

THE GOSPEL OF  
**MATTHEW**

*Part II: Proclamation to Israel of Jesus's Identity*  
*Chapters 4:17-16:20*

**ASBURY**

## Start Here.

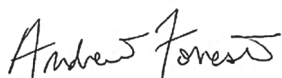
What you hold in your hands is a priceless treasure, a masterpiece, a work of beauty, mystery, and incendiary power. Matthew's Gospel is without question one of the most influential documents in the history of the world, perhaps *the* most influential document in the history of the world. This Gospel has been pored over by candlelight, smuggled into prisons, and stored in the memories of people who wanted to learn more about one extraordinary man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The claim that Matthew's Gospel makes about Jesus is explosive: that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, that the God of Israel has come in the person of Jesus to save his people (and through them the whole world), and that Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection has permanently defeated death and evil.

This Gospel opens with a genealogy that connects Jesus to the long line of Abraham, thereby showing that the entire Old Testament has led to Jesus, who is the fulfilment and culmination of Israel's story, and it ends with the Risen Jesus commanding his followers to go to the entire world to teach other people to obey and follow him.

Matthew set all this down in his Gospel for exactly that reason: so we could understand, obey, and follow after Jesus.

Let's do it.



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## WHAT IS A "GOSPEL"?

"Gospel" is the Old English translation of a Greek word that we transliterate as *euangelion*—pronounced "you-ahng-gell-lee-on"—which means "good news" or "good tidings." You know the story of

the Battle of Marathon, how the messenger ran 26 miles to Athens to bring the breathless news of the great Greek victory over the Persians? The message he was bringing was *euangelion*—it is good news about something that has happened in the world. It wasn't originally a religious word, but a political word. In fact, the early Christians adopted it for their purposes because they understood that what had happened with Jesus was news about something amazing that had taken place, that it was (to quote the angel in Luke's Gospel),

*"Good news of great joy that will be for all the people!"* [Luke 2:10]

This good news was carried from Jerusalem by followers of Jesus all over the world; when it came to the Anglo-Saxon people in what we now call England, the martyrs and missionaries translated it into the tongue of that place, and they called their message "gospel."

The early Christians called the Jesus news "gospel," and they also came to call the documents that contained that news "Gospels."

There are four Gospels in our Bibles, and each one gives a slightly different perspective on Jesus. The one we'll be reading through here is the one according to Matthew, i.e., Matthew's Gospel.

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### **WHAT IS A "DISCIPLE"?**

The concept of discipleship is important in Matthew. Disciple means student (the Greek word is pronounced *math-uh-tase*, from which we get our word "mathematics"); or a better English translation might be *apprentice*. A disciple was someone who was in training to become like the master.

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### **THE TWO KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING MATTHEW'S GOSPEL**

Matthew's Gospel begins like this:

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David,  
the son of Abraham. [1:1]*

And it ends like this:

*<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and*

said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”<sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”  
[28:16-20]

Those bookends give us the keys to understanding Matthew.

#### INTERPRETATIVE KEY #1

Matthew begins by telling us that Jesus is the son of Abraham, i.e., he is the culmination of Israel’s story. This means that the entire Old Testament has been leading up to Jesus. **The first key to understanding Matthew is to see everything about Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as connected to and fulfilling the Old Testament story.** In every passage, ask, “How does this information about Jesus relate to the Old Testament story?”

##### **What to Do When You Think You Understand What You’re Reading**

If you understand a particular passage or episode, *look deeper for the Old Testament connection*—there is more going on that first appears, and the Old Testament connection will greatly broaden your understanding!

##### **What to Do When You Don’t Understand What You’re Reading**

If you don’t understand what you’re reading, there’s a good chance you’re missing the Old Testament connection. So, ask yourself, “How does this story fulfill or complete an Old Testament story?”

#### INTERPRETATIVE KEY #2

Matthew ends by telling us that Jesus’s final instructions to his disciples were to teach other people everything Jesus had taught them.

Which raises the question, “What did Jesus teach?” The entire Gospel of Matthew is the answer.

**Matthew is an instruction manual for discipleship. It is meant to give readers what they need to know to become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.**

So, when you get to the last words of Matthew and the instruction to make disciples, you’re forced to go back and start all over again!

### The Question to Keep in Mind as You Read

If you were an apprentice to Jesus, what would this passage teach you about following him? Of all the things Matthew *could* have told us, why did he think that we needed to know this to be apprentices of Jesus?

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### **OUR READING PLAN**

Like the rest of the Bible, Matthew's Gospel can only be understood through repeated, attentive reading. Accordingly, I've parceled out the readings at a slow pace; each particular day's passage is short and very manageable and it is my hope therefore that you'll have time to go back and re-read a previous day or days and see how it all connects. (The readings are assigned on weekdays only—all the more reason to take your time and read and re-read on the weekends.)

### **THE COMMENTARY**

Each day I've written some commentary to go with the reading; the commentary is NOT the point—Matthew's words are the point—but I offer the commentary to help you get something out of what you've read each day. Some days I've interspersed the commentary in the midst of the reading, and some days the reading is given in its entirety all at once.

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### **THE SHAPE OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL<sup>1</sup>**

Matthew can best be understood as being made up of three main sections:

Part 1 – Preparation for Jesus the Messiah [1:1-4:16];

Part 2 – Proclamation of Jesus the Messiah to Israel [4:17-16:20];

Part 3 – Passion and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah [16:21-28:20].

Accordingly, our reading plan is divided up into three books; in Part 1 we read about both the origins of Jesus—his genealogy and his infancy—and the events that led up to the launch of his public ministry—the ministry of John the Baptism and the baptism and temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. In this volume—Part 2—we will read of the Proclamation of Jesus the Messiah to Israel. Jesus teaches with authority and performs acts of power, but he faces increasing opposition from both the religious leaders and the crowds who gather around him. At the same time, his disciples are given greater and greater knowledge of Jesus and the Kingdom, culminating with Peter's declaration in 16:16,

*"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

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<sup>1</sup>I'm indebted to David Bauer for this insight, and recommend his book, *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew*.

There is much more to say about Matthew than I could fit in this little reading guide; I will be preaching through Matthew through December 2023, and also teaching a series of churchwide Bible studies in that same period on the following Wednesdays:

September 13

October 11

November 8

The Bible studies will be held at 6:30-8:00 PM in the Sanctuary of Asbury Church and are for all ages.

(They will also be livestreamed at [asburytulsa.org](https://asburytulsa.org).)

The Gospel of Matthew is like an iceberg, in that when you first look at it, it seems obvious what it is—the basic story is fairly straightforward. However, what really matters is what's below the surface, and when you slow down and pay attention, the message of Matthew's Gospel will shock you. What's below the surface is IMMENSE and immensely powerful.

If you're willing to work through Matthew, I'm going to make two bold promises:

1. You will come to understand Jesus better;
2. You will come to love Jesus more.

Let's go.

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## ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER

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In a Bible study or small group?

Use the order below to provide some structure to your gathering.

### 1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

*Psalm 118:24*

### 2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

### 3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### 4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

*The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.*

### 5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen

## 6A. MORNING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## 6B. EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## 7. CLOSING BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;  
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace;  
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,  
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

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## OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

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I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

### A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*or*



Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR OUR NATION**

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A BIRTHDAY**

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as *he* begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY**

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY**

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **A THANKSGIVING PRAYER**

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

## **FOR OUR ENEMIES**

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

## **FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON**

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that his sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **AT THE TIME OF DEATH**

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

## **FOR DESIRING GOD**

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

### **FOR A PERSON IN TROUBLE OR BEREAVEMENT**

O merciful Father, you have taught us in your holy Word that you do not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men: Look with pity on the sorrows of your servant *N*. Remember *him*, O Lord, in mercy; nourish *his* soul with patience; comfort *him* with a sense of your goodness; lift up your countenance upon *him*; and give *him* peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR THE DISCOURAGED AND DOWNCAST**

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy: Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of your poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **FOR HELP TO BEAR BEREAVEMENT**

Heavenly Father, help us to entrust our loved ones to your care. Though sorrow darkens our lives, help us to look up to you, remembering the cloud of witnesses by which we are surrounded. And grant that we on earth, rejoicing ever in your presence, may share with them the rest and peace which your presence gives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE**

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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(I've selected these prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

### MATTHEW 4:17-25

#### WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

<sup>18</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

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Today we begin Part 2 of Matthew’s Gospel and today’s commentary will be longer than usual so as to properly orient us toward what is to come. Part 2 is about The Proclamation of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. In word and deed Matthew will show us the true identity of Jesus, and this section of the Gospel culminates in Peter’s recognition and declaration of that identity in 16:16:

*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

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Part 1 was about **Preparation** for Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, and we learned in the first sentence that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament story—he is Israel, as Israel was always supposed to be. **Jesus is embodied Israel, but unlike the Old Testament Israel,**

**Jesus will be faithful to the Lord even to the point of death.**

Preparation is over; Part 2 of Matthew's Gospel is now about the Proclamation to Israel of Jesus's identity. From Peter's confession of Jesus's true identity in 16:16 on, Matthew's narrative will move in Part 3 toward the **Passion and Resurrection** of Jesus the Messiah.

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Part 2 begins with a summary statement about everything that will follow:

*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [4:17]*

Up to this point, Jesus hasn't begun his ministry—rather, we've been told about the preparation for that ministry. Now, Jesus is ready to begin, and we learn the central message that Jesus came to proclaim, namely that God's ultimate reality was close and that therefore everyone needed to change direction to participate in it.

The Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God are interchangeable terms, and they refer to the realm where God's will is perfectly realized and God's reign is perfectly acknowledged. "The kingship of God" might be another helpful way to think about it. In the opening pages of the Bible, the Kingdom of heaven is Eden, and in the closing pages of the Bible the Kingdom of heaven is the New Jerusalem that John the visionary sees in Revelation 21-22.

In the Bible, repentance means a change of direction by changing how you think and how you live.

**Jesus's message is that God's ultimate reality—the Kingdom—is really close and that that fact *requires* a response!**

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<sup>18</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. [4:18-22]

Matthew's Gospel has two important themes:

1. Jesus is the fulfilment of Israel's story; and,
2. Jesus is calling everyone to become his disciples—i.e., his students or apprentices—so they can learn how to live in the reality of the kingship of God.

Here Matthew shows us what discipleship requires—*immediate obedience*.

Jesus calls Andrew and Peter, James and John to follow him without preamble—just do it.

Twice, Matthew tells us that the brothers left their nets "immediately," i.e., when Jesus calls, they respond totally: they don't hedge their bets or halfway follow him. What's Matthew trying to tell us?

Either we follow Jesus, or we don't: there is no place for half-hearted discipleship.

Jesus says, "Follow me." In response, what do you need to "immediately" leave, drop, or do today?

## **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12**

### **MATTHEW 5:1-12**

#### **HOW TO HAVE THE GOOD LIFE NOW**

**5** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Remember our 2 keys to understanding Matthew:

1. **The first key to understanding Matthew is to see everything about Jesus in Matthew's Gospel as connected to and fulfilling the Old Testament story.** In every passage, ask, "How does this information about Jesus relate to the Old Testament story?"
2. **The second key is to see Matthew as an instruction manual for discipleship. It is meant to give readers what they need to know to become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.** In every passage ask, "Of all the things Matthew *could* have told us, why did he think that we needed to know this to be apprentices of Jesus?"

The Sermon on the Mount is a great example to show how these two keys fit together and help us understand what we're reading.

1. In the Old Testament, Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments and the Law because the Lord wants to teach the Israelites how to live well. Here, we see Jesus is like a new Moses, and he's teaching his followers (on a mountain) what it will take to live the good life. In fact, Jesus is doing more than what Moses did, because the words of Jesus *fulfill* the purpose of the Law (5:17-20).
2. As the rest of Matthew's Gospel unfolds, we'll see that Jesus will model the qualities he describes in the Sermon on the Mount; his teaching here is an invitation to enter into the life that he's living—it's an instruction manual for his disciples.

**We will see that the Sermon on the Mount is a summary of life in the Kingdom of God; the rest of the Gospel gives us specific examples of what that life looks like.**

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## THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE BEATITUDES

The Sermon on the Mount begins with some strange statements about the good life. They are a summary of the subsequent teaching

of Jesus, and a shorthand picture of his entire life. These statements are called “The Beatitudes” because of the way Jesus begins each statement saying “Blessed are....”

Jesus sees the world as a fundamentally good place for those who trust God, and he begins his teaching by telling his hearers that even difficult personal circumstances cannot keep them from experiencing the blessedness that comes from trusting God. It's always important to pay attention to context; the crowds Matthew mentions in 5:1 are described in the previous verses at the end of chapter 4 like this:

*"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan."*

[4:23-25]

Jesus has been proclaiming the kingship of God and telling people that it has arrived, and many of the people to whom he has been speaking are sick, broken, down-trodden, unimportant, etc. And it is to those people that Jesus says, "You are in the position to flourish—you are in the right spot for the good life." Why? Because Jesus has brought the Kingdom to them!

That insight has made all the difference to me. All of those people--the poor in spirit, the mourning, the ones who hunger for righteousness--all of those people find the answer in Jesus, who is ushering in the Kingdom—**there is nothing that precludes them or anyone else from learning to live in the Kingdom right now.**

And you know what? It's still the same today. **Because of what *will* happen, you live now as if it's already here, thereby bringing it further into reality.**

So, even when really bad things happen—like being persecuted for doing the right thing—you can flourish because you know that God sees it and will vindicate you.



The Beatitudes are about how to have a flourishing life by living now in the truth and hope that those who trust Jesus and follow him will receive joy now and in the age to come, eternal life.

When you live with that trust and hope, you flourish.

**BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY  
LIVESTREAM: [asburytulsa.online.church](https://asburytulsa.online.church)**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13**

**MATTHEW 5:13-20**

WHAT WAS THE POINT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT?

<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

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Salt has two uses in the kitchen:

It enhances (brings out the flavor);

It preserves (keeps from rotting).

Jesus tells his followers that they are like salt: they are to make society better, and they are to keep society from going bad.

What about if the Church loses its saltiness, what if it loses what makes it distinct? Jesus says that then

*“It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” [5:13b NIV]*

We can all cite multiple examples over these last 2,000 years when the Church abandoned what made it distinct and went along with the wider culture--it's always disaster and ruin, both for the Church and the world. (Think of slavery in the New World, e.g.)

So, it is crucial that we stay salty and thereby have something to offer the world. But how? Here's one quick thought.

The Sermon on the Mount is a seamless garment, all woven together, and so I think part of the way that the Church keeps its saltiness is to pay attention to what Jesus says later on in today's passage:

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." [5:17]*

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and he is expressing God's heart behind the Old Testament law. Jesus isn't doing away with the Law but filling the law full of meaning. The law was always meant to show people the way to a flourishing life. So, the more we seek to understand the scriptures, the more we both experience life and the more we have to offer the world. I think one of the ways we can ensure our saltiness therefore is by doing exactly what we're doing: reading and poring over the Scriptures.

May God use his Word to make you salty today.

## **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14**

### **MATTHEW 5:21-48**

#### **WHAT KIND OF PERSON COULD DO THIS?**

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

<sup>31</sup> “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup> “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’

<sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Read today's passage from the Sermon on the Mount and then ask yourself, "What kind of person would be able to do the things that Jesus is talking about?"

That's exactly the point.

The person who could do the things Jesus is talking about is one who is being transformed from the inside-out. God's desire with the Old Testament law was to point to the reality behind the law—a disposition of the heart. And so the purpose of God is to remake a person from the inside out so that he or she is actually capable of fulfilling the promise of the Sermon on the Mount. Courage, fidelity, peace, honesty, reconciliation--these are what result in a person who decides to follow Jesus and learn from him.

Are you willing? Do one practical thing today.

## **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15**

### **MATTHEW 6:1-18**

#### THE MOST TERRIFYING VERSE IN THE BIBLE?

**6** “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup> “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>7</sup> “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread,  
<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

<sup>16</sup> “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

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Jesus is teaching his disciples that the purpose of good works and works of piety is not to show off, but to glorify God and to be approved of by God. For example, he shows the disciples how to pray—not by showing off with lots of words, but with simple, concrete statements and requests. One of those requests includes one of the most terrifying verses in the entire Bible. As part of his teaching on prayer, Jesus says this:

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. [6:14-15 NIV]*

The context is the closing part of what we call The Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." (The language is old-fashioned. What Jesus literally says is "debts," but the sense is more like "sins" or "wrongs," etc. I personally like "trespasses," which always makes me think of someone deliberately transgressing on someone else's property.) I don't totally

understand how this works, but Jesus clearly implies that there is some spiritual connection between our willingness to forgive others and our capacity to receive forgiveness from God.

Terrifying. Who do you need to forgive today?

Don't wait.

## **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18**

### **MATTHEW 6:19-34**

#### **THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GREED AND WORRY**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek

first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

<sup>34</sup> “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

---

Jesus sees the world as a fundamentally good and safe place for those who trust God. In his teaching here on material possessions, he explains that there is a connection between greed and worry, because both greed and worry are based on the idea that God can't be trusted to provide enough of what we need. Either we hoard out of fear, or we live in fear for tomorrow. Both ways lead us away from life. In fact, a focus on those things will bring darkness to our interior lives (vv. 22-23)!

So, in light of Jesus's teaching here, what if we literally starting doing what he said?

When he told his followers to "Consider the lilies," what if he really meant it?

And when he says, "Seek first the kingdom," what if he actually wants us to do it?

What if you spent time today looking at something beautiful and ordinary that God made?

What if you the first thing you did upon waking tomorrow was to spend time in quiet prayer and reflection before God?

What if this stuff actually works?

What if Jesus doesn't want you to live with anxiety, and what if he's telling you what to do to combat anxiety today?

Just do it.

## **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19**

### **MATTHEW 7:1-6**

TAKE THIS TEST TO SEE IF YOU ARE A HYPOCRITE

**7** “Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup>For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be

measured to you. <sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

<sup>6</sup>"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

---

TAKE THIS TEST TO SEE IF YOU ARE A HYPOCRITE

Are you breathing?

I'm sorry to tell you: you are a hypocrite.

Still not convinced?

Do you judge other people by their actions but yourself by your intentions?

Congratulations, you are definitely a hypocrite.

Still not persuaded? There is one final test.

Go look in the mirror. Only hypocrites can be seen in the mirror.

I kid. But seriously. When Jesus tells us not to judge, he doesn't mean that we should refrain from discerning between right and wrong, good and evil. (That's why he tells us not to throw pearls to swine—in other words, exercise discernment about right and wrong.) What he means is that we should beware putting ourselves in the morally superior position of the Judge. We're not the Judge; we're the same as everybody else: we're all hypocrites.

Which means we all need mercy.

So, by all means discern between good and bad, right and wrong, and call out evil where you see it. But never forget that there is only one Judge, and you aren't better than anyone else.

(And neither am I.)



**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20**

**MATTHEW 7:7-12**

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO ASK FOR TODAY?

<sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

<sup>12</sup>“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

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When my daughter was a little girl, she contracted a sinus infection that caused one of her eyes to swell shut. (This happened over Christmas. Of course it did.) The doctor prescribed medicinal eye drops, which we were to apply to her little eyes several times a day. I don't know if it's easier to rope a calf than to apply eye drops to a squirmy toddler, but I'm certain it's more pleasant for both cowboy and calf. After dropping the clear little drops in her hair and her ears and her mouth and her nose, we decided on a different tack: bribery. "If you let me put the eyedrops in your eyes, we'll give you some 'choca'". ("Choca" being her word for chocolate.) It worked. A drop was equal to a chocolate chip, and soon several times a day we were being asked for "I-jops" and "chocas", and dispensing a fair quantity of both.

And then her prescription ran its course, the infection went away, and we no longer needed the bribe. However, like many a corrupt Third World bureaucrat, my daughter had become hooked on the bribes, and would silently sidle up to me several times a day, climb into my lap, stick her face in mine, cock her head like a crow, and earnestly ask, "I-jops? Chocas?"

Weak father though I am, I was not about to give her medicine she didn't need, and so I politely turned down her requests. If it were good for her, I'd have refilled the prescription, but it wasn't and I didn't.

But you know what? I loved it that she asked me, and I hope she never stops asking me for things.

Jesus says that if human fathers like me delight in giving to our children, how much more will the one he calls our "Father in heaven" delight in giving to his children. **Again, Jesus sees the world as a fundamentally good and safe place for those who trust God.**

So, when he says in today's Gospel reading, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you," he really means it.

What do you need to ask for today?

How would your life change if you woke up every morning feeling certain that God loves you and wants good things for you?

## **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21**

### **MATTHEW 7:13-29**

THE ENTIRE SERMON ON THE MOUNT EXPLAINED  
(BE WARNED—IT'S LONG)

<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

<sup>15</sup> "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

<sup>24</sup> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain

fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

<sup>28</sup> And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

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Be warned—today’s commentary is much longer than usual, but it’s important. I want to help you understand how in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 Jesus is giving his followers practical advice they can actually use to become the kind of people who survive life’s storms.

Storms are inevitable in life. And what’s worse is that they are also unforeseeable. In literal storms, millions and millions of random occurrences come together to produce the winds and the waves; life’s storms are also the result of random interactions of complex systems. So, how do you prepare for something inevitable that’s also completely unpredictable and random?

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#### AMAZED AT WHAT HE HAD TO SAY

There’s this really fascinating aside Matthew gives us after Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount.

*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. [7:28-29]*

Having just heard Jesus give this famous set of teaching, his hearers are amazed. What Jesus has been saying was so insightful and unusual and so obviously cut to the heart of the matter of everyday life that it was nothing short of astounding. And you know what? Nothing has changed in 2,000 years--these words are still AMAZING.

#### THE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

Let’s begin at the end. Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount by saying that there are two options in life: the way that seems easy but

actually ends in ruin, and the way that seems difficult and unpopular but actually results in blessing [7:13-14]. He expands on this by talking about how it's not what people say that matters, but what they actually do (and how to tell between the talkers and the doers) [7:15-23], and then he sums up the entire set of teachings with a little parable:

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."* [7:24-27 NIV]

In his conclusion, Jesus says that the difference between the people who are destroyed by life's storms and those who survive them is that the survivors actually do what Jesus said to do. But how do we actually do that? That's what he's been telling us in the previous 3 chapters of his famous sermon. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount is meant to be a How-To manual to becoming the kind of person who can weather any storm. And the first thing we have to understand is what Jesus meant when he talked about the "Kingdom".

#### WHAT THE KINGDOM IS

Here's how Matthew sums up the central message of Jesus:

*"Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'"* - Matthew 4:17 NIV

Another way of translating this might be:

"HEY! Turn around and change your mind: living in the reality of God is now one of your options."

#### Matthew 4:17 AFV

**[Andrew Forrest Version, in the vein of Dallas Willard]**

A kingdom is wherever a king's will is done; beyond that frontier, it's no longer that king's kingdom. King Charles reigns over the United Kingdom; he does not reign in France. Each of us has our own kingdom or queendom; where my will is done is my kingdom. So, my body is one part of my kingdom, for example: I command my finger to move, and it does; I command my mouth to speak, and it does. The kingdom of heaven is wherever God's will is done. The only place in the Creation where God's will is not done is here on earth, where God has permitted for a while his human creatures to exercise their own private kingships and

queenships. This is why we pray in the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it [already] is in heaven."

From the beginning, it was God's plan that men and women would exercise their free will and rule in his name over the earth [see Genesis 1:26]; it remains God's will that we would freely choose to align our kingdoms under his Kingdom.

So, the message of Jesus in 4:17 is that through him God's Kingdom is now available to anyone, anywhere, RIGHT NOW if they are willing to do what he says. Apprenticeship or discipleship to Jesus is learning to live your life in the reality of the Kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount which follows his announcement in 4:17, he provides some practical examples of what Kingdom life will look like.

#### THE INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Jesus begins the Sermon by telling people that there is no spiritual condition that precludes them from learning to live in the Kingdom now: not the spiritually poor, not the mourning, not the meek, etc. [We call this section "The Beatitudes," 5:3-12.]

Then, Jesus tells his followers that living in the Kingdom will make them distinct from people around them: it will be as if they are salt—thereby bringing out the flavor in life—or light—thereby showing others how best to live. [5:13-16.]

To be clear, Jesus wants his followers to understand that he's not doing anything new, that this is ultimately what the Old Testament is all about, and that he's not come to abolish "the law and the prophets". [5:17-20.]

With those remarks out of the way, Jesus explains what it looks like to put his words into practice and live in the Kingdom. What he is going to do is take familiar situations that arise and give an example of what Kingdom living would look like in each of those situations.

Here's the point: it would seem at first that going along with the conventional wisdom in each of the examples that follow would be the best course of action; actually Jesus wants us to understand that if you just do what everyone else is doing—"the wide and easy path" he references in Matthew 7:13—it will be the equivalent of building a foundation on sand. Instead, if you do what he says to do, as counterintuitive as it might seem, you'll be building your life on bedrock.

## A PRACTICAL PLAN FOR BECOMING A SURVIVOR

### ANGER

Jesus begins his advice by talking about anger. He tells his hearers that though it is obvious that murder will mess up your life, the anger and contempt that are behind and underneath murder are also spiritually dangerous. So, rather than indulging in anger, Jesus tells his followers that they should actually seek reconciliation with people with whom they have bad blood. Living in the Kingdom is trying as hard as humanly possible to be reconciled with others. [5:21-26.]

Building on Sand: anger and contempt.

Building on Rock: seeking reconciliation.

### LUST

Next, Jesus tells his followers that though it is obvious that adultery will mess up your life, what's really important is to rid your thoughts of lust. Lust is using someone else's image for your own gratification, which is evil because people were created in the image of God, and not for the purpose of pornography. Jesus says that Kingdom living, then, is about doing whatever it takes--he uses the hyperbolic image of cutting off your own hand!--to learn to see other people as God sees them, and not as objects of desire. [5:27-30.]

Building on Sand: indulging your thought life.

Building on Rock: disciplining your thought life.

### MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

People have been having marital problems since the Garden of Eden, and they had marital problems in Jesus's day, too. But Jesus tells his followers that marriage is not primarily a contract between two people for the purpose of meeting their emotional needs; rather it is a one-flesh union that involves a covenant before God. And so Kingdom living is about being reconciled with your spouse (remember reconciliation is an important Kingdom value) as far as is in your power. Now, if your spouse persists in adulterous behavior, reconciliation is clearly outside of your power, but Jesus tells his followers divorce is a last resort. [5:31-32.]

Building on Sand: leaving a marriage when it doesn't fulfill your emotional needs.

Building on Rock: working towards reconciliation as far as is humanly possible.

## MANIPULATION ("OATHS")

Then Jesus takes on a pervasive human behavior: that of trying to manipulate other people into doing what we want them to do. In his day there had developed this convoluted practice of swearing on the Temple in Jerusalem to convince people you were sincere. ("I swear on the Temple I didn't take your money!") We don't do that, but of course we try to use language (social media posts?) to get other people to do what we want them to do. In contrast, Jesus says that Kingdom living is much simpler: just say what you mean, and leave it at that. [5:33-37.]

Building on Sand: trying to manipulate others.

Building on Rock: saying what you mean, and leaving it at that.

## VENGEANCE/RETALIATION/ENEMIES

You will have enemies; people will seek to do you harm. Though it seems natural to us to hit back and hate the people who hate us (the wide and easy path always seems "natural" to us at first), Kingdom living is about forgoing retaliation and instead seeking ways to bless the people who mistreat us, even to the extent of praying for God to bless them! Jesus makes the reason explicit: when you try to love the people who hate you, you are acting like God, who wants to bless all his children. So, Kingdom living is learning to act like God in the times of inevitable conflict we will encounter. [5:38-48.]

Building on Sand: vengeance and retaliation.

Building on Rock: seeking to bless those that hate us.

## VIRTUE-SIGNALING (E.G. GIVING AND FASTING)

Jesus tells his followers next that they should be careful of trying to impress other people with how they help the poor or by doing "spiritual" things like fasting. Instead, those should be personal practices and a way of life that's more private than public. In other words, learning to live in the Kingdom is learning not to need to impress other people with how good you are. (Think of all the virtue-signaling on social media.) [6:1-4, 16-18.]

Building on Sand: virtue-signaling to impress others with your goodness.

Building on Rock: doing the right thing because it's right, not because people will see you do it.

## PRAYER

Jesus tells his followers how to pray. Learning to live in the kingdom is to make prayer a habitual action ("When you pray, go in your room and shut the door...") and to use Jesus as a model for prayer. [6:5-15.]

Building on Sand: praying haphazardly.

Building on Rock: having a plan for habitual prayer.

## MONEY/WEALTH

It seems that having more money will make you happier, but Jesus points out that which we all already know: more stuff won't necessarily make you happier. (If that were the case, then the people in Beverly Hills would be the happiest people on earth, but we know that isn't true.) Living in the Kingdom is learning to trust God more than our own stuff. [6:19-24.]

Building on Sand: thinking more stuff will make you happier.

Building on Rock: learning that trusting God actually makes you happy.

## WORRY!

If there were ever a topic for practical pastoral advice, it would be worry! Jesus tells his hearers that worry, which seems so natural ("the wide and easy path") will actually be harmful. So, he tells his followers to focus only on the problems of that particular day (over which they actually have some measure of control), and leave the rest to God. [6:25-34.]

Building on Sand: getting worked up and worried over things you can't control.

Building on Rock: focusing on what you can control today, and working to trust God with everything else.

## OTHER PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR AND HYPOCRISY

Jesus tells his followers that though discerning between good and bad, right and wrong has a place, focusing on other people's behavior and ignoring our own is foolish. Rather, Kingdom living is about turning most of your attention on your own shortcomings and working on those. [7:1-6.]

Building on Sand: judging other people by their actions and yourself by your intentions; getting all worked up over other people's hypocrisy.

Building on Rock: focusing on your own actions and shortcomings.



## ASKING GOD FOR STUFF

Which brings us to the final bit of practical advice in the sermon: definitely ask God for stuff you need! Lots of folks think "I don't want to ask for the wrong thing; I'll just pray a generic prayer for God's will to be done." Instead, Jesus tells his hearers to ask boldly. [7:7-12.]

Building on Sand: refusing to ask and not persisting in prayer.

Building on Rock: asking and persisting in prayer.

## TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

All of the above is Jesus providing his hearers of examples of what Kingdom living looks like. Each topic he covers is a topic that each of us encounters all the time; doing what Jesus said is putting his principles into practice when you encounter anger, lust, worry, etc. Anyone can choose to participate, because Jesus came to bring the good news of the Kingdom to everyone. But, he concludes with telling his followers that hearing is not the point: actually practicing what he said is the point.

The people who actually do what he says will be the kind of people who, rather than going along with everyone else by taking "the wide and easy path" will be the kind of people who take the narrow, hard path that actually leads to life.

The people who do what he says will be able to survive any storm--even death!--because they are learning to live the eternal life of the Kingdom RIGHT NOW.

If you want to learn how to survive life's storms, start doing what Jesus says. Go down the list, and begin to practice the Kingdom response or mindset. It works.

Storms in life will inevitably come; no one is exempt. Jesus says the only way to prepare is to start learning to live in the Kingdom now, and the Sermon on the Mount offers advice how to do just that.

What are you waiting for?

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

### MATTHEW 8:1-17

#### THREE MIRACLES OF HEALING AND RESTORATION

**8** When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. <sup>2</sup> And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” <sup>3</sup> And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

<sup>5</sup> When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, <sup>6</sup> “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” <sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” <sup>8</sup> But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup> For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” <sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup> I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup> while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” <sup>13</sup> And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

<sup>14</sup> And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. <sup>15</sup> He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. <sup>16</sup> That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”

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The overarching theme of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of Matthew’s Gospel (4:17-16:20) is the Proclamation of Jesus the Messiah to Israel. Matthew has just shown us the teaching of Jesus the Messiah—and “the crowds were astonished at his teaching” (7:20)—and for the next few chapters he will show us that in addition to his teaching, Jesus also did great

works of power that showed his authority over both the seen realm (healing the sick, calming the storm, etc.) and the unseen realm (casting out demons). Note that Jesus demonstrates his power simply by words of command.

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One of the most amazing things about the ministry of Jesus is that it is for everyone. Although Jesus was a Jew and his ministry was to the people of Israel, he made it clear that he was inviting anyone who would hear and respond into the eternal life of the Kingdom of God. For example, in today's passage after he heals the slave of a Roman centurion--a man who was a living embodiment of Roman oppression and pagan idolatry--Jesus says this:

*"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."* [8:11 NIV]

Wow! Jesus is saying that there is nothing about a person's identity before he or she encounters Jesus that precludes that person from following after Jesus. If he is willing to follow Jesus, then even a Roman centurion can be his disciple.

But then Jesus says something troubling (as he always does):

*"But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* [8:12 NIV]

That part I don't like as much. In that specific context, Jesus is saying that just because you were born a Jew in Israel does not mean that are exempt from responding to Jesus. But, applied more broadly it means this: even religious people like me have to actually say yes and follow--no one gets a free pass.

P.S. Peter was married! I love those little details the Gospel writers throw in from time to time.

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

### MATTHEW 8:18-27

#### ENOUGH WITH THE LAME EXCUSES

<sup>18</sup> Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. <sup>19</sup> And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>20</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” <sup>21</sup> Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” <sup>22</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

<sup>23</sup> And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup> And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” <sup>26</sup> And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. <sup>27</sup> And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

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After Jesus calms the storm, the disciples are amazed and say to each other, “*What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!*” [8:27 NIV]

Matthew is using dramatic irony here: we (the readers) know something that the disciples (the characters) don't: Jesus isn't an ordinary man at all, but the God of Israel himself, incarnate. Just as the Lord calmed the waters of chaos at the beginning (see Genesis 1) and parted the Red Sea during the Exodus, so here Jesus has those same powers—over entropy and chaos itself.

When someone like that asks you to follow him, providing lame excuses as to why you'd really like to follow him but it's just that you're so busy--that makes no sense at all.

Will there be danger and difficulty? Yes. But disciples of Jesus will also see the glory of God. In the end everything will be okay, and it will all have been worth it.

Let's go.

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## EXCURSUS: “THE SON OF MAN”

The term “Son of Man” is how Jesus refers to himself. (He never calls *himself* “Messiah” or “Christ,” though does affirm it when other people do.) The phrase comes from Daniel 7:13-14:

<sup>13</sup> “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.  
<sup>14</sup> 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.

The phrase “Son of Man” in Hebrew is a way of saying, “the human one.” In Daniel’s vision, a human is taken up and enthroned in heaven next to God (“the Ancient of Days”) and given dominion over everything.

Why does Jesus use *this* term so frequently to refer to himself?

“It seems that the reason why Jesus found this title convenient is that, having no ready-made [title] in current usage, it could be applied across the whole range of his uniquely paradoxical mission of humiliation and vindication, of death and glory, which could not be fitted into any preexisting model. Like his parables, the title ‘Son of Man’ came with an air of enigma, challenging the hearer to think new thoughts rather than to slot Jesus into a ready-made pigeonhole.”

—R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*

Jesus *is* Israel’s Messiah, but the term was loaded with ideas that were contrary to Jesus’s mission. So, he uses a term that he can provide meaning to until folks can come to truly understand what the Messiah was supposed to be.

## **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26**

### **MATTHEW 8:28-34**

DO YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO BE DIFFERENT,  
OR DO YOU JUST WANT TO COMPLAIN?

<sup>28</sup> And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. <sup>29</sup> And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" <sup>30</sup> Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. <sup>31</sup> And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." <sup>32</sup> And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. <sup>33</sup> The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. <sup>34</sup> And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

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Do you actually want to change, or would you rather wallow in the filthy status quo?

Jesus performs an astounding miracle in this village, freeing these two men from filth and misery, and the villagers would prefer he leave than cause any more changes to the way things are.

You don't think that those villagers had parts of their lives that needed healing? But rather than begging Jesus to stay and work among them, their immediate response is to beg him to leave and never come back.

How true of human nature--so often we prefer the pain we know to the possibility of change.

## **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27**

### **MATTHEW 9:1-8**

VISIBLE PROOF OF INVISIBLE AUTHORITY

**9** And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. <sup>2</sup> And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." <sup>3</sup> And behold, some of the scribes said

to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” <sup>4</sup> But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? <sup>6</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” <sup>7</sup> And he rose and went home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

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The reason the scribes (religious leaders) think that Jesus is blaspheming is because only God is in the position to forgive sins. To demonstrate his authority over something “invisible” like a person’s sins, Jesus then heals the man visibly by word of command.

Jesus wants us to see that physical healing is connected to our relationship with God, a relationship that has been damaged because of our sin. Matthew told us in 1:21 that Jesus came to save his people from their sins, and we see him here bringing both physical and spiritual wholeness to a man in need of it.

## **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28**

### **MATTHEW 9:9-17**

**“TO FOLLOW JESUS IS TO FIND LIFE ON A NEW LEVEL”**

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

<sup>10</sup> And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away

from them, and then they will fast. <sup>16</sup>No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. <sup>17</sup>Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

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The Pharisees focus on the failures of the people, but Jesus sees their need. He calls Matthew, and Matthew responds the way a disciple of Jesus should: with no excuses but with immediate obedience.

But, why would Jesus mix with sinful people? He tells the Pharisees that their focus on appropriate religious structure and ritual is misplaced, and that God is interested in the disposition of people’s *hearts*, not simply outwardly “correct” actions: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”

And then Jesus gives a brief parable to get them to think in a new way—now that God has come among his people, the old ways of thinking will need to be cast aside. I like how R.T. France sums up what’s happening here:

*“Following Jesus is not like ‘discipleship’ as it was experienced in other pious circles at the time. It is characterized, at least for the present, by joy rather than solemnity, by feasting rather than fasting, and the two graphic sayings of vv.16-17 [the parable about the wineskins] indicate a fundamental incompatibility between the dry formality of existing religious traditions and an exuberant vitality in the Jesus circle which cannot be confined within conventional forms. To follow Jesus is to find life on a new level.”*

—R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*

“To follow Jesus is to find life on a new level.”

## **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**

### **MATTHEW 9:18-38**

#### **LET’S GET TO WORK**

<sup>18</sup>While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” <sup>19</sup>And Jesus rose and



followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup> And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, <sup>21</sup> for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” <sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup> And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup> he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. <sup>26</sup> And the report of this went through all that district.

<sup>27</sup> And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” <sup>28</sup> When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” <sup>29</sup> Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” <sup>30</sup> And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, “See that no one knows about it.” <sup>31</sup> But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

<sup>32</sup> As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. <sup>33</sup> And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” <sup>34</sup> But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus 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. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

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Remember, the overarching theme of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of Matthew’s Gospel (4:17-16:20) is the **Proclamation** of Jesus the Messiah to Israel. Here we have, one after another, examples of Jesus proclaiming his identity by word and deed.

The great prophet Isaiah had foretold that when God came close to his people, wrongs would be righted:

*<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
-Isaiah 35:5-6a NIV*

Here, Jesus is showing Israel who he is. Will they respond with faith?

The Pharisees admit that Jesus is doing remarkable works, but they claim it is because he is using demonic power to do so.

On the other hand, Jesus tells his disciples that many people will in fact respond in faith, that it will be a “plentiful harvest” as long as his disciples will put in the work.

I love the realism of Matthew:

1. On the one hand, the work of the Kingdom always encounters opposition—we should expect it;
2. On the other hand, the power of God is greater than the powers and principalities of the world, and many people will hear the Good News and respond with faith.

Be hopeful. Let’s get to work.

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 2**

### **MATTHEW 10:1-23**

#### THE TWELVE DISCIPLES=A NEW ISRAEL

**IO** And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. <sup>2</sup>The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ <sup>8</sup>Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give

without pay. <sup>9</sup> Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. <sup>11</sup> And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

<sup>16</sup> “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. <sup>21</sup> Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

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We’ve seen Jesus call 5 of the Twelve by name, and the other 7 are specifically mentioned now. Presumably these 7 responded to his call in the same way as the previous 5—with immediate obedience.

Jesus is Israel, and here he is reconstituting the 12 tribes. That’s why they are sent first to the Jews (and later, after the Resurrection—28:19-20—to the nations). What Jesus has been doing, he now sends the Twelve to do: heal, preach, exorcise, etc. And, like Jesus, they should expect opposition and difficulty.

Two quick thoughts:

- I. Note how importance *perseverance* is for a disciple of Jesus (v.22). **Don’t give up, don’t give in, live no lies, keep going.**

2. Note how Jesus counsels his disciples to respect people's choices—"And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town"—and to allow them to *refuse* the Good News. **By all means reach out to others in love, but if the others have made their refusal clear, at some point you have to respect their choices and let them live with the consequences.**

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3**

### **MATTHEW 10:24-42**

#### ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE IN THE BALANCE

<sup>24</sup> "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

<sup>26</sup> "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

<sup>40</sup> “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup> The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. <sup>42</sup> And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

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The entire purpose of this speech of Jesus is to strengthen their resolve to fulfill their mission faithfully. He doesn’t lie to them—their task will be difficult, and they should expect opposition. But, he wants them to understand that the reward will be worth it and that faithfulness to God outweighs any other consideration—there are eternal consequences in the balance.

A good reminder for us today, too.

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4**

### **MATTHEW 11:1-19**

“AN IRRATIONAL COMMITMENT NOT TO BELIEVE”

**II** When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

<sup>2</sup> Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

<sup>7</sup> As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is he of whom it is written,

“ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
who will prepare your way before you.’ ”

<sup>11</sup> Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup> and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

<sup>16</sup> “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

<sup>17</sup> “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

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John the Baptist had said that when the Messiah came, he’d bring judgment (see 3:11-12). So, when Jesus came healing and teaching, John was confused. Jesus cites Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1 to show John that the scriptures foretold that the Messiah would bring judgment, yes, but also *salvation*.

“Jesus proceeds to give a further reason for the rejection of his message by the greater part of Israel: *an irrational commitment not to believe* (Mt. 11:16-19). The people reject John because of his asceticism and reject Jesus because of his *lack* of asceticism. When Jesus declares that ‘wisdom is justified by her deeds,’ he suggests that the ministries of John and Jesus produce the kind of wholeness and human flourishing that the Old Testament and Judaism insisted wisdom produced, even though the crowds in their irrationality fail to see it.” [emphasis added]

—David Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God*

**The surest way to make sure your thinking isn’t getting in your way is to read the Bible until it begins to shape how you think.**

But the Jesus way is not about information, but about learning to live in light of God’s love. And so he invites everyone to come and take his “yoke”—a Jewish rabbinical term about submitting to teaching—and find that the Jesus way, when we trust him, is actually easy and life-giving.

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2023**

**MATTHEW 12:1-14**

WHY DO THE PHARISEES HATE HIM SO MUCH?

**12** At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. <sup>2</sup> But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” <sup>3</sup> He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? <sup>5</sup> Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? <sup>6</sup> I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

<sup>9</sup> He went on from there and entered their synagogue. <sup>10</sup> And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him. <sup>11</sup> He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? <sup>12</sup> Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” <sup>13</sup> Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. <sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

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Remember, the overarching theme of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of Matthew’s Gospel (4:17-16:20) is the **Proclamation** of Jesus the Messiah to Israel. And one of the things we see over and over again is how Israel misses the point and rejects Jesus. Why?

Well, here we see, in these disagreements over the Sabbath, that the reason the Jews reject Jesus is because they totally misunderstand the Old Testament and fail to see that God was instructing them that mercy—a disposition of the heart—was more important than outward observance of ritual.

Let’s not miss this lesson—to whom can you show mercy today?

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 9**

**MATTHEW 12:15-32**

**WHAT IS THE UNFORGIVEABLE SIN?**

<sup>15</sup> Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all <sup>16</sup> and ordered them not to make him known.

<sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup> “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,  
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

<sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;

<sup>20</sup> a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,  
until he brings justice to victory;

<sup>21</sup> and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

<sup>22</sup> Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. <sup>23</sup> And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” <sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” <sup>25</sup> Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>30</sup> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. <sup>31</sup> Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

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The Pharisees accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil. After pointing out the absurdity of the accusation—why would Satan cast



out Satan?—Jesus calls this attitude the unforgivable sin. Why? The one sin God can't forgive is the sin of refusing to acknowledge the grace of God, the refusing to acknowledge the good, and instead calling it bad. And this makes sense: God won't force anyone to accept his grace. If you insist that God is bad and refuse his grace, God can't help you.

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10**

### **MATTHEW 15:33-37**

#### **HOW TO TELL A GOOD PERSON FROM A BAD PERSON**

<sup>33</sup> “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. <sup>36</sup> I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

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Another reason that the Pharisees reject Jesus is because their hearts are evil, and Jesus makes the point that you can tell the truth about someone by what that person *does*.

What fruit does your life produce?

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11**

### **MATTHEW 12:38-50**

#### **WHY WON'T JESUS GIVE THEM A SIGN?**

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. <sup>42</sup> The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

<sup>43</sup> “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

<sup>46</sup> While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. <sup>48</sup> But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” <sup>49</sup> And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

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The overarching theme of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of Matthew’s Gospel (4:17-16:20) is the **Proclamation** of Jesus the Messiah to Israel. Unfortunately, we see that Israel refuses to accept Jesus as Messiah.

Here (and later, see 16:1-4), the Pharisees want a sign. Why won’t Jesus give them one? Aside from the fact that he has already been giving them sign after sign after sign (see 11:4-6), the reason he refuses here is because he knows that what they want is to have the Kingdom on their own terms, not God’s. In other words, they reject the Kingship of God altogether, since they want to put themselves at the center and use God, like a cosmic vending machine—to get what they want.

Jesus says that their rejection of him will leave them in a worse state, spiritually, than the darkness they walked in before he came. It’s terrifying.

But then Jesus shows us the way forward—obedience. “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Where do you need to be obedient today?

## **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12**

### **MATTHEW 13:1-23**

THE MOST DIFFICULT PARABLE OF ALL?

**13** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

<sup>2</sup> And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and

sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, <sup>6</sup> but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear."

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

“ ‘You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.’

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

<sup>17</sup> For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

<sup>18</sup> "Hear then the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches

choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.<sup>23</sup> As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

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The Parable of the Sower is not in itself particularly difficult, particularly because Jesus interprets it for his disciples (13:18-23):

- The seed is “the word of the Kingdom;”
- The seed on the path applies to people who hear and don’t understand because they have already decided that the news about Jesus makes no sense to them;
- The seed on the rocky soil applies to people who are not committed to learning from Jesus as disciples, but rather have a superficial commitment, and so when difficulty comes, they have no strength or perseverance;
- The seed among the thorns applies to people who allow the worries and concerns of the world to keep them from learning from Jesus;
- The seed on the good soil applies to people who hear and respond to the message of Jesus, and cool stuff happens as a result!

It’s not the parable that is difficult, but what Jesus says subsequently when the disciples question him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, and it almost seems as if he is *trying* to be obscure and confusing. But in fact, he’s merely explaining why it seems some people respond and others don’t.

“When people responded to the message of the parables by joining themselves to Jesus and seeking further understanding, further revelation and explanation about the kingdom were given; to those whose hearing remained at a superficial level no further revelation was given. They were left with parables which did not achieve their goal of enlightening. The lack of receptivity prevented further progress.”

-Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent*

The more you ask, the more you know, and by speaking in parables, Jesus is tricking people to listen harder and desire more.

**What are you doing with what you’ve been given today?**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13**  
**MATTHEW 13:24-43**  
THREE PARABLES EXPLAINED

<sup>24</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ <sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’ ”

<sup>31</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

<sup>34</sup> All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. <sup>35</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables;  
I will utter what has been hidden since the  
foundation of the world.”

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his

angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup>and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup>Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

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Let's take each parable in turn.

1. The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds is about the presence of evil in the world—the world contains evil. God will permit this right up until the Last Judgment. Why? Because rooting the “weeds” out of the world would end up hurting the wheat. Ponder on that one for a while.
2. The Parable of the Mustard Seed is about how the Kingdom looks small and insignificant, but looks are deceiving—it will grow!
3. The Parable of the Leaven is about how the Kingdom will end up affecting the whole world.

Of those 3 parables, which did you need to hear today? Why?

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 16**

### **MATTHEW 13:44-52**

#### THREE MORE PARABLES EXPLAINED

<sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup>When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw

them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.”

<sup>52</sup> 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.”

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Matthew has gathered many of the parables of Jesus together in chapter 13. Let’s continue to take each one in turn:

1. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is about how the Kingdom is the kind of thing that is absolutely worth going all-in for.
2. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is about how the Kingdom is worth whatever it costs.
3. The Parable of the Dragnet is about how the Kingdom is meant for everyone and everyone is invited—but the church contains true disciples and false disciples—and at the Last Judgment there will be a sorting of the faithful from the unfaithful.

P.S. The “treasure old and new” refers to the fulfilment of Israel’s story in Jesus—Jesus is not doing something entirely new since he is the embodiment of Israel, but he is taking the old thing and showing God’s purposes for humanity in a new way.

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17**

### **MATTHEW 13:53-58**

#### **JESUS WAS TOO ORDINARY FOR THEM**

<sup>53</sup> And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, <sup>54</sup> and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” <sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” <sup>58</sup> And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

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The people in Nazareth take offense at Jesus because he's not spectacular enough for them.

Once again, we see that Jesus is rejected because the people expected something different—they think he's too ordinary and is putting on airs.

How are your expectations of God affecting your trust in him today?

### **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18**

#### **MATTHEW 14:1-12**

#### **JOHN GOES FIRST TO DEATH**

**14** At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, <sup>2</sup> and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." <sup>3</sup> For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, <sup>4</sup> because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." <sup>5</sup> And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. <sup>6</sup> But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, <sup>7</sup> so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." <sup>9</sup> And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. <sup>10</sup> He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, <sup>11</sup> and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. <sup>12</sup> And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

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Matthew has made it clear so far that John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, and here unfortunately we see that John went first to death.

Jesus will follow shortly, but he won't stay dead, and will raise all the people of God with him.



**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19**  
**MATTHEW 14:13-21**  
TWO CONTRASTING BANQUETS

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. <sup>15</sup>Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup>But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." <sup>18</sup>And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup>Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup>And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>21</sup>And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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CONTEXT IS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPELS

One of the keys to understanding the Gospels is to pay attention to context:

Where specifically is this story taking place?

What happened beforehand? What happens after?

Why did Matthew place this story in this specific place?

TWO CONTRASTING BANQUETS

Today's story of the feeding of the 5,000 is a great example of the importance of context, because it occurs immediately after Herod's beheading of John the Baptist at a drunken banquet. After a banquet that culminates with a scene of horror --John's severed head is brought in on a platter--Matthew tells us the story of a very different kind of banquet on the green hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The crowds are gathered to see Jesus, and he has compassion on them. In addition to healing their diseases, Jesus presides over a remarkable miracle: everyone there is given plenty to eat.

HOW TO TELL A GOOD MAN FROM A BAD MAN

Jesus has been telling us throughout the Gospel of Matthew: you know a tree by its fruit. A good tree produces good fruit, a bad tree produces bad fruit.

It's not what someone says that matters, it's what someone does. We know all we need to know about the difference between Herod and Jesus by comparing what happens at the two quite different banquets.

You know how to tell the difference between a good man and a bad man? Watch his actions, not his words.

P.S. I find v. 13 to be heartbreaking—Jesus has just heard of John's murder, and “when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.”

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20**

### **MATTHEW 14:22-36**

WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT JESUS  
WALKING ON WATER?

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” <sup>29</sup> He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” <sup>32</sup> And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” "

<sup>34</sup> And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

<sup>35</sup> And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick <sup>36</sup> and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Remember our 2 keys to understanding Matthew:

1. **The first key to understanding Matthew is to see everything about Jesus in Matthew's Gospel as connected to and fulfilling the Old Testament story.** In every passage, ask, "How does this information about Jesus relate to the Old Testament story?"
2. **The second key is to see Matthew as an instruction manual for discipleship. It is meant to give readers what they need to know to become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.** In every passage ask, "Of all the things Matthew could have told us, why did he think that we needed to know this to be apprentices of Jesus?"

How does the account of Jesus walking on water relate to the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, the Lord has power over the waters of chaos. For example, Isaiah says:

*Thus says the LORD,  
who makes a way in the sea,  
a path in the mighty waters  
—Isaiah 43:16*

Here Jesus displays that same power. He is God!

And Matthew tells us about Peter walking and then falling on the water in order to teach us a central lesson of discipleship: the importance of keeping our eyes on the Lord.

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 23**

### **MATTHEW 15:1-20**

#### **RELIGIOUS MONEY-WASHING**

**15** Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,  
<sup>2</sup> "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?  
<sup>4</sup> For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and,

‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’<sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”<sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.<sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

<sup>8</sup> “ ‘This people honors me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;  
<sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

<sup>10</sup> And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” <sup>13</sup> He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” <sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” <sup>16</sup> And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

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The Pharisees followed oral teaching and equated it with the written Bible. Here, they complain that the disciples of Jesus don’t wash their hands in the correct ritual manner. Jesus, who never backs down, gives it right back to them and cites an example that shows their hypocrisy. See, there was a practice whereby you could declare your possessions “given to God” and meant to be dedicated as Temple offerings. Here’s the catch, though: some people would declare the lion’s share of their resources “given to God” *but not actually donate them until later, perhaps upon their death*. So, one way of avoiding the financial responsibility of caring for aging parents was to declare your resources “given to God” and then say to your parents, “Sorry, folks: I just can’t afford it—I’ve given everything away to God.”

See what’s happening? They are using the *letter of the Law* as a way of avoiding the *spirit of the Law*. This is why Jesus is so concerned about the disposition of the heart in his disciples.

## TUESDAY, OCTOBER 24

### MATTHEW 15:21-28

#### IS JESUS A JERK?

<sup>21</sup> And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

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Here's the first question to ask of this difficult story: what is Matthew trying to tell us? The Gospels are not an exhaustive transcript of the events of the life of Jesus. Rather, they have been arranged selectively to make a theological point.

#### CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Where does the story take place? Not in Israel proper, but in "the region of Tyre and Sidon." These are cities of Israel's traditional enemies, and to make sure we don't miss the point, Matthew makes it clear that it is a "Canaanite" woman who is pestering Jesus. The Canaanites were the violent idol-worshippers the Children of Israel fought when they entered the Promised Land. In other words, she is DEFINITELY NOT an Israelite.

This story takes place immediately after Jesus has had an argument with the Pharisees about what real faithfulness looks like. The Pharisees DEFINITELY ARE Israelites, but their hard-heartedness ultimately leads them to reject and crucify Jesus.

Contrast the Pharisees' dismissal of Jesus with the Canaanite woman's persistent pursuit of Jesus. The chosen people REJECT the Messiah, whereas the nations are eager to receive him.

#### "TO THE JEW FIRST, THEN TO THE GREEK"

Since Genesis 12, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years before the time of Jesus, the Lord's plan has been clear: to use the

family of Abraham as the means by which he would save the entire world. The Apostle Paul explains this plan in Romans 1:16:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.* - Romans 1:16 NIV

Jesus is therefore explaining the rescue plan accurately when he says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). His ministry takes place in Israel, and is directed toward Israelites. But because the Jews reject him as Messiah, the gospel is then taken by Paul and others to the non-Jews, i.e., the nations (also called "Greeks" or Gentiles).

The Jews traditionally viewed the Gentiles as unclean sinners, and no devout Jew would have anything to do with them. The Jews also called the Gentiles "dogs." Jesus is therefore using traditional Jewish ways of referring to Gentiles in this passage. He seems like a jerk, but I think he's setting up the disciples (and by extension, us) with the language he's using.

#### YOU KNOW THE TREE BY ITS FRUIT

His language seems harsh, but look at what Jesus does: he heals this pagan woman's daughter. Jesus has been telling us over and over again: you know the tree by its fruit. It's not words that matter, but actions. Though his words might seem harsh at first, he does in fact heal the little girl, just as he has previously healed the Centurion's slave. The ministry of Jesus is to the Jews, but here and with the Centurion there is foreshadowing: soon the gospel will be taken to the ends of the earth.

#### THE CANAANITE WOMAN IS A MODEL FOR FAITH

I think Matthew includes this story because he wants us to see the woman as a model for faith. She is persistent and single-minded: she needs what Jesus has, and she's not going to stop until she gets it.

**How can you imitate this unnamed woman today?**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25**

**MATTHEW 15:29-39**

WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000?

<sup>29</sup> Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

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Matthew has already told us about the Feeding of the Five Thousand (14:13-21). And here in the very next chapter we are told of Jesus Feeding the Four Thousand. Why?

Remember, context is king. Between the two stories Matthew has given us accounts of Jesus being rejected by Israel—his arguments with the Pharisees—and then bringing healing to a Canaanite woman's daughter. If you read carefully, the Feeding of the Four Thousand is taking place on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. So, here we see Jesus bringing the abundance of the Kingdom to the nations.

The gospel is for *everyone*.

## THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26

### MATTHEW 16:1-12

THE \*REAL\* REASON WHY SO MANY PEOPLE CLAIM  
NOT TO BELIEVE

**16** And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ <sup>3</sup> And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. <sup>4</sup> An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.

<sup>5</sup> When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>7</sup> And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

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Just as in 12:38-40, the religious leaders come to Jesus and ask for a sign—they want *proof*, in other words. But what has Jesus been doing *except* giving sign after sign after sign? That’s his point about the red sky—“Folks, you can easily discern when a storm is coming—are you really unable to discern who I am?”

Here’s the truth: they don’t *want* to understand what’s happening, because that would require them to respond. So, they would rather keep Jesus at arms’ length and pretend they don’t know who he is than have to repent and listen to him.



This is *exactly* the reason why so many people today claim not to believe—because if they actually admitted that Jesus is who he says he is, then they would have to live differently.

And the sign of Jonah? The early Church saw Jonah as a symbol for Christ:

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days;

Jesus was in the belly of the earth for 3 days.

Jonah was vomited up from death to life;

Jesus was vomited up from death to life.

Etc.

So, the Resurrection is *the ultimate sign* of the identity of Jesus. If we can't see the empty tomb for what it is, then God help us.

P.S. The “leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” is the false teaching that leads many people astray into unbelief.

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27**

### **MATTHEW 16:13-20**

#### ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SENTENCES IN HISTORY

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup>And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup>Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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The overarching theme of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of Matthew's Gospel (4:17-16:20) is the **Proclamation** of Jesus the Messiah to Israel, and today we reach the climactic and final scene of this section: Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus declares that knowing and confessing Jesus as the Christ is knowledge that comes from God's revelation of that knowledge, and that those who confess Jesus as the Christ will flourish.

The church is not a charity. The church is not a social service agency. The church is not a fraternal club. The church is a group of people called and centered around Peter's confessional claim at Caesarea Phillipi: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* - Matthew 16:16

Now, the church indeed does charitable things, serves the community, and draws people together. But each of those things derives from its identity; none of those things constitutes its identity. **It is Jesus himself who gives the church its identity.**

As long as we hold onto Peter's claim, the forces of evil and death itself will never prevail over Christ's church.

**The church's ROCK is its unwavering commitment to the proclamation of the true identity of Jesus the Christ.**

Herod is dead. Caesar is dead. Pilate is dead.

But Jesus is alive, and his church will never be defeated.

Amen.

#### SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES

The English word "church" is a translation of a Greek word which means "called out" or "the assembled ones." It was originally a political term that the early church co-opted. We are the "assembled ones" around Jesus the Christ.

"Peter" is really just "Rock." Peter's given name was Simon—the traditional Jewish name "Simeon"—but in this passage Jesus gives him his nickname and explains its significance—Peter's confession about the identity of Jesus will be the "rock" on which Jesus builds his church. (By the way, the Aramaic word for "rock" is "cephas," which is why Peter is sometimes called "Cephas" in the New Testament. It seems clear that Aramaic and not Greek was the first language of Jesus and the disciples--Greek was the language of commerce and politics.)

Jesus's words to Peter are a bit confusing there at the end:

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* [16:19 NIV]

What does that stuff about the binding and loosing mean? I like how David Bauer puts it:

"Jesus will give to the entire church the authority to declare what is required and what is not required for entrance into the kingdom, and God himself will validate and act on these decisions. Manifestly, the authority to declare what is required and not required does not include the possibility of contradicting the teaching of Jesus. The law continues in force and Jesus is its true interpreter (5:17-48). The judicial decisions of the church may involve adapting and applying the commands of Jesus to new situations which the church will continually encounter in the period between the resurrection and the Parousia (28:19-20), with the assurance that such ecclesial decisions will be binding."

—David Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God*

What this means is that Jesus has given the church the responsibility—and it is a heavy and sacred responsibility—of teaching what he has taught us.

P.S. Why does Jesus tell the Twelve not to tell anyone that he's the Messiah? Because the popular understanding of the Messianic role is not at all what the role will turn out to be, and this misunderstanding will be an impediment to Jesus's ministry. This is why, e.g., Jesus never calls himself "Messiah," but prefers the term "Son of Man" [see commentary on Monday, September 25]—he knows that the Jews will misunderstand if he uses the loaded term Messiah.

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