

NEMN Synod Lay Leader Network—Yearly Intensive Series
Session 2: November 2, 16, 2009
Gospel of Matthew

Introduction

Gospel of Matthew in First Century Context

- 30 CE Historical Jesus
Dynamic oral retelling of what Jesus said and did
- 50 CE Formation of Q tradition (primarily source of Jesus' sayings used by Matt & Luke)
- 70 CE Destruction of Jerusalem & temple; Gospel of Mark
- 85 CE Gospel of Matthew, likely composed in Antioch, Syria, when Jewish-Christian community was at a turning point (4:24, cf. 9:35 with Mark 6:6b); Gospel of Luke

Matthew resulted from a dynamic process

- Oral tradition was dynamic process, retelling Jesus-stories with relevance to new settings
- Jesus-stories were told in light of Jesus' resurrection
- Gospel written to be heard (90% of audience probably illiterate)
- In Matthew, stories witness to both pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus

"As the products of developing traditions, the Gospels combine memory and testimony. Some of what they narrate is early Christian memory of things Jesus said and did. Read discerningly, they provide glimpses of the pre-Easter Jesus. They also contain testimony, the significance that Jesus had acquired in the experience and thought of his followers in the decades between Easter and the writing of the Gospels."

(Borg, *Speaking Christian*, 88)

Outline of Matthew (narrative/discourse)

- 1:1-2:23 Genealogy and Infancy Stories of Jesus the Messiah
- 3:1-4:22 Jesus the Messiah's Baptism, Temptation, and Call of Disciples
- 4:23-9:35 Jesus the Messiah's Authoritative Words and Deeds
Discourse 1: Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)
- 9:36-11:1 Jesus the Messiah's Disciples Authorized and Sent
Discourse 2: Missionary Discourse (9:36-11:1)
- 11:2-13:52 Resistance to Jesus the Messiah's Mission
Discourse 3: Parable and the Kingdom (13:1-52)
- 13:53-18:35 Formation of the Church-Community Amid Continuing Conflict
Discourse 4: Life Together in the Community of Faith (18:1-35)
- 19:1-25:46 Conflict and Ultimate Polarization
Discourse 5: Judgment Discourse (23:1-25:46)
- 26:1-28:20 Jesus the Messiah's Passion, Resurrection, and Great Commission

The Year of Matthew: Year A (* = unique to Matthew in RCL; **bold** = texts from discourses)

Advent

1 Ad	24:36-44	Parable of flood & call to watchfulness
2 Ad	3:1-12	John the baptizer
3 Ad	11:2-11	John's question & Jesus' testimony to John
4 Ad*	1:18-25	Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Christmas

1 Chr*	2:13-23	Flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth
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Epiphany

Eph*	2:1-12	Visit of the Magi
Baptism	3:13-17	Baptism of Jesus the Messiah
3 Eph	4:12-23	Jesus' first preaching & call of disciples
4 Eph*	5:1-12	The beatitudes
5 Eph*	5:13-20	Salt & Light images & Jesus' fulfilling Law & Prophets
6 Eph*	5:21-37	Teaching on murder, adultery, divorce, & oaths
7 Eph*	5:38-48	Teaching on retaliation & loving enemy
8 Eph	6:24-34	Anxiety about food and clothing
Transfig	17:1-9	The transfiguration

Lent

Ash Wed*	6:1-6.16-21	Teaching on almsgiving and fasting
1 Lent	4:1-11	Jesus the Messiah's temptation
Passion Sun	21:1-11 or 27:11-54	Entry into Jerusalem or Jesus' trial and crucifixion

Easter

Resur	28:1-10 or 28:9-15a	Resurrection of Jesus & bribing of soldiers
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Pentecost

1 Pent*	28:16-20	Great Commission
2 Pent	6:24-34	Anxiety about food and clothing
3 Pent*	7:21-29	Final warnings at end of Sermon on the Mount
4 Pent	9:9-13,18-26	Call of Matthew and healing of Jairus' daughter
5 Pent	9:35-10:8 [9-23]	Sending out of disciples
6 Pent*	10:24-39	Overcoming fear for sake of mission
7 Pent*	10:40-42	Receiving Jesus by receiving "little ones"
8 Pent*	11:16-19,25-30	Jesus' testimony to John, Jesus' thanksgiving & comfort
9 Pent	13:1-9,18-23	Parable of sower
10 Pent*	13:24-30,36-43	Parable of tares
11 Pent*	13:31-33,44-52	Parables of mustard seed, treasure, pearl, & dragnet
12 Pent	14:13-21	Feeding of 5000
13 Pent	14:22-33	Walking on water
14 Pent	15:[10-20] 21-28	Healing of Canaanite woman's daughter
15 Pent	16:13-20	Confession at Caesarea Philippi
16 Pent	16:21-28	Conditions of discipleship
17 Pent*	18:15-20	Reproving one's brother/sister
18 Pent*	18:21-35	Parable of unmerciful servant
19 Pent*	20:1-16	Parable of the laborers in the vineyard
20 Pent	21:23-32	Question of authority & parable of two sons
21 Pent	21:33-46	Parable of wicked tenants
22 Pent*	22:1-14	Parable of marriage feast
23 Pent	22:15-22	Question about tribute to Caesar
23 Pent	22:34-46	Love commandment & question about David's son
24 Pent*	23:1-12	Jesus' criticism of scribes and Pharisees
25 Pent*	25:1-13	Parable of the ten virgins

26 Pent
ChKing*

25:14-30
25:31-46

Parable of talents
Parabolic story of sheep & goats

Lectio Divina

Lectio

Read

**Word
Syntax**

**Sentence
Paragraph**

Context

**Grammatical
Book
Author
Canonical**

**Study Bible
Bible Dictionary
Concordance
Synopsis
Commentary**

Meditatio

Meditate (connect to our lives; text as mirror for us)

Oratio

Pray (word becoming embedded in our heart)

Contemplatio

Live (word becomes a lens to see world; it shapes us day by day)

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now **the birth of Jesus the Messiah** took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together,
she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being **a righteous man** and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,
planned to dismiss her quietly.

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this,
an angel of the Lord appeared to him **in a dream** and said,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him **Jesus,**
for he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this **took place to fulfill what had been spoken** by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him **Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."**

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, **he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;**

he took her as his wife,

²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;
and he named him Jesus.

- **1:18** The word order in Greek draws attention to "Jesus the Messiah/Christ" – literally it reads "Now of Jesus Christ the birth took place in this way." It refers back to 1:16-17, which ends the opening genealogy that traces Jesus' lineage as Messiah from Abraham through David to Exile to Joseph.
- **1:19 "Joseph, being a righteous man . . ."** The Greek adjective *dikaios* means "upright, just, fair" (interested in doing the right thing, living according to Torah). In Matthew, this word appears in 1:19, 9:13, 10:41, 13:17, 20:4, 23:35, 25:37, & 25:46.
- **1:21 "...Jesus (Jeshua, later form of Joshua, means "YHWH saves/has saved), for he will save his people from their sins."** The word for "sins" denotes "sin, departure from human or divine standards of uprightness (Gr. *hamartia* has a wide range of meaning, including missing the mark as when throwing a javelin). For other uses of *hamartia*, see 3:6, 9:2-6, 12:31, & 26:28 ("for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"—this last one is significant since only Matthew includes these words in the Last Supper text).
- **1:22** In Matthew, this is the first of many fulfillment citations (e.g., 2:17-18, 4:14-16, 12:17-21, 21:4-5)
- **1:23 Quoting Isaiah 7:14**

Matthew 28:16-20

- ¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to **Galilee**,
to **the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.**
- ¹⁷ When they saw him, **they worshiped him; but some doubted.**
- ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them,
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- ¹⁹ Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations,**
²⁰ **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**
and **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.**
- And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Final scene in Matthew's Gospel, known as "Great Commission. These words of Risen Jesus are often taken out of their context in Matthew's Gospel and applied generally.

28:16

- Note the eleven disciples return to **Galilee** (see 2:22, 3:13, 4:12 as place of the "Gentiles," 26:32, 28:7 & 10) to a specific **mountain** to which Jesus directed (same mountain where Jesus shared summary of his teaching? Cf. 5:1 & 8:1). The form of verb *tassō* indicates that Jesus had "set or pre-determined the mountain as the gathering place in Galilee—the geography for ministry and mission.
- High mountain as holy place of prayer, worship, and revelatory experiences—see 5:1, 8:1, 14:23, 15:29, 17:1 & 9, & 28:16. In Jerusalem, Jesus takes his disciples to the Mount of Olives (21:1, 24:3, & 26:30).

28:17

- Greek verb *proskuneō* designates the custom of prostrating oneself and kissing the feet or hem of the garment or ground before a royal or deified person. In Matthew, the appearance of verb suggests "prostration" or "worship" of Jesus as the risen Lord (see 2:2,8,11 with magi; 4:9-10 in temptation story; 8:2, 9:18, & 15:25 persons seeking healing; 14:33 – in a boat after Jesus walks on water; 18:26, 20:20, & 28:9/17 with disciples and women). Often this verb is used with "Lord" title for Jesus echoing the community's worship of the post-Jesus.
- The connecting words *hoi de* can mean "and they." Hence, the better translation of the second part of v. 17 might be "they worshipped him and they doubted" (Matthew uniquely describes the disciples as "ones of little faith" – see 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, & 17:20). The eleven disciples "see" the risen Jesus on the Galilean mountain and respond with both "worship" and "doubt."

28:18-20

- In spite of their "little faith"—or, better yet, because of it, the risen Jesus surrounds his commissioning words with **a promise of his power and his presence.**
- In 28:18, the word order is actually: **To me was given/granted [implied by God] all authority in heaven and on earth.** For readers these words would recall the devil's words in 4:8-10, but here Jesus' words suggest a God-bestowed authority resulting from his faithful obedience and suffering. God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord. The Lord's power is transforming power!

- The Risen Jesus' final promise in 28:20b not only brackets his commissioning words but the entire Gospel of Matthew: "And **behold** [*idou* is a small word introducing a statement of grand significance) **I with you am all the days until the end of the age.**" The Risen Jesus promises his transforming presence with the disciples in their world-embracing mission. This final promise harkens back to 1:23 (Jesus shall be called "Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'") and also surfaces in 18:20 ("For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them").
- In the Risen Jesus' great commission in 20:19-20a, the main verb translated "make disciples" is one word in Greek *mathēteuō* and means "to disciple" (or "to cause them to be pupils") **all nations** (*ethnoi*). *Matheteuo* "implies drawing people into a close relationship with Jesus as his pupils, as ones who are not only *informed* by his teaching but also *transformed* by it" (Bailey, *Contrast Community*, p. 5). Interestingly, this same word is used in 13:52 to describe scribes trained—or disciplined—in the kingdom of God.
- Jesus' followers are "**to disciple**" **all peoples** "**by baptizing and teaching**" them. Jesus as "the great teacher" now directs the disciples to teach. "Their *discipling* efforts find concrete expression by *baptizing* others in the name of Triune God and then by *teaching* them what Jesus has taught. The act of baptism draws the newcomers into the church, a worldwide community stretching far beyond any narrow or limiting group or sect. They are brought into this ground-breaking community that transcends all ethnic and social divides within the Roman world. They gain a new identity as members of the people of God" (Bailey, *Contrast Community*, p. 6).

Discussion topic:

- Unlike the other Gospels, Matthew portrays Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and even as *Emmanuel*, "God with us."
- If Jesus as the "presence of God" is the alpha and omega of the Gospel of Matthew, what are the significant implications for us?
- What is involved for human beings in experiencing another person being fully "present" with them?

Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* sings "To love another person is to see the face of God!"

The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)

Beginning and Ending

5:1-2 ¹ When Jesus saw **the crowds**, he went up **the mountain**;
and after he **sat down**, **his disciples** came to him.
² Then he began to speak, and taught [**began teaching**] them, saying:

7:24-29

²⁴ "Everyone [**therefore**] who **hears** these words of mine and **acts** on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.
²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house,
but it did not fall, because **it had been founded on rock**.
²⁶ And everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **does not act** on them
will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew
and beat against that house, and it fell-- **and great was its fall!**"
²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these things,
the crowds were astounded at his teaching,
²⁹ **for he taught them as one having authority**, and not as their scribes.

Literary Brackets

5:17-20

¹⁷ "Do not think that **I have come to abolish the law or the prophets**;
I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.
¹⁸ **For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away,**
not one letter, not one stroke of a letter,
will pass from the law until all is accomplished.
¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks 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
²⁰ For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

7:12 ¹² "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you;
for this is the law and the prophets.

Center of Jesus' Sermon

6:9b-13 Jesus' "Kingdom Prayer"—daily bread, forgiveness, & saving from evil
Matthew 5:3-16

- 3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
 4 **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**
 5 **"Blessed are the meeek, for they will inherit the earth.**
 6 **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**
- 7 **"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**
 8 **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**
 9 **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**
 10 **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- 11 **"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
 and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**
 12 **Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,
 for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

5:3-6 (cf. Lk. 6:20-26 where Jesus' four beatitudes are matched by four woes)

- ❖ For Matthew, "reign of heaven" = "reign of God" (cf. 19:23-24).
- ❖ First four of Jesus' pronouncements of "blessing" (*makarioi* = "blessed, fortunate, happy/recipients of divine favor") on *the destitute in resources, the mourners grieving gap between what is and should be, the meek or gentle or humble* (cf. 11:29 & 21:5; Ps. 37:11), and *those who hunger & thirst for righteousness or justice* (cf. Borg, pp. 133-141)

5:7-10

- ❖ In the second group of four blessings, *the merciful or those who identify with the suffering of others, the pure in heart or those who seek communion with God and God's ways* (cf. Ps. 24:4-6), *those who make peace or are about reconciliation, and those who are persecuted for sake of God's justice*.
- ❖ Note that each stanza ends with a focus on "righteousness/justice" (see Borg, pp. 133-141). Note the use of this Greek word *dikaioσynē* in Matthew and particularly the Sermon on the Mount (see 3:15, **5:6, 5:10, 5:20, 6:1, 6:33, & 21:32**).
- ❖ ***dikaioσynē*** = "justice, fairness, righteousness" (can refer to human behavior or redemptive action)
 - 3:15 "...for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."
 - 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, ..."
 - 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, ..."
 - 5:20 "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, ..."
 - 6:1 "Beware of practicing your piety [righteousness] before others ..."
 - 6:33 "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness ..."
 - 21:32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, ..."

5:11-12

- Note the change from a third person plural to a second person plural in the Greek verbs and pronouns (i.e., "Blessed are all of you . . .").
- There is an irony of being persecuted for being about God's way of justice—by being merciful, pure in heart, and doers of peace.
- Exhortation to rejoice and be glad in the face of persecution—in the tradition of the prophets.

13 **"You are the salt of the earth;**

*but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?
It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.*

14 **"You are the light of the world.**

*A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket,
but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others,
so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Notes:

In 5:13 & 5:14, the plural pronoun in Greek is used so it means "All of you are the salt of the earth" (Gr. *gē*) & "All of you are the light of the world"(Gr. *kosmos*). Also notice that Jesus says "All of you are" rather than "You are to become..."

Jesus' declaration in 5:13 is a remarkable pronouncement, especially when compared with similar texts in Luke 14:34-35 ("Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the mature pile; they throw it away . . .") and Mark 9:49-50 ("For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another . . .").

In the parallel saying, the image of light would trigger many associations for Jesus' first-century hearers. In 4:14-16, Matthew has quoted Isa. 9:1-2 to connect Jesus' public appearance with the "great light" promised for people of the Galilee—" . . . so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned'" (cf. also John 8:12).

Question about literary context:

*Why is it important to see 5:13-16 as connected with the beatitudes in 5:1-12
and in a real sense the culmination of this entire segment in Matthew?*

“This new section in the SM (5:17-48) concentrates on the type of ‘righteousness’ or ‘justice’ (Gr. *dikaiosynē*) that is to characterize the behavior of the members of Jesus’ community as ones beckoned to follow God’s way here on earth. According to 5:20, their righteousness is not to be tightfisted but abundant and overflowing, far surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees. Beginning in 5:21-26, Jesus lays out six examples of how living by specific commandments of the Torah is to be understood generously rather than narrowly, in ways that promote healthy and honest relationships within the community and beyond” (Bailey, *Contrast Community*, p. 35).

Matthew 5:38-48

38 "You have heard that it was said,
'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 **But I say to you,**
Do not resist an evildoer.

*But if anyone strikes you on the **right** cheek, turn the other also;*

40 *and if anyone wants to sue you and take your **coat**, give your **cloak** as well;*

41 *and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.*

42 *Give to everyone who begs from you,*

and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said,
'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 **But I say to you,**
Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 **so that** you may be children of your Father in heaven;

for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,

and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

46 *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?*

*Do not even **the tax collectors** do the same?*

47 *And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,*

what more are you doing than others?

*Do not even the **Gentiles** do the same?*

48 **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

5:38-39a

- “An eye for an eye” and “a tooth for a tooth” echo O.T. passages, offering an example of *lex talionis* (cf. Lev. 24:19-20 – “Anyone who maims another shall suffer the injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered;” Exod. 21:22-25, & Deut. 19:21). These passages were designed to limit retaliation.
- In v. 39, the Greek *egō* emphasizes Jesus’ authoritative “*but I say to you*” (plural), “*Do not oppose*” or “*set oneself against the evil one.*”

5:39b-42

- Next Jesus’ non-retaliatory principle is concretely illustrated in four situations experienced in the first century world—a dishonoring slap on the face, loss of a garment in court case, being pressed into service by a Roman soldier, and a request for help or a loan. Notice that “right” cheek is specifically mentioned, a detail missing in Lk. 6:29. In the second situation, “coat” (*chitōn*) designates inner garment next to the skin, and “cloak” (*himation*) the outer robe. According to Exod. 22:25-27 & Deut. 24:12-13, a poor person’s cloak is his inalienable possession for warmth at night.

5:43

- The command to love your neighbor is in Lev. 19:18, but the second part is missing. See also 22:37-39.

5:44-47

- Note that Jesus’ command in 5:44 uses the Greek verb *agapaō* that means “to have a warm regard for or interest in another.” How does this verb fit with a person who is hostile to us? The second part of the command (“*and pray for . . .*”) helps to explain or illustrate what it means to “love the enemy” (see Lk. 6:27-28).
- In 5:45 the “so that” (this Greek conjunction expresses purpose) provides the motivation to act in this radical way. We are generous to all even as our heavenly Father is unconditionally generous.
- The next verses (5:46-47) further Jesus’ argument to love enemies by use of what in ancient rhetoric was called “contrary examples.” Note Jesus uses rhetorical questions to remind his hearers of what was self-evident. Both “tax collectors” and “Gentiles” (*hoi ethnikai* = “unbelieving, ungodly, and polytheistic people”) provide negative examples for Jews.
- Jesus’ exhortation in 5:48 appears to be a summary for the six “antitheses” in 5:21-47. The Greek adjective for “perfect” is *teleioi*, which is derived from the noun *telos* and can mean “having attained a goal” or “being complete, fully-developed, or mature.” In 19:21, Jesus challenges the rich man, “If you want to be *teleios*, go sell your possessions and give to the poor . . .” See also Lk. 6:36.

Discussion Questions:

- How strong in us is the desire to retaliate or payback someone who has hurt us? Examples?
- Is Jesus here suggesting becoming a victim to the aggressive action of a malicious person or is he urging a non-violent response that is more creative and perhaps even transformative of the encounter with the enemy?
- Why is loving your enemy so outrageous in our world?

Matthew 10:5-15

5 *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions:*

6 ***"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans,
but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.***

7 *As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'
8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*

You received without payment; give without payment.

9 *Take no **gold**, or silver, or copper in your belts,
10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff;
for laborers deserve their food.*

11 *Whatever town or village you enter, **find out who in it is worthy**,
and stay there until you leave.*

12 *As you enter the house, greet it.
13 If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it;
but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

14 *If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words,
shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.*

15 *Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable
for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.*

See Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6, and Luke 10:1-12 (sending of the 70) for parallel passages. **The words in bold are unique to the Matthean version.**

Major themes in the Jesus' Discourse on Mission are traveling light, avoiding personal gain, receiving hospitality, and overcoming fear for sake of mission.

Note also that here Jesus' mission in which his disciples participate is restricted to "the house of Israel" (see also 15:24 where Jesus responds to the Canaanite woman by saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.>").

Matthew describes a two-stage mission—the historical Jesus & his disciples confine their mission to the restoration of Israel and only after the resurrection does the post-Easter Jesus send his disciples to baptize and teach "all peoples" (28:16-20). It is only at the end of the Gospel that Jesus' disciples are instructed to "teach" what Jesus taught them. Prior to that only Jesus "taught" (cf. 4:23 & 9:35, verses that summarize Jesus' typical activities: "teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness).

Matthew 18:15-20

- 15 **"If another member of the church sins against you,**
go and **point out the fault** when **the two of you are alone.**
If the member listens to you, you have **regained** that one.
- 16 **But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you,**
so that **every word may be confirmed**
by the evidence of two or three witnesses.
- 17 **If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;**
and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church,
let such a one be to you **as a Gentile and a tax collector.**
- 18 **Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,**
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
- 19 **Again, truly I tell you,**
if **two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,**
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
- 20 **For where two or three are gathered in my name,**
I am there among them."

18:15-17 - Three Step Pattern

- In 18:15, "another member of the church" is in Greek simply "your brother" (*ho adelphos sou*), and the words "against you" are lacking in the best manuscripts Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. If omitted, then Jesus' words invite everyone in the congregation to confront the brother or sister who sins; it is not only the "hurt" or "aggrieved" party who takes action.
- The Gr. verb in 18:15 translated "point out the fault" can also be render "correct" or "bring to light." Note this first step is done privately, "between and him/her alone."
- In 18:16, the second step in regaining your brother/sister involves taking one or two others as witnesses. These words echo Deut. 17:6 and 19:15, both of which prohibits convicting another person on the basis of only one witness.
- In 18:17, the Greek noun *ekklēsia* appears twice; this word occurs previously in Jesus' words addressed to Peter (16:18 -- *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it*). In the Greek and Roman worlds, *ekklēsia* was the regularly summoned legislative assembly, but here it means "the assembly" of those who trusted the risen Jesus. Although this word is used often by Paul and appears in the Book of Acts, Matthew is the only Gospel that includes it. For Matthew, it seems to designate "synagogue-like gathering of Christ-believers" in Antioch.

18:18-20 – Three Pronouncements of Jesus

- In 16:19, Jesus' pronouncement about "binding and loosing" further describes the "keys of the kingdom" given to Peter, but here in 18:18 this solemn authority (*amen legō humin* = "Truly, I say to all of you") is granted to the assembly for its ministry of intervention. The assembly's judicial decisions have heavenly confirmation.
- In 18:19, the generalized authority granted the assembly is narrowed to two members of the assembly agreeing about a matter if it is done in prayer. This saying of Jesus is not about prayer in general but applies to the community's ministry of admonition.
- The little word "for" (Gr. *gar*) introducing 18:20 offers the reason for Jesus' promise in the previous verse—it is abiding and authoritative presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of disputes and offenses that damage the community's life together (see 1:23 & 28:20). This is similar to the assertion that where two or three men gather to study the Torah, there is the presence of *Shekinah* or glory of God (*M. 'Abot* 3.2,6).

Process for Ministry of Admonition

- Luke 17:3 has a simpler word of Jesus: *Be on your guard! If another disciple [your brother] sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.*
- The Matthean pattern is similar to one described in *The Community Rule* used at Qumran: *They shall rebuke one another in truth, humility, and charity. Let no man address his companion with anger, or ill-temper, or obduracy, or with envy prompted by the spirit of wickedness. Let him not hate him (in the wickedness of an uncircumcised) heart, but let him rebuke him on the very same day lest he incur guilt because of him. And furthermore, let no man accuse his companion before the Congregation without having admonished him in the presence of witnesses* (translation by G. Vermes).

18:1-35 as Literary Context

- Chapter 18 offers us the fourth discourse by Jesus, aimed at the character and life of the Matthean community.
- The immediate frame stresses the graciousness of God. Both the parable of the lost sheep (the unbounded joy after finding the lost one) and the parable of the unmerciful servant depict boldly the graciousness of God. Active intervention for the one who strays (18:10-14) needs God's abundant forgiveness and mercy which shape how we humans relate to others (18:21-35).

Discussion:

- "The early church had no public confession yet fought seriously every instance of sin. The contemporary church has public confession and does little about the practice of sin" (E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*). How do you react to Schweizer's statement?
- In what ways, if at all, might this Matthean three-fold pattern guide the contemporary Christian community in its ministry of admonition?

Matthew 23:1-12

- ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,
- ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;
- ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it;
but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.
- ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others;
but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.
- ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others;
for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.
- ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷
and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,
and to have people call them rabbi.
- ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.
- ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father-- the one in heaven
- ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.
- ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant.
- ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

23:1-12 introduces a chapter unique to the Gospel of Matthew with its searing critique of the "scribes and the Pharisees." It contains Jesus' seven devastating woes against the scribes and the Pharisees as well as his lament over Jerusalem (23:13-39). Contrary to their claim in 23:30, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets,' they are culpable for the deaths and flogging of God's messengers (23:34).

23:2-3 suggests that Jesus' concern with the scribes and the Pharisees is not their teaching of Mosaic law; rather it was their failure to practice what they taught. They did not "walk the talk." At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus similarly warns his own followers of the danger of hearing his words but not doing them (7:13-27). Following Jesus is challenging and costly.

23:5-7 – This theme of ostentatious piety is also humorously depicted in the Sermon on the Mount. In 6:1-18, Jesus warns against making a show of almsgiving, praying, and fasting—foundational pillars of Jewish piety or righteousness.

23:8-10 – These verses likely hint as to how Matthew's community of faith was organized, in an egalitarian way avoiding all hierarchy (no male figure as "father" as a counter move in the patriarchal Roman society; cf. also Mark 10:28-31).

23:11-12 ends the introductory segment to Jesus' discourse with his surprising reversal—the "greatest" among them will be the "servant."

Matthew 25:31-46

31 *"When **the Son of Man** comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,
then he will sit on the throne of his glory.*

32 ***All the nations** will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.*

34 *Then the king will say to those at his right hand,
'Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
35 for I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
36 I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me.'*

37 *Then the righteous will answer him,
'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,
or thirsty and gave you something to drink?
38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,
or naked and gave you clothing?
39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'*

40 *And the king will answer them,
'Truly I tell you, **just as you did it to one of the least of these
who are members of my family, you did it to me.'***

41 *Then he will say to those at his left hand,
'You that are accursed,
depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,
naked and you did not give me clothing,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'*

44 *Then they also will answer,
'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger
or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'*

45 *Then he will answer them,
'Truly I tell you, **just as you did not do it to one of the least of these,
you did not do it to me.'**
46 *And these will go away into eternal punishment,
but the righteous into eternal life."**

Notes:

25:31 – In the final days “the Son of Man” figure (or “one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven”) depicts the coming of the glorified Jesus, like the apocalyptic one in Daniel 7:13-14 to whom all authority is given by God. This use of the coming “Son of God” in glory appears often in the Gospel of Matthew, particularly in the final judgment discourse in chapter 24-25 (see 10:23, 13:41, 16:27-28, 19:28, 24:27, 24:30, 24:37, 24:44, 25:31, & 26:64).

25:32 –The Greek phrase *panta ta ethne* here apparently refers to “all the nations.” A nation represents “a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions.” The Greek noun *to ethnos* and adjective *ethnikos* occur nearly 20 times in Matthew: see 4:15, 5:47, 6:7, 6:32, 10:5, 10:18, 12:18, 12:21, 18:17, 20:19, 20:25, 21:43, 24:7, 24:9, 24:14, 25:32, & 28:32. The majority of these seems to designate “non-Jewish peoples” or “Gentiles.”

Two interpretations:

This judgment scene in Matthew is often interpreted to suggest that “all peoples”—including the Jews and the Matthean community—will finally be judged as to whether or not they minister compassionately to the “least of their fellow human beings”—that is, the destitute, hungry, stranger, naked, and imprisoned. By caring about and serving the “least” is in reality ministering to Jesus himself. Jesus is “incarnated” in the “least” of the world even though we don’t recognize him in them.

A second interpretation views this parabolic-like scene as describing the criteria by which “outsiders” to the Matthew’s community, the restored people of Israel, are finally judged. It is on the basis of whether or not these “outsiders” respond compassionately and caringly to Jesus’ disciples who are “the least ones” in whom Jesus is anonymously present in his mission to the world. Hence, how “outsiders” respond to Jesus-representatives was crucial. Did they act in compassionate ways toward them—the ways of Jesus himself? As one interpreter suggests, this is Matthew’s “theology of the other” and resonates with God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3—“*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (see Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, pp. 414-425).

Discussion questions:

- *What are striking features of this familiar judgment scene of the sheep and the goats?*
- *Which of the above two interpretations seems to fit best with the overall narrative of the Gospel of Matthew? Why?*