Jesus is the path or way of YHWH. This issue also surfaces with the last verse of Matthew (an “I am” verse) that is dealt with in the conclusion to this lesson. Whether Matthew is equating Jesus with YHWH, the title “Lord,” which Matthew frequently ascribes to Jesus, denotes Jesus as one to be obeyed and honored.

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (Mt. 3:17).

Chapter 4 – Jesus as Son of God, Conqueror of the Adversary’s Temptations, Lord of Angels, the Great Light, Preacher and Harbinger of the Kingdom of Heaven, Leader, Teacher, and Healer

After the baptism, Jesus followed the Spirit into the wilderness. After a long period of fasting, Satan came and tempted Jesus repeatedly, twice with the taunt of “*If you are the Son of God...*” Jesus accepted the title of Son of God,⁹ but refused the temptations, each time quoting Scripture in response. He would not prove it by satisfying his own need for food:

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:3-4; Dt. 8:3).

Nor would he show off God’s power (or his):

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Mt. 4:5-7; Ps. 91:11-12; Dt. 6:16).

He certainly wouldn’t worship Satan in return for this world’s riches. He refused each of Satan’s offers, and commanded Satan to leave (which he did). Angels then came and ministered to Jesus.

After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus made Capernaum his base of operations by the Sea of Galilee. In this Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as a “great light” that would dawn on the region of Galilee. Jesus spent his time preaching that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). He called four fishermen, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, to follow him and become fishers of men. The group went throughout all Galilee with Jesus teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel, healing all sorts of diseases and affliction. Great crowds followed him.

Chapters 5 through 7 – Jesus as Teacher, Lord, Fulfillment of Law and Prophets, Revealer of God’s Will, Judge, and Authority

⁹ Repeatedly, Matthew labels Jesus as the Son of God. This title denotes a special relationship and corresponding status.

In these three chapters, Matthew presents Jesus' teachings from what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, the first of five discourses of Jesus that Matthew preserved, Jesus sets out his ethic in practical terms, teaching God's holiness beyond the simple strictures of the Old Testament laws.¹⁰ Jesus taught the blessings that flowed from holy actions and attitudes (the "beatitudes"), he explained the importance of people's actions in reference to those around them, as salt, and light that preserves and illuminates. Jesus' teachings were not to abrogate the Old Testament Law or the Prophets. Jesus never came to abolish those laws; he came to fulfill them.

But part of fulfilling the Law and Prophets was to teach that the simple external following of commands was never sufficient. Not only should one not murder, one should not be insulting or offensively angry toward another. Similarly, not only was one to avoid adultery of the body, but also adultery of the heart. Divorce was more serious than anyone thought, and oaths should never be necessary for someone to be honest. There was a higher road than retaliation, and enemies should be prayed for not preyed upon. Piety should never be for show, whether giving to others or praying to God. Prayer instead should be private, personal, and earnest. Seek God daily in praise and service, looking and asking him to meet your needs and to assist you in treating others with the same measure of love you hope to receive from God.

Jesus explained the principle that our heart follows our investments. So we are to invest in the eternal things of God rather than the temporal material things around us. Rather than having anxiety over what we have or don't have, we should see how God takes care of those that depend upon him. Our goal is to cast cares upon him, seeking his kingdom and his righteousness. God will take care of everything we need.

Jesus taught about the hypocrisy of those who judge others. No one is suitable as a judge of another, for all of us have great sin of our own. So we ask of God, trusting him to supply our needs. We treat others as we would like to be treated. In the process, we are to be wary of those who try to teach otherwise. Their fruits should reveal the truth about them. Many will even claim to be followers of Jesus to Jesus' face. But Jesus will judge them as ones who had no real relationship with him. Instead, we are to listen to Jesus' teachings and trust that he is who he is and means what he says. We are to build upon his teachings. Jesus, as the crowd recognized, was one who had authority, and it was evident by how he taught!

¹⁰ Many scholars structure the gospel around these five discourses. Each discourse ends with the formulaic phrase, "And when Jesus finished these sayings..." See, Mt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1.

Chapter 8 – Jesus as Lord, Worthy, Eternal, Healer, Bearer of Diseases, Homeless, Beyond Normal Humanity, and Frightening

In Chapter 8, Matthew begins to reveal Jesus as a miracle worker. It begins with Jesus healing a leper, who recognizes Jesus as “Lord” who could make him clean, if Jesus simply chose to. Jesus said, “I will; be clean” and the man was (Mt. 8:3). A Roman officer came to Jesus and asked Jesus to heal a servant who was clearly important to him. Jesus offered to come heal the servant, and the centurion replied that as a centurion, he of all people understood authority. Jesus did not need to come to heal, but could simply agree to do so – “only say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Mt. 8:8). Jesus exercised his authority over the disease and spoke healing over the servant. Jesus then proclaimed that the centurion’s faith was a model for Israel, and would be a reason the centurion would recline at the table with Abraham and others in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus also healed Peter’s mother-in-law, fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah that Jesus,

Took our illnesses and bore our diseases (Mt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4).

Jesus attempted to remove himself from the crowd, but a groupie/scribe insisted on following Jesus wherever he went. Jesus used the moment to teach that in this world, Jesus as God’s minister on mission for God had no place to go as a home. He was on mission, and others who wanted to follow should be on mission as well. It was a mission to those alive and in need of the kingdom.

While Jesus was on a boat, a storm arose, inciting fear in his disciples. Jesus was asleep, but awakened when the disciples thought themselves about to die. Jesus calmed the storm and the disciples marveled. Jesus was no ordinary man: “even the winds and the seas obey him” (Mt. 8:27). Once Jesus was ashore on the east side of Galilee, he healed two demon-possessed men, to the terror of the surrounding town, who begged Jesus to leave.

Chapter 9 – Jesus as Forgiver, Physician, Bridegroom, Bringer of Newness, Raiser of the Dead, Teacher, Healer, and Harvester

Jesus returned to Capernaum and was faced with a paralytic who needed healing. Rather than just heal him, Jesus also pronounced his sins forgiven. The scribes thought Jesus blasphemous, for only God could forgive sins. They would have been right, if Jesus were only a man!

From there Matthew tells about Jesus calling the tax collector Matthew to follow. Matthew agrees and has Jesus over for a sinner attended by other “tax collectors and sinners” (Tax collectors were viewed with even greater disfavor in Jesus’ day

and culture than in ours!). When the Pharisees confronted Jesus and his disciples for keeping such company, Jesus explained as a physician, he was always going to be near those who are sick!

Matthew then linked the complaints about Jesus not enforcing ritual fasting on his disciples. Jesus explained that he was a bridegroom, and there is never fasting at a wedding! Jesus was ushering in a new day, and the old ways would not fit well with the newness. It was like the problem sewing an old wineskin to a new one.

Jesus was then told of a local ruler whose daughter was sick. Jesus was on his way to heal the daughter when an interruption delayed him. Jesus stopped to talk with one healed by touching his garment and the daughter he was headed to help died in the interim. Jesus was not deterred. He raised the girl from the dead, showing Jesus as the master over even death. In other miracles, he opened blind eyes, gave voice to the mute, and,

went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction (Mt. 9:35).

Jesus as teacher and healer acted out of compassion. He saw the helpless and harassed, and became their shepherd. He was the Chief Harvester seeking others to join him in his mission for God.

Chapter 10 – Jesus as Dispenser of Authority, Instructor, Director, Prophet, Dispenser of Wisdom, Object of Hatred and Persecution, Son of Man, Link Between Heaven and Earth, Most Important and Righteous

In Matthew 10, we have the second of Jesus' five discourses set out in Matthew. In this one, he calls the twelve apostles to him, sending them out on the first trial run of what will become their lifetime mission, speaking and acting in Jesus' name to further the kingdom of heaven. Jesus begins by giving the apostles the necessary authority to heal and cast out demons. He instructs them to go first among the Israelites before going to the Samaritans and Gentiles. Along the way, they will carry blessings to those who receive them, but not to those who won't. Their lifetime journey will require both wisdom and innocence. They will be persecuted as followers of Jesus, hauled before courts, betrayed, and some even killed (all facts born out by history). Yet they would always be given the words from God necessary for the time and occasion. They can go with the assurance that Jesus will come again as the Son of Man.¹¹ Accordingly, they need not fear

¹¹ Matthew' references to Jesus as the Son of Man link back to Daniel 7. There the Son of Man is predicted carrying the promise he would have an everlasting kingdom comprised of all peoples from all nations and languages.

any man who can destroy their body. Real fear should be preserved for God who can destroy body and soul in hell! God has full knowledge down to the number of sparrows flying or number of hairs on their heads. Jesus is the link with the Father and will protect and acknowledge his people before the Father.

This pointed to Jesus as the most important person in the world. As the link to eternity with God, he was more important than one's family, or one's own life. Everyone should set aside everything and everyone, to make pursuing Jesus and his instructions his or her highest priority. This will not always bring peace, but it right. It is the model for those who are looking to Jesus, the ultimate prophet and righteous one. We are to value those like Jesus, with one addition: we should also value the little people, seeking to serve those in need.

Chapter 11 – Jesus as Teacher, Preacher, Messiah, Target of Prophecy and Prophetic Ministry, Misunderstood and Rejected, Holder of All Authority, Exclusive Knower of God, Gentle, Humble, and Assumer of Burdens

After the instructions to his apostles in chapter 10, Jesus went out into the cities to continue preaching and teaching. John the Baptist was in prison and sent messengers to Jesus to ask if he was indeed the Messiah (Christ). Jesus sent back, not a simple “yes,” but instead reassuring proofs. Echoing many passages from Isaiah, Jesus showed that the “year of the Lord’s favor” (Isa. 61:1) had arrived. He gave sight to the blind, the lame could walk, the deaf could hear, the dead were resurrected, and good news was getting preached to the poor. Jesus confirmed he was the Christ, the object of not only the Old Testament prophets, but the object of John the Baptist’s prophetic work as well. John the Baptist was like Elijah, called to prepare the way for the Messiah.

The people did not understand. In their equivocations, many would not accept John the Baptist because he was too austere and serious. He wouldn’t eat, drink, or celebrate with the people. Jesus, on the other hand, they rejected because he wasn’t austere! He did eat, drink, and celebrate with people. A firm rejection was destined for those who rejected Jesus. Jesus possessed all the authority of God. He knew God unlike any other, and in Jesus, people saw God, whether they accepted it or not. Jesus showed a nature of God that was gentle, humble, and yet strong enough to take away all burdens from everyone, giving all who struggle much yearned for rest.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Chapter 12 – Jesus is Greater than the Temple, Lord of the Sabbath, Servant of God, Beloved of God, Champion of Justice, Hope of the Gentiles, Plunderer of Satan, Greater than Jonah, and Family to All

Matthew 12 begins with Jesus and his disciples passing grain fields on the Sabbath. The hungry disciples picked and ate some grain along the way and the Pharisees saw it, and got upset over an apparent violation of the Law of Moses. Jesus corrected their theology, but also emphasized that they were missing the point:

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:7-8).

Jesus then punctuated his title as Lord of the Sabbath, by healing a man with a withered hand at Sabbath synagogue services.

Jesus then withdrew from Capernaum and healed those that followed him. He was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy as God’s “servant” and “beloved,” possessing God’s Spirit and championing justice and bringing hope to the Gentiles.

Jesus continued his mastery over demons, and in spite of the blasphemous accusations of the Pharisees that Jesus himself was demonic, Jesus explained that he was not a demonic master. Rather Jesus had bound Satan and was plundering his possessions. Jesus was bearing good fruit, evidencing his true nature as a good tree. People were the same – we can know them by their fruits.

As Pharisees and more scribes confronted Jesus, they were seeking their own signs, wanting Jesus to dance to their satisfaction. Jesus instructed them they would get the sign of Jonah, who was dead in the whale’s belly for three days and nights. For Jesus, the “Son of Man” would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt. 12:40). In other words, “something greater than Jonah is here!” (Mt. 12:41) In the midst of Jesus teaching and ministering, his mother and brothers came for him. When it was pointed out to Jesus, he emphasized he was more than just their son and brother. Jesus belonged to all who belonged to God!

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:49-50).

Chapter 13 – Jesus as Teacher of Parables, Keeper and Revealer of Secrets, the Longing of the Prophets and the Target of the Enemy, and a Prophet Without Honor

Matthew 13 is the third section where Matthew provides us dialogue and discourse of Jesus speaking truth into his disciples and the crowds. This time, we read of Jesus as a teacher of parables. He told parables repeatedly, revealing the meaning to those disciples who truly cared to hear and understand, but leaving the rest in their own self-imposed befuddlement.

Jesus explained the kingdom of heaven as seed sown in different places. On paths where it lies open and is snatched up, never growing at all, on rocky ground where it grows quickly (“received with joy”) but with no roots and genuine depth, dying in the heat. On paths where it is choked out by the weeds of life (“the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches”), and then on good soil, where it grows and bears fruit.

Jesus likened the kingdom to a man who sowed seed in his field, but had enemies come in and pollute the field with weeds. Those weeds would get sorted out at harvest time, and the good seed salvaged. Other parables of the kingdom included it as a mustard seed, small but with immense future to grow large. Similarly, a little leaven would grow and infiltrate entire loaves of bread. The kingdom’s value was like a hidden treasure or a fine pearl. It was a net that would gather valuable fish and discard the rest.

Matthew adds a noteworthy link here to his own gospel, as Jesus first verified that his disciples understood his parables and then emphasized that they were being trained for later writing!

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt. 13:51-52).

In the midst of his teaching, Jesus also went home to Nazareth and taught there. The reception was anything but grand. The people saw Jesus as uppity, beyond what a boy of that region should grow up to be. He was rejected as a prophet, and left to go where others would receive his ministry.

Chapter 14 – Jesus: Famous, Touched, Compassionate, Provider, Master of the Elements, and Son of God

Jesus’ reputation spread, and his fame reached the ears of Herod the tetrarch. Herod feared Jesus might be a resurrected John the Baptist. Herod had recently beheaded John, and when news of his cousin’s demise reached Jesus, Jesus was touched and sought some alone time. The crowds followed him, however, and he was moved by compassion to teach and feed them. He miraculously provided food for thousands from a few loaves and fish.

Later that evening, the disciples were moving by boat across the Galilee Sea when a storm endangered them. Jesus came to them by walking in the water. First fearing a ghost, they realized it was him. Peter took the moment to try to walk to Jesus in faith, and it worked, until he shifted his gaze from Jesus to the storm. Jesus then reached out and saved a sinking Peter. As Jesus got into the boat, the storm ended, and the disciples began to worship him, proclaiming

Truly you are the Son of God (Mt. 14:32).

Chapter 15 – Jesus Reliable Guide to Mosaic Law, Offender of the Pharisees, Lord to Gentiles, and Man of Compassion

In Chapter 15, Matthew contrasts Jesus before Pharisees, a Canaanite woman, and crowds of needy followers. Jesus encountered Pharisees when they challenged his piety based on the disciples' failure to wash their hands. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees let their traditions trump the Law of God and they were far from honoring God. Then Jesus directed teaching against the Pharisees to the larger crowd, explaining that true defilement came from the heart, not from failing to wash hands. The Pharisees were offended, but Jesus was not concerned. Jesus was guiding people to truth; the Pharisees were blind guides to nowhere.

Jesus then encountered a Canaanite woman who sought his help for her demon-possessed daughter. She cried out to Jesus knowing him as "Lord, Son of David." Jesus did not answer at first, and his disciples urged him to get rid of her. Instead, Jesus confronts her, explaining he was sent prophetically to work among the Jews. She begged for help, even though she was not of the household of Jews. When she explained, "even dogs get to eat crumbs," Jesus responded,

"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly (Mt 15:28).

Jesus then encountered large crowds by the Sea of Galilee, in need of healing and more. Jesus was again healer, teacher, and provider, again miraculously using a few loaves and fish to feed the many.

Chapter 16 – Jesus as the Sign of the Times, Who Warns Against Danger, the Son of Man, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Builder of the Church, Destined to Suffer and Defeat Death, With Angels at his Ready, and the Glory of the Father

Matthew 16 is about Jesus' identity as his earthly ministry began to draw short. More Pharisees and Sadducees came seeking a sign, and Jesus pointed to himself as the true sign of the times. They needed to see what God was about rather than dictate to God what they wanted. Jesus warned his disciples of the danger of such an approach and teaching. The idea of us wanting to make Jesus prove himself to

our manner of believing is a dangerous leaven that will infiltrate and pollute our faith and life on many levels.

As Jesus and his disciples approached the area of Caesarea Philippi, a site at the base of Mt. Hermon, set aside as a worship grotto and altar to Pan, the Greek shepherd god, Jesus asked his disciples,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Mt. 16:13)

Their replies ran the gamut from John the Baptist to Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. Jesus then made the question personal, asking who they said he was. Peter, by revelation of God, answered on point:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16).

This from Peter, whose name meant small rock, was a rock on which Jesus would build his church. Jesus charged the disciples to keep silent for a time on his role as Messiah.

Here Matthew’s story starts building toward a conclusion. Jesus begins telling his disciples about the coming horrors of the crucifixion, although they clearly do not understand what he is referencing. Jesus was set to go to Jerusalem and suffer, eventually being killed and resurrected. Peter rebuked Jesus for such a negative prognosis. In doing so, Peter shifted from taking revelation from God (“You are the Christ”) and instead listened to the adversary. Jesus responded,

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Mt. 16:23).

As Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, he would willingly give up his life in service to his Father. Jesus knew also that he would come again with his angels in the glory of the Father. Jesus used this as a focused lesson to teach his followers to give up their lives for the higher purpose of God’s calling and mission. Sadly, however, Jesus added that some would never take that step of giving their life up in the service of God.

Chapter 17 – Jesus as Transfigured and Beloved Son, with Exemplar Faith Before a Challenging Future, and as One Willingly Compliant

Matthew 17 continues to explain Jesus as not only the man he was in life, but with an eye toward who he would become in death. The Chapter begins with Jesus on what is commonly called the Mount of Transfiguration. There, Elijah and Moses appeared with Jesus who was himself transfigured into one whose “face shown like the sun” and with “clothes white as light” (Mt. 17:2). As the event drew to a

close, a voice from the cloud declared to Peter, James, and John (who had accompanied Jesus and witnessed the events),

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Mt. 17:5).

This frightened the three, but Jesus reassured them they need not fear. That said, he then told them of the difficult road before him, and what the future would reveal about him. Jesus as “Son of Man” would soon die and be raised from the dead. Understanding this to likely be a claim of Messianic proportions, the disciples pointed out that Elijah was supposed to precede the Messiah. Jesus explained that John the Baptist was indeed such an Elijah.

As if underscoring the disciples’ failures in faith and belief, a demon-possessed boy was brought to Jesus. This was a boy the disciples could not help. Jesus cast out the demon, explaining that their faith was not up to the task! Again Jesus punctuated this with the foretelling of the coming events around his death.

Almost as an aside, Matthew includes the story of the need to pay the coming taxes. Jesus pointedly said that there was no need for him to be subject to the authorities, yet he would do so voluntarily. He then sent Peter to fish for the tax and pay it.

Chapter 18 – Jesus as Greatest and Most Humble, Guardian of Children, Seeker of Lost, and Dispenser of Unlimited Grace

In Matthew 18-20, we have the fourth discourse of Jesus. the disciples begin arguing over who is greater and lesser amongst them. Jesus, who is truly the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, placed a child in their midst as an object lesson. The truly great, will seek to serve in humility. The truly great will seek to take care of and nurture children and those who are in need. The temptation is always to tend to one’s own desires, but those temptations are to be carefully avoided.

Jesus cares for all the sheep, whether old or young. He would leave the 99 safe sheep to go find the lost one. This should teach his followers, what would later be called the “church” to be deliberate in dealing with those at fault and in need. Jesus set out important steps that would help restore unity among those in fellowship together. Of course, that will often require forgiveness. Peter pointed out a willingness to forgive his brother fully - “seven times,” with seven representing fullness. Jesus responded that forgiveness should be more full and complete than even that – “seventy time seven” (Mt. 18:21-22). This is the nature of the kingdom. Forgiveness comes to those who forgive.

Chapter 19 – Jesus as Lawgiver, Advocate for Children, and Prophet of the new World

In the continued discourse of Jesus in Matthew 19, we read about Pharisees testing Jesus by asking him about lawful divorce. This was an issue in that day, much as it is today. One school (R. Shammai) would not allow divorce unless there was unfaithfulness. Another school (R. Hillel) was more lenient, allowing divorce if a wife “spoiled a dish for him.” Another school was somewhat in the middle (R. Akiba) allowing divorce when the husband found someone more suitable for marriage.¹² Jesus did not side with any Rabbi, but instead went to Scripture, citing Genesis and urging that what God has joined, no man should separate. The Pharisees pushed him further pointing out that Moses provided for divorce. Jesus then showed his understanding of the Law, Moses and the will of God as he explained Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of people’s hearts. He was making the best of a bad situation. The truth is that divorce was never God’s plan. Furthermore, if one does divorce, except in situations of sexual immorality, and then remarries, such a one is himself committing adultery.

Jesus’s concerns were not simply over the marriage, but over the children as well. Another set of events had Jesus intervene on behalf of children brought to him for attention and blessing. What was irrelevant and a nuisance in the eyes of his disciples was important to Jesus.

Matthew closed the chapter showing Jesus as a prophet about the world to come. Jesus encountered a rich young ruler, and showed him the obstacle his wealth had become in his desires to follow God. The apostles thought it important to point out their readiness to leave all for Christ and the mission, and Jesus prophetically proclaimed that as Son of Man sitting on the throne in the new world, he would have his apostles sitting on thrones as well. In other words, there is a future that far outshines the present, and life lived here will affect the future life one has in the world to come.

Chapter 20 – Jesus as Declarer of Fairness, Mediator of Disputes, a Ransom, and the Kingly Son of David Motivated by Pity for the Hurting

Matthew finishes this three-chapter discourse with Jesus recounting a parable of the kingdom of heaven being like a vineyard. The master of the vineyard hired various workers at various times, with each set of worker making a different wage. When the workers declared it unfair, the master pointed out that it was his vineyard, and he decided what was fair and what wasn’t. While on the subject of fair treatment, Matthew joined another time where Jesus pointed out again his

¹² These positions are found in the *Mishnah*, Gittin 9, 10.

impending suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus would not be getting “fair treatment” in the eyes of the world or by any appropriate measure of justice. Yet Jesus would be doing this for the good of others. As this storyline is brought to a conclusion in this chapter, the alleged unfairness of the vineyard owner, combined with the absolute sacrifice of Jesus, gets the ironic finish of James’s and John’s mother kneeling before Jesus asking for places of seniority for her sons in the coming kingdom. Jesus pointed out that she really didn’t know what she was talking about. It left the other disciples jealous and angry, and Jesus stepped in as mediator explaining everyone needed to step back and take on a servant’s attitude, not a self-seeking one. That is the life of Jesus – lived as a ransom for many.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:26-28).

The chapter ends with two blind men shouting out from a roadside at Jesus as he passed by. Their shouts were to Jesus as the kingly “Son of David.” The blind men cried for mercy. Jesus and his entourage stopped so he could listen to the blind men and engage them, asking what they wanted. The men wanted their sight, which Jesus, moved with pity, readily granted them.

Chapter 21 – Jesus as humble Messiah and King, Prophet, Protector of God, Savior, Outsmarting the Wise, Despised, Rejected, and the Cornerstone for the Lord’s Kingdom

Matthew 21 records what is commonly called the triumphal entry. It begins with Jesus instructing his disciples to go get a donkey for his ride into Jerusalem. HE was riding in as king, in humbly on a donkey. Jesus cited Zechariah 9:9,

Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden (Mt. 21:5).

As Jesus came in, the crowds shouted prayers of praise to him, proclaiming loudly, “Save us please!” (Matthew records their cries of “hosanna” which means, “Save! We pray you!”). The crowds were loudly blessing Jesus as the one coming in the name of the Lord. He was “the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” (Mt. 21:9-11).

Jesus came into Jerusalem and cleaned house – literally. He cleansed the temple, driving out the money-changers and sellers, exclaiming,

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers” (Mt. 21:13).

Jesus continued to heal those in need, and the chief priests came to him instructing him to quiet the noisy crowd. They were indignant that the crowd was proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Son of David. Jesus regarded the please of the crowd for saving as “perfect praise,” and did nothing to stop them, other than soon departing to spend the night out of the city walls.

The next morning, Jesus showed his disciples an important object lesson. He cursed a nonbearing fig tree that withered up. Jesus instructed his disciples both to the importance of bearing fruit, and to the power of faith in prayer. As Jesus arrived in the temple, the chief priests, who undoubtedly spent the night assessing the earlier ruckus associated with Jesus, challenged him. They insisted on knowing what authority he claimed for his actions. Jesus delayed answering their question until they would answer his about the authority John the Baptist had. The priests were unable to answer because they feared the crowd’s response. So Jesus replied he would answer after they answered!

The real answer, was folded into two parables Matthew related next. In the first, there was a man with two sons, one rebellious one who became obedient and one who feigned obedience but was truly disobedient. Jesus pointed out that many repentant sinners were like the first son, while those challenging Jesus were like the second. In the next parable, Jesus told of a master who had a house and vineyard run by tenants. When harvest approached, the man sent servants to collect his share, but the tenants would beat or kill the servants, never sending what they owed. Finally the master sent his son, trusting the tenants would show proper respect. Instead the tenants killed the son! This was the parable of Jesus and what was about to happen to him. Jesus ended it citing Psalm 118:22, 23:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ (Mt. 21:42).

The chief priests and Pharisees knew the implications of Jesus’ message, but they were powerless at the moment because of the large crowds of support around Jesus. The people held Jesus to be a prophet, so the power structure had to figure a way around the crowds!

Chapter 22 – Jesus as Son of the King, the True Teacher of God, Intimate with Scriptures and the Power of God, the Son of David and Lord of David

Jesus’ time in Jerusalem was punctuated with more teaching that related to the kingdom, and the coming tribulations for Jesus. In a parable, Jesus related the kingdom of heaven to a king giving his son a wedding feast. The invited guests

did not come, and when the king sent servants to remind and bring them, the invited guests killed the king's servants. The king responded with destruction of the guests and their possessions, then inviting any who might attend to come. Of those that came, one showed great disrespect, not even bothering to wear the appropriate clothes. This man was immediately tossed out of the feast into a place of darkness.

The Pharisees plotted to "entangle him in his words" and decided to trap him with a carefully articulated question that would either show Jesus in rebellion to Rome and Caesar or aligned with Rome and Caesar. This was designed to either make Jesus subject to arrest, or would cost him his popular support. Disingenuous men came proclaiming Jesus as "true" and as one who taught "the way of God truthfully." They then challenged him whether they should pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked them whose head was on the tax coin, to which they replied "Caesar." Jesus then told them to give Caesar what was his, but to give God what was God's. This left the challengers at a loss, and they marveled at Jesus' response.

From there, Sadducees decided to test Jesus with one of their patent questions meant to show the absurdity of any belief in a resurrection. They explained a man died leaving a wife. The man's brother married the wife before he also died, then the same with another brother, all the way until seven brothers had married the woman. The Sadducees challenged Jesus to tell who would have the woman as a wife in the resurrection. Jesus corrected their whole premise, noting they were wrong, because they knew "neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29). Resurrection was not what they thought. It was not a time of marriage. Sadducees were famous for standing on the first five books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch" or "Books of Moses." From these they derived their theology. Yet Jesus pointed out even in the texts they valued, they failed to perceive the teachings of a resurrection. Jesus cited Exodus 3:6, 16, 4:5 and more that states,

'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?
He is not God of the dead, but of the living.'

Jesus pointed out God is the God of the living, not dead. All those who had died in his care were spoken of as living! Such is God's power.

The Pharisees noted that Jesus silenced the Sadducees and tried another test for Jesus. This time over which commandment was the greatest. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:5, and the imperative to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind. Jesus then went further and gave the second greatest commandment from Leviticus 19:18, the command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Turning the tables, Jesus then asked the Pharisees a question: Whose son is the Christ? They replied "the son of David." Jesus then asked why David could call the Messiah his

Lord if he were in fact his son? The Pharisees had no answer, for they truly did not understand the Messiah Jesus, who was Son of David *and* Lord of David!

Chapter 23 – Jesus as Rabbi, Messiah, Servant, and Lamenter

In Matthew 23, Jesus finished his confrontations with the Pharisees and scribes pronouncing seven woes upon them. Jesus exploded the myth of their holiness as cloaked hypocrisy. They tied burdens on people, but never helped with the burdens. They grabbed attention, but failed to work for those who needed help. They claimed titles and positions of prestige, not realizing that the real teacher and Rabbi was Christ. The real position of authority was God's the Father in heaven. The real great people were those serving in humility. The scribes and Pharisees did not truly make converts. They were blind guides who taught faulty practices. They ignored justice, were greedy and selfish, hypocritically pretended to be righteous, and acted as if their forefathers were wrong in killing the prophets, when they were about to do the same!

Jesus lamented over what was done in Jerusalem in the name of the Lord. It certainly was not the will of God:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Mt. 23:37)

Chapter 24 through 25 – Jesus as the Coming Prophet and Herald of the End of the Age, the Coming Son of Man, the Commander of Angels, and the Enthroned King of Heaven

As Jesus left the temple, the disciples pointed out the impressive structures. Jesus made the point that a time was coming when those structures would be destroyed. Later, on the Mount of Olives, the disciples pressed for details, asking multiple questions: When would the temple structures be destroyed? When would be the sign of Jesus' coming? When would be the sign of the end of the age? Jesus weaves responses to those questions into this final of Matthew's five recorded discourses.

In his prophetic response, Jesus explained that the world would see false Messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes. Jesus' followers would face tribulation, death, and hatred. Some would fall away, false prophets would claim some, but the enduring ones would be saved, even as the gospel reaches the ends of the world.

Jesus also taught that Daniel's abomination of desolation would stand in the Holy Place and those in Judea would need to flee. The tribulation would be very difficult, and many false Christs will again come. But when Jesus truly comes, all will know it. Jesus will come as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will command his angels who will announce his coming with a loud trumpet call, gather the elect from one end of the earth to another.

Just as the fig tree gives signs of approaching summer, so these signs will indicate the approach of judgment. The destruction of the temple was going to occur before all those alive and listening to Jesus passed away. But as for the day of the second coming, no man, not even Jesus at the time, knew. It would come at an unsuspected time, and people were to live every day ready for the end!

Jesus used two parables to explain the need to be ready. In the first, wedding attendants were divided into two groups, one that brought sufficient oil for their tasks and one that failed to. Those that failed to, left to go buy some more oil, and they missed the wedding. In the second parable, Jesus told of a master who gave talents to his subjects before leaving. Those that dealt wisely with the talents, always ready for the master's return, were blessed. Those that did not, were cast out. This same separation is set to happen upon the Lord's return. He will return as King enthroned in heaven above. The sheep will be separated from the goats, with true followers of Christ embraced eternally, while the fakes and frauds are sent into the unending fire.

Chapter 26 – Jesus as Target, Anointed, Betrayed, as Body Broken for All, and Blood Poured out for All, Arrested, Abandoned, and Abused

Jesus told his disciples that he was the target of nefarious plans by a number of the temple power structure. He would soon be crucified, as he had been telling them for some time. The chief priests and elders were working on the timing of their plot against Jesus as Jesus was visiting Simon the leper in Bethany. A woman intruded and came to Jesus with a flask of expensive ointment. She poured it on his head, to the verbal disgust of some of his disciples who were saying,

Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor (Mt. 26:8-9).

Jesus corrected the disciples and defended the woman's actions as appropriate preparation for his coming burial. That she cared so much for Jesus was significant and not to be overlooked!

Among the incensed disciples was Judas, who then went to the chief priests volunteering to betray Jesus. The agreed upon price was 30 pieces of silver.

As plans were unfolding, Jesus held a Passover feast for his disciples. While eating, Jesus declared that he was going to be betrayed by someone dining with them. Other disciples asked, “Is it I, Lord?” Judas asked, “Is it I, Rabbi?” Now Jesus was both Lord and Rabbi, but Judas used the more diminutive title, even as Jesus answered affirmatively, “You have said so.’

Jesus instituted the Eucharist, explaining that the unleavened bread was his body and the fruit of the vine his blood of the covenant, poured out for forgiveness of sins. Jesus would not be taking the elements again until in the Father’s kingdom. Jesus then foretold Peter’s denial and the group went to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed and prepared himself for what was to come, already finding some isolation as those he asked to pray with him fell asleep instead.

It was in the garden that Judas brought a crowd of anti-Jesus people gathered and sent by the chief priests and elders. Judas identified Jesus in the dark and shadows with a kiss, and Jesus was at once arrested. Peter, likely feeling the sting of Jesus’ exclamation that Peter would betray him, used his sword to start a fight. Jesus instructed him to put the sword up. That was not the time or the place. Jesus was going willingly. If Jesus had not wanted to go, he had command of legions of angels. No man could force Jesus to do what Jesus was not wanting and willing to do.

Jesus was taken before the high priest Caiaphas where perjured testimony was declared by a number of authoritative people. Jesus would not answer the false accusations until Caiaphas asked bluntly, the question that is at the root of Matthew:

I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God (Mt. 26:63).

To this Jesus answered,

You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mt. 26:64).¹³

Caiaphas understood Jesus’ claim, but rather than accept the Messiah before him, Caiaphas condemned Jesus as a blasphemer. He struck Jesus, and others quickly joined into the beating.

¹³ Here Jesus turns around the Son of Man prophecy of Daniel 7. In Daniel, the Son of Man comes with the clouds *up* into heaven before the throne. Here, Jesus says the Son of Man will descend already enthroned in judgment upon the earth!

Meanwhile, outside, Peter was waiting and watching, trying to maintain anonymity. When a servant girl recognized Peter as a follower, she tried to verify her suspicions. Peter denied knowing Jesus, precisely as predicted by Jesus earlier in the evening. Realizing it, Peter left the scene, crying bitterly.

Chapter 27 – Jesus Messiah and King, a Righteous Man, True Son of the Father, Blood for the People, Crucified, Forsaken, Dead, and Buried

As morning approached, the all-night pretend trial of Jesus drew to a close. Jesus was sent to Pilate for a death sentence. It would certainly allow the priests to keep the appearance of clean hands if it was Pilate responsible for Jesus' death! Judas had second thoughts, returning the blood money, but rather than put blood money into the temple treasury, it was used to buy a burial plot for strangers. Meanwhile Jesus was before Pilate on charges of sedition, delivered over by the priests who claimed Jesus was trying to foment rebellion by naming himself King of the Jews. Jesus would not answer the charge, to Pilate's amazement.

At this time each year, Pilate would release a prisoner to the people as a deed of goodwill. He offered the people a choice, Barabbas or Jesus. (Pilate had received some pressure from his wife who had dreamt of Jesus and knew him to be a righteous man). The people, at the instigation of the chief priests and elders shouted, "Barabbas!" This was the first of two ironic comments by the people. "Barabbas" is Aramaic for "son of the father." Unknowingly, the people were shouting for the man whose name was the real title of Jesus, the Son of the Father! The second ironic comment came when Pilate asked what should be done with Jesus. The crowd, again at the instigation of the chief priests and elders shouted for Jesus to be crucified adding, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Again unknowingly, the people set out the gospel cry, for without the blood of Jesus, no one has remission of sins!

Jesus was mocked, spat upon, abused, stripped, made to wear a crown of sharp thorns, and after being fully degraded and physically worn out, was sent to Golgotha, with a cross carried in part by Simon of Cyrene. Jesus was offered some medicinal drink to help with the pain, but he refused it. He was strung up, and the crowds derided him while the soldiers gambled for his clothes. The mockery continued pointing out that Jesus could save others, but not himself, that Jesus trusted God but God abandoned him, that Jesus claimed he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, but it was Jesus being destroyed. Little did they know that the temple was the body of Jesus, and that they were witnessing its destruction. Similarly they were clueless the resurrection was the rebuilding just three short days away!

Jesus continued to suffer on the cross, crying out about being forsaken by God. Shortly after 3 in the afternoon, Jesus died, yielding up his spirit. At that moment, the curtain in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was ripped from the top down. This was the curtain that separated God from his people in the symbolism of the temple. It was rent asunder by the crucifixion.

Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate ordered it given, and after having Jesus wrapped in a linen shroud, Jesus was placed in a new tomb. A stone was rolled over the entrance, while Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" sat nearby and watched. Remembering the promises Jesus made about a resurrection on the third day, the chief priests and Pharisees sought and received from Pilate, 24-hour guard protection over the tomb of Jesus.

Chapter 28 – Jesus, the Resurrected Lord, Commissioning, and Coming Again!

Matthew ends his book with what is really the beginning of a whole new story. On the dawn of Sunday morning after the resurrection, the two Mary's that had witnessed the burial went to see the tomb. With a great earthquake, an angel rolled away the stone. Then angel's appearance was like lightening with clothing white as snow. The guards were scared to death, as the angel reassured the women,

Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him (Mt. 28:5-6).

The women ran to tell the disciples, and they met up with Jesus. Grabbing his feet, they worshipped him. Jesus reiterated the instructions about telling the disciples. Meanwhile, the guard told the chief priests what happened, and the chief priests paid them off to tell folks that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus while they slept. That story was still circulating at the time Matthew wrote his gospel.

Jesus did meet up with the eleven remaining apostles in Galilee, and they worshiped him. Matthew ends his gospel with Jesus' charge to the apostles:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Mt. 28:18-20).

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Matthew begins with “Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and called “Immanuel” – God with us. Matthew ends with the words of the resurrected Christ assuring his followers that he – the I am- is with them always, to the end of the age. These truths book end this early gospel with the identity of Jesus, God with us, the Great I am.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ...“Who do you say that I am?”*” (Mt. 16:13, 15).

This question frames the core of Matthew’s gospel. At the beginning we have Christ in relation to history; at the end we have Christ in relation to the future. In the core, we have his ministry. The center of this core is his question that focuses first on what others believe, but then upon one’s personal belief.

Many people have a lot to say about who Jesus is. The real question each person must answer is, “Who is *I* say he is?” In my life, my actions, as well as my beliefs. Is he a prophet? A good man? An echo from history? A figment of history’s smartest fishermen’s creative minds? Or is he the Jesus portrayed by Matthew?

2. *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Mt. 16:16).

Matthew identifies Jesus in a myriad of ways: Son of David, Son of Abraham, Messiah, Son of man, King, Bridegroom, Ruler, Shepherd, God with us, I Am, Rabbi, Teacher, Lord, Savior, and more. All those roles, and all those titles are summed up by Peter: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. This proclamation speaks volumes. Are we listening?

3. *“...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* (Mt. 16:18).

Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, builds his church upon the one foundation of faith. The church is the bride to the groom, and it awaits his return, as he faithfully guards it against every enemy, as the eternal kingdom of heaven. Come quickly Lord Jesus!