

The Gospel According to Matthew

“Give a man a fish and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you’ll feed him for a lifetime.” The writer of the gospel of Matthew would have appreciated this proverb, and maybe people had a similar expression in his day. If not, his gospel certainly embodies the heart of this saying. As New Testament scholar Richard Burridge reveals, “The symbol always associated with Matthew is the human face...In this, the most Jewish of gospels, Jesus is not just the rabbi, but the human face of God, the revealer who has dominion and authority as the son of God.”¹ Jesus is pictured as the great teacher who (by word and deed) shows us who God is and who we are to be, and sends out his pupils to disseminate his teachings to all who will listen.

While the gospel according to Mark is nearly universally accepted as the first to be written, Matthew has proven to be the “gospel of the church.”² It stands at the head of the New Testament, and is the gospel most widely read and used. Jesus’ teachings are grouped together into five (5) lengthy discourses—each concluded with a *summary transition*³—interspersed between the narrative of his life and ministry.⁴ In these teaching segments, the writer portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and promises. This gospel continually looks back in order to look forward, as it is steeped in Old Testament quotations, known as *formula citations*, which function as evidence of Jesus’ messianic identity (1.22; 2.6, 15, 16, 23; 4.15-16; 8.17; 12.17-21; 13.14, 35; 21.4; 27.9-10).⁵

¹ Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 67, 68.

² Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 172. Most scholars date the writing of Matthew to AD 80-90, with a 10-year window on either side. Mark is thought to have been written c. AD 65, Luke around the same time as Matthew, and John c. AD 80-110, preferring a later date of 100-110. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 172, 127, 226, 334.

³ Matthew “uses stereotyped *summary transitions* between discourse material and narrative: ‘When Jesus had finished these words...’ (7.28-29; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1; 26.1). These transitions accentuate the alternation between kinds of material. The effect is similar to saying ‘Now, to pick up the story again...,’ Johnson, 173-174.

⁴ “Matthew builds the character of Jesus as the Teacher of Israel and structures the gospel around his five great blocks of teaching—the discourses punctuating the narrative (chaps. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25),” Burridge, 78-79. The communal identity is revealed through these “sermons,” which aim at “the transformation of character and of heart...Jesus’ teaching provides a dramatic new hermeneutical [interpretive] filter that necessitates a re-reading of everything in the Law in light of the dominant imperative of mercy,” Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco), 98, 100.

⁵ “[Matthew] introduces many of his direct quotations from Scripture with the stereotyped formula ‘this was to fulfill what was spoken’...and they offer an authorial commentary on the narrative,” Johnson, 174. “Matthew has about 60 references of quotations from the Old Testament...Only in Matthew has Jesus come not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (5.17-20),” Burridge, 76-77. “This is almost a Matthean peculiarity among the Synoptic Gospels [Lk 22.37; see also Mk 15.38; Lk 18.31; 24.44]. That Jesus is to be related to the Scriptures is a commonplace in early Christianity, but Matt has uniquely standardized the fulfillment of the prophet word. In finding this fulfillment, Matt usually makes no attempt to interpret the larger contextual meaning of the cited OT passage; rather there is a concentration on the details where there is a resemblance to Jesus or the NT event...[L]ikely the citations have a didactic purpose, informing Christian readers and giving support to their faith....Besides using the formula citations to fit the general theology of the unity of God’s plan, the Matthean evangelist selected them to serve his particular theological and pastoral interests in addressing a mixed Christian community of Jews and Gentiles,” Brown, 207, 208. Reading Matthew’s gospel with the OT story at the forefront of our thoughts, we will see the writer revealing how events in Jesus’ life have πληρωθη a statement in the OT. Most translations render πληρωθη as “fulfill,” as in, “to actualize a prediction of future events,” which, though a viable rendering, may overstate, or at least muddle, the function of such statements. I believe a better, and more helpful, way of rendering the phrase would be “to cram,” “to fill up,” “fill to the fullness,” “to fully preach,” “to execute,” or “to perfect,” James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, 1996), Greek 4134, 4137. Thus, Eugene Peterson’s rendering: “This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term,” *The Message*, Mt 1.22. The problem with the translation “fulfill” is that it fails to appreciate the original context of these statements, with which Matthew’s hearers would have been familiar. While we cannot explicate each of these citations here, by way of example we can note that the initial audience who read Matthew 1.23 would have known it was a quote from Isaiah 7.14, part of the prophet’s message to Ahaz, king of Judah, who reigned c 736/5-716/15 BC, John D. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, (Word Books: Waco, 1985), 78. Assyria was the “super-power” of the day, but uprisings against their dominion were common. Around 734 BC, Pekah (king of Israel) allied with Rezin (king of Aram) to revolt against Assyria, and threatened to destroy Judah if Ahaz did not cooperate. At this, “the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind” (Isa 7.2b). This is the context for Isaiah’s proclamation in 7.14, cited by Matthew, which is part of a larger message of assurance that if king Ahaz and the people of Judah would trust in YHWH, this threat would be averted. Isaiah declares that Aram and Israel, threatening though they may seem at the present time, will be defeated (vv 3-9), and as a sign of confirmation, “the danger will disappear so rapidly that women who are now with child will name their sons, in thankfulness for being saved, ‘Immanuel,’ ‘God with us’ (cf. Judg 6.16; Ps 46.7, 11).” In short, Isaiah declares that this threat will be gone by the time these children are old enough to distinguish between good and evil—generally thought to be the twentieth year (see Gen 3.5; Deut 1.39), though the emphasis is on brevity rather than a specific time frame—and women will name their children

The writer sees the Old Testament hope of a coming Messiah fulfilled, a redeemer who will be the presence of God among humanity, who will continue God's redemptive work by re-enacting and expanding upon the OT story (SEE NOTE 12), who will fulfill the promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all peoples (cf. Gen 12.1-3),⁶ and who, like Moses, is the supreme Teacher and Lawgiver, interpreting the Torah by revealing its deeper meaning—"you have heard it said, but I say to you..." (e.g. 5.17-20, 21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-35, 38-39, 43-44).⁷ Therefore, one must recognize the myriad tacit allusions to the OT story amidst the conspicuous citations to fully grasp the implications of Matthew's narrative, and this requires more than a cursory knowledge of the OT.⁸

Immanuel in thankful praise to YHWH, Otto Kaiser, *The Old Testament Library: Isaiah 1-12*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 104. Therefore, when Matthew applies this verse to Jesus it does not mean that Isaiah was prophesying the future event of Jesus' birth since the context of Isaiah 7.14 makes it clear that "its primary meaning requires a sign that will be fulfilled in the immediate future," Watts, 99. Rather, Jesus, like the children during this seemingly hopeless point in Ahaz's reign, is born into a period of threatening oppression, exploitation, and domination causing no little distress, uncertainty, and fear in the land (see Isa 7.2). The promise of Jesus' birth, coupled with this quotation, recalls God's deliverance of Judah from structures and systems of oppression in the past, and God's presence in the midst of chaos and approaching catastrophe. Through a seemingly common, un-extraordinary event—the birth of a child—God offers a sign of hope for rescue, redemption, and restoration. The birth of a child offers the hope of new beginnings, where all that stood before Judah's vision was a tragic and demeaning end. Just as the birth of the child functioned as a sign of coming relief from the threat of destruction in the days of king Ahaz, so too the birth of Jesus signals relief and redemption from the systems of oppression in Matthew's day—"[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (1.21). This is why Matthew can declare that "all this took place to πληρωθῆ ("fill to the full" "execute," or "perfect") what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (1.22). Jesus, like the child of Isa 7.14, is the unexpected, easily dismissed sign of hope in hopeless times who executes, universalizes, and perfects the hope of God's presence for those suffering under the threat (or actuality) of captivity, oppression, and exploitation. Such a reading allows us to appreciate the original context of the text as well as Matthew's declaration that Jesus re-enacts these past situations, bringing them to fuller and more wide-reaching manifestations. For the initial audience, such connections would have been clear. For us, it requires understanding the context of the OT citation as best we can. Failure to do so will inevitably result in misunderstandings and interpretations that miss connections the writer sought to make, turning them into proof texts of Messianic identity rather than a demonstration of Jesus' continuity with, and πληρωθῆ (perfecting and filling up) of, God's redemptive purposes. As Dale Allison notes, "The ubiquitous scriptural citations and allusions...direct the informed reader to other books and so teach that Matthew is not a self-contained entity: much is missing. The gospel, in other words, stipulates that it be interpreted in the context of other texts; it evokes tradition through the device of allusion. This means that it is, in a fundamental sense, an incomplete utterance, a book full of holes. Readers must make present what is absent; they must bring to the gospel knowledge of what it presupposes, i.e., a pre-existing collection of interacting texts, the Jewish Bible (the main source of our knowledge about the four women in the genealogy, [for example]). The first gospel, like so much ancient Jewish literature...[is] designed to trigger intertextual exchanges which depend upon informed and imaginative reading," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, CD-ROM. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), "Introduction, F. The Nature of the Text, 1." So what's significant in the birth of another Jewish child? Not much, it seems, next to the posturing and proclamations of world powers, unless his/her name happens to be *Immanuel*. Then it is an event of world shaping proportions. Reading Matthew's *fulfillment citations* in this manner may require rethinking the nature of the *good news* (gospel) of Jesus (SEE FOOTNOTE 14 BELOW), and most certainly requires this kind of "informed and imaginative reading" to grasp the significance and implications of Matthew's OT references. SEE ALSO NOTE 12.

⁶ "Jesus is the one through whom the promise to Abraham for all nations will be fulfilled, and who will be accused of being a friend of Gentiles and sinners...The development of the story describes the rejection of the Teacher of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles. Jesus is the Son of Abraham, through whom all nations will be blessed, with Gentiles in his genealogy," Burrige, 70, 93. Jesus reveals that Israel's calling had always been to bless, love, serve, and draw others into God's redemptive plan, yet they, like us, too often became self-focused by seeking to hoard the blessings of God for themselves to the exclusion of others. This led the religious leaders of Jesus' day to deem "tax collectors, Gentiles, and sinners" unclean, unworthy, unholy. The irony is that these are the very ones Jesus' disciples are called to demonstrate God's love toward by treating them as people of unsurpassable worth. That the religious leaders were offended at Jesus sharing meals with "those kinds of people" reveals how inwardly focused they had become, and Jesus must redirect their thoughts and attention to the world in need of grace and hope and redemption.

⁷ "In a non-legalistic way, [Jesus] goes beyond the letter of the law to the interior meaning, but without any antinomian [rejecting law/authority] weakening of the law...Thus, through this fulfillment of scripture and the law, Matthew stresses the continuity of Jesus the Teacher with Israel's scriptures and traditions," Burrige, 76-77. "Rather than reading the Law's requirements as rules that fix the normative standards of righteousness, Matthew's Jesus sees them as pointers to a more radical righteousness of the heart, intensifying the demand of God far beyond the letter of the Law...Matthew insists that it is Jesus—not the punctilious Pharisees—who truly instructs his followers to do what the Law requires," Hays, 95, 96. As Brian McLaren notes: "The most concentrated example of the teaching of Jesus is found in Matthew 5-7, a passage often called the Sermon on the Mount, but which we'll call Jesus' kingdom manifesto." Jesus *fulfills* the law and the prophets (see 5.17-20) by offering "an invitation not to lower standards but to raise them, deepen them, fulfill them—to take them above the level of the religious scholars and Pharisees, from the level of external conformity to internal change of mind and heart," *The Secret Message of Jesus*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 117, 121.

⁸ As Johnson noted, "In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is teacher of Torah, fulfillment of Torah, and the very personification of Torah," 190. To aid the reader, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* and *The New Interpreter's Bible* are excellent resources that provide brief commentary on the text while noting both explicit and implicit OT references (usually with a brief explanation of the original context), allowing the reader to see how Matthew

Written c. AD 80-90 in the region of Syria (likely in the city of Antioch),⁹ the writer seeks to explain the good news that extends beyond Israel to the entire world (Mt 1.23; 28.20). Living in a predominantly Jewish community—though one becoming infused with Gentile believers¹⁰—the Matthean community is provided a lens through which the Old Testament hopes becomes increasingly clearer. The writer seeks to interpret what has transpired in Jesus’ life in light of YHWH’s prior efforts, giving clarity to what had been obscured at times. Impressionist paintings often can be appreciated only by seeing the object from which the painting is derived, for only then can one recognize the actual in the impression. In like manner, Matthew’s gospel looks back into the OT for impressions of God’s redemptive purposes. In so doing, the author demonstrates that the hoped-for Messiah (anointed, deliverer, liberator, redeemer) is, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth, Immanuel (God with us), who clarifies, continues, and expands the mission of God where Israel’s vision had become myopic.¹¹ To accomplish this, Matthew must overcome years of reflection and interpretation that produced a myriad of messianic hopes and expectations by clarifying and redefining what it looks like and means for Jesus to be Messiah—one who conquers not by overthrowing the Roman government, not by restoring the monarchy in Israel, not by any act that most would consider mighty, not according to prevailing conceptions and/or hopes, but by establishing a kingdom that comes through small, confusing, unexpected, and seemingly insignificant acts (Mt 1.18-25; 5.17-22; 9.9-13; 10.38-39; 11.28-30; 13.1-9, 24-30, 31-32, 33, 44-50; 16.21-28; 17.22; 27.35-46) and through YHWH living and dwelling among humanity through the promise and reality of Immanuel for all the ages to come (Mt 1.23; 28.20).¹²

The writer draws upon Mark for his basic outline but develops the teachings of Jesus into five lengthy discourses, touching upon themes and ideas found in the surrounding narrative. The opening chapters of the gospel focus on the person of Jesus (**1.1-4.16**), revealing his identity and demonstrating that he is in continuity with, and the fulfillment (culmination, perfection, fullness) of, YHWH’s redemptive purposes.¹³ At **4.17** the gospel begins to narrate Jesus’ actions and

interpreted Jesus ministry as a perfecting recapitulation/re-enactment of OT history. If you are interested in a more detailed look at how Matthew interprets and applies the OT in light of Jesus’ life and teachings, see R.H. Grundy, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), J.H. Neyrey, “The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42.1-4 in Matthew 12,” *Bib* 63 (1982): 457-473, M.D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974). See notes 6, 11.

⁹ Johnson, 177. This places the gospel sometime after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. This is important to keep in mind when reading the gospel because “Matthew’s community was engaged in a struggle with the representatives of emergent Rabbinic Judaism, each side claiming to represent the authentic interpretation of the Torah and of Israel’s traditions....The crucial questions that separated Matthew from ‘formative Judaism’ was christological, for his distinctive claims about the proper reading of the Law are all grounded in his more fundamental claim that Jesus is the fulfillment and definitive interpreter of the Law,” Hays, 107. Thus, there is no place for anti-Semitism, as this is a discussion among Jews over whether or not they will accept Jesus as the Messiah. Knowing this, the reader should recognize that stereotyping and pejorative language is often part of such conflicts, and so he/she ought to take what Matthew says regarding the Jewish leadership with a grain of salt. Moreover, the fact that Gentiles came to dominate Christianity fairly early into its history is no excuse for the anti-Semitic strains that have occurred within Christianity. Repentance for such misapplication is necessary, and the recognition of Matthew’s extensive use and interpretation of OT history in light of Jesus will help the reader avoid such short-sighted, wrong-headed tendencies when reading this gospel. SEE ALSO NOTE 2.

¹⁰ Brown, 212-217.

¹¹ As Hays put it, Matthew reveals that Jesus’ “life is the typological completion of numerous OT prophecies and stories....Matthew sees it as his business to demonstrate the continuity of Jesus—both in his teaching and in his person—with the Torah,” 96.

¹² “The final verse, ‘I am with you all days until the end of the age’ is an inclusion with God’s revelation about Jesus through the prophet Isaiah at the beginning of the Gospel (1.23): ‘His name shall be called Emmanuel (which means ‘God with us’),” Brown, 203. “There is no ascension or departure of Jesus at the end. This is not an ending, but more of a beginning—and one which is all embracing: ‘all authority’ is given to Jesus, the disciples are to go to ‘all nations,’ teaching them ‘all things,’ and Jesus will be with them for ‘all time’—for, according to Matthew’s portrait, he is nothing less than the human face of God,” Burrige, 98-99.

¹³ This point is made through the genealogy (1.1-18) and birth narrative (1.18-25), the visit of the magi (2.1-12), the flight to (2.13-18) and return from Egypt (2.19-23), and the proclamation of JBap and Jesus’ wilderness temptation (3.1-4.16). The genealogy is divided into three units, which recall the entire scope of OT history and connect Jesus to the major stages therein—Abraham to Jesse (patriarchal period); David to Josiah (monarchical period); Jehoniah to Joseph and Mary (exilic and post-exilic period). “As a *descendant of Abraham*, Jesus continues God’s promise to Abraham....As a *descendant of king David*, Jesus inherits a reign or empire that embodies justice and righteousness for all (Ps 72),” Warren Carter, *New Interpreter’s Bible: Matthew*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.), 1748, 1.1. I would add, that as a *descendant of those in exile*, Jesus offers hope in the midst of violence, injustice, and oppression. For details on the birth narrative see note 5 above. The magi’s visit reveals the universal scope of God’s redemptive plan, and Herod’s effort to manipulate them into becoming unwitting accomplices reveals the sharp contrast between the ethics of God’s kingdom and those of earthly rulers. The deliverance of Jesus from Herod’s plot moves through Egypt—recalling God’s rescue of Jacob’s family from famine

teachings, noting the shift with the statement: *From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'* Thus, from **4.18-16.20** Jesus journeys throughout modern-day Palestine proclaiming the kingdom of heaven—calling individuals (through his words *and* his actions) to a new way of life, a new ethic, which challenges the prevailing power structures (religious, political, social, economic, etc.) of his day and ours. Within this narrative unit we find three of the five major discourses in Matthew's gospel—the “sermon on the mount” (*chaps. 5-7*), the “mission sermon” (*chap. 10*), and the “sermon in parables” (*chap. 13*)—which discuss what it means to live according to the ethics of God's kingdom.¹⁴ At *16.13-20* we find the central question Jesus sets before his followers: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter, speaking for all who have chosen to follow Jesus up to this point, declares “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God” (*16.16*).¹⁵ Following Mark, Matthew's narrative shifts again after this confession (**16.21**), using another temporal transition (*see 4.17*): *From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* Therefore, from **16.22-28.20** we find Jesus' revelation of

by redeeming the wicked plot of Joseph's brothers (see Gen 37-50). This leads to Jesus' deliverance out of Egypt and subsequent temptation in the wilderness, where he succeeds in remaining faithful to YHWH, post-Exodus, where Israel had faltered (see Exod, Deut 6-8).

¹⁴ “In the Sermon on the Mount, the Matthean Jesus describes the piety the disciples are to practice. As those who live in the sphere of God's end-time rule, their piety is to be that of the greater righteousness (5.20).” In the Mission Sermon, Jesus provides followers with “instruction in the first mission they are to undertake...This mission is an extension of Jesus' own mission.” Finally, the Sermon in Parables “encompasses insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and knowledge of Jesus' identity,” J.D. Kingsbury, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 505, 506. Throughout Jesus' “sermons” we see him overturning prevailing patterns of behavior and thought, revealing that God's kingdom is both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. It is the mournful, meek, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure, peacemaking, and persecuted poor rather than the wealthy, powerful, domineering, exploitive elite who are blessed (5.1-11). There is a higher law, the law of righteousness that supersedes and triumphs over the traditional interpretations of Torah (5.17-48). Jesus provides this higher law characterized by love, mercy and grace (5.38-48) and rejects revenge as valid, refuses to flaunt righteous behavior (6.1-18), dismisses wealth and worldly splendor as objects worthy of striving toward (6.19-34), and seeks to bear fruit in keeping with this new and different kind of life (a kingdom lifestyle) taught and embodied by Jesus (7.1-28). A closer look at Jesus' teachings will inevitably challenge the traditional formulation of the gospel message. When we opt out of the prevailing ideology that Jesus came simply to save peoples' souls and get them into “heaven” (i.e., the somewhere over the rainbow place that one day we'll fly away to in the sweet by and by), we can better appreciate the renewal of all creation proclaimed by Jesus. We find in Jesus the presence of God among humanity, bringing a message of holistic redemption which he refers to as *the kingdom of God*. This is not some esoteric set of doctrinal or theological statements, nor is it primarily concerned about the individual salvation of a person's soul (this distinction of soul, spirit, and body owes much more to Platonic thinking than it does to the biblical witness anyway), but rather a redemption that transforms all things, offering a new way of life through a new story (*euaggelia*, good news) that defines all of our individual stories. This is precisely why we find the imagery regarding Jesus' return “in his glory” focusing on deeds of love, compassion, and kindness rather than doctrinal correctness, theological acumen, or professions of faith through a recited “sinner's prayer” (see 25.31-46). Instead, we find a call to follow Jesus coupled with the declaration that “every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit,” and we are known as Jesus' followers by our fruit (7.15-20). As Brian McLaren noted, “Jesus says, in essence, ‘I have been sent by God with this good news—that God loves humanity, even in its lostness and sin. God graciously invites everyone and anyone to turn from his or her current path and follow a new way. Trust me and become my disciple, and you will be transformed, and you will participate in the transformation of the world, which is possible, beginning right now.’ This is good news....Jesus came to be the Savior of the world, meaning he came to save the earth and all it contains from its ongoing destruction because of human evil. Through his life and teaching, through his suffering, death, and resurrection, he inserted into human history a seed of grace, truth, and hope that can never be defeated. This seed will, against all opposition and odds, prevail over the evil and injustice of humanity and lead to the world's ongoing transformation into the world God dreams of. All who find in Jesus God's hope and truth discover the privilege of participating in his ongoing work of personal and global transformation and liberation from evil and injustice” *Everything Must Change*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 79-80. I would also recommend McLaren's *The Secret Message of Jesus* for further reflection upon Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of heaven/God.

¹⁵ I find Brian McLaren's comments regarding the location of Peter's confession (Caesarea Philippi) fascinating, particularly in light of Jesus' declaration of a new and different kind of life (the kingdom of heaven/God). “The city's name was itself evocative....The city was built near the base of an escarpment, where an important spring emerged from a cliff face. The spring had been a center for worship of the Canaanite god Baal; but the place was renamed Pnias (or Baniyas, when the Greek god Pan replaced Baal as the focal point of worship...[W]hen the regional Roman ruler Herod the Great died, his son Herod Philip was given control of the region around Pnias. He changed the name to Caesarea Philippi—the first name honoring Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, and the latter name honoring himself....Taken together, the religious associations (Baal, Pan) and political associations (Caesar, Philip) would have been fused....So this Jewish prophet and his band of closest friends come to the foreign city named for the occupying emperor and a puppet regional ruler...and a location known as a center for the worship of false gods.” Therefore, it is all the more radical when Peter declares Jesus to be *Christ*, “which means *liberating king*. To say *liberating king* anywhere in the Roman Empire is dangerous, even more so in a city bearing Caesar's name....Similarly, *Son of the living God* takes on special radiance in this setting. Caesars called themselves ‘sons of the gods,’ but Peter's confession asserts that their false, idolatrous claim is now trumped by Jesus' true identity as one with authority from the true and living God,” *Everything Must Change*, 110, 111.

his messianic identity as that of suffering servant, whose death and resurrection ushers in the new age, the new life, the new kingdom. Within this portion of the narrative we encounter the final two discourses—the “sermon on the church” (*chap. 18*) and the “eschatological sermon” (*chaps. 24-25*)—which detail the characteristics of kingdom interaction, a discipleship of suffering, and the necessity of watchfulness and faithfulness.¹⁶ The story concludes with Jesus’ resurrection and the commission extended to all who choose to be his followers (*28.18b-20a*)—*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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*¹⁷ Most significant is the final line of the gospel, recalling Matthew 1.23 and framing the entire proclamation of good news with God’s liberating presence (*28.20b*): *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*¹⁸

¹⁶ The Sermon on the Church reveals once more (see *chaps. 5-7*) that the Kingdom of God is characterized by humility, forgiveness, love, mercy, and reconciliation. This is sometimes misunderstood because of *18.15-20*, where the community member who refuses to listen to loving correction is to be treated “as a Gentile and tax collector.” If the Christian community treated these groups like the religious leaders of the day (rejection, avoidance, critique, condemnation), it would be confusing given Jesus’ call to limitless forgiveness that follows (*vv 21-22*). However, in the Kingdom of God, treating the unrepentant “as a Gentile and tax collector” does not mean excluding and shunning them, but following Jesus’ practice of eating and fellowshiping with them and loving them into the kingdom of God, *NIB*, 1779, *18.16-17*. As Richard Hays noted, such action “aims at regaining the brother [or sister]...In the wider narrative context of the gospel of Matthew, to say that the expelled sinner must be ‘as a Gentile and a tax collector’ cannot mean that the person becomes a pariah to be shunned by the church; it means, rather, that the person becomes an object of the community’s missionary efforts,” 102.

¹⁷ “Disciples do not live for themselves. Jesus commissions this group of disciples to form a world-wide mission community of Jewish and Gentile disciples that lives out Jesus’ teaching...The community of disciples carries out this task in a world marked by imperial lies and hostility (*28.11-15*). But Jesus’ presence strengthens and guides it (*1.21-23*), *to the end of the age*,” *NIB*, 1800, *28.19-20a*, *28.20b*. Being assured of the continuing presence of God, the ones who have been instructed in kingdom ethics are now sent out to embody this lifestyle and “are to perform the scribal function for the messianic community, teaching the church what Jesus first taught them,” Johnson, 182.

¹⁸ The promise of God’s abiding presence (*1.23*, *28.20b*) bookends the Matthean narrative. For an intriguing perspective on the so-called “great commission” in light of Matthew’s entire gospel, see David Bosch’s “Matthew: Mission as Disciple-Making” in his book *Transforming Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005 reprint), 56-83. SEE ALSO NOTE 12.

Outlines and Commentaries on Mark

Luke Timothy Johnson¹⁹

I. The Person of Jesus Messiah (1.1-4.16)

Temporal Transition (4.17) – *From that time, Jesus began to preach...*

II. The Proclamation of God's Kingdom by Jesus Messiah (4.17-16.20)

Temporal Transition (16.21) – *From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples...*

III. The Revelation of Jesus Messiah to his disciples through his Suffering, Death, and Resurrection (16.21-28.20)

Raymond Brown²⁰

Introduction: Origin & Infancy of Jesus the Messiah (1.1-2.23)

Part One: Proclamation of the Kingdom (3.1-7.20)

A. Narrative (3.1-4.25)

B. Sermon on the Mount (5.1-7.29)

Part Two: Ministry & Mission in Galilee (8.1-10.42)

A. Narrative (9.1-9.38)

B. Mission Sermon (10.1-42)

Part Three: Questioning & Opposition to Jesus (11.1-13.52)

A. Narrative (11.1-12.50)

B. Sermon in Parables (13.1-52)

Part Four: Christology & Ecclesiology (13.53-18.35)

A. Narrative (13.53-17.27)

B. Sermon on the Church (18.1-35)

Part Five: Journey to & Ministry in Jerusalem (19.1-25.46)

A. Narrative (19.1-23.39)

B. Eschatological Sermon (24.1-25.46)

Climax: Passion, Death, & Resurrection (26.1-28.20)

¹⁹ Johnson, 175.

²⁰ Brown, 172.

For Further Study

- Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew, Volumes 1-2*, revised edition. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975.
- Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
- Burridge, Richard A. *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*, 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005.
- Davies, W.D. and D.C. Allison, Jr. *International Critical Commentary: The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 3 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988, 1991.
- Carson, D.A. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Volume 8*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- France, R.T. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Garland, David E. *Reading Matthew*. Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001.
- Hagner, D. *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13, 14-28*, 2 vols. Dallas: Word, 1993, 1995.
- Johnson, Luke T. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Metzger, Bruce M. and Michael D. Coogan, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Mounce, Robert H. *New International Biblical Commentary: Matthew*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.
- Schweizer, Eduard. *The Good News According to Matthew*. Richmond: John Knox, 1975.
- Talbert, Charles. *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.