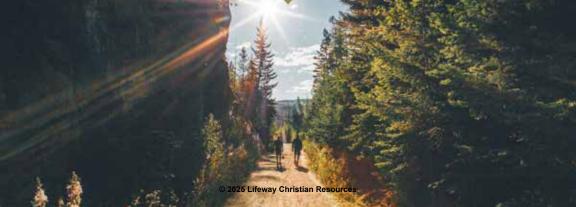


Matthew 1–13

Commentary Winter 2025-26



THE POWER OF ONE

The teacher writes the essay prompt on the board, and you stare at it blankly: "Name the person who has made the single greatest impact on your life and why." You sense various levels of confusion assault you at the same time. One minute, you wonder if anyone has really made that big of a difference in your life. The next minute, you've got a list of candidates that seems impossible to whittle down.

And even if you could eliminate every name but one, surely the last person standing deserves more attention than you could ever offer in a few hundred words. Someone like that would make such an indelible impression that you wouldn't know where to start, what to include, or what to leave out. Such a transformational figure requires the word count of a novel, not a few pages filled with the snatches of collected memories.

Naming the most influential person in your life? On the surface, it might seem like an impossible task for you and me. But, for a former tax collector named Matthew, the choice was easy: Jesus. See, it was Jesus who had found him at his tax booth, and it was Jesus who had called him in a new direction. It was Jesus who had seen past the social and spiritual stigma that hung on first-century tax collectors like barnacles on a boat. And it was Jesus who taught him what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Matthew, the cultural outcast, had met Jesus, and Jesus had made all the difference. That's why Matthew wrote an entire book of the Bible dedicated to the words and actions of Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus is still in the business of transforming lives today. He still accepts outcasts and social pariahs. He still makes room for them in His kingdom. And He still teaches us what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Honestly, Jesus has the single greatest impact on the lives of all who come to Him. If you've never met Him, now is the time. Like Matthew, all you have to do is hear His call and respond by following Him in faith. If you're ready to take that step, here's what you need to do . . .

- Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- By faith receive Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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^{*}Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS



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FROM THE TEAM LEADER



Our King Has Come

"Delivery delayed. Now arriving November 9." How well do you wait? When a package you've been anxiously awaiting is delayed, for example, do you respond with patient anticipation or irritated frustration? Personally, one-day shipping, DoorDash®, and streaming TV shows have spoiled me. When unexpected circumstances require me to wait, it's a needed exercise for me to practice patience.

Jesus's birth in Bethlehem was a long-awaited event. For centuries, God's people waited for the promised One. Old Testament prophets spoke of a Deliverer. This news of a coming Messiah was especially meaningful to those who persevered year after year with no deliverance in sight. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Matthew's Gospel recounts the story of Jesus's life. This quarter, we will study Jesus's teachings, witness His miraculous power, and examine His earthly ministry.

May this study stir anew within you a deep appreciation for our Savior, the One who delivers us from our sins. We no longer have to wait; those days are over. Our King has come!

In Him, **Amber Vaden**amber.vaden@lifeway.com

Explore Discover



BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The Gospel of Matthew was probably not the first Gospel account to be written. Likely Matthew's Gospel account is placed first in our New Testament because one of its primary themes and purposes is to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, and it bridges the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

WRITER

All Old Testament and New Testament books have two authors: God and a human writer (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). All four of our New Testament Gospel accounts are anonymous, but most conservative Christian scholars agree that the books of Matthew and John were written by the apostles Matthew and John and that Mark and Luke were connected to the apostles Peter and Paul. Early church historians such as Papias of Hierapolis (AD 60–130) and Eusebius (AD 260–340) identified Matthew as the human writer of the first Gospel account.

PLACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is only one Gospel according to four witnesses—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Irenaeus, a second-century Christian leader in Lyon (modern-day central France) offered the quintessential defense of the four-fold Gospel about AD 185. He wrote that it was not possible that there should be fewer or more Gospels than the four, basing his logic on the analogy of the four corners of the earth and the four principle winds.¹

The first list of twenty-seven books that agrees with our New Testament today was written in AD 367 by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria (Egypt). However, we have many second and third century AD Christian leaders referring to Matthew's Gospel account. One of the earliest and most important of these is the Muratorian Canon, a list of books that the church at Rome was using about AD 180–200. Although the first two sections are lost, the third section begins "the third gospel book, that according to Luke." Nearly all scholars believe the first two Gospel accounts were Matthew and Mark.

THEME/PURPOSE

Like the other three Gospel accounts, The Gospel According to Matthew is first and foremost gospel, a biographical and theological telling of the story of Jesus and the salvation He brings to all who believe. Specifically, Matthew's Gospel is centered around fulfillment and has the primary theme of the kingdom of God. Jesus's longest recorded sermon we call "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5–7), and it elaborates on the



kingdom of God. A brief definition of "the kingdom of God" is God's rule in our hearts individually, and it is made up of all the redeemed of all ages corporately.

How did Jesus fulfill God's written Word, the Old Testament? He faithfully did the works of His Father (John 14:10), fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Jesus is the messianic King, the zenith of David's dynasty, the Servant of the Lord from Isaiah, the Son of Man from Daniel, the culmination of Old Testament prophets from Moses onward, the fulfillment of the priesthood prefigured by Melchizedek, the paschal lamb symbolized by His redemptive death, the rock-like source of living water, and the tabernacle-temple abode of God on earth.

SOURCES

That the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of each book of the Bible is without question. "The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."

Many (perhaps most) New Testament scholars believe that Mark's Gospel was written first and served as one source for both Matthew and Luke. These three Gospels are usually called the "Synoptic Gospels." The Greek word for *Synoptic* means "able to be seen together." These three Gospels take a similar biographical or chronological approach to telling the story of Jesus. John used a completely different approach. He organized his Gospel into two major sections: (1) around seven signs in the book of signs (John 1–12) and (2) the book of glory (chaps. 13–21) describing Jesus's final days. John also added an introduction and an epilogue.

Additionally, many New Testament scholars believe that Matthew used several sources (written or oral) to which he alone had access. Further, scholars believe that Matthew and Luke shared some sources. Again, this is not in the Bible, so we cannot confirm its truthfulness. But it may provide some insight on the sources and technical details of how the Gospel writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit and what sources they may have used.

DATE OF WRITING

Jesus was born before Herod the Great died in 4 BC, so Jesus was likely born in either 5 BC or 4 BC. Luke 3:23 records that Jesus was about thirty when He began His public ministry. Jesus had a three-year ministry

concluding with His crucifixion, resurrection, and several post-resurrection appearances in about AD 30. Therefore, Matthew could not have been written earlier than AD 30.

The church leader Papias, who wrote in the late first century–early second century AD, mentioned Matthew. So, Matthew must have been written prior to AD 110–120 at the latest and likely as much as forty to fifty years earlier.

However, since Matthew appears to have used Mark's Gospel (probably written in the early-mid 50s-60s AD), a likely date-range of writing for Matthew's Gospel account is in the mid-60s-70s AD. This date is by no means certain but is perhaps the best estimate.

MATTHEW'S JEWISHNESS

Most Jews felt that after Malachi, the last Old Testament book, was finished (about 435 BC), God was silent until Jesus's day. Some Jews still listened for God, attended synagogue, and awaited the Messiah, but many did not. To them it seemed that God was not speaking any more. Matthew, a Jew, wrote into this culture. Yet Matthew cooperated with the Roman government in collecting taxes. In the minds of many Jews, that made him a worse person than a Gentile.

Matthew opened his Gospel by connecting Jesus to "the Father of the Faithful," Abraham (lived about 2000 BC), and to David, "the Military King of a United Israel" (lived about 1000 BC). This illustrated Matthew's connection with his Jewish audience. Matthew's emphasis on Jewish customs and religion throughout his Gospel strengthened that connection even more with his emphasis on God's kingdom and Jesus's fulfillment of God's purpose as stated in the Old Testament. Matthew seems to have quoted from both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (called "the Septuagint" or LXX). Most other New Testament writers quoted much more from the LXX than from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

"Matthew introduced Jesus as 'the son of David, the son of Abraham'... Only Jesus, the God-Man, of all David's descendants, and of all people on earth, had the authority of God Almighty to bring the kingdom program to its proper order and perfection... Only Jesus, the God-Man, of all Abraham's descendants, and of all people on earth, could live a sinless life, incurring no debt of his own, to offer himself as the object of God's righteous wrath, substituting himself in our place, paying the debt we owe. Only he could redeem God's fallen people."

^{1.} Adversus Haereses 3.11.8.

^{2.} Baptist Faith and Message 2000: I. The Scriptures. https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#i.

^{3.} Stuart K. Weber, Matthew, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary series (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 11.

OUTLINE



Gospel of Matthew

Birth and Infancy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-2:23) II. Beginning of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (Matt. 3:1-4:25) III. Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29) IV. Jesus's First Miracles (Matt. 8:1-9:38) Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus's Disciples (Matt. 10:1-42) VI. Responses to Jesus's Ministry (Matt. 11:1-12:50) VII. Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:1-58) VIII. Close of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (Matt. 14:1-17:27) IX. Discourse Four: Character of Jesus's Disciples (Matt. 18:1-35) Jesus's Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem (Matt. 19:1-20:34) XI. Jesus's Ministry in Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-23:39) XII. Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1-25:46) XIII. Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial (Matt. 26:1-27:66) XIV. Resurrection and Commission (Matt. 28:1-20)

Affirmation

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE FATHER'S PLAN OF SALVATION.

When I get a cup of coffee, I don't want it completely filled. I prefer to leave some room for my cream and sugar. In fact, my late mother-in-law who drank her coffee black told me that I didn't like coffee as much as I liked the cream and sugar (as usual, she was probably correct). Refilling my coffee cup means more cream and sugar—I like the idea of fulfillment (coffee and otherwise).

One of the reasons that the Gospel According to Matthew is placed first in our New Testament is its often-repeated theme of fulfillment. Over and over throughout his Gospel, Matthew revealed how Jesus Christ fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Matthew noted many instances in which Jesus or the events related to Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (1:22-23; 2:15,17-18,23; 3:3,15; 4:14-16; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15,35; 21:4-5; 26:54,56; 27:9-10), more than in any other New Testament Gospel. However, this does not include the writings of the apostle Paul, who quoted the Old Testament 131 times—including Isaiah 36 times and Psalms 23 times.

The Greek word translated *fulfillment* carries the ideas of completion, perfection, bringing to pass a prediction, and meeting the requirements. Fulfillment suggests the unity of events and time in history directed by God—according to His timetable. However, seeing the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament as merely prophecy and fulfillment ignores the fact that God's message is always relevant for the present and has implications for the future. The idea behind prophecy is "speaking God's word" for the present situation (one of the tasks of our pastors today). In some situations, a prophet "predicted" the future so that when people saw the fulfillment, they would have recognized the authenticity of the prophet's message as God's word for them in their current situation. When you read Matthew, think of "fulfillment" and "the kingdom of God."





Matthew 3:1-4:11

Matthew opened his Gospel by providing a genealogy of Jesus that spans three great periods of Jewish history (1:1-17): the time of Abraham to the time of David (vv. 2-6a), from David to the time of the Babylonian exile (vv. 6b-11), and from the exile to the birth of the promised Messiah (vv. 12-16). The eight remaining verses of the first chapter describe Jesus's birth as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel,' which is translated 'God is with us'" (Matt. 1:23; see Isa. 7:14). Matthew used the Greek word for "virgin" (meaning sexually pure) so that his readers would understand that Mary had no sexual relations prior to Jesus's birth (Matt. 1:24-25).

Matthew 2 details the visit of the wise men and their interaction with Herod the Great (2:1-8), king of Judea from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC He is called Herod the Great likely because of his many building projects including the renovation of the temple in Jerusalem. Matthew 2 also reports that after the wise men worshiped the baby Jesus (vv. 9-12); Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt at an angel's directions due to Herod's searching for Jesus to kill him (vv. 13-15). Matthew details Herod's order to kill all the boy babies in Bethlehem who were two years old and under (vv. 16-18). This chapter ends with the return of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee after Herod's death (vv. 19-23). Nazareth was the village in which Jesus grew up.

Matthew 3 opens with the ministry of John the Baptist, who preached repentance and baptized people in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (3:1-12). According to Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist's message was "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" Matthew, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, described the reaction to John's preaching: "Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (vv. 5-6). To repent, God requires people to (1) stop doing the wrong things, (2) make a 180-degree turn away from sin and toward God, and (3) start doing the right things. John insisted that repentance should result in a changed life (3:8).

God gave John the Baptist insight into the spiritual condition of the Pharisees and the Sadducees in verses 7-12 when he called them a "Brood of vipers" (v. 7) and told them God was ready to chop them down unless they produced "fruit consistent with repentance" (vv. 8-10). John continued by stating that the One who would come after him would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (vv. 11-12).

Matthew 3:13-17, the beginning of this session's focal passage, describes Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River. Parallel passages of Jesus's baptism are found in Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22. While John does not describe Jesus's baptism, in John 1:26-36 John the Baptist testified to Jesus being both "the Son of God" and "the Lamb of God."

Matthew 4:1-11 records Jesus's temptations by the devil and His response to them. Using Jesus's response as a guide, we can learn a lot about how we should respond to the temptations we face.



Obeying God (Matt. 3:13-17)

Jesus came to John the Baptist at the Jordan River to be baptized. Initially, John resisted Jesus's request, but he relented once Jesus assured him it was part of God's plan. When Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the Father affirmed Him from heaven.

VERSE 13

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

The location of **John** the Baptist's preaching about repentance was "the wilderness of Judea" (v. 1). That geographical reference doesn't tell us exactly where Jesus was baptized. John 3:23 states that John the Baptist "also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there." Perhaps this is the same location where Jesus was baptized. The exact location of Aenon is debated

The **Jordan** was the largest and most important river in the Roman province of Judea. The word translated *Jordan* means "descender." The Jordan River is over 200 miles long and about 17 feet deep at its deepest. From its origins at the foot of Mount Hermon, it empties into the Sea of Galilee. The Jordan River then descends from over 1,000 feet above sea level and empties into the Dead Sea at 1,300 feet below sea level.

Verse 13 reveals Jesus had been in the region of **Galilee**; He had been in His hometown of Nazareth (according to Mark 1:9) which was

located about twenty miles east of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. This verse also reveals God's purpose for this event in Jesus' life: He came to John the Baptist **to be baptized by him**. New Testament scholars have expressed quite a few possibilities for Jesus's motive for being baptized. Certainly, Jesus was following God the Father's plan for His life. Likely Jesus wanted to identify with John the Baptist's ministry and focus on repentance. Jesus had no need to repent, because He was sinless. Baptism revealed Jesus's identification with human beings who need to repent of their sins to begin a relationship with God. His favorite title was the Son of Man (used eighty-two times in the Gospel accounts).

VERSES 14-15

But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized.

Matthew 3:14-15 reveals the dialogue between Jesus and John the Baptist immediately prior to Jesus's baptism (vv. 16-17). These verses also illustrate both John's humility and Jesus's submission to His Father's will. Based on God's gift of prophecy (and possibly their family relationship—likely they were cousins on their mother's side), John knew that he was unworthy to baptize Jesus. The Greek verb translated **tried to stop** indicates John's made several attempts to deter Jesus from being baptized by John. John's reason was "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" Since John the Baptist's focus was on repentance and Jesus never sinned and thus had no need for repentance, we can understand John's reluctance to baptize Jesus. Correctly, John felt that Jesus was superior to him and that Jesus should baptize him. In fact, John had previously said that he was unworthy even to remove Jesus's sandals (v. 11).

With Jesus's words, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness," Matthew recorded Jesus's first spoken words in his Gospel account. Notice especially that Jesus used the words us, fulfill, and righteousness. In John the Baptist's baptizing Jesus, both of them would be fulfilling God's plan. "Both John's baptism of Jesus and Jesus' submission to baptism at the hands of John (note the use of 'for us') are identified as having their part to play in the unfolding of God's purpose." The Greek words translated for now indicate Jesus's baptism (and subsequent temptations) were God's will to inaugurate Jesus's

public ministry. Jesus's words convinced John of the necessity of his baptizing Jesus.

While Matthew used the word translated *righteousness* only seven times in his Gospel, it serves as the basis for all of Jesus's ethical decisions. Jesus's baptism also fulfills *all righteousness*. Baptism is the first outward evidence of our following God's plan of salvation after we repent and place our faith in Jesus. Through Jesus's righteousness—and only through His righteousness—can we enter a relationship with God (Rom. 3:21-26). Righteousness comes when we die in Adam and become alive in Christ (5:12-6:14). God permanently removes our sins and gives us the perfect righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:22; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The phrase to fulfill all righteousness may also refer to several Old Testament passages such as Psalm 2:7 (a coronation song for a Davidic king) and one or two passages of Isaiah's four Suffering Servant songs (Isa. 42:1 and perhaps Isa. 53:11). Jesus fulfilled all the elements of Isaiah's four songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).

Matthew 3:15 concludes with John's action: **Then John allowed him to be baptized**. Jesus's words had convinced John of the appropriateness of John's baptizing Jesus. Jews practiced a ritual similar to baptism called a *mikvah*. It involved being totally immersed in water to restore ritual purity to that person. In secular Greek and Roman literature, baptism was always by immersion. The Didache (translated as "the Teaching," a Christian church manual describing the practices of the early church written in the late first century or early second century AD) details various rules surrounding baptisms. The preferred mode of baptism was first in living (running) water, second in a pool of water, and third in pouring or sprinkling if enough water was unavailable. The other modes of baptism were allowed as a concession only if complete immersion in water was not able to be performed. Baptists have always viewed baptism by immersion as the only proper mode of baptism, rejecting sprinkling and pouring as valid modes of baptism.

VERSES 16-17

When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

In verses 16-17, the Holy Spirit led Matthew to record responses to Jesus's baptism rather than to describe the baptism itself. Whereas in

Luke's account of Jesus's baptism (Luke 3:21-22) the phrase "the Holy Spirit" is used, Matthew used the term **Spirit of God.** Both refer to the same Person of the Trinity. However, Matthew may have used *Spirit of God* because that's how the Holy Spirit is referred to in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) most early Christians used.

The Greek New Testament uses the word *idou*, frequently translated "behold," to point the reader to noteworthy events that are very important. This word is usually not translated in many modern translations of the Bible because no single English word conveys the entirety of its meaning. However, the Greek term occurs twice in these verses. In verse 16 it points to the heavens being opened **suddenly** (*idou*) in reference to **the Spirit of God descending like a dove**. Matthew's inclusion of the *dove* representing the Holy Spirit at Jesus's baptism is one of the many times he refers to the Spirit in Jesus's ministry. Here at Jesus's baptism, it refers to the role the Holy Spirit played in giving Jesus His "marching orders" at the beginning of His public ministry. In verse 17 *idou* (not translated in the CSB) refers to **a voice** speaking **from heaven**, pointing to the authority of God the Father.

Although the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible, a Latin lawyer named Tertullian (from Carthage in northern Africa) first used the term about AD 200 in reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The baptism of Jesus is one of the places in the Bible where the three Persons of the Trinity are mentioned, though the term "Trinity" is not used (see also Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13). In relation to Jesus's baptism, first, God the Son (Jesus Himself) is the one who initiated the action of baptism. Next, the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of God") is present in verse 16 descending on Jesus. Finally, God the Father (indicated by a voice from heaven said) speaks, saying: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased." These words reveal the relationship of the Father and the Son. This is also the first of three times the Father speaks from heaven. The other times are at Jesus's transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) and after Jesus's prayer that God's name be glorified (John 12:28).

Those final words in verse 17 also reveal the Father's evaluation of the Son—the Father is *well-pleased* with the Son. The Greek term translated *well-pleased* means to take pleasure or find satisfaction in.

This was the first recorded instance of God speaking since the prophet Malachi some 400 years earlier. The Jews believed that God would only speak when the Messiah appeared. New Testament scholars vary in their opinions on who heard the voice. Was it Jesus, John the Baptist, the crowd, or some combination of these? No consensus exists.



Explore Further

Read the article "Trinity" on pages 1605–1607 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the article's definition of "the Trinity"? How does the work of the Trinity involve all three members of the Godhead at the same time? How are they separate?

Hearing God (Matt. 4:1-4)

Immediately following His baptism, Jesus followed the Spirit's leadership into the wilderness. After forty days of fasting, He experienced Satan's temptations. Knowing Jesus's hunger, Satan challenged Him to prove He was the Son of God by turning stones into bread. Jesus rejected the temptation by quoting Scripture (Deut. 8:3) that affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction.

VERSE 1

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The temptation of Jesus is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Mark's temptation account is brief (Mark 1:12-13). Matthew and Luke give extended accounts of the same three temptations, but in a slightly different order (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The location of these temptations is **the wilderness**, the deserted places on both sides of the Jordan River. Jews believed this wilderness was home to demons.

The opening word **Then** indicates a strong connection between Jesus's baptism and His temptations. All three Gospel accounts link Jesus's temptations with His baptism. The linking is significant in Jesus following God's will in all aspects of His life.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness was so that Jesus could **be tempted by the devil**. The Greek word translated *tempted* is also translated as "test" (Matt. 19:3; 22:35). To be tempted is not a sin (Jesus was tempted). It depends on if we allow the temptation to lead us toward God or away from Him. Since Jesus had no evil desires, He could not be tempted by them. Rather, He was tempted by the devil. Satan tempts; God tests. "No one undergoing a trial should say, 'I am being tempted by God,' since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself

doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (Jas. 1:13-15). While Jesus's temptations were different than ours in this instance, He understands what it is like to be tempted and sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14-16).

The word *devil* is a transliteration of a Greek term meaning "false accuser," and "slanderer." "Satan" (Matt. 4:10), a synonym for *devil*, is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "adversary." These terms and others, such as Beelzebul (12:24,27; CSB, ESV, NIV)/Beelzebub (KJV), all describe the same being, who is the leader over the demonic forces.

VERSE 2

After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Fasting was a Jewish practice in which a person substituted the need to expend the time preparing food and eating it with devotion to prayer. In essence it substituted the physical desire to eat with the spiritual desire to communicate with God (to pray). Growing out of that Jewish background, fasting was commonplace for Christians, especially in the first few centuries AD.

Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights. His forty-day fast mirrors Israel's wilderness wanderings for forty years after their failure to follow God's will for their entering the land God promised to them (Num. 14:26-35). Jesus's fast may also reflect the fasts of Moses (Deut. 9:9) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). That Jesus was hungry after these forty days reveals His humanity.

VERSE 3

Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Knowing Jesus's hunger, Satan challenged Him to prove He was **the Son of God** by turning stones into bread. Indeed, the small round rocks in this area would have reminded most people of the small round baked loaves so common at this time. Rather than the words "devil" (vv. 1,5,8) and "Satan" (v. 10), Matthew described this evil being by his function, **the tempter**.

Scholars have interpreted the phrase "If you are the Son of God" in two distinct ways. (1) Some scholars believe that the devil's words are meant to *remind* Jesus that indeed He was God's Son, a fact emphasized

by His recent baptism, and therefore He should demonstrate the unlimited power available to Him by turning stones to bread. Yet Jesus never used His power for His own interests; His miracles accomplished God's will. Indeed, the Greek particle translated *if* often is translated "since."

(2) Other scholars argue that the devil was encouraging Jesus to question His relationship with God and the power that He gave the Son. Had Jesus followed the devil's suggested course instead of God's will, the Son would have held the enemy/tempter in higher regard than His Father. In that way, Jesus would have become a sinner.

VERSE 4

He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Jesus rejected the devil's temptation by quoting Scripture that affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction (Deut. 8:3). In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminded Israel of God's provision for the nation; just as the devil may have been reminding Jesus of the Father's provision for Him. The phrase **it is written** refers to what God had written in the Old Testament. Notice Jesus's reverence for Scripture—**"every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

Jesus used Scripture as a weapon to defeat the devil. Paul equated Scripture with "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), while the writer of Hebrews described Scripture as "living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12, NASB). Later Paul reminded Timothy that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (a literal translation of the Greek; "inspired," 2 Tim. 3:16). We also should remember Peter's words in 2 Peter 1:21: "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (NASB)



Explore Further

Read the articles "Temptation" on pages 1545–1546 and "Temptation of Jesus" on pages 1546–1547 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the difference between temptation and sin. What steps can you take to avoid letting your temptations lead you into sin and away from God?

Trusting God (Matt. 4:5-7)

The devil urged Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple. By twisting Scripture (Ps. 91:11-12), Satan was encouraging Jesus to prove He was the Son of God by forcing the Father to perform a miracle. This diversion from God's plan would use His promises for the Messiah to reveal Jesus to the public in a dramatic way and avoid the cross. Again, Jesus used Scripture (Deut. 6:16) to reject the temptation.

VERSE 5

Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,

This temptation involved the devil transporting Jesus to **the pinnacle of the temple** in Jerusalem. A literal reading of this verse assumes the devil had supernatural powers to transport Jesus. From *the pinnacle of the temple* in Jerusalem to the floor of the Kidron Valley below during Jesus's time was about 450 feet. The devil's thought may have been that Jesus would attract people's attention and cause people to follow Him without His having to endure the cross.

VERSE 6

and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Again, the devil pointed out that Jesus was **the Son of God** and had the ability to avoid death. By citing Psalm 91:11-12, the devil indicated that he knew Jesus had the power to call God's **angels** for help. The verses from Psalm 91 focus on God's protection for the godly. But the verses were not written with the intent of putting God to the test.

VERSE 7

Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."

Jesus again used Scripture (Deut. 6:16) to reject this temptation, emphasizing the sin of putting God to the test. In the original context of Deuteronomy 6, Moses encouraged Israel to not repeat their rebellion at Massah, where they failed to trust God to meet their need for

water (Ex. 17:1-7). Since God cared for the sons of Israel, would He not much more express His care for His only Son? But where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded in trusting and obeying His Father.

We can learn from Jesus's response how to correctly use Scripture. As Christians we must not fall into the temptation of using "proof-texts" to give support to our own ideas, thereby ignoring the original context of Scripture in its historical setting. Understanding the original context is so important for properly understanding and interpreting God's Word. Jesus applied the truth of never putting God to the test. So too we do well when we do the same as we apply Scripture to our lives.



Explore Further

Jesus again refused to put God to the test. What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? How can you trust in God yet not unnecessarily put Him to the test?

Worshiping God (Matt. 4:8-11)

The devil's final temptation dealt with who Jesus would worship: God or the devil. This temptation was meant to deter Jesus from following His mission of the cross. The devil's offer: worship him and he would give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world.

VERSES 8-9

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."

This temptation may have been a vision. No mountain is tall enough to allow seeing all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. The word kingdoms refers to countries and governments. The New Testament pictures the devil's domain as the world (John 14:30). By offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor if Jesus would fall down and worship him, the devil was promising Jesus "instant power, authority, and wealth apart from the way of the cross."2

Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

But Jesus chose to obey His Father's will and take the path to the cross. Matthew concluded his Gospel account with Jesus saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (28:18).

In this climactic moment, Jesus revealed His authority by commanding **Satan** to go away. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 to defeat Satan's temptations. The first two of the Ten Commandments deal with who or what we worship (Ex. 20:2-6; Deut. 5:6-10). We are commanded to worship and serve only God. Likely Jesus had these commands in mind as He responded to the devil.

VERSE 11

Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

The devil left Jesus for a time, only to reappear at other times in Jesus's ministry. By performing exorcisms throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was defeating the devil and his demons.

As the devil left, **angels came and began to serve him**. *Angels* are spiritual beings who serve as God's servants, warriors, and messengers. The tense of the Greek verb translated *began to serve* indicates a repeated action (as in preparing and serving food).



Explore Further

As Christians we face the temptation of who or what to worship each day. How we deal with this temptation reveals who is on the throne of our lives. Do we follow God's will and plan for us or do we succumb to the devil's easier way? Would you say that God is on the throne of your life? Why or why not? If He is not, what would it take to make Him the center of your life?

John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 153.

^{2.} Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 85.

Invitation

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

Growing up as the son of a Southern Baptist pastor, I didn't know you could have a worship service without an invitation. My first real experience with a worship service without an overt invitation was singing in a youth choir with 50-60 singers from my Baptist church, the Methodist church, the Presbyterian church, and the Nazarene church in Bennettsville, SC, the small county-seat where I went to high school.

Instead of an invitation, the choir met together after the concerts and shared how singing those late 1960s Christian youth musicals brought us closer to God. So there was not an invitation, but there was a time of response.

My next experience of a worship service without an invitation was in my United States Air Force's Basic Military Training at Lackland AFB, Texas. During the next four years of serving our nation, I learned that some chaplains offered an invitation while other chaplains did not.

When I was ordained as a Southern Baptist minister in 1982, I became the pastor of Roseland Baptist Church in Roseland, Louisiana. I also joined the United States Air Force as a chaplain in the USAF Reserves. Later as a chaplain in the Mississippi Air National Guard, I completed more than twenty-four years of serving our country and our God as a chaplain, retiring in August of 2002. During my service as a chaplain, I sometimes offered an invitation. At other times, I reminded those military members who attended worship services that I would be available to talk with anyone after the worship service was over.

As we study this passage in Matthew 4, we see that Jesus called people to follow Him. He continues to do that today. Our focal verses remind us that Jesus joined John the Baptist in preaching a message of repentance, fulfilling His role of Messiah as prophesied by the eighth-century BC prophet Isaiah. Even as Jesus urged the crowds to repent, He invited them to follow Him as His disciples ("one who learns"). To twelve of these disciples, Jesus extended the invitation to special service as an apostle ("one who is sent").





Matthew 4:12-25

When Jesus was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23), the Holy Spirit led Him to participate in His first public ministry event: to be baptized (immersed) by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:13-17). Prior to Jesus's baptism, Matthew stressed John the Baptist's fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (vv. 1-12; see Isa. 40:3). Matthew's Gospel account follows Jesus's baptism by detailing the Holy Spirit's leading Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (4:1-11). Immediately following Jesus's defeat of Satan, the angels (spiritual beings created to serve God) ministered to (served) Jesus. Jesus then began His public ministry.



Starting Out (Matt. 4:12-17)

Jesus began His ministry by leaving Nazareth and settling in Capernaum. This region of Galilee once belonged to the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, and Jesus's ministry there fulfilled ancient prophecy about those tribes. His message was simple and clear. People needed to repent from their sins and recognize the arrival of God's kingdom through Him.

VERSE 12

When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

Jesus began His public ministry by (1) leaving Nazareth, (2) encouraging John the Baptist to baptize Him, (3) being led into the wilderness to be tempted, (4) visiting Nazareth, and finally (5) settling in Capernaum.

When Jesus heard that **John** the Baptist had been arrested by Herod Antipas (the fuller story of John the Baptist's arrest and beheading is given in Matt. 14:1-12), He left the wilderness area of the Jordan River and traveled to Galilee further away from this Herod's influence. Galilee was in the northern part of the Roman province of Judea.

The area of Galilee was approximately 2,000 square miles with an estimated population of 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 in at least 200 cities, towns,

and villages. More than half the residents of Galilee were Gentiles (which is probably why this area was sometimes called "Galilee of the Gentiles," 4:15). Galilee was bordered to the north by Lebanon, Samaria to the south, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the Jordan River to the east. Galilee was divided into two parts: Upper Galilee which had mountains over 4,000 feet and Lower Galilee which had hills of about 1,000 feet. Agriculture, trade, and fishing were the principal areas of employment.

VERSE 13

He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Jesus visited His hometown of **Nazareth** (pop. about 400), which was located in the hill country of Lower Galilee about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. It was near the Via Maris, an international trade route running from Egypt to Mesopotamia. The main economy of the village was agriculture. Centuries earlier, Joshua allocated this region to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali around 1400 BC.

After His visit, Jesus relocated to **Capernaum** (pop. about 1500), a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was the center of a thriving fishing industry and became Jesus's headquarters for His Galilean ministry. This move from Nazareth to Capernaum represented the beginning of Jesus's preaching and teaching ministry.

VERSES 14-16

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

These verses quote from **the prophet Isaiah** (Isa. 9:1-2). Matthew's quote preserves Isaiah's use of parallelism (saying the same thing with different words); this is a common element of Hebrew poetry. (More than half of the Old Testament was written in poetic format.) The **great light** Isaiah referred to was the Messiah. "Messiah" is a transliteration of the Hebrew term *Mashiach*, while "Christ" is English for the Greek term *Christos*. Both have the meaning of "anointed one." New Testament writers identified this great light with Jesus (John 8:12).

The phrase **along the road by the sea** likely refers to the road from Damascus south and west to the Sea of Galilee and possibly to the

Mediterranean seaport of Caesarea. Why did Isaiah refer to this area as **Galilee of the Gentiles**? When Israel's United Kingdom under David and Solomon was split into two nations (around 930 BC), Israel (10 tribes) in the north and Judah (plus Benjamin's tribe) in the south, Israel's kings led them away from worshiping the one true God. God punished Israel by allowing the nation of Assyria to destroy them in 722 BC. Assyria exiled many of the Israelites and imported foreigners to Israel. The subsequent intermarriage between the Jews and Gentiles destroyed any racial ties to the former Israelite tribes. Thus, the term *Galilee of the Gentiles* is an appropriate designation for many people living in Galilee in Jesus's time.

VERSE 17

From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

John the Baptist preached: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (3:2). After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus began to preach repentance as well: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near." Whereas John proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, in Jesus the kingdom had arrived. Jesus's message was simple and clear. People needed to repent from their sins and recognize the arrival of God's kingdom through Him. With His arrival, Jesus had partially established the reign of God's kingdom; it will fully arrive with Jesus's second coming. This "already" but "not yet" aspect of Jesus's fulfillment of the kingdom of God is taught in the New Testament and is still preached today.



Explore Further

Read the article "Galilee" on pages 608–610 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What role did Galilee play in the Old and New Testaments?

Calling Out (Matt. 4:18-22)

Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus encountered two sets of brothers: Peter (Simon) and Andrew, James and John. He invited these fishermen to join Him in His work, challenging them to fish for men. All four immediately left their nets and their families behind to follow Jesus.

As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen.

The **Sea of Galilee** is a heart-shaped freshwater lake approximately thirteen miles long (north-south) and eight miles wide (east-west); its deepest part is about 141 feet. The headwaters of the Jordan River flow into its northern end, and the Jordan River flows out on its southern end. This sea (lake) is located in the upper portion of the Jordan Rift Valley.

Surrounded by hills and mountains at an elevation of almost 700 feet below sea level, the lake is prone to sudden, violent storms. The Sea of Galilee is also called Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1), and Sea of Chinnereth (Josh. 11:2; 13:27).

The Sea of Galilee contained three major types of fish: small sardines, members of the carp family, and large musht (tilapia). Nets were used for most fishing from small boats.

During a drought in 1986, the low water level allowed two Israeli fishermen living on the northwest shore to see part of a well-preserved wooden boat emerging from the mud. The ancient craft measured about 27 feet long \times 7.5 feet wide \times 4.3 feet tall and was propelled by a sail and oars. The boat is dated to about 40 BC.

The calling of Jesus's first disciples is reported in our focal verses, as well as in Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11. Jesus called two sets of brothers: Simon (Peter) and Andrew, and James and John (Matt. 4:18,21). Previously, Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:40). Peter also met Jesus during that time (v. 42). A frequent practice at this time was for the older brother to be listed first. Probably Peter was older than Andrew and James was older than John.

With the common practice in Jesus's day of wandering rabbis calling younger men to follow them, Jesus (about thirty years old) commanded Simon and Andrew to follow Him. Matthew preferred the name Peter (twenty-two times) to Simon (five times) in his Gospel.

VERSES 19-20

"Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

In Matthew's Gospel, **follow me** is frequently used in the sense of discipleship. The word *disciple* means "one who learns," frequently in terms

of a master/student relationship. Disciples in Jesus's day were usually about thirteen to fifteen years old.

Jesus captured the interest of Peter and Andrew by asking them to do something they were familiar with: fishing. But instead of fishing for fish, Jesus elevated His call to them to fish for something much more important—to **fish for people**. They would be doing what Jesus was doing, calling people to follow Jesus. What a contrast: fishing for fish kills but fishing for people brings life, abundant in the "here and now" and eternal in the future. The word **immediately** describes Peter's and Andrew's response to Jesus. Peter and Andrew did not say their goodbyes to their family. They responded to Jesus's call to discipleship immediately.

VERSE 21

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them.

Matthew presented Peter, **James**, and **John** as the most prominent of the disciples. James and John's father was **Zebedee**. Likely they were mending their nets when Jesus called them. For James and John to leave their father points to the radical nature of discipleship—a person's relationship with Jesus is even more important than their relationship with their earthly family (Luke 14:25-27). All the Gospel accounts communicate this view of the costly nature of what it means to follow Jesus as His disciple.

VERSE 22

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

James and John's response to Jesus's call was the same as the first set of brothers. **Immediately** they left their occupation and their family, making Jesus their number one priority. Jesus's call for these four to become His disciples occurred about AD 26–27. This James (not Jesus's half-brother who wrote the book of James) played a prominent role as an apostle in the early church after Jesus's ascension into heaven until his martyrdom in about AD 44. James was the first of Jesus's twelve disciples who was killed for his faith (Acts 12:2). Peter, James, and John formed the inner circle of Jesus's disciples (Matt. 17:1; 26:36-37; Mark 5:37).



Explore Further

Read the article "Fish, Fishing" on pages 575–576 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In what ways are "fish" and "fishing" used symbolically in the Bible?

Reaching Out (Matt. 4:23-25)

As Jesus shared the message of God's kingdom around Galilee, He proved He was the Messiah through His preaching and His miracles. News of Him spread, and His popularity grew. Before long, people from surrounding regions were coming to hear Him speak. They also brought sick and demon-possessed people to Him for healing. Jesus's popularity was not limited to Jews and Jewish areas. Syria and the Decapolis (along with "beyond the Jordan") represented primarily Gentile populations. Yet, He highlighted God's work among these people by ministering to them as well.

VERSE 23

Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

During the first and probably second year of Jesus's ministry (AD 27–28), Matthew reported that Jesus **began to go all over Galilee**. The words *all over Galilee* imply an extended amount of time. While we don't know the exact amount of time Jesus spent in Galilee, likely it was several months or more.

According to this verse, Jesus's **teaching** was in the **synagogues** (a word which means "coming together" and refers to a place where worship services were held and teaching was done). The synagogue developed while the Jews were in Babylon (sixth century BC).

Synagogue worship services were similar to our worship services today complete with prayers, singing, reading Scripture—primarily from the Law [the first five books of our Old Testament] and Prophets as well as Psalms. Women, if they were allowed into the synagogue, had to sit or stand in the back, frequently behind a screen. A synagogue usually was established when there were ten Jewish men who could come together for

worship in that area. Outside of the temple in Jerusalem, most of Jewish religious life was focused in the synagogues. Visiting guests frequently were asked to read Scripture and make brief comments on that Scripture.

The second activity that Matthew reported Jesus doing was **preaching the good news of the kingdom**. Although similar to teaching in Jewish synagogues, there are some differences between these two activities. *Teaching* involved making comments about Old Testament Scripture and pictures a teacher and learners. *Preaching* involved speaking or announcing something new as town heralds did.

Matthew gave us the content of the teaching: the good news of the kingdom. The Greek word translated good news or "gospel" refers to the content of Jesus's preaching. We get our English word "evangelist" and similar words from this Greek word. In this context, the word kingdom refers to God's rule in a person's heart and not to a geographical area or a political designation. It also involved repentance from previous acts of sin and belief that the kingdom of God had come in Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). Jesus was both the source and the embodiment of what God's kingdom meant.

The third activity that Matthew reported was Jesus **healing every disease and sickness among the people**. This statement revealed Jesus's power and authority over all different types of *disease* and *sickness*. Jesus's healing ministry was a sign that God's kingdom was not only coming but, to a certain extent, had already arrived. His healing drew the crowds that enabled Jesus to present Himself as *the good news*. By healing people, Jesus demonstrated God's love and mercy.

VERSE 24

Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them.

Matthew revealed the scope of Jesus's popularity in stating **the news** about him spread throughout Syria. This mention of Syria probably refers to the area north of Galilee and demonstrated the growing popularity of Jesus's ministry even outside Galilee.

Verse 24 then gives an impressive list of the categories of afflictions Jesus healed, moving from comprehensive to general and finally to specific. The word **afflicted** is a broad term referring to those with medical problems. The root of this word is the general Greek term meaning "bad."

The phrase **those suffering from various diseases and intense pains** is less comprehensive than *afflicted* but the phrase is still general in its scope. Matthew then moved from the general to the specific problems using the phrases **the demon-possessed**, **the epileptics**, **and the paralytics**. These three terms specify particular medical and mental problems.

The Gospel's focus on Jesus's healing of various types of maladies emphasized Jesus's power and authority over all types of sickness and diseases, regardless of their origin, medical or mental. Demon exorcism revealed Jesus's power over the devil and his demons (Matt. 12:28; Mark 1:23-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). Some demons acknowledged Jesus to be "the Holy One of God" before He exorcised them from people (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). Verse 24, taken as a whole, emphasizes the extensive range and scale of Jesus's healing ministry. As previously noted, it pictures Jesus's unlimited power and authority demonstrating the dramatic coming of God's kingdom in Jesus.

Matthew concluded with a summary statement without elaboration: **And he healed them.** Regardless of the type of problems people had, Jesus met their needs through God's coming into their particular situations through His gifts of grace to them.

VERSE 25

Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Matthew reported one major result of Jesus's healing ministry: **Large crowds followed him.** These *large crowds* enabled Jesus to preach, teach, and evangelize, pointing to Himself as the one who would meet all their deepest needs. In Jesus—and only in Jesus—the kingdom of God had arrived.

We don't know the exact size of these crowds, but on several occasions, Jesus had fed large crowds. On one such occasion Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children (14:13-21), bringing the total number of people to possibly 15,000 to 20,000. Another time Jesus fed 4,000 men plus women and children (15:32-39) for a total number of possibly 8,000 to 12,000 people.

The remainder of verse 25 lists the areas the people in these crowds who followed Jesus had come from: **Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.** These five geographical areas comprise the major land area of modern-day Israel and Jordan. People from *Galilee* represented many in the crowds since Jesus's healing and

evangelistic ministry had been centered in Galilee at that time. People from *the Decapolis* were from the region east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. The word *Decapolis* means "ten cities." The population of these Greek cities is uncertain, but we do know that some Jews lived there and people traveled from the region to see Jesus. The Decapolis is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31). Although some disagreement exists about the cities in the Decapolis, frequently these are listed: Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Dion, Pella, Gerasa, and Canatha.

People from *Jerusalem* were part of the large crowds who followed Jesus as well. Although much of Jesus's ministry was located in Galilee, Jesus also spent time in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. In Jesus's time, the population of Jerusalem was estimated to be approximately 25,000 to 50,000. Those numbers more than doubled (some estimate an increase to 2.5 million people) during the Passover and major Jewish feasts.

People from Judea also made up some of the large crowds who followed Jesus. Judea is the name of the Roman province made up of both the Old Testament Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin) and the Northern Kingdom (Samaria; the other ten tribes of Israel).

People from *beyond the Jordan* represented those in the crowd from the area east of the Jordan River. Matthew, Mark, and John use this Greek phrase translated "beyond the Jordan" (Matt. 4:15,25; Mark 3:8) or "across the Jordan" (Matt. 19:1; Mark 10:1). This included the area the New Testament calls Perea and possibly included the Decapolis, and Nabataea.



Explore Further

Read the article "Kingdom of God" on pages 964–966 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does the article define "the kingdom of God"? How can believers follow Jesus's example of sharing the message of God's kingdom? We should apply these verses to our lives by remembering that Jesus's call means following His example and ministering to others. Are you following Jesus's example? How so?

Worship the King

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

Some of my most joyful worship experiences have been in singing praises to God. When I first enrolled at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1977, my wife and I joined the First Baptist Church of New Orleans and began singing in the choir. The minister of music there and his wife, the pianist, were superb worship leaders. Singing in a choir of nearly one hundred voices was the high point of our worship experiences there. Although we enjoyed singing at other times of the year, we especially enjoyed singing during the Christmas season.

When we left there so I could pastor my first church, Roseland Baptist Church in Roseland, Louisiana, we also sang in its small choir. I also sang in the choirs of several Mississippi churches where I served as interim pastor while teaching New Testament and Greek at Clarke College in Newton, Mississippi. These choirs welcomed me with open arms; together we led in worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and His Holy Spirit. God—and God alone—is worthy of our worship.

In addition to the choruses in Handel's *The Messiah*, I also enjoyed singing Terry York's hymn "Worthy of Worship" which can be found in our *Baptist Hymnal*. (Terry was the Minister of Music at East Edgewater Baptist Church in New Orleans and was working on his doctoral degree in music while I was working on my doctorate in New Testament and Greek.) The words of this hymn remind me of the importance of worshiping God.

Our focal verses from Matthew 2:1-12 record the worship of the wise men. Their worship of the baby Jesus provides us with an example of worshiping our Savior and Lord.





Matthew 1:1-2:23

The birth of Jesus occurred in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great (37 BC-4 BC). An unidentified number of wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem seeking to worship the newborn King of the Jews. Many Christians assume that since there were three gifts, there were also three wise men. Matthew—the only one who mentions the wise men—does not indicate their number.

The wise men had been following a special star. We should focus on God's leadership of the wise men rather than attempting to be specific about the nature of the star that guided their journey.

As the reigning "king of the Jews," the arrival of the wise men seeking the new born king of the Jews deeply disturbed Herod and all of Jerusalem as well. Rome had given Herod the title of "king of the Jews," so he felt threatened by the wise men's announcement. Being warned in a dream, the wise men saw through Herod's claim that he wanted to worship Jesus also. Matthew indicated that after worshiping the baby Jesus they went home another way without reporting back to Herod.

The wise men's visit probably happened a year or so after Jesus's birth. Matthew reported that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were in a house (2:11). Also, when describing Jesus as the "child," Matthew used the Greek word for a young child rather than the word for a newborn baby (vv. 9,11,13,14). Furthermore, Herod killed all the baby boys under two years of age, not merely the newborn boys (vv. 16-18).



Seeking the King (Matt. 2:1-3)

The birth of Jesus occurred in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great. An unidentified number of wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem seeking to worship the newborn King of the Jews. They had been following a special star. As the reigning "king of the Jews," this turn of events deeply disturbed Herod. His uneasiness spread throughout Jerusalem.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,

Matthew began his Gospel by relating Jesus's genealogy (1:1-17), demonstrating Jesus was a descendant of Abraham (the father of the Jewish race, lived around 2100 BC) and David (the great king of the Jews, lived 1000 BC). This genealogy is structured in such a way to show the three great periods of Jewish history with fourteen generations in each period.

Matthew completed the first chapter of his Gospel by recording how Jesus's birth came about (vv. 18-25). Matthew tied Jesus's birth with the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 7:14) describing the birth of "Immanuel" (a Hebrew word meaning "God is with us," Matt. 1:23). Throughout his Gospel Matthew emphasized how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. Of our four Gospels, only Luke detailed the actual birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-7). Matthew preceded Jesus's birth by writing about Joseph and Mary (Matt. 1:18-25). Matthew then fast-forwarded an unknown number of months and described the wise men's visit (2:1-12).

The town of **Bethlehem** was located about five to six miles south-southeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of **Judea**. The word *Bethlehem* occurs about fifty times in the Bible being first mentioned in connection with the death of Rachel, Jacob's wife (Gen. 35:19). Bethlehem was then connected with various persons in the book of Judges and was Naomi's hometown (Ruth 1:1-2), the setting for the book of Ruth. Boaz and Ruth became ancestors of King David (Matt. 1:5-6). After David rose to power, Bethlehem was known as the "City of David." Another name associated with Bethlehem was Ephrathah in Micah's prophecy (Mic. 5:2) which concerned the birthplace of the Messiah.

Jesus's birth occurred during the rule of Herod the Great over Judea. Herod the Great was not born a king. The Roman Senate designated Herod "king of the Jews" in 40 BC and tasked him with conquering Judea, which he did by 37 BC. He reigned from 37 BC to 4 BC. In contrast, the Messiah would be born as a king. Matthew's genealogy demonstrates that Jesus was the legitimate Jewish King.

Herod was known for his cruelty. Throughout his reign, King Herod killed hundreds of people, perhaps thousands. He burned alive two teachers and forty of their students because they took issue with him putting a golden eagle in front of the Jerusalem temple. The eagle represented Roman authority. Herod's incredible cruelty may have been due in part to various mental diseases caused by metal poisoning—he drank wine from metal goblets.

Part of this king's paranoia stemmed from the fact that he was Idumean (a descendant of Esau, Jacob's brother; half-Jewish on his mother's side; half-Arab on his father's side). Herod's evil actions also led the Jewish people to greatly resent him. Of the multiple Herods mentioned in the Gospel accounts, Herod the Great was probably so named because of his ambitious building projects. Christians especially remember this Herod for his connection with Jesus's birth.

Rome supported Herod as ruler because he helped the government control the people in Judea. Some liked him because of his building projects, including an almost complete renovation of the temple in Jerusalem. This project was begun about 20 BC. While the renovation of the temple itself was completed relatively quickly, the outer buildings of this forty-six acre temple complex were not fully completed until about AD 64; it was destroyed along with the rest of the city in AD 70 by the Romans.

The **wise men** were probably astronomers/astrologers from Babylon/ Persia in modern-day Iraq or Iran. Other scholars believe the wise men may have come from modern-day India or Saudi Arabia. Any of these countries would fit in with their being **from the east**. The wise men probably connected the stars with important historical events. These men may have been the first non-Jews (Gentiles) to worship Jesus as the King. These *wise men* **arrived in Jerusalem** in about 5/4 BC.

VERSE 2

saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."

Perhaps they assumed the new king had been born into the royal family. They asked Herod, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" The wise men may not have known that Herod was so paranoid and jealous of his "right" to the throne that he killed several of his wives, their sons, and his closest relatives out of fear they might overthrow him.

The wise men gave King Herod this explanation for their coming: "For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him." The rationale of the wise men certainly fit in with their occupation and the stated reason for their trip. The phrase at its rising also has been translated "in the east" (KJV; NASB) because the east is where stars "rise." God used this star to lead the wise men to the newborn Messiah.

VERSE 3

When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew reported that Herod was **deeply disturbed** by the wise men's question. The English words deeply disturbed do not convey the depth of meaning of this Greek word which involves the mental aspects of fury and physical aspects of shaking. All of Jerusalem most likely refers to the religious leadership of Israel, many of whom were appointed to their positions by Herod himself. The first three verses of Matthew 2 reveal a lot about Herod's lack of good character. These verses help "set the stage" for the remainder of our focal verses for this session.



Explore Further

Read the article "Herod" on pages 740–742 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How do Herod's credentials to be king of the Jews compare with Jesus's?

Finding the King (Matt. 2:4-8)

Herod sought the specific birthplace of this rival king. The religious leaders shared that the prophet Micah revealed that the King (Messiah) would be born in nearby Bethlehem. After determining when the wise men first became aware of the star, Herod ordered them to come back when they had found Him. He deceptively claimed an interest in worshiping the King himself.

VERSE 4

So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.

During Jesus's time, there were more priests than could minister at the temple at one time. So, priests were divided into twenty-four divisions. The heads of these divisions were called chief priests. Each priest served one week out of twenty-four (roughly twice a year). Scribes were initially men who copied the Old Testament Scripture. However, by Jesus's time, scribes were known as men who understood Scripture, skilled in the interpretation of Scripture and the application of it to a person's life.

This group of chief priests and scribes was probably the Jewish Sanhedrin (the supreme court for the Jews). Scholars believe that during Jesus's time, the Sanhedrin was composed of seventy-one members from the Sadducees (priests) and Pharisees (laymen). In addition to these seventy-one men were an unknown number of scribes. The Jewish Sanhedrin also included the High Priest and possibly any men who had previously held that office. The Roman government allowed the Sanhedrin to function as Judaism's high religious court. For Herod to ask this group of men for answers to a religious question reflects the general practice of this time.

The Hebrew term translated **Messiah** is rendered into Greek as "Christ" and means "anointed one." This refers to the Old Testament practice of anointing prophets, priests, and kings with oil, symbolizing the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The *Messiah* would be the person on whom God's Spirit rested in a complete way. Herod connected "the king of the Jews" (v. 2) with the Messiah.

VERSES 5-6

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

The response of the Jewish religious leaders to Herod's question was to quote the Old Testament prophet Micah. The quote only included part of Micah 5:2. What they left out was "whose going forth is from everlasting" (writer's translation; "His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times," CSB). Micah also spoke about the Messiah's reigning over Israel. The prophet's point was to show the importance of a small town. To avoid confusion, Micah referred to **Bethlehem of Judea** located five miles southwest of Jerusalem (not the Bethlehem seven miles north northwest of Nazareth). Micah's words **out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel** may be recalling Samuel's anointing of David as king over Israel at God's command (1 Sam. 16:1-13; see also 2 Sam. 5:2).

Micah used the term **shepherd**; Jesus called Himself "the good shepherd" (John 10:11,14; see also Ezek. 34). This term is used to describe how Jesus would guide and care for God's people in comparison with the same function of shepherds and their sheep. On occasion shepherds would lay down their lives for their sheep—as Jesus did in taking upon Himself the penalty for sin in His "once for all" voluntary sacrifice (John 10:15; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10).

"Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.'"

That **Herod secretly summoned the wise men** hints at his later treachery and his true intentions (killing the boy babies in Bethlehem). To narrow the scope of Herod's murderous intentions, he asked the wise men **the exact time the star appeared**.

Herod relayed the information from the Jewish religious experts about the birth of the Messiah to the wise men, sending them to **Bethlehem**. Herod then ordered the wise men to come back to Jerusalem and give him the information as to the identity of this new-born Messiah so he could **worship** the child as the wise men planned to do.

Later verses in Matthew 2 reveal Herod's true evil intentions and serve as further fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Herod had no intention of worshiping the new king. Instead, he wanted to locate the child and eliminate the one he saw as potential competition to his rule as "king of the Jews" (vv. 16-18).

As noted previously, the Greek word translated **child** was not used for newborn babies but rather for older children. At the time of the wise men's visit Jesus was probably between one to two years old. Also, Matthew 2:11 indicates that the wise men found Jesus in a "house," not in a cave that probably served as His birthplace (Luke 2:6-7). This sheds further light on Jesus's age when the wise men arrived to worship Him.



Explore Further

Read the article "Sanhedrin" on page 1414 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What role did the Sanhedrin play in the life of Jesus and in relation to the early church?

Worshiping the King (Matt. 2:9-12)

The wise men continued to follow the star toward Bethlehem. When they found the house where Jesus and His family were staying, they worshiped

Him and presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. However, after receiving a warning to avoid Herod, they returned to their homeland another way.

VERSES 9-10

After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Matthew reported the wise men being led by a star (vv. 2,7). As the wise men traveled the five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, they saw the star again. **There it was** translates a Greek word used to draw the readers' attention to an important statement. In Matthew 2:9, this word points to the importance of the star in guiding the wise men. The words also seem to indicate they had not seen the star while they were in Jerusalem. That the wise men were **overwhelmed with joy** may indicate that they had not followed the star into Jerusalem. Could it be that the wise men took their eyes off the star, and used logic, determining that the newborn king must be in Jerusalem? After the detour to see Herod, they must have felt overwhelming joy and renewed confidence about accomplishing their mission when they saw the star again. It must have assured the travelers that they were well on their way to finding the one "born king of the Jews" (v. 2).

Matthew noted that the star moved: It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. God directed the wise men to the right place where Jesus was via the star. In a similar way, God had directed Israel by a pillar of fire (at night) and a pillar of cloud (during the day) guiding them during the exodus (Ex. 13:21; 40:38).

Luke detailed the birth of Jesus in his Gospel account (Luke 2:1-20). He noted that because of the census being taken at that time (v. 1) there was no room available for Jesus's family at the inn (v. 7, ESV, KJV; "guest room," CSB, NIV). Shepherds were the first to be told of Jesus's birth (vv. 8-12) and behold Him (vv. 16-20). As Matthew did not mention the shepherds, Luke did not record the wise men's visit.

VERSE 11

Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The star not only directed them to Bethlehem, it also directed the wise men to a specific house which Matthew called **the house**. The family had probably moved into a house some time after Jesus was born. There they found **the child with Mary his mother**.

When the wise men saw the child, they fell to their knees and **worshiped him**. Falling to one's knees or lying prostrate on the ground were and are physical ways of expressing worship (Gen. 17:3; Ex. 34:8; 1 Chron 29:20; Pss. 5:7; 22:29; 95:6; Rev. 7:11). This action reveals that the one who worships regards the person they are worshiping to be their superior. "This is the way eastern rulers were shown homage; people would prostate themselves with their foreheads touching the ground."

In this case it indicates Jesus's kingship. Matthew had presented Jesus as the rightful King of Israel (the genealogy of Matt. 1:1-17), the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the one to be worshiped. Jesus is both the King of the Jews and the one worshiped by Gentiles (the wise men). As Gentiles, the wise men foreshadow that God's offer of salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles alike, to all who will repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as their Savior.

The wise men presented Jesus with their gifts of **gold**, **frankincense**, **and myrrh**. All three were luxury items and their presentation to Jesus was befitting of honoring a king. "Gold, then as now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship."²

VERSE 12

And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

Throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, God communicated His will to people using dreams and visions (Gen 28:12; 37:5-10; Dan. 7; Matt 1:20; 2:13; Acts 10:9-16; 16:9-10). Many Bible students believe that God uses dreams to communicate His message today. Matthew had already introduced dreams as one way God communicates with people. When Joseph discovered Mary to be pregnant ("by the Holy Spirit," NASB), he had intended to divorce her secretly (1:18-19). "But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (vv. 20-21). God would also warn Joseph

in dreams both to flee with his family to Egypt to escape from Herod's plot to kill the baby Jesus and telling him when it was safe to return to Israel after Herod had died (2:13,19-20).

In this instance, the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Therefore the wise men returned to their own country by another route. Matthew did not further describe what that other route was. Some speculate that route was east to the Jordan River and then north and east back to Persia.

Were the wise men taking a chance by not obeying Herod's request? Absolutely, but the wise men chose to obey God rather than Herod. This was a wise choice for them, and it is a wise choice for all of us. Perhaps this wise choice is reflected in the common name for these men: wise men.

Matthew 2:16 describes Herod flying into a rage after he discovered his wishes (orders) were not followed. Although Herod had lied to the wise men about his desire to worship Jesus, he was outsmarted by the wise men who obeyed God's message to them. Herod ordered all the boy children in Bethlehem who were two years old and under to be executed. This is another indication that at the time of the wise men's visit, Jesus's age was somewhere between one to two years old (v. 16). As mentioned above, prior to Herod's actions, God warned Joseph in a dream to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt (vv. 13-15).

Matthew provided a brief narrative concerning the star that guided the wise men and their visit with the baby Jesus. Perhaps it is enough to know that the guidance the Father provided for the wise men is available to us today through His Holy Spirit. May we seek Jesus as persistently and respond as they did, with worship and the best we have to offer.



Explore Further

Jesus is both Savior and King. What gifts can believers offer to Jesus in their acts of worship? We acknowledge Jesus as King not only through our worship, but also through how we think, speak, and live. Spend some time reflecting on how you worship Jesus in your life. What is one thing you can do in the coming week to demonstrate such worship?

Grant R. Osborne, Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

^{2.} Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 66.

True Righteousness

JESUS DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN HIS KINGDOM.

In April 2001, my family and I joined Belle Aire Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Working at Lifeway Christian Resources since 1993 as an editor in the Adult Sunday School department equipped me to be a good Sunday School teacher. So after joining the church, I began team-teaching a co-ed Adult Sunday School class of people around my age.

Shortly after that, I volunteered to teach discipleship classes on Wednesday evenings. I taught several "background" classes such as "Canon" (Why we have sixty-six books in our Bibles) and "What is the Best Bible for Me" (an overview of various Bible translations). In addition to these 7-week classes, I taught several classes of fourteen weeks each on verse-by-verse studies of various New Testament books (or portions). I taught 1 John, Ephesians, James, and the Sermon on the Mount several times each. Those in these classes told me they learned a lot; I learned even more.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is the longest and most extensive record of Jesus's teachings in our New Testament. When I taught "Life and Teachings of Christ" courses at Clarke College in Newton, Mississippi, we spent a month learning from the Sermon on the Mount. In addition to the commentaries I have on Matthew, I have twelve to fifteen commentaries specifically on the Sermon on the Mount.

The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The word translated "perfect" also means "complete" and "mature." On our own, this is an impossibly high standard to meet. However, we don't have to do it alone. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and helps us do what we could not do on our own. We'll discuss more about what this verse means in this session. If you really want a life-changing experience, I suggest reading the Sermon on the Mount each day during our three-week study.





Matthew 5:1-48

Matthew followed his account of Jesus calling His first disciples (4:18-22) with a focus on what Jesus did next: teaching, preaching, and healing (vv. 23-25). Chapters 5–7 record Jesus's longest sermon in the Gospels: 111 verses. After setting the stage for the sermon, Matthew reported Jesus teaching His disciples (5:1-2); the crowds following Him also overheard Jesus's words.

The term "Sermon on the Mount" was first used by the early Christian theologian Augustine (late fourth-early fifth century AD). Luke reproduced some of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount throughout his Gospel, primarily in his "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:20-49).

Students of the New Testament have suggested various purposes Jesus may have had in preaching this Sermon on the Mount. It certainly proved Jesus's superiority over all other teachers. This greatest of all sermons also showed Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Law, outlined how to live a life that honors Him, set His followers apart from all others, corrected misunderstandings of the Old Testament (especially Matt. 5:21-48), and revealed the high ethical standards that God requires of His people. These standards are impossible to meet without the aid of God's Holy Spirit indwelling our lives.

Jesus described those who were "blessed" in verses 3-12. No single word in English adequately conveys the meaning of the Greek word for "blessed." In addition to "blessed," some other English terms that help understand its meaning are "how blessed," "how happy," "happy," "fortunate," "congratulations," "fulfilled," and "flourishing." Perhaps the best translation for this Greek word is: "God's favor is upon." A good summary of the meaning of the beatitudes is: "The happiness of the Beatitudes is not about *feeling good* but about *being good*, and being good is defined by Jesus and shaped by one's relationship with God through him" (emphasis added).

EXPLORE THE TEXT





Influence Your Culture (Matt. 5:13-16)

Jesus compared kingdom living to salt that preserves and adds flavor. Without its saltiness, however, it becomes useless. Jesus also said that believers serve as lights to the world. Instead of hiding their light, their good works should shine and point others toward the Father.

VERSE 13

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

In the ancient world, there were several important uses for salt. Among the most popular were: (1) use in sacrifices, (2) seasoning, (3) preservative, (4) means of purification, and (5) payment (particularly for soldiers). Scholars today debate whether Jesus was referring to salt's purifying or preservative uses. Possibly Jesus had both of these in mind.

One commentator notes, "Jesus' purpose was not scientific but ethical, making the point that his disciples must never allow themselves to become useless in their mission. The verb [for "should lose its taste"] means to 'become foolish' with the idea that the disciple is a fool." People who claim to be disciples of Jesus while living impure lives will not only have ineffective ministries, but they also will have counterproductive ones.

In the Gospel According to Mark, Jesus applied to "have salt" in oneself as helpful in living at peace with others (Mark 9:50). The apostle Paul used salt in his comment about speech "seasoned with salt." This meant that gracious speech is speech that offers appropriate answers (Col. 4:6).

VERSE 14

"You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house."

After creating "the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), God's next creative act was to create **light** (v. 3). Perhaps the New Testament's most important use of *light* was Jesus's declaration: "I am the light of the

world" (John 8:12). *Light* in Scripture was used in a physical sense as well as a metaphor to represent good and God (Father, Son, or Spirit) whereas "darkness" represents the devil and evil (all that is in opposition to God).

In the Old Testament, God desired Israel to be a light to the nations. Unfortunately, Israel failed to understand or accomplish God's mission for them. The prophet Isaiah mentioned several times in his writings that light would be a constant characteristic of the coming Messiah—a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). With Matthew's emphasis on fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, we must understand *light* (righteousness) in reference to what the Messiah brought to a world lost in darkness (sin).

Jesus elaborated on the light metaphor with three short statements. First, "A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden." One purpose of building a city on a hill would be the opposite: for people to see it from miles away. The purpose of Jesus's disciples (both then and now) was/is being lights that reflect who Jesus proclaimed Himself to be: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

VERSES 15-16

"No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. 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."

Second, Jesus referred to the small terra cotta (unglazed earthenware) lamps filled with olive oil. That oil was lit and gave light for all those in the house. In the same way as He had done with reference to a city on a hill, Jesus referred to the opposite of the intended purpose of the lamp: covering up the light by putting the lamp under a basket. Instead, people would light a lamp and put it on a lampstand so that it would accomplish its intended purpose: to give light to those in the house.

Third, Jesus used *light* to refer to **good works** done by His disciples. In a similar way that the city set on a hill and a lamp on a lampstand give light, the good deeds done by Jesus's disciples result in **glory** being given to our **Father in heaven**. Paul likely had the same concept in mind as he described salvation in Ephesians 2:8-10. Paul first described the "how" of salvation (vv. 8-9). Then he described the "why" (one of the purposes of salvation) in verse 10: to do good works, to show we are God's masterpieces (the same Greek word used to describe a painting, a sculpture, or a poem; "workmanship," CSB).

Jesus's use of *light* also reflects His emphasis on His mission to the Gentiles. Matthew's account of the wise men in our previous session (Matt. 2:1-12) and his reference to Jesus's preaching, healing, and teaching ministry to both Jews and Gentiles (4:23-25) reinforce Jesus's purpose. That purpose was to bring salvation to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, who will repent and place their faith in Him for salvation. **Your Father in heaven** (or "heavenly Father," 6:14) is almost unique to Matthew's Gospel. As salt, Jesus's disciples allow the world to taste God's goodness. As light, Jesus's disciples allow the world to see God's goodness.



Explore Further

Read the article "Light, Light of the World" on pages 1017–1018 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What ways is light used as imagery in the Bible? What does it mean that Jesus is "the light of the world"?

Obey Your Father (Matt. 5:17-20)

Jesus affirmed that He did not come to earth to dismantle the law of Moses. Instead, He came to fulfill the law and to restore it to God's original intent. For believers, the key to kingdom living is obedience to God's commands. This is His standard for a successful life. To enter God's kingdom, individuals must live in a way that moves beyond rituals and rules and embraces an active and meaningful faith for the glory of God.

VERSE 17

"Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

Verse 17 functions both as an introduction to and summarizes the remainder of chapter 5 which concludes with the theme of Jesus's sermon, in verse 48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In the New Testament human writers call the three sections of the Old Testament: the **Law**, the **Prophets**, and the "Writings"

(or "Psalms" after its longest book). Jesus's stated purpose was to **fulfill** the Old Testament, not to replace it, through His life and teachings.

VERSE 18

"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished."

The phrase **truly I tell you** (or something similar) is used seventeen times in the New Testament (ten times in Matthew) to reveal important facts. The phrase **until heaven and earth pass away** reinforced the permanence of God's written Word and is used only once in the New Testament. However, Jesus expressed this same idea in Luke 16:17.

Not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away refers to the parts of a letter that distinguish it from another letter (such as the part of an "R" that distinguishes it from a "P" or the part of a "Q" that distinguishes it from an "O" in English). This stresses the permanence of God's Word.

Finally, the phrase **from the law until all things are accomplished** emphasizes the permanence of God's Word as well. Jesus *accomplished* (fulfilled) God's purpose concerning Him in the Old Testament's prophecy. "With the coming of Christ, many aspects of the law are brought to complete fruition (e.g., the need for sacrifices, on which see Hebrews). In other instances certain requirements of the law endure until Christ's second coming (e.g.: classically, love of neighbor and God)."³

VERSES 19-20

"Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven."

Jews had great respect for God's written Word. Fathers were expected to teach God's Word to their sons; the synagogue's purpose was also to teach God's Word. Most, if not all Jews would have agreed with Jesus's statement about breaking and doing/teaching God's commands. Also, most Jews would have agreed with the terms **least** and **greatest** as Jesus used them in respect to God's kingdom.

The **scribes** and **Pharisees** were groups of men who had dedicated themselves to following God's Word even to the smallest detail. If anyone deserved to get into heaven, the people probably thought it would be the scribes and Pharisees. Even the name "Pharisee" meant "separated ones." They sought to separate themselves from all forms of sin and dedicated themselves to all forms of what they perceived as **righteousness** (doing the right thing, doing what God had commanded).

Jesus's statement about needing to **surpass** (exceed) the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees must have come as a total shock to His audience. What the Jew's of Jesus's day did not understand was God's requirement of absolute, perfect righteousness and the impossibility of sinful people to attain that goal and so enter the kingdom of God. The only way we can get into heaven is to depend on Jesus's perfect righteousness, permanently given to the believer at the moment of conversion (Rom. 4:20-25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9).



Explore Further

Read the article "Justification" on pages 948–950 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What would you say to a person who believes they are going to heaven because of the goodness of their behavior, how they live?

Love Your Enemies (Matt. 5:43-48)

Jesus challenged His disciples to live in a way that distinguishes them from the prevailing culture. One way Christ followers could demonstrate this new way of life was by loving their enemies and praying for those who mistreated them. Loving those who reciprocate with love does little to move the needle for the kingdom. In contrast, loving one's enemies reflects the love shown by the Father toward those who reject Him.

VERSE 43

"You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

Following verses 19-20, Jesus cited six examples of how people had misunderstood the teachings of the Old Testament laws. Jesus set up these contrasts not as a replacement for God's law; rather these contrasts corrected a Jewish misunderstanding of what God's law originally was intended to do. God's law is perfect (Ps. 19:7). The traditional way that Jews understood/applied God's law did not accomplish what God originally intended for it to do. Jesus repeated the phrases "you have heard . . ." and "but I tell you . . ." six times in what scholars call the antitheses (opposites) in verses 21-47.

The areas Jesus presented included: (1) murder/anger (vv. 21-26), (2) adultery/lust (vv. 27-30), (3) divorce/adultery (vv. 31-32), (4) lying/oaths (vv. 33-37), (5) retaliation (vv. 38-42), and (6) loving enemies (vv. 43-47). Instead of merely focusing on actions, Jesus's complete understanding of God's law focuses on motivation—what a person's heart/mind leads him or her to do and to be (see also Luke 6:27-36).

In verse 43 Jesus repeated the structure found in the previous five contrasts. The Old Testament command to **love your neighbor** appears in Leviticus 19:18: "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

Jesus cited this verse along with Deuteronomy 6:5 as a summary of the Law and Prophets in Matthew 22:34-40 and its parallel in Mark 12:28-31. Jesus reduced the entirety of the Old Testament commands to these two commands: love God, and love your neighbor ("all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands," Matt. 22:40).

VERSES 44-45

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Jesus continued to correct people's misunderstanding of Scripture and explain God's original intent behind His command to "love your neighbor" with the words "but I tell you." Jesus's command to "love your enemies" is evidenced by praying "for those who persecute you." The Bible's definition of love has nothing to do with emotions; rather, love is the generous, self-sacrificial action for the good of another person.

In speaking these commands, Jesus set up parallels: *love/pray* and *enemies/those persecuting you*. The Greek grammar of these commands to *love* and to *pray* indicates these actions are to be continuous

or habitual. These commands should distinguish the lives of Jesus's disciples from the lives of all others. This is what it means to live as citizens of God's kingdom.

Jesus's command to love is expounded in what we call the "Golden Rule" in Matthew 7:12: "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." James, Jesus's half-brother, called it the "Royal Law": "Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well" (Jas. 2:8).

In verse 45, Jesus explained His reason for His commands: "so that you may be children of your Father in heaven." God's actions are expressed in the last part of verse 45: it is He who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Perhaps Jesus was thinking about the psalmist's words: "The Lord is good to everyone; his compassion rests on all he has made" (Ps. 145:9). Most people would agree with the ethic expressed in this maxim: "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine."

VERSES 46-47

"For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?"

The way Jesus framed His question, "For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have?" expected the answer "no reward." That tax collectors were a hated group of people for most Jews was a tremendous understatement. To say that Jews "despised" tax collectors is more accurate. Gentiles were also hated by the Jews. Jesus's point in mentioning these two groups of people was to direct His followers back to God's intention that love would characterize all their relationships.

Many if not most *tax collectors* deserved their bad reputation. In addition to collecting taxes for the hated Roman government, these men frequently became rich by collecting more than was required. Tax collectors paid a certain amount in advance to the Roman government in order for the right to collect taxes from the people of a certain region. Rome placed few if any restrictions on how much the tax collectors could take in taxes from the people. There was almost nothing a Jew could do to protest the amount of taxes a collector demanded. Thus, anger was a frequent result of the over-taxed Jews.

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

This final verse is the theme verse, summarizing the last example of how the people had misunderstood God's Word (vv. 43-48), all six examples (vv. 21-48), and the entire Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5-7). It reinforces both of Matthew's twin themes (fulfillment and the kingdom of God) and Jesus's shocking revelation that to enter heaven, a person's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 19-20).

This command also condenses what Jesus commanded His disciples to be and do. The Greek word translated **perfect** generally refers to attaining an end or purpose, to be complete or mature. In the immediate context, it refers to God's complete love. Perhaps *perfect* is best defined here as seeking complete obedience to God through a reconciled relationship with Him by Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. This is accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit indwelling believers, enabling them to focus on love, righteousness, and reconciled relationships with all people—even their enemies. The standard Jesus used for the conduct of His followers is God Himself. We are to be holy because God is holy (Lev. 19:2), and we are to love because God is love and first loved us in Jesus by accomplishing our salvation—so we should love others (1 John 4:7-11).

Applying Jesus's teachings in Matthew 5 to our lives enables us to be His disciples as salt and light in our world, loving toward all people, and to be perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect.



1909), 89.

Explore Further

Read the article "Perfection" on page 1245 of the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How is the believer's growth toward spiritual maturity a cooperative effort between the believer and God's Holy Spirit?

^{1.} Scot McKnight, Sermon on the Mount, The Story of God Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). 51.
2. Grant P. Osborne, Matthew Zondervan, Evadetical Commentary on the New Tastament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

^{2.} Grant R. Osborne, Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Ml: Zondervan, 2010), 175

^{3.} Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 104.
4. Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press,

Treasure

JESUS CHANGES OUR PRIORITIES.

I've always enjoyed music. At times it invigorates me; at other times, it calms me. Even now as I write this session, I'm listening to soothing music through my TV.

When I listen to various music channels, I sometimes pay attention to quotes on different topics such as anxiety and inner peace. One quote I frequently see is something like this: "Regrets over the past and worry over the future are the twin thieves that destroy peace in the present."

About two-thirds of the content of our focal verses for this session deal with anxiety. In this section of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us the cure for anxiety: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt. 6:33). I don't know any Christian who would disagree with Jesus's statement. However, I also don't know of any Christian who puts into practice Jesus's cure for anxiety 24/7/365.

I wonder what a society would look like that put God's kingdom and His righteousness as their one guiding principle. Would that society be called heaven? Yes, as Christians our eternal reward is to live with God in heaven. But we are called to live now as Jesus's disciples here on earth with the guiding principle for our lives being seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness.

In 1975—the summer before we got married—my fiancée and I worked at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center just outside of Black Mountain, NC. Approximately three hundred college students worked jobs such as registration, cafeteria, maid service, and classroom setup. We developed a great atmosphere of love for God and for each other as we performed our individual jobs. Our leadership kept us focused on seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness in all we did. That summer helped me see what a little bit of "Heaven on Earth" could be when we have the proper focus of putting God's kingdom first. Now, when I do premarital counseling, I tell the couple that the secret for a long and fulfilling marriage is to put their relationship with God above all else and to put their relationship with each other above all other human relationships.





Matthew 6:1-34

Jesus opened Matthew 6 by discussing three common religious practices of His day: giving (vv. 1-4), praying (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18). As part of the section on praying, Jesus gave us what many people today call "The Lord's Prayer." Actually, "The Lord's Prayer" refers to what Jesus prayed in John 17:1-26 on the Thursday night before His crucifixion on Friday morning and afternoon. A better title for the prayer contained in Matthew 6:9-13 is "The Model Prayer." These words serve as a model of how Jesus's disciples should pray and comes from Jesus's words: "you should pray like this" (Matt. 6:9).

In teaching His disciples about God and possessions (vv. 19-24), Jesus reminded them that they could not serve two masters: God and the love of money. Jesus never said that having possessions was wrong; what He did say was that not recognizing God's ownership of all there is leads people to worship false gods. Matthew 6:19-34 flows from Matthew 6:1-18's centrality of God in one's life over earthly concerns. In teaching His disciples about the cure for anxiety (vv. 25-34), Jesus explained that the proper focus on God's kingdom and His righteousness showed people how to avoid worry and anxiety.



Possessions (Matt. 6:19-24)

Jesus delivered a message to His followers about worldly possessions and spiritual blessings. He emphasized the fleeting value of material things and their vulnerability to damage or theft. Instead, we should pursue spiritual blessings that retain their eternal value. Our hearts will reveal where our devotion lies. We should be fully devoted to God and not to earthly possessions.

VERSE 19

"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal."

In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus addressed three distinct ideas: (1) treasures, (2) the eye, and (3) two masters. Some title these verses: "Avoiding Materialism." This section follows a pattern: give a command, explain the reason for that command (vv. 20-21), give a modified second command, explain it (v. 23), and then conclude with the overall principle (v. 24). Jesus asked who or what will control the lives of His disciples. Will it be God and His kingdom's values or self and worldly concerns?

The form of the Greek verb translated **don't store up** means to stop an action already in progress. Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught about the incompatibility of focusing on earthly needs—**treasures**—while ignoring spiritual needs. The Greek word translated "disciple" means "one who learns." The sermon served as Jesus's disciples "boot camp" through which He taught them the true meaning of being a disciple. Nowhere is this more prominent than in Jesus's contrasts of earthly (temporary) possessions and spiritual (eternal) rewards in these verses.

In English, we lose some of the wordplay that is apparent in the Greek text. To get some insight into that wordplay, we might translate the first part of verse 19 as "don't treasure up treasures" or "don't store up stores." Jesus gave the reason in the second part of the verse: we could lose these things because of **moth**, **rust**, or **thieves** who destroy or steal such treasures. In those days wealth was usually either in cloth (clothing and perhaps tapestries), jewelry, or money; things that easily might be damaged or taken by thieves. What James (Jesus's half-brother) wrote in James 5:2-3 speaks to the impermanence of such material things.

The words **break in and steal** can also be translated as "dig through and steal." This probably referred to the first-century construction of most homes being made of a mixture of clay, dirt, and water similar to the adobe construction popular in America's southwest regions.

VERSE 20

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal."

To avoid losing these things, Jesus taught that His disciples should "treasure up treasures" in heaven. Jesus stated that those **treasures in heaven** can't be lost, eaten, or stolen. We should store up permanent treasures *in heaven* not temporary ones on earth. At this point Jesus did not specify exactly what those treasures were or how His disciples might acquire them. However, Jesus did elaborate on a general principle in the next verse.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus then stated this general principle: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In the Bible, the word heart most often refers not to the organ that pumps blood; rather heart refers to the thought processes that make decisions. The terms heart and "mind" or "thinking" are interchangeable. The apostle Paul reflected Jesus's thinking when he wrote: "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2).

VERSES 22-23

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!"

Throughout the New Testament, the words translated **light** and **darkness** were used literally as well as figuratively. In the figurative sense, *light* frequently represents righteousness and goodness. Likewise, *darkness* frequently represents sin and evil. In these two verses, Jesus's meaning referred to the figurative meanings of these words.

These two verses compare the function of the **eye** with our life-controlling perspective. The phrase **the light within you** refers to participation in the light, as revealed in Jesus's ministry. This section calls on Jesus's followers to let that light shine to illuminate their lives (and the lives of those around them; 5:14-16).

People in Jesus's day had a belief in what they called "the evil eye." This look was believed to produce a curse on the one seeing it. This leaves no room for God's kingdom and His righteousness in a person's life. In Jesus's day, some thought the eye itself was a source of illumination (rather than the eye seeing the light reflecting off an object).

Perhaps the following quote helps us understand Jesus's meaning in these verses. "When the light of God is shining into one's life, a generous spirit is the result, and one will 'lighten up' the lives of everyone around." The parallel verses in Luke 11:34-36 focus more on the impact the good eye has on the disciples' lives; that is, God's light directing them. These verses help explain how Jesus's disciples become "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14), reflecting Jesus's life in how they live.

"No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

The **two masters** Jesus referred to in the first part of verse 24 are specified in the last few words of this verse: **God** and **money**. Probably "wealth" or "material possessions" is a good translation of the Greek word *mammon* ("money," CSB). Perhaps the best translation is "materialism," a form of idolatry. This Greek word is used in the New Testament only here and the parallel verse in Luke 16:13. However, other Jewish sources not in our Old Testament do use this word.

At the heart of the Jewish faith was the declaration known as *The Shema* (repeated by observant Jews at least three times per day) "Listen Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4-5). The title is taken from the first word in Hebrew, *shema*, which is usually translated as "hear" or "listen" with the intent of obeying. When Jesus was asked what was the most important command, He responded by quoting the *Shema* and adding "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39; see Lev. 19:18). Considering the 613 commands of "do this" or "don't do this" (including the Ten Commandments) and the thousands of interpretations in the "Oral Law," or "Oral Traditions" of the Jews, Jesus's emphasis on these two commands is most insightful. It reveals Jesus's understanding of His Father's original intent in issuing these commands.

In the middle of Matthew 6:24, Jesus gave the logical reason for His statement: "since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." "Love' and 'hate' in Semitic thought are often roughly equivalent to *choose* and *not choose*." This helps us understand Jesus's statement in Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."

The five verses in this section address what controls a person's focus in reference to one's heart (vv. 19-21), eye (vv. 22-23) and master (v. 24). The practical application for Jesus's disciples is that the more one focuses on materialism, the less one will focus on God. Likely Paul had this same principle in mind when he wrote: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim. 6:10).



Explore Further

Read the articles "Master" on page 1066 and "Idol" on page 788 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded.* What are some things in our culture that people "worship" other than God? How could a Christian fall into the trap of making something other than God their master?

Worry (Matt. 6:25-30)

Jesus continued His sermon to address a similar issue: worry. He commanded His listeners to not worry about daily needs like food and clothing, but to consider the birds whom the Father faithfully feeds. Worry and anxiety occur when we have little faith in God to provide what we need.

VERSES 25-26

"Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they?"

Jesus's command regarding **worry** could be better translated as "do not ever worry." Jesus used the Greek word for *worry* six times in verses 25-34. *Worry* is more than a simple concern; it is to be distracted from following God's will. Jesus's disciples were to trust God to take care of their basic needs. Jesus's answer to the question of how disciples should address their basic needs is this: stop worrying and start praying. The general principle is that since God gave life (the greater), He can also provide **food** and **clothing** (the lesser). Jesus continued this "lesser to greater" argument in referencing **birds**. Since God cares for birds, wouldn't He care even more for His children? The birds (the lesser) don't worry about food, but God feeds them. People (the greater) shouldn't worry because God will feed them.

Jesus commanded His disciples not to worry about their lives, specifically about what they will **eat** or **drink** and not to worry about their bodies, specifically about what they are to wear. Jesus issued this

command by asking His disciples this particular question: "Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Then Jesus repeated a similar question: "Aren't you worth more than they?" This phrasing of these questions in Greek anticipated this answer: yes.

An incorrect application of Jesus's teaching would be to avoid all planning for basic needs. Jesus encouraged counting the cost (responsible planning), as in Luke 14:28. Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus had addressed what the disciple should do about basic daily needs: pray to their heavenly Father (v. 11).

VERSE 27

"Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?"

Jesus's question here pointed to the futility of our own efforts. Worry can't add time to a person's **life span**. Scholars disagree whether the word **add** refers to height or to length of life. Whether Jesus was speaking of adding time to our lives or inches to our heights (KJV), the point is the same: our worrying accomplishes nothing positive. In fact, rather than worry being beneficial by adding time to one's life, it has the opposite affect; worrying subtracts time from one's life. Our own efforts can reduce our life spans rather than increasing them.

VERSES 28-29

"And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these."

In Jesus's day, most people wore dull clothing with little color (frequently a dull brown or gray) because brightly-colored clothing was expensive. Only the rich could afford multiple sets of clothes or colorful clothing. Most people had only an inner garment and an outer garment that served as a coat and/or blanket. Most clothing was made of wool, which was cheap because of the plentiful sheep in the Middle East.

The Greek word translated **wildflowers** is sometimes rendered *lilies* (ESV, KJV, NASB). Regardless, Jesus's point is the same: **they don't labor or spin thread**. The flowers don't labor to make themselves pretty; that's how God created them. Jesus's point is this: God provides for the flowers (the lesser); He also provides for His children (the greater). All Jews knew of Solomon's greatness (1 Kings 9:26–10:29); part of his wealth was seen in his clothing.

"If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith?"

Yet, the beauty of the grass and wildflowers of the field which are **here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow** surpass Solomon's greatness. Jesus's point was that even the less important things God did were more important that the greatest things people could do. Not to recognize this fact would cause Jesus's disciples to be people of **little faith**. All five times it is used in Matthew (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20), the phrase *little faith* always refers to Jesus's disciples' weakness in faith, not their lack of faith. Jesus's disciples (then and now) need to recognize that God will do more for them than He does for the grass and wildflowers. Jesus's disciples struggle with completely trusting God to meet their needs rather than worrying about those needs. God supplies what His creation needs, whether that which is of little importance (grass, wildflowers, birds) or that which is of greater importance (the crowning achievement of God's creation: His children).



Explore Further

What things do you worry about? Why? How might your life change if you handed all your worries over to God by trusting in His love for you?

Trust (Matt. 6:31-34)

Jesus again entreated His listeners not to worry since God knows what they need. Instead, they are to pursue kingdom priorities and righteous living, trusting God to satisfy their needs. They weren't to worry about future needs but rather focus on the challenges of each day.

VERSES 31-32

"So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."

Matthew 6:31-34 should not be understood to be prohibiting planning for the future, but rather worrying over future needs. In the Model Prayer (vv. 9-13), Jesus commanded His disciples to ask God for "daily bread." Instead of worrying or being anxious, Jesus's disciples are to ask God for their needs and trust that He will provide everything they need. We are to ask and trust rather than worry or become anxious.

So, the first word of verse 31, ties Jesus's command to the principle in previous verses revealing God's care. Jesus's command, "don't worry," has also been translated as "do not be anxious" (ESV), "don't be full of care" and "take no thought" (KJV). Not only does this command repeat Jesus's warning in verse 25 ("Don't worry about your life"), but it also sets the stage for Jesus's command in 6:33 ("Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you").

The remainder of this verse is composed of three questions referencing the physical needs each person has: "'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'" Each of these three areas reveals a necessity for living. What Jesus taught is that the focus of life must not be meeting those needs. Instead, Jesus's disciples must trust God to meet these needs (vv. 25-30).

The two reasons for Jesus's command are: (1) "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things," and (2) "your heavenly Father knows that you need them." These two statements provide the reasons believers are not to worry about basic necessities. The Jewish view of God was radically different from the Gentile view of their false gods. The Jews believed in the God who loved them and desired to help them with whatever they needed. By contrast, the Gentile view of their false gods was that they were beings who had to be bribed or manipulated by giving gifts to get what the worshiper needed. The Jewish view of their God and the Gentile view of their false gods could not be further apart.

VERSE 33

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

This verse provides the antidote for worry. It is the climax of this session's focal verses, and, along with the "Be perfect" command of 5:48, the guiding principle for Jesus's disciples (then and now): "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

The first Greek word in verse 33 is usually translated **but.** This word might also be translated as "instead"; it paints a contrast between what

the Gentiles do (6:32; seek after human needs) and what Jesus's disciples should do: seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Jesus's command to *seek* might be translated better as "keep on seeking" since the Greek verb indicates continuous action, in this context a day-by-day focus. It means to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, strive for, aim at, try to obtain, desire, wish for. The word translated *first* reveals the importance of how the seeking is to be done. This term also could be translated "above all else" or "first in order of importance."

The kingdom of God and His righteousness are probably referring to similar things; it is best to see them as inseparable. The kingdom of God refers to God's rule in people's hearts. In this verse God's rule refers specifically to the hearts of Jesus's disciples (then and now).

VERSE 34

"Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

The focus on seeking God's kingdom **each day** means that Jesus's disciples should not let themselves be distracted with **worry** about anything else. This verse draws parallels with the Model Prayer (vv. 9-13) in its emphasis on today rather than a preoccupation with what may happen tomorrow or in the future. Jesus's disciples trust in God's care: today, tomorrow, and forever. Worry, possessions, materialism, and idolatry all find their solutions in Jesus's command "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (v. 33).



Explore Further

Read the article "Providence" on pages 1312–1313 in the Holman Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What does the fact that God invites you to cast "all your cares on him because He cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:7) mean in relation to your worries?

Grant R. Osborne, Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Ml: Zondervan, 2010), 243.

^{2.} Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 124.

Authority Acknowledged

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

"Authority" is my favorite word to describe the Bible. I've also used two other terms not found in the Bible. When applied to the Bible, "inerrant" means "does not contain an error." "Infallible" means "cannot contain an error." These words are accurate but "authority" is a better word I use to describe the Bible. Matthew used the Greek word for "authority" in Matthew 7:29 (as well as nine other times in his Gospel account).

Authority means "the Bible has power over how I live my life." Authority governs the way I live and provides principles and rules for me to follow. It also demands that I think, act, and speak in certain ways that are positive in my relationships with God and people—and that I don't think, act, or speak in other ways that are harmful to my relationships with God and with people.

Three days after I graduated from high school, I enlisted in the United States Air Force and flew to San Antonio, Texas, for basic military training. Those six weeks gave me a new perspective on authority. During my first four years of service to America as an enlisted man, I experienced more of what authority meant.

The time I spent at DaNang Air Base in South Vietnam provided me reasons that authority was necessary. One May night in 1972 when the loudspeaker informed us that we were under attack, I put on my flak jacket and helmet and jumped into the foxhole *immediately*. That night a jagged piece of metal (from a rocket shot into the base) missed my head by less than an inch. Had I not responded immediately to that authority, only God knows what would have happened.

After completing my four-year enlistment, I studied and graduated from Baptist College at Charleston. I spent the next eight years at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, graduated twice, and became a pastor. Then I became a college and seminary professor, USAF chaplain, and after earning my doctorate in New Testament and Greek, I became an editor of Adult Sunday School material at Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee. Over the seventy-four plus years of my life, I have had even more insight into what God's authority over my life means.





Matthew 7:1-29

Matthew 7 opens with Jesus's teaching on not judging (vv. 1-6) and His teaching on asking and giving (vv. 7-11). Jesus then summed up the Old Testament teachings on relationships—the Golden Rule—"whatever you want others to do to you, do also the same for them" (v. 12). He described the way to enter God's kingdom and taught that few would find it (vv. 13-14). Finally, Jesus concluded by contrasting the character and behavior of false prophets and true disciples (vv. 15-20) by obedience (vv. 21-23) and by wisdom (vv. 24-27). Matthew ends the chapter by describing the reaction of the crowd to Jesus's sermon (vv. 28-29).



Fruit (Matt. 7:15-20)

Jesus continued His Sermon on the Mount by warning His listeners of false prophets, who are deceptive and dangerous. He taught that false prophets are recognized by their fruit (character and behavior). True disciples can be identified by their good works. Judgment and eternal punishment await those who aren't true disciples.

VERSE 15

"Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves."

The function of a prophet was to declare God's will and word into the situations the people were facing. The function of the priest was to represent the people. Today, pastors lead churches in both the prophetic role and priestly role.

Jesus's role in the sermon was prophetic. As the human Word of God, He declared the original intent of God's written Word, and that set Jesus apart from all others. Jesus's command to His disciples was to "be on your guard against false prophets." Be on your guard has been translated most frequently as "beware" (ESV, KJV) and less frequently as "watch out for" (NIV). The Greek word means to "hold the

mind towards," "pay attention to," "be cautious about," and other similar warnings. The grammatical form of this Greek verb means that Jesus's disciples must be constantly on alert for *false prophets*.

In addition to Old Testament prophets, Paul (Acts 20:28-31), Peter (2 Pet. 2:1-3,17-22), and other New Testament writers also addressed the problem of false prophets. These false prophets may have been the same enemies of the gospel that Paul wrote against in Galatians: Judaizers—people who taught a person had to practice Judaism in addition to trusting Jesus to be saved. If they were not the same, they were a similar group Jesus often spoke against in Matthew which included the scribes and Pharisees (see especially the "woes" of Matt. 23:13-36).

What defines the *false prophets* was their inability to understand and teach God's intent for His Word. These false prophets also were deceptive; they appeared externally to be helpful (**sheep's clothing**) but internally were harmful (**ravaging wolves**).

What should Jesus's followers do about these false prophets? The task of those who follow Jesus is not to "shoot the wolves" or even to "disrobe" them of their sheepskins. Jesus's disciples' task is to hear and obey the words taught by Jesus.

VERSES 16-18

"You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit."

The principle behind the statement "You'll recognized them by their fruit" is repeated elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 12:33; Luke 6:43-45; Gal. 5:19-23; Jas. 3:10-12). In Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus said that good and bad people are revealed in the same way trees are "known" by their fruit (vv. 43-45). In Matthew's account, Jesus used a form of the same Greek word translated recognized. In outward appearance, true prophets and false prophets look the same (like sheep). The difference becomes apparent in the fruit they produce. Good fruit is doing the will of God. Jesus reminded His disciples that grapes do not come from thornbushes nor do figs come from thistles.

From those two examples Jesus then stated, "In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit." It is impossible for a good tree to produce bad fruit or a bad tree to produce good fruit.

"Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Again, a **tree** refers to a person and the **fruit** to that individual's actions. The false prophets would face God's judgment for their actions. They would be **cut down and thrown into the fire.** The form of these words in the Greek indicates an ongoing action and may also look toward God's final judgment.

These actions of cutting down and throwing into the fire first appear in John the Baptist's warning concerning the coming of God's judgment and wrath (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9) These words also point to Jesus's parable of the "Wheat and Tares (or Weeds)" in Matthew 13:24-30,36-43. Similar language also appears in Jesus's words concerning the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8).

In light of the eternal security of the believer, it's important to emphasize that verse 19 should not be understood to support any kind of worksbased righteousness. We are saved by faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9). But we are saved to do good works (v. 10). We should also stress that believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit. Good works don't save us, but in reality are the result of being redeemed, the fruit of our salvation. As Paul pointed out, good works grow out of our faith in Christ Jesus through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 5).

VERSE 20

"So you'll recognize them by their fruit."

Jesus repeated this principle—"So you'll recognize them by their fruit"— which He first mentioned in verse 16. His repetition of this principle indicates the importance that His followers of all ages constantly assess the speech and actions of those who preach and teach us. We are to observe their words and deeds to make sure they are teaching us the whole gospel.

Perhaps the reason Jesus used the metaphors of both bad trees/fruit and wolves is this: Jesus's followers can become "fruit inspectors" by simply waiting and watching. This waiting doesn't produce significant problems. However, wolves devouring sheep calls for immediate action. When Jesus's followers are deceived by false teaching, they lose influence instead of being light and salt in a dark world. This requires more than simply waiting; it requires immediate action by Jesus's disciples.



Explore Further

Read the article "Works" on pages 1668–1669 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What are the ways Paul and James addressed the relationship between faith and works? As stated in the article, how are their teachings "two sides of the same coin"?

Obedience (Matt. 7:21-23)

True disciples affirm Jesus's lordship, submit to His authority, and obey His commands. Neither words nor actions are suitable proof that someone follows Jesus. People transformed by the gospel are true disciple, and they will seek to obey Jesus in all areas of their lives.

VERSE 21

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Whereas verses 15-20 warned of the fruit of the false prophets, verses 21-23 further explain the character of the false prophets by focusing on their words and actions and their inability to enter heaven. Verses 21-23 also indicate three ways these false prophets/teachers claimed to be true disciples of Jesus: lip service, spectacular signs, and doing these signs in Jesus's name (based on His authority).

The genuine measure of discipleship is not what any person says, but what he *does*. The proverb "Your actions speak much louder than your words" certainly applies to this verse. The criteria for entry into heaven is not only what a person says about Jesus, although confession is important (Rom. 10:9). A person's actions reveal to whom his heart truly belongs. Actions must be consistent with the Father's will. However, the false teachers who used the title **Lord** without full commitment or obedience to the Lord provides evidence of lip service rather than a genuine relationship with God the Father through Jesus the Son.

The doubling of Jesus's title/role ("Lord, Lord") is found three times in the Gospels (Matt. 7:21,22; Luke 6:46). The use of the term translated Lord is found on the lips of true disciples as well as those who were seeking to be disciples. It was much more than merely a term of respect

such as "Rabbi" or "Master." The early (perhaps the earliest) Christian confession is "Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11).

This is the first time in Matthew that Jesus used His favorite address for God—"my Father" (occurs thirteen times in Matthew). Just referring to God as *Father* does not guarantee a person's entry into heaven. Rather, the criteria for entrance into heaven is that the individual "does the will of my Father in heaven." (It is the "good fruit" in Matt. 7:17-18.) Jesus also referred to "the will of my Father in heaven" in Matthew 12:50 where He linked that phrase with those who are His brother, sister, and mother. In John 6:40 Jesus states that "the will of my Father" is "that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." The things Jesus taught are the equivalent of "the will of my Father in heaven."

In Greek the term translated **does** refers to continuous actions, habits, and the prevailing character traits of an individual as opposed to a singular event. Matthew's Gospel gives special emphasis to the Son's commitment to doing Father's will. By His unwavering obedience, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the promised Messiah, the Anointed One.

VERSES 22-23

"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'"

The phrase **on that day** refers to the judgment day at the end of this age, the day the "age to come" begins (that is eternity). The **many** refer to the false teachers in Jesus's day and also identify those today who claim to know Jesus without really being known by Him. The way the three questions (about prophecy/confession, exorcism, and other miracles) are formed in Greek expects a positive answer. Yet these people did not submit to Jesus's lordship. These individuals expected commendation; Jesus pronounced condemnation. Jesus's response was that He **never knew** them. The only way that people are saved is by having a personal relationship with God the Father (knowing Him) through Jesus the Son made possible through the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin that person had committed that leads to repentance and faith in Christ. Paul revealed that even a person who does great miracles but fails to have love is "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

Jesus's words "**Depart from me, you lawbreakers!**" mean these people have no place in God's eternal kingdom. The term *lawbreakers* stands in opposition to those who do "the will of My Father in heaven" (v. 21).



Explore Further

Read the article "Obedience" on pages 1176–1177 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What is the definition of obedience? What does it mean to be obedient to God?

Wisdom (Matt. 7:24-29)

The wise person is the one who has responded to Jesus's teachings and the fool is one who has rejected the gospel. The wise man is prepared for the day of judgment, but the one who hears and doesn't act on Jesus's words will face calamity.

VERSE 24

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

The six verses in this section comprise the third time Jesus stressed the need to choose between life and destruction (see also vv. 21,23). The key in choosing is obedience to Jesus's teaching, specifically His teaching found in the Sermon on the Mount. This section begins with the choosing of Jesus's teachings and concludes with the crowd's amazement at the authority of Jesus's teachings.

Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount were primarily directed toward His disciples (5:1-2). But now at His conclusion to the sermon both His disciples and the crowd are challenged to do more—to put Jesus's teaching into practice in their lives. The word **Therefore** links these verses on doing rather than merely hearing to Matthew 7:15-20 which stresses the fruit of righteousness and 7:21-23 that more fully stresses doing God's will. In Hebraic thought a person fails to hear genuinely until that person **acts** on what has been heard.

The tense of the Greek verb for acts indicates a lifestyle rather than individual actions.

Most rabbis of Jesus's day cited other highly respected rabbis to support their pronouncements. But Jesus cited Himself as the authority to make His pronouncements as the phrase "these words of mine" indicate. In ways we don't completely understand, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one. When one Person of the Trinity speaks, the others are in agreement. Jesus had already indicated that His words were the Father's will (v. 21). For grammatical reasons, the phrase these words of mine refer specifically to Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

The word **wise** in this verse (and "foolish" in v. 26) point back to a central feature of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. This contrast between the *wise* and the *foolish* appears numerous times in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets and in the wisdom literature (Prov. 3:35; 10:14; 12:15; 13:20). The comparison of God the Father to a rock is also found in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:4; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:3: Ps. 18:2; Isa. 17:10). This stresses His strength and stability.

The imagery of construction would have been familiar to Jesus's audience. The wise builder constructed his dwelling on a secure rock to protect it against flash floods that occurred during sudden storms. Those who built their houses on sand were exposed to the destructive forces of nature. In Jesus's parable, the two builders (the wise and the foolish) represent the two responses of people to the sermon. The similarity between the two is this: both groups *heard* Jesus's teaching. The difference was that the wise people continued *to do* what Jesus's taught. Although present throughout the sermon, in His conclusion Jesus stressed the necessity of His followers *doing* what He taught rather that merely *hearing* what He said. "Obedience as the necessary result of true hearing was emphasized in the OT [Old Testament] . . . Judaism . . . and the NT [New Testament] . . . Both the Hebrew and the Greek connote the message that one has not truly 'heard' . . . until one has 'obeyed.'"

In His conclusion Jesus stressed that His true followers are not those who merely profess to be His disciples but in reality those who do God's will (Matt. 7:21; meaning also to follow Jesus's teaching). Jesus used the parable (or example) of the two builders to reinforce this truth that doing is the ultimate mark of true discipleship.

VERSE 25

"The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock."

Jesus joined the Old Testament prophets as He likened storms to God's judgment. For those who construct their houses on rock—who listen to and act on Jesus's words—no matter what forces try to destroy the house, "it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock." This echoes the Old Testament's blessings on those who follow the Torah (the law) and curses on those who fail to follow it. Paul certainly reflects this in his writings (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Jesus may have had in mind a double application of this strong *foundation*. On the physical side, He may have referred to a natural disaster and the preparation needed to help lessen its effects. On the eternal side, Jesus may have been looking forward to the events that would surround His second coming.

Like the house built on the foundation of rock that does not collapse under the pounding of storms, those who build their lives on the foundation of Jesus's teachings and act upon them need never fear. The solid foundation of Jesus's teachings provides strength and security to those wise people who live their lives according to Jesus's teachings.

This points to the truth of the old adage "Only what's done for Jesus will last forever." These verses, along with many others in the New Testament, answer the question of what it means in God's eyes to be a genuine Christian. Those who merely listen to Jesus's teaching without obeying them are, in Jesus's words, fools. In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus exposed these "false Christians." The point of this contrast between the wise and foolish builders (here and in Luke 6:47-49) is the choice the two "builders" made in acting upon or not acting upon Jesus's words.

VERSES 26-27

"But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash."

Along with rhythm, a primary element (perhaps the primary element) of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. A simple definition of parallelism is saying the same thing using different words (Ps. 120:2; Prov. 3:13). Various types of parallelism are in the Bible. Verses 26-27 provide an example of antithetic parallelism—presenting the same meaning by using opposite words. An example of this in English is a speaker saying "it is hot, not cold."

These two verses present the opposite of the two verses preceding them. Listening to (obeying) Jesus's teaching produces good results; not hearing (not obeying) Jesus's teachings produces bad results: collapse. Therefore, if we want to avoid destruction from the storms of life, we will obey Jesus's teachings.

VERSES 28-29

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes."

The crowds were **astonished** at Jesus's teaching. The reason was that Jesus **was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.** The *scribes* were considered experts in what the law said, and as their authority they cited statements made by previous rabbis. However, as Jesus pointed out, these scribes often missed God's original intent in the law (5:21-48). Jesus's source was Himself and God the Father. The Greek word usually translated as *authority* also conveys the idea of power. Jesus said His authority and power came from His heavenly Father (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; see John 5:19-23).



Explore Further

Read the article "Salvation" on pages 1403–1404 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What role does obedience to Jesus's commands play in the life of the believer?

Grant R. Osborne, Matthew, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Ml: Zondervan, 2010), 275.

Every Life Valued

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.

President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation designating Sunday, January 22, 1984, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. The following year (1985) many churches took up the call to affirm the sanctity of all human life. The date was intended to coincide with the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* (January 22, 1973), though it included the sanctity of the outcast and less fortunate, as well as the unborn. Reagan continued to issue the proclamation as long as he was in office.

The sanctity of human life is grounded in the creative work of God. Life is not the result of a cosmic accident but rather the carefully crafted creation of God. "So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27). God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him life (2:7). God continues to give life and breath to everyone (Acts 17:25).

The most vulnerable of God's creation are the unborn, which is why Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is observed in January. The date reminds us of the impact of *Roe. v. Wade* on our unborn population. However, human life is sacred from the womb to a senior citizen in hospice. The value God places on human life can be seen in God's concern for the poor, the oppressed, and the handicapped. God pays special attention to the widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27). Those who are sex trafficked are made in God's image as well.

In today's session, we will see Jesus heal a leper, two demon-possessed men, the servant of a Roman soldier who was surely a Gentile, a woman with a high fever, and a lame man carried on a pallet. None of these people would have been considered acceptable Jewish table guests. May God give us eyes to see and hearts to help the least of these.





Matthew 8:1-9:8

Earlier Jesus had seen large crowds "from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan" come to Him (4:25). As a result, He had gone up onto a mountain to teach His disciples (5:1). Now at the end of His teaching session, Jesus came down from the mountain with a crowd following Him (8:1). Matthew had characterized Jesus's ministry as teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23). Having given an example of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7), Matthew turned to describing Jesus's miracles. These miracles are grouped in two sets of three miracles each, with all but one having to do with physical healing. The other was a miracle in nature, calming the storm. All six of these stories can be found in at least one other Gospel, with some found in two other Gospels.

The first three healings, a leper (8:2-4), a centurion's servant (vv. 5-13), and Peter's mother-in-law, plus the crowds (vv. 14-17), were performed on people who from a Jewish perspective may have seemed to have been unworthy of the grace given to them. These miracles demonstrate Jesus's concern for all people. These miracles were followed by a discussion of the cost of following Jesus (vv. 18-22). Two potential disciples believed they were ready to commit to following Jesus. However, to one Jesus said that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (v. 20). To the other Jesus said that commitment to Him was more important than family obligations (v. 22). Matthew did not record the decisions that these two potential disciples made, though the impression is that they, like the rich young ruler (19:16-22), were not willing to pay the price of discipleship and left.

After this discussion on the cost of discipleship, Matthew turned his attention to three more miracles of Jesus: the calming of the storm (8:23-27), demons being driven out of two men (vv. 28-34), and forgiveness and healing (9:1-8). Only Jesus and His disciples were present for the calming of the storm; one of the primary points related to this miracle may have been the lack of faith demonstrated by the disciples. The second miracle demonstrated Jesus's power to break the demonic bonds under which two men struggled daily. In today's session, we cover three of these six miracles: healing of a leper (8:2-4), healing Peter's mother-in-law, as well as the crowds assembled (vv. 14-17), and the forgiveness and healing of a lame man (9:1-8).

EXPLORE THE TEXT





Leprosy (Matt. 8:1-4)

Jesus had concluded His Sermon on the Mount and had traveled down the mountain. A man with leprosy approached Him saying "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean" (v. 2). Jesus touched the man and his leprosy was immediately cleansed. Then, He instructed the man not to tell anyone, but rather to go to the priest who would declare him clean.

VERSE 1

When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

Jesus had been on a **mountain** teaching what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7). The **large crowds** were astonished with Jesus's teaching (7:28-29) and had followed Him when he came down from the mountain. They were more than likely motived by curiosity to learn more about Jesus.

VERSE 2

Right away a man with leprosy came up and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

The man with leprosy enters the story rather abruptly. The Greek word translated Right away ("behold," ESV, KJV) was frequently used to indicate a new turn in the story. The Greek word translated leprosy could refer to a number of serious skin diseases in addition to Hanson's disease, which is usually called leprosy today. The Old Testament law required that a person with this skin disease live separated from normal society, outside the village. He was to wear torn clothes and unkempt hair. In addition, the leper was required to cry out "Unclean, unclean" when anyone approached him (Lev. 13:45-46). Matthew did not record whether the man in question followed the course of action prescribed in Jewish law. The man's desire to see Jesus may have been stronger than his fear of violating the Jewish laws related to interaction with lepers. A man in his condition should have been retreating from Jesus; rather, he came up to Him. The man expressed his humility and respect for Jesus by kneeling before Him. The Greek word translated knelt can also be translated "worshiped." The same thing is true of the Greek word for the title the

leper gave to Jesus: **Lord**. That Greek word can also be translated "sir." So, either the man was showing extreme respect and deference to Jesus, or the man had seen enough to know that Jesus is worthy of worship. Another possibility is the man may have started by addressing Jesus politely, and then as things changed, he may have moved to worship.

Lepers were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The effects of the disease were devastating physically and psychologically. Would Jesus have time for someone like him? Rather than waiting for Jesus to speak, the leper initiated the conversation with Jesus with what could be seen as a challenge: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." The leper was convinced that Jesus had the power to make him clean.

VERSE 3

Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus obviously could have healed the leper from a distance, without touching the man. In the miracle story that follows, Jesus healed the centurion's servant without ever seeing the young man (v. 13). Yet here Jesus reached out and **touched** the leper. Such an action was a violation of Jewish law: "Or if he touches human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become defiled—without being aware of it, but later recognizes it, he incurs guilt" (Lev. 5:3). Rather than the leper's uncleanness affecting Jesus, Jesus's compassion affected the leper.

Jesus answered the leper's challenge quickly, with a statement and a command: "I am willing; be made clean." In the Greek, Jesus's statement and command consist of just one word each. The healing of the leper was instantaneous: Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

VERSE 4

Then Jesus told him, "See that you don't tell anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The healing of the leper removed the physical stigma of the lesions the man had endured. Jesus moved directly from the healing of the leper to what the man would need to do to reenter normal society. First, Jesus admonished the man, "don't tell anyone" about the miracle. This is the first occasion in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus demanded silence about a miracle, though frequently Jesus did command people whom He had healed to remain silent. The command was often ignored (Mark 7:36).

Various explanations have been given for the command. It is possible that the impact of the crowds might prohibit the work that Jesus intended to do. It is also possible that Jesus did not want the man to be distracted from his duty of presenting himself clean before the priest.

At any rate, the command to silence was followed by three other commands: go, show, and offer. Leviticus 14 details the procedure that the man had to follow in order to be accepted back into society. The offering had to be made in the temple, which meant that the man had a journey to make. Once the man had arrived at the temple, he was to present himself to the priest, who would examine the man to verify that the skin disease was gone (Lev. 14:2-3). Then an appropriate gift (offer the gift that Moses commanded) was given (vv. 10,21-22). The meaning of the phrase as a testimony to them is not completely clear. The word them could refer to either the priests or to the people in general. The witness the leper was to bear may have been a witness against those opposed to Jesus's ministry. However, the hostility between Jesus and the priests did not develop until later in Jesus's ministry. The better option may be that, by his sacrifice, the leper bore testimony to Jesus's power to heal.

A leper not only had to deal with the physical lesions but also with the role of social outcast, which came with the disease. Jesus's desire was to heal this man and to return him to being an accepted member of society.



Explore Further

Read the article "Leprosy" on page 1004 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded for a more complete discussion of leprosy and its impact on those who suffered from the disease. What are some typical reactions to outcasts in our society?

Fever and Demon-possession (Matt. 8:14-17)

Jesus later went to Peter's home where his mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. She was well enough to rise and serve Jesus. Others brought those who were demon-possessed to Jesus who drove out the spirits with a word. Jesus healed all who were sick.

VERSE 14

Jesus went into Peter's house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (see Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39) is the shortest in the first set of three miracles. However, several things may be inferred from the text. Peter was obviously married, given the fact that he had a mother-in-law (see 1 Cor. 9:5). Matthew gave no explanation as to why Jesus entered Peter's house, simply that He went into Peter's house. Peter's fishing business must have been doing well enough for Peter to have his own home, large enough for his mother-in-law and guests to reside there. Some Bible teachers have drawn the conclusion that Jesus was staying with Peter when He was in Capernaum.

Matthew gives no explanation for how Jesus knew that the woman was sick or where she was in the house, simply that He **saw** her. She was suffering from a **fever**; Luke described the illness as a "high fever" (Luke 4:38) The fever may have been connected with malaria, which was common in the Mediterranean region.

VERSE 15

So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him.

Once again, Jesus directed His healing power on someone who would have been deemed a second-class citizen. As with the leper earlier, Jesus **touched** the woman. The Pharisees both looked down upon a man touching a woman and touching anyone who was suffering from a fever. Jesus ignored these restrictions and touched the woman's **hand**. Immediately **the fever left her** and she was also restored to full strength. Once healed, Peter's mother-in-law **got up and began to serve him**. The Greek word translated *serve* is used elsewhere to describe those who waited on tables ("wait," Acts 6:2). While word *him* is singular and refers to Jesus, Mark and Luke made it clear that others were served as well (Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39).

VERSE 16

When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, The fact that the people delayed bringing those in need of help until evening would indicate that they were waiting for the end of the Sabbath. The crowds brought those who were **demon-possessed** and those who were **sick**. It must be emphasized that not all sickness has its source in demon-possession. Jesus **drove out the spirits** from those who were *demon-possessed* with a single **word**. In contrast, many exorcists in Jesus's day used lengthy incantations hoping that many words would be more effective. For Jesus, one *word* was sufficient. The *sick* included those who had various types of ailments. Matthew was not concerned with the types of illnesses but rather with Jesus's power to heal. There was no illness that was beyond Jesus's power to heal.

VERSE 17

so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases.

Jesus's healing ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 54:4). The single Greek word translated here as **so that** ties together Jesus's healing ministry and Isaiah's description of God's Suffering Servant (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12). Generally, when Matthew quoted a short Old Testament passage, he expected his readers to understand the context in that passage. "The context of Isa 53 centers on the vicarious suffering of the Servant who is 'pierced for our transgressions' and 'crushed for our iniquities'" (Isa. 53:5).

Healing from demon-possession and physical illnesses was a sign of God's kingdom coming, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy; however, this is not the core of the gospel. Obviously, when we gather before God's throne, sickness and pain will be no more: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). However, Jesus was more concerned about the heart. From the beginning, Jesus's name revealed His mission: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus's healings and exorcisms attracted a large crowd of people. Jesus instructed His disciples to go with Him to the other side of the lake (8:18). However, they did not leave immediately but waited for Jesus while He had discussions related to the cost of discipleship with two potential disciples (vv. 19-22; see Luke 9:57-60). Then the disciples and Jesus embarked, headed for the other side of the lake (Matt. 8:23).

After the discussion about the cost of discipleship, Matthew recounted the second set of three miracles: the calming of the storm while Jesus and His disciples were on the Sea of Galilee (vv. 23-27), the casting out of demons from two men (vv. 28-34), and the healing and forgiveness of the paralyzed man (9:1-8).



Explore Further

Read the article "Healing, Divine" on page 719 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What were the various aspects of Jesus's healings? How is modern medicine a miraculous gift from God?

Paralysis (Matt. 9:1-8)

Jesus got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee to reach Capernaum. Some men brought to Jesus a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic. Scribes who heard Jesus declared Him to be a blasphemer since they believed only God could forgive sins. Jesus knew what the scribes were thinking, so He questioned them. Then, He proclaimed that as the Son of Man, He has the authority to forgive sins. Then, Jesus told the paralytic man to get up and walk. The man obeyed and went home. When the crowds saw the paralytic man walking, they glorified God.

VERSE 1

So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town.

Once Jesus had completed His time with the two men who had been demon-possessed, He crossed over the Sea of Galilee with His disciples. Jesus **came to his own town**. Earlier in Jesus's life, Nazareth would have been His hometown. However, as His public ministry began to take shape, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum: "He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali" (4:13). Matthew saw this as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy (vv. 15-16; see Isa. 9:1-2).

Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven."

This third miracle in the second set is also found in Mark 2:2-12 and Luke 5:18-26. Matthew's account is the shortest of the three accounts, primarily because Matthew did not include the paralyzed man's friends' lowering him down to Jesus through the roof of a home.

The Greek word translated **just then** does not give a specific length of time between Jesus's arrival in Capernaum and the arrival of the men with **a paralytic.** Mark's account supplies several details. Jesus had been in Capernaum for several days before word got out that He was home (Mark 2:1). By the time the men arrived, the door to the house was completely blocked and the house was full (v. 2). Therefore the men "removed the roof above him, and after digging through it, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying" (v. 4).

Jesus saw the **faith** of the men. Since the Greek word translated **their** is plural, **their faith** could refer to the faith of the men carrying the pallet or the men and the paralytic they carried. Although some Bible teachers would restrict the faith to the men carrying the pallet, there is no reason to believe that the man being carried did not also have faith, especially since Jesus's first remarks were directed to him.

Jesus initiated the conversation by addressing the paralytic. There is no indication that the paralyzed man or those who carried him asked Jesus for healing, though they had come for that very reason. Jesus's first words were words of encouragement: "Have courage, son." Only Matthew included this word of encouragement. Rather than deal with the man's physical condition, Jesus addressed the man's spiritual condition: "your sins are forgiven." Jesus's statement indicates that He is Lord over sin as well as over sickness. Matthew did not record the response of the man or those who had carried him to Jesus. It seems obvious that they would not have been expecting words of forgiveness.

VERSE 3

At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "He's blaspheming!"

Rather than dealing with the response of the man or his friends, Matthew turned his attention to the Jewish **scribes** who were present. In Matthew's day, illness was often linked to sin. At one level illness exists

because we live in a broken world scarred by sin. However, not every individual illness is the result of a specific sin. Jesus's encounter with the man born blind dealt with this issue. Jesus's disciples asked Him whose sin had caused the man to be born blind, his own sin or the sin of his parents (John 9:2). Jesus responded that the blindness was not the result of sin (v. 3).

Originally *scribes* were copyists for kings and other wealthy people. Given their exposure to the content of Scripture, scribes also became well versed in the interpretation of Scripture. That led them to be seen as enforcers of orthodoxy. As a result, the scribes were often seen around Jesus, looking for what they considered improper beliefs.

Jesus's forgiving the paralyzed man's sins caused consternation among the scribes. However, the scribes did not confront Jesus at that time. They talked to themselves as they reflected on how to deal with the situation. They assumed that their private thoughts would remain private. Perhaps they were waiting to see what Jesus would do next. The scribes stated their charge against Jesus: "He's blaspheming!"

Mark and Luke provided further detail to the scribes' thoughts related to the charge of blasphemy: "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7; see Luke 5:21). By declaring that the man's sins were forgiven, Jesus had assumed a role that was reserved for God only. The scribes could have drawn two conclusions from Jesus's statement. First, they could have concluded that Jesus was divine and therefore had the authority to forgive sins. Or second, they could have concluded that Jesus was just an ordinary man who had no right to forgive sins, in which case Jesus would have been guilty of blasphemy. The scribes chose poorly. They could not accept the fact that Jesus is more than an ordinary man.

VERSE 4

Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?"

Jesus was able to discern the scribes' private thoughts. The Greek word translated **thinking** means to think carefully about something. The scribes' way of processing information was not the problem. The problem was the **evil things in** [their] **hearts**. The *evil things* could refer to a wide range of situations. In this instance, the evil things probably referred to the scribes' attitude toward Jesus. The scribes had chosen not to engage Jesus in discourse: they spoke to themselves. However, Jesus got straight to the heart of the matter, their evil hearts.

"For which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"

Jesus gave the scribes two options to determine the hardest task: "Your sins are forgiven," or "Get up and walk." Forgiving someone of their sins, as Jesus did, is difficult to verify. When Jesus said that the paralytic's sins were forgiven, no one in the crowd could have verified that the man's sins had actually been forgiven since only God can forgive sins. On the other hand, when a paralytic is told, "Get up and walk," everyone present would have known immediately whether the person was healed.

VERSE 6

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — then he told the paralytic, "Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."

Jesus chose to validate the unseen by means of the seen. He put His purpose statement up front so that the scribes would not miss it ("so that you may know"). He moved to demonstrate that He was able to make both statements true.

The Son of Man is a title for Jesus used primarily in the Gospels and almost always by Jesus. It was not a title for the expected Jewish messiah, which may explain why Jesus chose the title for Himself. Most Bible teachers think Jesus took the title from Daniel 7:13-14. Daniel described one who, like a son of man coming with clouds of heaven, approached the Ancient of Days. To the one like a son of man was given everlasting dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

The scribes challenged Jesus's authority to forgive sins because they saw Him as an ordinary man. The title *Son of Man* emphasized Jesus's deity more than His humanity. As Son of Man, Jesus's authority on earth to forgive sins would be validated by His ability to heal the paralytic, a task only God could perform. Jesus accepted the premise of the scribes: only God can forgive sin. Here He asked them to reflect on what that meant in their situation.

At this point, Jesus turned and addressed the paralytic. Jesus told him to do three things to do: "Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."

VERSE 7

So he got up and went home.

Matthew recorded that the man did two of the three things Jesus commanded him: he **got up** and **went home.** Although Matthew left out any reference to the man taking his pallet, Mark and Luke include the detail (Mark 2:12; Luke 5:25). By leaving out that detail, Matthew focused on the contrast between the way that the paralytic approached Jesus initially and the way that he left. When he came to Jesus, the man was being carried by friends because he could not walk on his own. Now at the end of his encounter with Jesus, the man was able to walk home on his own.

VERSE 8

When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

The Greek word translated **awestruck** carries two possible meanings: to be in a state of fear or to have a profound respect for. Although some have suggested that anytime God reveals Himself fear is involved, there is nothing in the context that suggests that the crowd feared Jesus. Translations like *awestruck* or "filled with awe" (NIV) are probably the better choice. The awe that moved the crowd led them to give **glory to God.** The man himself "went home glorifying God" (Luke 5:25).

Who had given such authority to men. The word *authority* probably refers to the forgiveness of sins since the same word was used earlier (Matt. 9:6). "That the authority is given to men does not mean that any person can do what Jesus had just done. There is not the slightest indication that anyone in the crowd thought that. Rather, the thought is that God has been pleased not to keep the power in heaven, but to give it to people here on earth in and through Jesus."²



Explore Further

Luke recorded that after Jesus healed the paralytic, some in the crowd said, "We have seen incredible things today" (Luke 5:26). What have you seen in your church and in your personal life that has caused you to give glory to God?

^{1.} Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 299

Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 218.

Mercy Extended

JESUS SHOWS MERCY TO ALL WHO COME TO HIM IN FAITH.

Five days before Christmas in 1943, Second Lieutenant Charles Brown and his co-pilot Spencer "Pinky" Luke were returning from a bombing run over Germany. Their B-17 bomber had been shot up; the tail gunner was dead and half the crew was wounded. The twenty-one-year-old pilot was on his first combat mission and things had not gone well. The B-17 had been shot to pieces by German fighters and was barely flying above the tree tops. They were the only U.S. plane left in the sky over Germany that night, so there was no air support for them.

Second Lieutenant Franz Stigler, a German pilot, was standing by his plane when he heard the sound of the B-17 flying close to the ground. Stigler was one kill away from earning the Knight's Cross, Germany's highest award for valor. His older brother had been killed earlier in the war. The B-17s were bombing his country's cities. Stigler saluted the ground crew and prepared to hunt down the unlucky B-17.

Stigler decided to approach from the rear of the bomber. To his surprise, no one on the B-17 fired at him. As he came closer, he saw the tail gunner's white fleece collar covered in blood. The guns on the plane had been knocked out, and inside the plane he could see crewmen working over their wounded colleagues.

As the fighter eased up beside the B-17, Brown got his first look at the gray German Messerschmitt fighter that was just feet off the bomber's wingtip. Brown said to his co-pilot, "He's going to destroy us." Stigler had his hand on the trigger, but he couldn't pull it. Shooting such a helpless aircraft didn't seem right. Nodding at the American pilot, Stigler moved his fighter into formation with the crippled B-17, shielding it from German anti-aircraft gunners. Stigler escorted the American plane all the way to the North Sea, then he turned back to his base.

Stigler never mentioned the incident because if he had been reported he would have face a firing squad. Stigler left Germany at the end of the war and moved to Canada. Stigler and Brown eventually were reunited and became close friends. During a reunion, a video was played showing all the faces of the people that now lived—children, grandchildren,

relatives—because Stigler extended an act of mercy. The two men died within a few months of each other in 2008. Stigler was ninety-two and Brown was eighty-seven. Mercy was extended and mercy was received.



Matthew 9:9-38

After a brief description of Jesus's call to Matthew to be His disciple (v. 9), Matthew recorded two questions directed toward Jesus. The first was asked by the Pharisees and dealt with Jesus's table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners (v. 11). Since Jesus came to call sinners to repentance, Jesus's table fellowship with sinners made sense (vv. 12-13). Jesus's concept of discipleship was radically different from that of the Pharisees.

The second question was asked by disciples of John the Baptist and dealt with the reason Jesus and His disciples did not fast, especially given the practice of the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus answered their question with a question of His own. The question challenged the appropriateness of fasting at a wedding. The issue was not the practice of fasting in and of itself. The issue was one of timing (vv. 14-17).

Matthew recorded Jesus performing four miracles—the raising of the daughter of a leader of a synagogue (vv. 18-19,23-25), the curing of a woman with a bleeding issue (vv. 20-22), the curing of two blind men (vv. 27-31), and driving a demon out of a possessed man (vv. 32-33).

The crowds were amazed by this last miracle (v. 33). Perhaps motivated by jealousy, the Pharisees struck back at Jesus's popularity. The Pharisees could not deny that Jesus had driven the demon from the man, so they attacked the source of Jesus's power. They said, "He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons" (v. 34). This hostility directed towards Jesus would increase as time passed.

Today's background passage ends with a summary of Jesus's ministry: "Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness" (v. 35). Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them (v. 36). Jesus's conclusion was that the harvest was abundant; the problem was with number of workers in the fields (v. 37). Jesus challenged the disciples to "pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest" (v. 38).

EXPLORE THE TEXT





Jesus's Mission (Matt. 9:10-13)

While Jesus was eating a meal, tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees saw this and questioned the disciples, wondering why Jesus would eat with such people. Jesus, hearing the question, taught that those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. He came to call sinners to righteousness.

VERSE 10

While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples.

Sometime after Matthew chose to follow Jesus a dinner was held in Jesus's honor. The location of the dinner is not clear; Matthew simply said in **the house**, with no indication as to whom the house belonged. Both Luke and Mark make explicit that the house belonged to Matthew/Levi (Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29).

Also, the type of meal involved is unclear. The Greek phrase translated **reclining at the table** ("having dinner," NIV) could mean simply that they shared a meal together. Again, Luke provided additional information; he described the meal as "a grand banquet" held in Jesus's honor (Luke 5:29). The large number of **tax collectors** and **sinners** were probably attending at Matthew's invitation. Matthew wanted his colleagues and friends to know Jesus as he knew Him. What better way for that to happen than for Matthew to invite both Jesus and Matthew's colleagues to his house.

As one of the *tax collectors*, Matthew was involved in collecting duty on goods being transported. Tax collectors were not unclean in the sense that a leper was unclean; however, the tax collectors spent time with Gentiles, including Roman officials. The tax collectors were often viewed as traitors to their nation. They were also viewed as dishonest because they frequently collected more money than they were entitled to.

The second category of people who attended the banquet was *sinners*. This category would have included those whose occupations did not allow them to maintain purity to the level that the Pharisees insisted on. Also included would have been those who simply chose not to comply with all the Pharisees' rules. Generally, sinners were grouped with tax collectors, as is the case in this passage. However, tax collectors also were grouped with Gentiles (Matt. 18:17) and with prostitutes (21:31-32),

suggesting more than a refusal to follow purity rituals. This group probably was not worried about righteousness. The attendees were surely not the sort of people one would expect at a dinner held in honor of the new rabbi.

VERSE 11

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

The Pharisees questioned Jesus's disciples as to why He ate with **tax collectors** and **sinners**. It is not completely clear how the Pharisees were aware of Jesus's actions. They probably were not invited to the banquet, and if they were, it is unlikely they would have attended. It is possible that Matthew would have opened windows and doors in his house so as to create a breeze to make the guests more comfortable. If that were the case, the Pharisees would have been able to see at a distance what was going on. It is also possible that someone who attended the banquet told them about Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners.

In either case, the Pharisees were aware of Jesus's actions at the banquet and questioned **His disciples** about those actions. Sharing a meal was considered a way of accepting a person into fellowship. To share a meal with sinners like these men was something that the Pharisees could not understand.

VERSE 12

Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick."

Jesus became aware of the Pharisees' question and answered with a well-known proverb: "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick." The two categories could be expressed as "respectable" and "outcasts" of society. The tax collectors and sinners belonged to the outcasts, and as such stood in need of the doctor's healing care. The respectable were the Pharisees; because they were not aware of their need, they could not be helped. If they really had been respectable they would have helped the outcasts rather than ignoring them.

VERSE 13

"Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus's command, "Go and learn," challenged the Pharisees at what they deemed to be their strong point, knowledge of Scriptures. The Pharisees were probably stung at Jesus's suggestion that they needed to study Scripture. Jesus quoted the first half of Hosea 6:6 as a starting point for the Pharisees' learning assignment. The Greek word for mercy translates a Hebrew word in Hosea 6:6 that is sometimes rendered "steadfast love" (ESV) or "faithful love" (CSB). The Pharisees, like Hosea's audience, needed to understand God's heart for mercy. Hosea 6 begins with a call for repentance and a return to God.

Earlier the two categories had been those who are "sick" and those who are "well" (Matt. 9:12). It is the sick who need a doctor. Here the two categories are sinners and the righteous. Jesus's mission was one proclaiming repentance and salvation. Therefore, Jesus's call was to the sinners who were aware of their sin and ready to repent. Luke explicitly tied the call to sinners with a call to repent: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Those who think they are righteous (the Pharisees) are not able to see their need for healing. The Pharisees' conviction that they could see demonstrated that they were really blind. They were convinced of their own righteousness, so they were unable to experience the true righteousness Jesus was offering.

The Pharisees who engaged Jesus's disciples with a question about table fellowship could not imagine that they were no different from the tax collectors and sinners who came to Jesus. On the other hand, those who were sick and understood their need for healing were graciously given mercy and forgiveness.



Explore Further

Read the article "Publican" on pages 1319-1320 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How did a person become a tax collector for the Romans? Why were they viewed so negatively? Who were they compared to socially?

Jesus's Work (Matt. 9:14-17)

John's disciples approached Jesus, asking why His disciples did not fast. Jesus used a metaphor to explain that they could not be downcast while He was with them, though someday He would be taken from them. Then Jesus offered the imagery of a shrinking patch that tears the garment it was meant to repair and brittle wineskins being ruined when new wine is poured into them. What Jesus came to do was a new work, unlike anything in the traditional Jewish teaching.

VERSE 14

Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

Unlike the **Pharisees**, who approached Jesus indirectly through His disciples, the **disciples** of John the Baptist approached Jesus directly. Their question related to the practice of fasting. In the Old Testament law, the only required fast was on the Day of Atonement ("practice self-denial," Lev. 16:29-30; 23:27-31; Num. 29:7). However, by the time of Jesus pious Jews often fasted twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays. Fasting also was seen as a way to find favor with God when people needed to approach God in deep humility. The disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees fasted often, and Jesus's disciples didn't fast at all. Jesus did, in fact, teach His disciples to practice fasting in secret (6:16–18).

VERSE 15

Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Jesus answered their question with a question of His own: "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them?" The Greek words that are translated wedding guests can be translated more literally as "the sons of the bridal hall." These men stood closest to the groom and worked hard to see that nothing went wrong. The sadness associated with fasting is not appropriate for the joy of a wedding. The wedding celebration often lasted a week, with the whole village participating in the festivities. The obvious answer to Jesus's question is "No they can't." The wedding was a time of joy, not of sorrow. The atmosphere of sadness appropriate for fasting was not appropriate for a wedding.

Jesus told of a time when fasting would be appropriate for His disciples. Jesus identified Himself as the **groom** and alluded to the fact that there would be a time when He would be **taken away**. Jesus would be taken from His disciples, and then fasting would be appropriate. John the Baptist had identified himself as Jesus's best man, while Jesus was

the groom (John 3:28-30). John rejoiced greatly in the presence of the bridegroom. Jesus did not command His disciples to fast but predicted that they would. And they did (Acts 9:9; 13:3; 14:23).

VERSE 16

"No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse."

Jesus used two illustrations from everyday life which point out "the essential discontinuity between old forms of worship in Judaism and the new spirit of the messianic age." The first illustration would have been familiar to most of Jesus's audience. For those who worked outdoors, finding holes in garments was a common occurrence. In poor households buying new clothes was out of the question, so clothes were mended.

An **old garment** would have shrunk long ago. If the **patch** that was chosen to mend the garment had not been shrunk, it would shrink the first time it came in contact with water. As the new patch began to shrink, it would pull away from the old garment, and the **tear** in the old garment would be made **worse**. Using an unshrunk patch to repair a garment that had already been shrunk was foolish. Jesus did not come "to patch up a worn-out Judaism."

VERSE 17

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

The second illustration parallels the first and makes the same point. The **skins** of goats were tanned and toughened and used to transport **wine**. The feet and the neck of the goat skin were tied off to prevent spillage. The hides of larger animals, like an ox or a camel, were used for larger amounts of wine. As the skins got older, they lost their elasticity and were subject to breaking or cracking.

New wine probably referred to wine that was just beginning the fermentation process. Since the wine was still fermenting, care had to be exercised in storing the new wine. As the new wine fermented, it put more pressure on the **old wineskins** than they were able to bear. Eventually, the old wineskins would **burst** and both the wine and the skins

would be lost. Only **fresh wineskins** could preserve both the skins and the wine.

The burst wineskins were not a reference to rejecting the Old Testament; Jesus had already made clear that He had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not to abolish them (5:17). However, Jesus was not bringing a revised or updated Judaism. Nor was He founding a new sect within Judaism. The teaching and actions of Jesus would not fit in the old Jewish system. His disciples could not be confined in the old system; they needed new skins to hold the new wine of the gospel.³



Explore Further

Read the article "Fasting" on page 558 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some purposes of fasting?

Jesus's Compassion (Matt. 9:18-19)

A leader in the synagogue knelt before Jesus and asked Him to come and lay His hand on his daughter so she would live. Jesus and His disciples got up and followed the man.

VERSE 18

As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, "My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Matthew tied this story with Jesus's teaching on fasting: **As he was telling them these things**. Matthew identified the man who approached Jesus simply as **one of the leaders**. Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41 identify the man as a leader of the synagogue, which seems to be what Matthew was suggesting. Mark and Luke also provide a name for the leader: Jairus. The leader of the synagogue was an important person in the Jewish community. It is unlikely that someone in Jairus's position would have sought out Jesus unless he had tried every other possibility. Jesus had just recently been criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. In spite of that, Jairus sought out Jesus.

The leader approached Jesus as He was teaching and **knelt down before him**. Both Mark and Luke used a different Greek word that is normally translated "fall down" ("he fell at his feet," Mark 5:22; see Luke 8:41). The word Matthew used often suggests worship, though that is probably not the case here. Even so, Jairus approached Jesus with a certain humility. For such a person of Jairus's position to kneel before someone who was beginning to be regarded as a heretic would have put Jairus in a precarious position in the synagogue.

Jairus's urgency is evident in the way he addressed Jesus: "My daughter just died." Both Mark and Luke report that when the leader arrived the child was still alive: "My little daughter is dying" (Mark 5:23; see also Luke 8:42). The Greek word that is translated *died* is used in Hebrews to describe Joseph as "nearing the end of his life" (Heb. 11:22). Matthew may have used the word in a similar way. The child may have been barely hanging on, only to receive confirmation that the child had died. The Greek word that is translated *just* indicates that the action took place in either in the immediate present or the immediate past.

The leader was convinced that Jesus was able to help his daughter even if she had already died. His confidence is similar to that of the leper (Matt. 8:2) and the centurion (vv. 8-9). The leader said that if Jesus would come and lay His hand on her, she would **live**. The ruler's confidence may have come from his background in the Old Testament. Both Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37) had raised people from the dead. Perhaps he concluded from those stories that someone like Jesus would be able to help. Perhaps he had heard stories of Jesus's power and was convinced that Jesus was able to restore his daughter. Whatever the case, his faith in Jesus's power to restore was obvious.

VERSE 19

So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

Jesus and **His disciples** got up and followed Jairus. The disciples are not mentioned again until the end of this chapter when Jesus challenged them to pray to the Lord of the harvest (vv. 37-38). The focus of what follows is on Jesus and His power.

As Jesus went toward the leader's house, He and His entourage were approached by a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (v. 20). She was probably bleeding in between her normal menstrual flows. Mark and Luke relate that the woman had spent all of her money in the hopes of being healed, but nothing had helped (Mark 5:25-26; Luke 8:43). Her situation meant that she was constantly in an unpure state.

The woman approached Jesus from behind and touched the edge of His robe. She was convinced that if she could touch the hem of His robe, she would be healed (Matt. 9:20-21). And she was. The woman was healed, and immediately her flow of blood stopped (Mark 5:29). Jesus found her in the crowd and said to her, "Have courage, daughter. Your faith has saved you" (Matt. 9:22). The Greek word translated here as "saved" means to rescue someone from some danger. The context usually determines what the danger is and what English word should be used in translation. When the disciples were on the boat in a storm, they called out for Jesus to rescue ("save") them from the storm (8:25). The angel of the Lord told Joseph that Jesus would save His people from their sins (1:21.) In the first context the danger was physical (a storm); in the second, it was spiritual (sins). In this context, the woman's physical situation was the first thing mentioned and a word that indicates physical recovery would be appropriate ("made you well," ESV; "healed," NIV). If Jesus had intended to refer to the woman's spiritual state, then the English word "saved" would be appropriate ("has saved you," CSB). Matthew likely intended a focus on both the physical and spiritual.



Explore Further

Read the article "Kneel" on page 977 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. According to the article, what were the various contexts in which kneeling was appropriate?

Jesus's Power (Matt. 9:23-26)

When Jesus arrived at the home of the synagogue leader, He sent the crowd outside the home. He took the girl by the hand and she stood up, healed. Word of Jesus's miracles spread throughout the region.

VERSE 23

When Jesus came to the leader's house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly.

Once the woman who had suffered from bleeding was healed, Jesus continued His journey to **the leader's house** uninterrupted. When He

arrived at the leader's house, Jesus was greeted by a chaotic scene. But this was not unusual. Professional mourners were part of the grieving process. They were used in the Old Testament as well (Jer. 9:17-18). Even the poorest families in the land were expected to hire at least two **flute players** and one wailing woman. For someone of the status of the leader of the synagogue, many more professional mourners would have been expected. Family members would mourn as well. Apparently, the mourning began before the father returned from finding Jesus. Their goal was to produce as much sound as possible. The Greek word that is translated as **lamenting loudly** literally means "to throw into disorder" and can be translated as "to agitate" ("making a commotion," ESV).

The burial process moved quickly. Because Jews did not practice embalming, the corpse had to be buried quickly, usually within twenty-four hours. This was done before bodily decomposition set it.

VERSE 24

"Leave," he said, "because the girl is not dead but asleep." And they laughed at him.

Jesus told the mourners to **leave** ("go away," ESV, NIV). Their services were no longer needed. Although the daughter was indeed dead at the moment, shortly she would be alive again, and mourning would no longer be appropriate. It would be replaced by joy.

Jesus said that the girl was **not dead but asleep**. The word *asleep* is often used as a euphemism for death. When Jesus received word that Lazarus had died, He told the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on my way to wake him up" (John 11:11). His disciples misunderstood, and Jesus had stated clearly, "Lazarus has died" (v. 14).

When the crowd heard Jesus's statement, **they laughed at him**. The Greek word translated *laughed* can mean "to ridicule." Luke indicated that their laughter was based on the fact that they knew that the child was dead (Luke 8:53). Obviously, they had been there long enough to verify her death. The Greek word that is translated **girl** could refer to a young girl approaching puberty. Mark and Luke both reported that the girl was twelve years old (Mark 5:42; Luke 8:42). The woman with the issue of blood had suffered for twelve years; the young girl who died was twelve years old. The woman had suffered the entire life of the young girl.

VERSE 25

After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

Matthew does not record how the noisy **crowd** was removed from the house. Even though the crowd laughed at Jesus's statement about the child's being asleep, they probably obeyed Him by exiting the house, even if reluctantly. Jairus may also have helped to encourage people to leave, since it was his home and his child. When the crowd had been put out of the house, Jesus entered the room where the child was. Matthew, as he frequently did, wasted no details in telling the story. He mentioned no one entering the room except Jesus. Mark mentioned Peter, James, and John plus the girl's parents accompanying Jesus into the room (Mark 5:37,40). Jesus **took** the girl **by the hand**, and she was raised. Mark and Luke record that Jesus spoke to the girl and that she got up and began to walk (Mark 5:41-42; Luke 8:54-55). Matthew leaves out these other details, allowing the reader to focus on the miracle itself. This miracle was the first of three times that Jesus raised someone from the dead in the Gospels. In addition to this miracle, Jesus raised the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and He also raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

VERSE 26

Then news of this spread throughout that whole area.

Matthew brings to an end his record of the two miracles with a brief description of the powerful effect this miracle had on the surrounding region. The phrase **whole area** may be a reference to the area around Capernaum. However, it may have been a reference to the whole of Galilee.



Explore Further

Read the article "Miracles, Signs, Wonders" on pages 1110–1111 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does one's perspective on God affect one's view in relation to miracles? How can God's working through everyday events still

be miraculous?

^{1.} Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 85. 2. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 226.

^{3.} Ibid., 226-227.

Loyalty Tested Jesus is worth everything.

Several years ago I was teaching a course on the Letter to the Hebrews. On this particular day we were discussing persecution, specifically how we were to apply the teaching in Hebrews to our lives. Most of the students were middle class and had lived in the U.S. for all of their lives. Their concept of persecution was obviously influenced by their life experiences. In defining persecution, the students mentioned things like being laughed at for trying to share their faith and losing friends or promotions for speaking boldly about their faith.

When the conversation began to slow, two students from different countries in Africa began sharing their experiences. Both students had been arrested for proclaiming their faith. Both had spent time in prison for refusing to deny their faith. The room became very still. Without belittling the experiences of the U.S. students, it was evident that the two African students had experienced persecution at a different level than the other students.

Today's session covers Jesus's instructions to His disciples who were preparing to embark on a preaching mission. Some would not be welcomed in homes or towns. Some would be flogged in the synagogues. In both cases Jesus was expecting fearless proclamation of the gospel.



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT



Matthew 10:1-42

This context for this session begins with Jesus giving His twelve disciples authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and the power to heal every disease and illness (v. 1). After Matthew's list of the twelve disciples (vv. 2-4), Jesus gave them instructions before sending them out into God's harvest (vv. 5-15).

This mission was to be directed to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 6). The disciples' were to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven had come near (v. 7) and to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, and drive out demons (v. 8). Jesus stressed the necessity of them depending on God to meet their needs. They were not to accumulate money, taking only the bare necessities, nothing more. If they were welcomed in a home, they were to let their peace be on that house. If they were not welcomed, they were to shake off the dust of the town as they left. Those towns would be in worse shape than Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment (vv. 9-15).

Jesus's instructions continued but His tone shifted. The previous instructions fit the context of a short-term preaching mission. The second set of instructions detailed how believers were to act when flogged in the synagogues and when they were brought before kings and governors. The conflict would also involve family members betraying other family members. When believers were persecuted in one town, they were instructed to flee to another (vv. 16-25).

Jesus's instructions shifted again as He told His disciples to fear no one but God (vv. 26-31). These believers were to acknowledge Jesus openly so that they would be acknowledged by Jesus before His Father in heaven (vv. 32-33). For the second time Jesus highlighted conflict within the family (vv. 34-37; see vv. 21-22). Those who are worthy are the ones who love Jesus more than father, mother, son or daughter, and who are willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus (vv. 37-39). Something as small as a cup of cold water given to one who was a disciple because he or she was a disciple would result in a reward that will never be lost (vv. 40-42). When Jesus finished His instructions to the twelve disciples, He Himself went from town to town teaching and preaching (11:1).



Snakes and Doves (Matt. 10:16-20)

Before sending out the Twelve, Jesus warned them they would experience rejection. They would need to be "shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves" (v. 16). However, this persecution would provide opportunities for the disciples to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. The Holy Spirit would give them words to say.

"Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves."

Jesus prepared His disciples for the persecution and death that would follow Christians after Jesus's return to the Father. Jesus referred to the disciples as **sheep**, and the point of comparison was the vulnerability of the sheep with respect to **wolves.** There can be no question that the persecution envisioned would be severe.

Jesus used two phrases to indicate how the disciples were to succeed in the midst of wolves: they were to **be as shrewd as serpents** and **as innocent as doves.** This may be a proverbial saying, without the reference to serpents and doves. The Greek word translated *shrewd* means understanding that is associated with wisdom and insight. The word can also be translated into English as "wise" (ESV) or "wary" (NASB).

The second phrase features a dove with the admonition to be as *innocent as doves*. The Greek word translated *innocent* means to be unmixed and, therefore, to be pure. It specifically refers to purity of intention. The vulnerability of the sheep is offset by Jesus's call for His sheep to be "smart sheep, sheep who use our heads, sheep who don't overestimate the benevolence of wolves." 1

VERSE 17

"Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues."

In the previous section, the harshest reaction that the disciples would receive would be a refusal to welcome the disciples into a home (vv. 12-14). In this section Jesus made it clear that the reaction on future mission journeys would be much more severe. Jesus issued a command to stay alert: "Beware of them" ("Beware of men," ESV, KJV; "Be on your guard" NIV). The men in question were probably the people in authority who were responsible for passing judgment on the believers. The Greek word translated <code>hand...over</code> is often used as a technical term for turning someone over to the police or courts to pass judgment.

The Greek word translated **local courts** ("local councils," NIV) is the transliterated word "sanhedrins." The plural form of the word was a reference to the smaller courts (councils of twenty-three men) found in towns and villages outside of Jerusalem ("Sanhedrin" singular referred to the supreme religious court in Jerusalem). The smaller courts handled smaller, local issues. On a first offense the parties causing the offense

were warned and released (Acts 4:18). On a second offense, the offending parties were flogged (5:40). No more than thirty-nine strokes could be given in the synagogues (see 2 Cor. 11:24).

VERSE 18

"You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles."

While Jesus had earlier given instructions on what to do when the disciples were not welcomed into a home, here He instructed them on what to do when standing before **governors** and **kings**. Jesus's focus switched from the preaching tour on which His disciples were about to embark to mission trips that the disciples would make after Jesus returned to the Father. The Greek word translated *governors* referred to men in a position like that of Pilate (Matt.27:2,11). It could also refer to Caesar.

All of these appearances would be because of Jesus ("because of me"). The disciples would not be persecuted because they were criminals but rather because of their relationship to Jesus and their proclamation of His gospel. Jesus viewed these trials positively; the trials would provide opportunities for the disciples to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. Them refers to the governors and kings. The addition of to the Gentiles indicates the spread of the disciples' witness outside the courts to the people.

VERSE 19

"But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour,"

The presence of persecution was certain, even if the timing was not (when not "if"). The Greek word translated hand ... over is the same word that was used in verse 17 and has the same technical sense of "hand one over for trial." The first reaction many disciples probably had was anxiety. Jesus commanded them not to worry. Another reaction may have been a strong desire to strike back, not remembering that their primary goal was to preach the gospel not to defend themselves. Their lack of anxiety would be due to God giving them both the how and what they were to speak before kings, governors, and councils. Both the content of what they were to say as well as the manner in which they were to say it would be given to them at that hour. God would give Jesus's disciples the defense they would need when they would need it.

Some Bible teachers have applied this text to the act of preaching or teaching in the church. But Jesus was talking specifically about facing a hostile situation where the disciple's very life might be in danger. Jesus was not advocating laziness when preparing to preach or teach believers, but He was challenging believers who were in difficult situations to rely on God for their defense (Luke 12:11-12).

VERSE 20

"because it isn't you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you."

The reason that the disciples were told not to worry would be because they were not the ones who would be speaking. **The Spirit of** [their] **Father** ("Holy Spirit," Mark 13:11) would speak through the disciples. The phrase *the Spirit of your Father* appears no where else in the Greek New Testament. However, John recorded a similar phrase: Jesus would send "the Spirit of truth" from the Father to the disciples (John 15:26; 16:13). Jesus regularly spoke of God as His Father, but there is a sense in which God is the Father of believers as well. Jesus taught disciples to pray "our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Jesus connected God as the Father of believers and the Holy Spirit as the Father's Spirit. Jesus also promised, "for I will give you such words and a wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" (Luke 21:15).

The persecution would extend to the believer's own household (Matt. 10:21). Jesus quoted the Old Testament prophet Micah, who described a similar situation where "a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Matt. 10:35-36; see Mic. 7:6). In some cultures, converting to Christianity is viewed as bringing shame to a family. In many cases the only perceived recourse to restore the family's honor is to turn over the believing family member to the authorities.



Explore Further

Read the article "Flogging" on pages 579–580 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How might Jesus's statement that believers would be flogged in synagogues affect the way His disciples carry out their mission?

Sparrows and Hairs (Matt. 10:26-31)

Jesus encouraged His disciples to not be afraid of their persecutors, reassuring them of the Father's care. They are both known by and valuable to Him.

VERSE 26

"Therefore, don't be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won't be uncovered and nothing hidden that won't be made known."

Therefore refers to the reason why the disciples would be treated as they were. They would be treated no better than their Master, Jesus; the things that authorities did to Jesus would be done to His disciples as well (vv. 22-25). **Them** whom the disciples were not to fear refers to those who were persecuting both Jesus and later the disciples. Jesus repeated the command not to fear three times in this section (vv. 26,28,31).

The disciples were not to fear because those things that are **covered** and **hidden** will be **uncovered** and **made known**. Some Bible teachers view this as a reference to the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus primarily had been teaching His disciples and not the masses, so His teaching was in that sense *covered* and *hidden*. The secrecy would soon be a thing of the past and gospel would be boldly and openly proclaimed.

Other Bible teachers have suggested that the reference is to the last judgment when God will reveal all the secrets that people thought had gone unknown. Believers in God will be vindicated and those persecuting God's children will be punished. The disciples should not be afraid to preach the gospel Jesus had declared to them. Paul went on to say that the saints will be involved in judging the world (1 Cor. 6:2). Choosing between the two options is not easy, and both have an element of truth.

VERSE 27

"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops."

The disciples received their message from Jesus ("What I tell you"). They were responsible for the proclamation of the gospel, but the content came from Jesus. What they heard in the dark was what Jesus had told them in a whisper. The disciples were responsible for maximum publicity. The large, flat roofs of most homes were commonly used to proclaim important messages. The approach of the Sabbath was signaled

by a trumpet on a rooftop. The workers in the field would know when to stop work and come in from the fields. What was to be spoken **in the light** was to be shouted from **the housetops**. Jesus's point was that His gospel message was to be proclaimed fearlessly.

VERSE 28

"Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

The verse begins with the second "do not fear" command—"Don't fear those" and gives the reason why persecutors are not to be feared. The disciples had nothing to fear from the ones who persecuted them because those persecutors were capable only of killing the body. They could not kill the soul. Martyrdom was a real possibility for the disciples; however, those who could kill only the physical body had no authority or power over the soul. God "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." God is omnipotent. Only God has control over a person's ultimate fate. Therefore, only He should be feared. When Jesus spoke of God being able to destroy both soul and body, He was not speaking of the total annihilation of the person. Rather He was referring to the loss of everything that makes life meaningful, the loss of everything good and right. This destruction will take place in hell, another reason why Jesus was not referring to the total cessation of the person's being. The Greek word for hell literally refers to the "Valley of Hinnom" (geenna), a ravine south of Jerusalem containing constantly burning garbage fires which were likened to the eternal punishment of the wicked (Matt. 5:22,29-30).

VERSE 29

"Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent."

Jesus transitioned into the worth of the person by comparing the worth of a sparrow and the worth of an individual. **Sparrows** were the least expensive animal sold in the market and were considered cheap food for the poor. **Penny** refers to a Roman copper coin worth about one-sixteenth of the daily wages of a manual laborer. Five sparrows were sold for two pennies (Luke 12:6). Jesus's point is that God has intimate knowledge of and control over all of His creation. Nothing happens "without your Father's consent." God is in control of His creation, even the most minute parts.

"But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

God knows even the smallest details of our bodies, even the number of the hairs of your head. The God who is sovereign over history is sovereign also over the hairs of our heads. The language of the hairs on one's head was frequently used to indicate protection of an individual from harm (1 Sam. 14:45; see also 2 Sam. 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52).

The first two commands not to fear focused on specific objects. First, Jesus instructed His disciples not to fear those who persecuted them, be they of the government or one's own family (v. 26). Second, the disciples were warned not to fear those who killed the body but were not able to kill the soul (v. 28). The third command appears at the end of this section and has no specific object that disciples are not to fear. Rather, the command is a general admonition not to fear: "So don't be afraid."

Throughout this short section Jesus had relied on the "less than, greater than" argument. Even though sparrows are insignificant from a human perspective, they are still the objects of God's concern and care. If this is true of the sparrows, how much more does God care for humans. Jesus said that people are "worth more than many sparrows." Two things stand out in this section. First, God is sovereign over everything. Second, for that reason we have nothing to fear.



Explore Further

Read the article "Fear" on pages 559-561 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What is the difference between fear of God and fear of one's enemies or a particular situation?

Peace and Swords (Matt. 10:32-34)

Jesus's teachings would bring opposition and conflict. Armed with the assurance of the Father's care and a lasting reward, the Twelve were to remain loyal to Jesus even in the face of hostility and division.

"Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

Because we have nothing to fear, we should **acknowledge** Jesus publicly. The Greek word translated *acknowledge* can mean to agree on something, to commit oneself to, or to acknowledge something—specifically to publicly profess allegiance to Jesus. The mission on which Jesus was about to send His disciples, as well as their future appearances in courts, provides the context in which the disciples were to acknowledge Jesus publicly. The disciples would appear before governors and kings because of Jesus (v. 18); they would be hated because of Jesus's name (v. 22).

The disciples' acknowledgment of Jesus on earth affected Jesus's acknowledgment of the disciples in the last day "before my Father in heaven." In Matthew, Jesus referred to God the Father as "my Father in heaven" seven times (7:21; 10:32,33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,19). He also used the phrases "your Father" (thirteen times) and "our Father" (once, 6:9).

VERSE 33

"But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven."

This verse is practically identical to the preceding verse with the exception of one word: **denies/deny** instead of the word "acknowledge." The two choices lead to different outcomes, acceptance by Jesus and God the Father or rejection by them. The Greek word translated *deny* can mean to refuse to consent to something, to disdain. It can also mean to disclaim association with something or someone, to repudiate or disown. Disowning Jesus leads to being disowned by Him. In the final judgment Jesus will speak for or against a person based on whether they accepted or rejected Him. John made the same point in his first letter (1 John 2:22-23).

Jesus responds to people at the final judgment who claim to have had prophesied in His name, driven out demons in His name, and done miracles in His name, telling them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!" (Matt. 7:23). Jesus is the one who determines whether the confession of a person is genuine, coming from the heart (John 2:23-25).

VERSE 34

"Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Jesus warned His disciples that things would not be the way that they might expect them to be. **Don't assume** ("Do not suppose," NIV) introduces a repeated parallel clause which emphasizes Jesus's commitment not to bring **peace**. Jesus promised His disciples He would give them peace: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful" (John 14:27). Later Jesus again promised peace: "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world" (16:33).

Matthew 10:34 must be understood in the context of Jesus's other statements on peace. The peace that Jesus referred to here was more than the absence of conflict. God's peace rests in knowing that in Christ we are forgiven all our sins, reconciled to God, and have received eternal life. "And that means war with evil and accordingly hostility against those who support the ways of wrong . . . his coming presents a challenge to which people respond differently. And emotionally, for some who oppose Jesus do so passionately, as do those who become his followers. And where strong and opposed feelings are held, conflict is inevitable." 2

In the Old Testament, **a sword** often symbolizes the judgment of God (Jer. 12:12). The presence of God's sword means peace for no one. In the context of Matthew 10:34, the sword fits best with the conflict within the families described in the following verse. The sword is a symbol for that which divides a family against itself. Matthew 10:35-36 echoes the situation in Micah's day (Mic. 7:6). "Turn" ("set . . . against," ESV) in Matthew 10:35 means to cut completely into two parts.

Jesus listed three situations in which the person involved was not worthy of Him: loving father or mother more than Him (Matt. 10:37a), loving son or daughter more than Him (v. 37b), and not taking up one's cross to follow Jesus (v. 38). The only way to find one's life is to lose one's life for Jesus's sake (v. 39).



Explore Further

How does Jesus bringing a sword affect the way that we proclaim the gospel and our expectations of how people will respond?

Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 253.

^{2.} Ibid., 266.

Confronting Doubts

JESUS DEMANDS DECISION.

The list of doubters in the Bible is long. The serpent spread doubt to Adam and Eve: "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). Abraham doubted (chap. 15), and Sarah laughed when the Lord said Sarah would give birth to a son (18:10-15). Moses doubted whether he could become the spokesman God wanted him to be (Ex. 3:11). God gave Aaron to Moses as a spokesman.

In today's session, John the Baptist took his place in the list of doubters. John had been imprisoned by Herod and was waiting to be executed. He had heard about Jesus's activities and wanted to know whether Jesus was the one or was another to come. When we are faced with doubt in our lives, how should we handle it?



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT





Matthew 11:1-30

The previous chapter concluded with Jesus's last command to His disciples before they departed on their preaching tour (10:40-42). Rather than follow the disciples on their preaching tour, Matthew kept his focus on Jesus, as He taught and preached "in their towns" (11:1).

John the Baptist had been in prison and but still heard reports of Jesus's activity. Through his disciples, John sent a message asking Jesus if He was the coming one or should they look for another. Jesus told the men to tell John what they had seen and heard (vv. 2-6).

When John's disciples left, Jesus began to explain to the crowd the significance of the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus questioned the motive of the crowds in seeking out John. Jesus asked if they had come to see a prophet. John was more than a prophet (vv. 7-10). John not only was a prophet but he was the fulfillment of prophesy (Mal. 3:1). The law

itself as well as all the prophets prophesied until John (Matt. 11:13), who had been sent to prepare the way for the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). John was not the physical "Elijah" for whom some Jews were waiting but rather the one who had prepared the way for Jesus. Jesus ended this section with a challenge to listen to what He was saying.

Jesus focused on the fickleness of the Jewish leaders. According to them, John was too serious and the Son of Man was a glutton and drunkard. Then Jesus began to denounce the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Most of His miracles were done in these three cities, yet the cities had not responded in repentance, belief, and obedience (Matt. 11:16-24).

The chapter ends with Matthew recording Jesus's prayer to His Father. First, Jesus thanked God that He had not revealed His message to those who thought that they were wise but rather to the spiritual infants. Second, God was pleased to reveal Himself through the Son to whomever the Son chose to reveal Him. Finally, Jesus issued an invitation to all who were burdened to come and find rest in Jesus (vv. 25-30).



Uncertainty (Matt. 11:1-6)

When John the Baptist heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Jesus confirmed His identity as the Messiah. He reassured John by pointing to the evidence of His miraculous works.

VERSE 1

When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

This verse can be seen as the conclusion to chapter 10 or as a transitional verse leading into chapter 11. Though Matthew did not explicitly say so, apparently **when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples,** He sent them on their way, while He embarked on a preaching tour of His own. Matthew did not record the results of the disciples' preaching tour. On the other hand, Mark recorded a brief

summary of the success of the disciples' work: "So they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons, anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mark 6:12-13).

VERSES 2-3

Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Matthew immediately turned his attention to the situation with **John** the Baptist. When Jesus had completed His encounter with Satan (4:1-11), He traveled to Galilee because He had heard that John the Baptist had been arrested (v. 12). While in prison, John was able to keep track of **what the Christ was doing.** This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is referred to simply as *the Christ*. John's uncertainty led him to send a **message** to Jesus for clarification: "**Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?**"

When Jesus came to John to be baptized by him, John recognized Jesus's superior position (3:14). What had happened to cause John to be uncertain about who Jesus was? Some Bible teachers have suggested that John had no doubts, but he asked the question for the sake of his followers. But nothing in the text suggests that John was asking for others rather than himself. Others have suggested that John's experience in Herod's prison had begun to wear on him. The Messiah was to provide freedom for those in prison, and yet John was still in prison (Isa. 61:1). Or perhaps John was beginning to become impatient. John had preached that judgment was imminent (Matt. 3:10-12). And yet nothing seemed to be happening that would indicate the in-breaking kingdom that most Jews expected. Jesus was walking among ordinary people teaching them. Was He the Messiah or were they to wait for another?

VERSE 4

Jesus replied to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see:"

Jesus did not answer John's question directly. Rather, He challenged John's followers to look and listen for evidence of the Christ's activities, then, "Go and report to John what you hear and see." Jesus's challenge did not mean that John's followers already had been with Jesus for an extended period of time and had seen these things take place personally. They were to find those who had heard Jesus's teaching and

witnessed Jesus's miracles and report back to John. Even though he was in prison, John could draw the correct conclusions for himself.

VERSE 5

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news,"

Jesus listed six diseases or conditions from which John's followers could draw material for their report to John. Most appear in Isaiah's discussion of the Messiah's work (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1). **The blind** regained their sight (Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Matt. 9:27-31). **The lame** walk (Isa. 35:6; Matt. 8:5-13). **Those with leprosy** are cleansed (Matt. 8:1-4). **The deaf** hear (Isa. 35:5; Mark 7:31-35). **The dead** are raised (Isa. 26:19; Matt. 9:18,23-25). **The poor** are told the good news (Isa. 61:1; Matt. 9:35).

VERSE 6

"and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."

Jesus pronounced a blessing on all of those who were not **offended** by Him. In many ways, Jesus's Messiahship did not conform with the common view among the ordinary Jewish people of a political and military messiah. The Greek words translated **isn't offended** can also be translated "does not stumble" (NIV). The word for *offended* means "to cause to be brought to a downfall" or "to cause to sin."

God's blessing rests on those who remain committed to Jesus, even when that commitment leads to different expectations than one may have. Jesus's call to John was to trust Jesus even when John's concept of Messiah clashed with what Jesus was saying and doing. "In beatitude form Jesus encourages John, and everyone else with similar doubts, to remain faithful to him no matter what may come." 1



Explore Further

Read the section entitled "John the Baptist" in the article "John" on pages 911–913 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does having a better understanding of John the Baptist help understand his uncertainty about Jesus's role as Son of Man?

Cynicism (Matt. 11:16-19)

Jesus's generation rejected John because he came neither eating nor drinking; they rejected Jesus because He came eating and drinking. They were like children who insisted that other children play their games. They played the flute for John, but he didn't dance; they sang a lament for Jesus, but He didn't mourn.

VERSE 16

"To what should I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:"

After the messengers from John the Baptist had left, Jesus began to question the crowds about why they went to the wilderness to see John. Did they go to see a reed swaying in the wind or a man wearing soft clothes? Jesus said that the crowds went out to see a prophet. John was a prophet who came to prepare the way for the Messiah (vv. 7-14).

Jesus turned His attention to the crowds (**this generation**) who had assembled around Him, comparing these people to **children** playing games. In addition to being places where goods were bought and sold, the **marketplaces** were apparently places where children played. The point of Jesus's short parable was the children's inability to be appeased.

VERSE 17

"We played the flute for you, but you didn't dance; we sang a lament, but you didn't mourn!"

The **flute** was usually played by women, while men danced. These dances were often associated with the joy of a wedding. One group was interested in playing the wedding game and so played the flutes. The children did not respond by dancing, but rather, they refused to participate. Another group **sang a lament**, associated with a funeral. The Greek word translated *sang a lament* can also be translated "sang a dirge" (ESV, NIV). The word can mean to mourn for someone in a ritual way. The word also is used in connection with Jesus's march to the cross ("lamenting," Luke 23:27) and in Jesus's discussion of the disciples' mourning over His death ("mourn," John 16:20). The proper response to someone singing a dirge or a lament was to **mourn**. Again the children refused to play; it mattered not whether the game was happy or sad.

"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!"

Jesus summarized the two approaches in relation to Himself and John the Baptist. "John came neither eating nor drinking." John lived a very ascetic lifestyle. His diet consisted of locust and wild honey (3:4; see Luke 1:15). In addition, John's disciples had a reputation for fasting often, a reputation that they surely received from their leader (Matt. 9:14).

The phrase **they say** indicates that the speakers were part of the "generation" Jesus mentioned in Matthew 11:16. This group's conclusion was that John's actions indicated that he had **a demon.**

VERSE 19

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Jesus referred to Himself as **the Son of Man** (see the divine figure in Dan. 7:13-14 who receives authority and an everlasting kingdom), and unlike John's ascetic lifestyle, Jesus came **eating and drinking**. Jesus was involved socially with the people He came across. Those of that generation observed the lifestyle of the Son of Man and concluded that he was a **glutton** and a **drunkard**. Jesus and His disciples attended a wedding together (John 2:1-2). Jesus was a **friend of tax collectors and sinners** (Matt. 9:10-11). John was too holy, and Jesus wasn't holy enough.

Jesus ended this section with a brief statement about **wisdom**. The background for this statement on *wisdom* may go back to the Old Testament: "Happy is a man who finds wisdom and who acquires understanding" (Prov. 3:13; see also 1:7). The word may also go back to the wisdom that Jesus was imparting to His disciples. The Greek word translated **vindicated** ("justified," ESV, KJV; "proved right," NIV) means to render a favorable verdict. In a parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke, *wisdom* will be vindicated "by all her children" (Luke 7:35). There is no real difference between the two statements. "The wisdom Jesus taught was not meant as a topic for debate in religious or philosophical schools—it was something to be lived out and it is *proved right* in the works his followers do." Jesus's statement is very similar to His words in the Sermon on the Mount: "So you'll recognize them by their fruit" (Matt. 7:20).



Explore Further

Read the articles entitled "Dancing" on pages 384–385 and "Grief and Mourning" on page 681 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does a better understanding of dancing and mourning help in understanding the games the children played?

Denial (Matt. 11:20-24)

Jesus pronounced a series of woes on unrepentant cities. Though they had seen Jesus's miracles, they denied the evidence and refused to believe.

VERSE 20

Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent:

Jesus turned His attention to three cites (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum) where He had done **most of His miracles**. These three towns are relatively close to each other north of the Sea of Galilee. The Greek word translated **denounce** in this context means to find justifiable fault with someone, to reproach or reprimand. The mighty works done in their presence should have been enough for the towns to see that God was working in their midst. From the beginning of Jesus's ministry, His call had been, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4:17). Jesus's goal with *His miracles* was not that the people would be amazed but rather that they would **repent**. The Greek word translated *repent* can mean to change one's mind about a person or an opinion. However, in the New Testament the word *repent* usually includes a call for a new direction in one's life in addition to the change of mind. The citizens of these towns were not willing to act on Jesus's call to repentance.

VERSE 21

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago."

Jesus compared **Chorazin** and **Bethsaida** with two cities known for their sinful ways—**Tyre** and **Sidon**. The Greek word translated **woe** was a call to judgment. Jesus pronounced judgement on these two cities. The word also appears in Matthew 23, where "woe to you" is supplemented with "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Some suggest that the New Testament use of the word carries with it a combination of warning and compassion. Jesus's miracles "were works of power, manifestations of the presence of God, and accordingly, invitations to people to reflect on how they stood before God and to repent of the evil they had done"³

Chorazin is mentioned only in the New Testament here and in Luke 10:13. It was located in Galilee about two miles north of Capernaum and was probably the smaller of the two towns. Chorazin was known for its wheat production. Bethsaida, meaning "house of fish," indicates the most common occupation of the town's residents. Bethsaida was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee on the western side of where the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee, but the exact location is uncertain. Bethsaida was the hometown of at least three of Jesus's disciples: Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44; 12:21), though by this time Peter had a home in Capernaum (Matt. 8:14). When Jesus arrived in Bethsaida, He was asked to heal a blind man, which He did (Mark 8:22-26). Luke recorded that after the disciples had completed their preaching tour, Jesus and the disciples withdrew to a town called Bethsaida where Jesus "healed those who needed healing" (Luke 9:10).

The two towns known for their sinful ways were *Tyre* and *Sidon*. These two cities were both located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea west of the Lebanon mountains. Tyre was about twenty-five miles south of Sidon. The two cities had a reputation for an opulent lifestyle that resulted in judgment from God (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26–28).

The severity of the sins of Chorazin and Bethsaida was demonstrated by a comparison with Tyre and Sidon, who had not received the kinds of mighty works that Jesus had performed in Galilee. If they had seen what those in Galilee had seen, "they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago." As we saw earlier, repentance involves not simply a change of mind, that is, an intellectual acknowledgement or feeling badly for something the person has done. Rather, it also involves a new direction in life. But such miracles had not been performed in Tyre and Sidon, and the people had not believed.

Dressing in *sackcloth and ashes* was a way to demonstrate the depth of one's desire for a new direction in life. *Sackcloth* was a rough cloth of camel hair worn in times of mourning. The *ashes* were sprinkled on the head or poured out of the floor for the mourners to sit in.

"But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus pointed out that on the coming day of judgment the pagan cities of **Tyre** and **Sidon** would fare better than Chorazin and Bethsaida. The **judgment** to which Jesus referred was the final judgment when Jew and non-Jew would give an account for how they had lived their lives. The Greek word translated **tolerable** ("bearable," ESV, NIV) brings to mind the statement to whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12:48). The cities of Galilee had seen most of Jesus's mighty works but had not responded in repentance. Much had been given the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida ("towns where most of his miracles were done," Matt. 11:20), and much would be required of them. Jesus was aware of what the citizens of Tyre and Sidon would have done if they had witnessed all the miracles Jesus had done in Chorazin and Bethsaida.

Jesus did not say that the people of Tyre and Sidon would not be punished at all, just that their situation in the final judgment would be more *tolerable*. This would seem to indicate that there are levels of torment in hell. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how the punishment of one group would be more tolerable than the punishment of another.

VERSE 23

"And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today."

The conversation shifted from Chorazin and Bethsaida to **Capernaum**. Jesus began with a question that received a negative answer, followed by a reason for the negative answer. The pattern and language of this section is similar to Isaiah's rebuke of the king of Babylon. Isaiah spoke of the king of Babylon, "You said to yourself, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will set up my throne above the stars of God. I will sit on the mount of the gods' assembly in the remotest parts of the North. I will ascend above the highest clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'" (Isa. 14:13-14). God answered, "But you will be brought down to Sheol into the deepest regions of the Pit" (v. 15). Like the king of Babylon, the people of Capernaum expected to be **exalted to heaven**, but instead they would **go down into Hades**. The Greek word translated *Hades* occurs in the Greek New Testament only ten times. The word originally referred to the Greek

god of the underworld and later to the place itself, specifically the place of the dead (Acts 2:31). The phrase $go\ down\ to\ Hades$ did not refer to the physical destruction of the city but the eternal judgment the inhabitants of Capernaum would face.

Capernaum was the leading town on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. It had a population of about 1500 people and was economically prosperous. Early in His ministry Jesus moved His base of operation from Nazareth to Capernaum (Matt. 4:13). Later Matthew would refer to Capernaum as Jesus's "own town" (9:1).

Capernaum was compared with the city of **Sodom**, which was proverbial along with Gomorrah for its wickedness and God's judgment of the city (Gen. 18:20; Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12; Rom. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7). The destruction of the city and its sister city Gomorrah is recorded in Genesis 18:16–19:29. Had Sodom experienced the mighty works of Jesus done in Capernaum, the city would have **remained until** Jesus's day. Once again, Matthew presents Jesus as having special insight into how the people of Sodom would have responded to His **miracles**.

VERSE 24

"But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Once again, Jesus opened the final phrase with the statement, "But I tell you," indicating the seriousness of what Jesus was about to say. Just as with Chorazin and Bethsaida, Capernaum was headed down the wrong road. In the final judgment, Sodom would find things more tolerable ("more bearable," NIV) than Capernaum. Notorious pagans would have it better than self-satisfied religionists on the day of judgment.



Explore Further

Read the article "Repentance" on pages 1344–1345 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What are the different aspects of repentance, and why is each important?

^{1.} Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 185.

Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 286.

^{3.} Ibid., 289.

Rejecting Legalism

JESUS OFFERS MERCY, NOT RELIGIOUS RULES.

The Sabbath rest from work was a significant element in the law that God gave to Moses for the Israelites. Over time rules had been established defining what constituted "work." By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had come up with a list of thirty-nine categories of work that should not be done on the Sabbath. Those rules became just as important as the commandment itself. Many of Jesus's conflicts with the Pharisees were related to Sabbath observance. The Pharisees contended that Jesus was placing Himself above the law.

Much of the minutiae of the rules related to the Sabbath missed the point of the commandment. The same thing can be seen in blue laws that were once popular in the United States. In the early 1970s I was leading a group of youth to Glorieta, New Mexico. The bus broke down and we were stuck on the side of the road. I took the van and drove back to a store we had passed earlier. This breakdown was not the first, and we should have already arrived at our destination. This particular break down was on a Sunday.

When we got to the store, I was surprised to see sections of the store roped off; those sections were off limits on Sunday. That was my first introduction to blue laws. We had fifty people on the side of a really hot road who needed food and cold drinks. I wanted an ice chest to ice down the drinks, but ice chests were on the other side of the rope. Looking around on our side of the rope, we found several large, plastic garbage cans, which we filled with ice and drinks. Shopping on only one side of the rope was challenging, but we made do. I felt as though I could identify with those who lived under the rule of the Pharisees. But those who were working in the store we found, like the Pharisees, were working to protect a commandment that was very important to them.

We have probably gone the opposite direction in today's world. It is difficult to see how Sunday is any different from any other day. In today's session, we will see the conflict between a legalistic view of Sabbath observance and a view that seeks to meet needs and show mercy.





Matthew 12:1-50

This session begins with the theme of Sabbath observance, one event involving eating grain in a field on the Sabbath (12:1-8) and another involving a man with a shriveled hand, whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath (vv. 9-14). The compassionate response of Jesus was contrasted with the Pharisees' plot to have Jesus killed. Jesus was aware of their plan and urged the large crowds not to make Him known (v. 16). Matthew quoted Isa. 42:1-4, which would be fulfilled in Jesus (vv. 17-21). In Him the nations would put their hope (v. 21).

Matthew next related Jesus's healing of "a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak" (v. 22). The healing was so impressive that the crowd wondered whether Jesus was the Son of David (v. 23). The Pharisees attacked Jesus by questioning the source of Jesus's power: "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons" (v. 24). Jesus refuted their accusations with several points. First, He contended that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Driving out demons by the power of the ruler of the demons was counterproductive (vv. 25-26). Second, Jesus questioned by whose power the sons of the Pharisees cast out demons (v. 27). Third, Jesus used the example of entering a strong man's house. The strong man must first be bound before his house can be entered. Jesus said that people were either for Him or against Him. Jesus ended this section by discussing the seriousness of speaking against the Holy Spirit (vv. 29-32).

Jesus pointed out that "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart." Whether the storeroom of one's heart is of good or of evil will be obvious on the day of judgment when everyone will have to give an account of every careless word spoken (vv. 33-37).

A group of scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, a request that Jesus promptly rejected. The only sign would be the sign of Jonah. As Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so the Son of Man would spend three days and three nights in the earth (vv. 38-40). The men of Nineveh and the queen of the south would condemn this generation in the day of judgment. The men of Nineveh responded to the preaching of Jonah, and the queen of the south responded to the wisdom of Solomon. And yet something greater than Jonah or Solomon was present among them (vv. 38-42).

Jesus used an example to show what the evil generation had in store. The story was about an unclean spirit who went out of a person.

Looking for a place to rest, it was not able to find rest. So it returned to the place it had left and found it vacant, cleaned, and in order. So, the unclean spirit found seven other spirits, who returned with it. "As a result, that person's last condition is worse than the first" (vv. 43-45).

The last event in this chapter concerns an encounter with Jesus's family. As He was teaching the crowds, someone let Jesus know that His family was outside, wanting to speak with Him. Jesus used the opportunity to make a point about His spiritual family. Gesturing with His hand, He indicated that His disciples were His family. He said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (vv. 46-50).



Religious Rules (Matt. 12:1-2)

Jesus and His disciples passed through grainfields when the disciples began to pick and eat some grain. The Pharisees criticized Jesus's disciples for picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, a violation of their religious traditions.

VERSE 1

At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain.

Matthew 12 details several events which showed the increasing hostility towards Jesus by the Jewish leaders, especially events connected with the keeping of the Sabbath. It was probably no coincidence that the discussion of the Sabbath immediately follows Jesus's invitation to people to find rest for their souls because His yoke was easy and His burden was light (11:28-30). The Pharisees were very serious about keeping Sabbath law. In contrast, Jesus presented the Sabbath as a way to honor God, not just keeping a list of man-made rules and traditions.

The phrase **at that time** ties this story to the previous one, though the connection is vague. The ripening grain suggests that this event (12:1-8) took place sometime in the spring, though no other details are given. Matthew did not explain where Jesus and His disciples were headed or

why they were traveling on the Sabbath. Neither did he explain why the disciples were hungry. Hunger unites Jesus's disciples and David's warriors (see 12:3 below).

The action of the disciples in curbing their hunger was not an issue. The law was clear about the right of a traveler walking through a field of grain to pick and eat grain: "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck heads of grain with your hand, but do not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain" (Deut. 23:25). The issue was the timing of that action not the action itself: Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath.

VERSE 2

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

The Pharisees criticized the action of Jesus's disciples, contending their actions were unlawful on the Sabbath. The commandment in question was the prohibition against work on the Sabbath since it was a holy day to the Lord. The command did not clarify what constituted work, but it was very specific as to who was responsible for keeping the command: "You must not do any work-you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates" (Ex. 20:10). In order to quantify what was considered work, the Pharisees developed thirty-nine rules that had to be observed to keep the Sabbath properly, things that must not be done on the Sabbath. Over time, the rules created by the Pharisees were deemed just as important as the primary command itself. Some Bible teachers have suggested that according the Pharisees, by eating grain picked from the field on the Sabbath Jesus's disciples had violated four different rules: they reaped the grain (pluck the grain from the stalk), winnowed (rubbed it between their hands), threshed (separated the chaff), and prepared a meal (ate the grain).1



Explore Further

Read the article "Sabbath" on page 1396 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How does the Jewish understanding of Sabbath help explain the Pharisees hostility towards Jesus?

Something Greater (Matt. 12:3-8)

Jesus responded to the criticism of the Pharisees by citing examples from the Old Testament. He taught that God is more concerned with our hearts than with our adherence to man-made, religious rituals. In doing so, Jesus pointed to Himself as greater than the temple and its priesthood.

VERSE 3

He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry:"

Jesus chose two stories to drive home the place of Sabbath observance. First, He highlighted David feeding his warriors from the consecrated Bread of the Presence in the temple (1 Sam. 21:1-6). Jesus began the story by suggesting that the Pharisees would find the answer by examining Scripture ("Haven't you read what David did"). The Pharisees may have taken offense at Jesus's comment. The insinuation was that the Pharisees were not well versed in Old Testament events. When David was fleeing for his life from Saul, David's men were hungry and needed to eat. Both David's men and Jesus's disciples were hungry. It is no coincidence that this story comes immediately after Jesus's statement that His yoke is easy and His load is light. Jesus was not just freeing believers from a stifling load of rules prescribed by the Pharisees. Jesus was teaching a new understanding of Sabbath: The Pharisees had a wrong understanding of the Sabbath altogether, seeing it as a day for keeping a list of rules. But Jesus demonstrated, "It was a day for honoring God, which meant doing good . . . It was a day for refreshing people, for meeting their need."2

VERSE 4

"How he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence — which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests?"

The Bread of the Presence consisted of twelve loaves of bread placed on a golden altar before God in the tabernacle. The loaves were replaced once a week, and only the priests were permitted to eat the week-old bread. David requested "five loaves of bread or whatever can be found" to feed his men; the priest informed David that there was only consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:3-4). The loaves belonged to Aaron and his sons (Lev. 24:8-9). That is, no one but the priests had the right to eat them.

In replying to the Pharisees, Jesus made a lesser-to-greater argument. David was not condemned for feeding his warriors. The hunger of David's men took precedence over the religious rule. How much more should Jesus's disciples have been allowed to eat grain from a field. People are more important than things. The needs of David and his men and Jesus and His disciples were more important than following the letter of law. The Pharisees had misunderstood the purpose of the law.

VERSE 5

"Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent?"

The second point Jesus made began with the same challenge to study Scripture (**Or haven't you read in the law**). The law commanded the priest to sacrifice two unblemished year-old lambs mixed with flour and oil on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10). The work involved in preparing two lambs for sacrifice was significantly greater than the effort involved in eating grain from the stalks. However, the Pharisees considered the priests in the temple to be **innocent**—the temple service took priority over the observance of Sabbath. Yet Jesus's disciples were considered guilty of violating Sabbath law.

VERSE 6

"I tell you that something greater than the temple is here."

If the Sabbath rules could be set aside for temple service, then it makes sense that Sabbath rules could be set aside in the presence of **something greater than the temple**. The use of *something* probably referred to the nature of Jesus's service and the Person of Jesus as the One bringing in God's kingdom. Again Jesus was using a lesser-to-greater argument. If priests were exempt from obeying Sabbath rules because of temple service, then the disciples who serve the One **greater than the temple** were guiltless as well. If the Pharisees could have seen Jesus for who He is, they would have seen the error of their ways.

VERSE 7

"If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent."

The type of Greek conditional clause that Jesus used here is called a contrary-to-fact condition. If the Pharisees had understood Scripture

(but they did not), they would not have **condemned the innocent** (but they did).

This is the second time Jesus quoted the first half of Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." The first time was in connection with Jesus's call to those who were aware of their need of healing. Sick people need a doctor, not the healthy ("For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners," Matt. 9:13). Jesus had challenged the Pharisees to "go and learn" what Hosea 6:6 meant. In the current context, Jesus concluded that the Pharisees did not understand the meaning of Hosea 6:6.

Hosea 6:6 was not eliminating sacrifice but rather understood that mercy should be much more characteristic of the children of God than keeping external rituals. Those who practice mercy are much less likely to rush to judgement, condemning those who, like the disciples, are *innocent*. The Greek word for *mercy* translates a Hebrew word that is sometimes translated "steadfast love" (Hos. 6:6, ESV). The Pharisees, like Hosea's audience, needed to hear and embrace God's heart for mercy.

VERSE 8

"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

The word **for** introduces the reason Jesus could make the statement He made in the previous verse. The phrase **the Son of Man** was Jesus's favorite self-designation. Although the phrase could refer to any human, here it refers to the "one like a son of man" who "was given dominion and glory and a kingdom . . . His dominion is an everlasting dominion" (Dan. 7:13-14). God is the absolute **Lord of the Sabbath**. Here that authority has been given to Jesus, who has authority over *the Sabbath*. In Mark's parallel passage, Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). God's purpose in creating human beings was not to have someone keep the Sabbath. Rather, God's creation needed a Sabbath rest on which people also could honoring God through doing good.



Explore Further

Read the article "Bread of the Presence" on pages 235–236 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How did Jesus use the symbolism of unleavened bread in the last supper with His disciples?

Compassionate Response (Matt. 12:9-14)

Jesus entered the synagogue where He encountered a man with a shriveled hand. He authenticated His claim to be Lord of the Sabbath by restoring the man's hand. Because Jesus threatened the traditions of the Pharisees, they began to plot how to kill Him.

VERSE 9

Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue.

The phrase **Moving on from there** provides a transition from the grain fields to the synagogue. Luke indicated that the two events occurred on two separate Sabbaths ("On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue," Luke 6:6). The two events are connected in that they both involve Sabbath observance. The synagogue is identified as **their synagogue**. Matthew frequently referred to Jewish synagogues by that title (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 13:54). The pronoun *their* could be a reference to the Pharisees (the synagogue of the Pharisees) or the local people (the people's synagogue). Some Bible teachers have suggested that the use of *their synagogue* is an indication of the conflict brewing between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Whichever meaning Matthew intended, the phrase indicates a separation between Jesus and the synagogue. Jesus **entered** the synagogue for the purpose of worshiping on the Sabbath.

VERSE 10

There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

On entering the synagogue, Jesus immediately noticed **a man who had a shriveled hand**. The Greek word translated *shriveled* means "to be withered and therefore immobile because of a disease." Luke reported that the man's right hand was shriveled (Luke 6:6). There is no indication as to how long the man's hand had been shriveled, or why the man was in the synagogue on that particular Sabbath. The withered hand probably made it difficult for the man to earn a living

Mark and Luke pointed out that the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7). Eventually, the Pharisees took the initiative in baiting Jesus into breaking what they assumed was a legitimate Sabbath rule: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" The rabbinic Sabbath rules stated that healing could happen on the Sabbath only if the life of

the person was in peril. Surprisingly, the Pharisees were fairly flexible with the rule in that if there was a doubt concerning whether the person's life were in danger, the healing superseded the law. But if the person could safely wait until Sabbath was over, then the person needed to wait. The man's life definitely was not in jeopardy. So if Jesus was contemplating healing the man on the Sabbath, according to the Jewish leaders, Jesus would be considering an action that was against the law.

VERSES 11-12

He replied to them, "Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath."

Jesus answered the Pharisees' question with a question of His own. The phrase **Who among you** assumes that any of those present would agree with Jesus's assessment of the situation, that is, the **sheep** should be rescued. Generally, Jews treated their animals with care. The Jewish oral law permitted the owner to rescue his sheep from a pit on the Sabbath.

Jesus continued His argument by pointing out the relative worth of a human being over a sheep. "A person is worth far more than a sheep" ("How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!" NIV). What was true of the worth of an animal was even more true of the worth of α person. Therefore, He concluded that "it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath." Not only was it a good thing to do good on the Sabbath, it was $l\alpha wful$. The Lord of the Sabbath had deemed it so (v. 8). Jesus's proclamation was applicable to every Sabbath, not just to the situation that Jesus was currently involved in.

VERSE 13

Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other.

Jesus's argument should have been acceptable to the Pharisees, but they were more interested in trapping Jesus in a breach of Sabbath law so that they could accuse Him in court. Mark added that Jesus looked around at the Pharisees "with anger" because "he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). The Pharisees were not willing to look at this man through Jesus's eyes of compassion. For them, the man was someone to be used to accomplish their goal of having Jesus discredited.

Jesus did not touch the man in any way. He simply spoke to the man with the shriveled hand: "Stretch out your hand." The man immediately obeyed Jesus by stretching out his hand and the hand was restored. The Greek word translated restored means to restore or reestablish to an earlier state, in this case to be healthy or sound. The shriveled hand was now as good as the other. Matthew gave no indication of the man's reaction to being healed. The primary focus of the story was not the man who was healed, as important as that was, but rather the Pharisees who refused to accept that a good deed had been performed on the Sabbath.

VERSE 14

But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

The Pharisees left the synagogue in order to begin plotting how they might kill Jesus. Since the action took place in the synagogue, one might expect to see a synagogue trial with a punishment somewhere between a warning and a flogging. The severity of the Pharisees' proposed punishment was astounding, especially given the mercy shown by Jesus to the crippled man.

The Greek word translated *kill* can also mean "destroy" (ESV, NASB). It is possible that the Pharisees initially wanted to destroy Jesus's ministry rather than to have Him killed. There can be no doubt that soon the Pharisees would see that the only way to destroy Jesus would be to kill Him. The Jewish leaders were so blinded by legalistic piety that they could not see the wonderful thing Jesus had done for the formerly crippled man. In healing people, Jesus challenged the Pharisees' ritualistic rules.



Explore Further

Do you know any people who like the Pharisees reject and even hate Jesus? Why do you think they do so? Pray that God would do a work in their hearts and that they would see how much Jesus loves them.

Robert H. Mounce, Matthew, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 112.
 Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 300.

Judgment Coming

FAITH IN JESUS DETERMINES OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.

The first time I was asked to serve as a pastor was of a small, rural church. I soon learned that everyone in the church, including the pastor, was expected to have a garden. My father, who was also a pastor, had gardens when I was a child. The gardening gene apparently skipped a generation. However, I gave it a try.

A retired deacon used his cub tractor to break up the ground and plow the rows for me. My first crop was to be butter beans. I meticulously planted the seed I had bought at the local feed and seed store, making sure the depth of the seed and the space between seeds was what my deacon had taught me. When I finished, I had nice, straight rows with only brown dirt to show for my work.

I watched the rows every day, to no avail. I wasn't even growing weeds. Finally one day, I convinced myself that something had gone wrong. Perhaps I had gotten bad seed. Maybe I had planted the seeds too deep. I decided to dig up a few seeds and assess the situation. When I dug up my first seed, I was surprised to see that the seed had begun to swell and it had roots and stems beginning to develop at the top and bottom of the seed. The seed was doing what seeds are supposed to do. I was just being impatient.

In today's session we will examine Jesus's parable of the seeds and the weeds. The good seed and the bad seed had been sown together. The problem became apparent when the seeds began to mature. The landowner counseled patience in dealing with weeds sown by the enemy. Sometimes we see problems that we feel must be dealt with immediately. However, like the servants in the parable, we may need to exhibit patience, understanding that the Father is in control and He will act at the proper time.





Matthew 13:1-58

Matthew 13 begins with Jesus leaving the house and teaching by the sea, telling the crowds "many things in parables" (13:3). The classic definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Sometimes the details of the parable are significant, and sometimes the details add color to the parable by providing details that flesh out the story. Matthew presented seven parables in the chapter. The last six parables all begin with the phrase "The kingdom of heaven is like" or similar language. The first parable, the parable of the soils and the sower (vv. 3-9), does not have such an introduction. It is tempting to refer to all seven parables as parables of the kingdom, though it is probably better to follow Jesus's lead in restricting the kingdom parables to the last six.

When Jesus had told the parable of the soils and the sower, His disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the crowd in parables (v. 10). The conclusion of Jesus's answer was a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. This quotation is Isaiah's commission of what to preach to the nation. The message was one of hard hearts, ears that are hard of hearing, and eyes that are shut. Jesus's disciples, by contrast, were blessed because their eyes saw and their ears heard (vv. 16-17). Jesus next explained the meaning of the parable of the soils and sower to His disciples (vv. 18-23).

The parable of the wheat and the weeds is the second parable (vv. 24-30). It is followed by the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32) and the parable of the leaven (v. 33). Both of these parables demonstrate the small beginning of the kingdom, followed by the remarkable growth the kingdom will experience. Matthew noted that Jesus taught in parables so that Psalm 78:2 might be fulfilled (Matt. 13:34-35). Jesus explained the parable of the wheat and weeds to His disciples (vv. 36-43).

The parables of the hidden treasure (v. 44) and the priceless pearl (vv. 45-46) both demonstrate the unmatched value of the kingdom. The parable of the net (vv. 47-50) describes the end of the age.

Jesus queried His disciples about their understanding of His teaching (vv. 51-52). They answered in the positive. Jesus then said a teacher of the law (or scribe) who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like a person who, from his treasure, brings out old and new treasures. What exactly Jesus meant by this saying is debated. Jesus, having finished those parables, left there (v. 53) and returned to His former hometown of Nazareth where in spite of His teachings and miracles the people did not believe in Him (vv. 54-58).

EXPLORE THE TEXT





Wheat or Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30)

Jesus told a parable about wheat and weeds growing together in a field. Concerned, the landowner's servants questioned if they should pull up the weeds. They were told not to pull the weeds for fear of uprooting the wheat also. Only at harvest time could the two be distinguished and separated.

VERSE 24

He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field."

The teaching topic may have been the question concerning why **the kingdom** had not arrived. Why wasn't the kingdom more positively received? Rather, the rising hostility among the Pharisees pointed in another direction. **Them** probably refers to all of the people who were assembled to hear Jesus's teaching and not just to Jesus's disciples.

This parable is the second of seven parables in chapter 13 and appears only in Matthew's Gospel. It is the first of six parables connected with the kingdom of heaven (13:24,31,33,44,45,47). Each of these six parables is connected to the kingdom of heaven by the phrase **The kingdom of heaven may be compared to** ("The kingdom of heaven is like," NIV) or similar language. What happens in *the kingdom of heaven* is like what happens when a farmer plants **good seed in his field.** The *seed* is initially described simply as *good seed*. In the following verse the seed is identified as "wheat." Galilee was well-known for its wheat, and wheat was a crucial staple in the Roman Empire. Whereas the parable of the sower and the soils may have been describing a single worker, maybe a peasant farmer, this parable envisions a wealthy landowner with many servants who care for the landowner's fields.

VERSE 25

"But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left."

The phrase **while people were sleeping** ("while his men were sleeping," ESV) does not indicate that the workers were guilty of negligence. While the landowner and his men worked in the day and slept at night,

his enemy worked under the cover of night because his deeds were evil. *His enemy* may have been a rival farmer, or someone who had a grudge against the landowner. The act of sowing **weeds** among wheat happened often enough that it was illegal in the Roman Empire. The Greek word translated *weeds* could refer to several weeds, though it is generally assumed that the weed in question was called "darnel." This weed was poisonous and carried a fungus that could attack wheat. Early in its maturation it is difficult to tell the difference between darnel and wheat.

VERSE 26

"When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared."

Nothing that the enemy had done was obvious until **the plants** began to grow. When the ears of wheat began to develop and produce a crop, **the weeds** began to grow as well. As they both grew, it became obvious that the field had been sown twice, once with wheat and a second time with weeds. The servants of the landowner could easily recognize the weeds that were scattered across the field.

VERSE 27

"The landowner's servants came to him and said, 'Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?"

The landowner's servants would have recognized the problem first, since they spent more time in the fields than their master did. Their initial response was to approach the landowner with the problem. Their greeting showed respect ("Master," CSB, ESV; "Sir," NIV, NASB). The form of their question "Didn't you sow good seed in your field?" in Greek indicates that the servants expected a positive answer: The servants' question probably should be understood as "cause good seed to be sown." The servants likely would have done the actual sowing and would have had firsthand knowledge of the type of seed that was sown. That begs the question, if only good seed was sown, and it was, "where then did the weeds come from?"

VERSE 28

"'An enemy did this,' he told them. 'So, do you want us to go and pull them up?' the servants asked him."

The landowner answered that **an enemy** had sown the weeds in his field. The reaction of the servants was to get rid of the offensive weeds immediately. They wanted to pull them up and destroy them.

VERSES 29-30

"'No,' he said. 'When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I'll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them, but collect the wheat in my barn."

The landowner rejected the servants' solution with a firm "No." Because the weeds had been sown among the wheat, the root systems from the two plants had intermingled. The roots of darnel are deeper and stronger than the roots of wheat. Therefore, pulling out the weeds would uproot the wheat as well.

The landowner's solution was to allow the two plants to grow together until the harvest. The two would then be separated at the harvest when little damage would be done to the wheat. At the harvest the reapers would tie the weeds in bundles to burn them. While the stalks that were bundled were often used for animal food, because of the lack of wood the bundles were also used as fuel for fire. Once the weeds were removed, the reapers could collect the wheat in [the landowner's] barn.



Explore Further

Read the article "Parables" on pages 1215–1218 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How does recognizing the nature of parables help in understanding Jesus's point in the parable of the wheat and weeds?

Jesus or the Devil (Matt. 13:36-39)

Jesus explained to His disciples the meaning of the wheat and the weeds, identifying the major characters of the parable. He noted that the wheat represents believers while the weeds represent unbelievers.

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

Matthew next recorded two brief parables with basically the same message. Both parables emphasize the small beginnings of the kingdom of heaven, followed by remarkable growth. The mustard seed and the lump of leaven appear insignificant because of their size, but the growth of both the mustard seed and the lump of leaven are astonishing (vv. 31-33).

Jesus was still addressing His parables to the crowds who were following Him. Before moving on to the next parable, Matthew made a brief comment about the role of parables in Jesus's teaching. Jesus's extensive use of parables was directed toward the crowds (vv. 2-3,34). By addressing His parables to the crowds, Jesus was fulfilling prophesy found in Psalm 78:2.

Matthew noted that Jesus **left the crowds and went into the house**. The *house* probably refers to the house mentioned at the beginning of the chapter (v. 1). In this private setting **His disciples** requested that Jesus **"explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."** The parables themselves were intended for everyone; however, the meaning of the parables was for Jesus's disciples alone: "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them" (v. 11).

VERSE 37

He replied, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;"

The explanation of the parable began with the identification of the elements in the parable. But not every element in the parable is identified and given an interpretation. For example, the sleeping (v. 25), the production of the grain (v. 26), and the servants (v. 27) appear to be elements that round out the parable, while contributing nothing to the meaning of the parable itself.

Jesus first identified the farmer who sowed the good seed as **the Son of Man**. This title was Jesus's favorite designation for Himself (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8). As noted earlier, this title has its source in the "one like a son of man" given an everlasting kingdom and dominion by the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13-14.

"the field is the world; and the good seed — these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one,"

The field represents **the world**. The word *world* can have several different meanings, though here it refers to the total population of the earth. Jesus's mission is as broad and expansive as the world itself. God is the force behind the spread of the kingdom. He sows His seed widely.

One might think that the **good seed** would represent words about the gospel that tell about the kingdom. However, the good seed represents the children of the kingdom and the weeds represent the children of the evil one. The children of the kingdom are those who respond positively to the message of *the kingdom* (salvation through Jesus Christ) and, thus, belong to the kingdom. The children of the evil one are those who respond negatively to the message of the kingdom and, thus, belong to the evil one. Just as the wheat and weeds were allowed to grow together until the harvest, so the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one are allowed to grow (live) together to avoid uprooting the children of the kingdom. No one who lives in this world, that is the entire population of the world, can avoid the conflict between good and evil; there is no middle ground from which one can avoid making a choice between the kingdom of heaven and the evil one. Those who belong to the kingdom and those who belong to the evil one exist side-by-side in the world. They will continue to grow together until the final judgment.

VERSE 39

"and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels."

The last three elements found in this parable are **the enemy** who is **the devil**, **the harvest** which is **the end of the age**, and **the harvesters** who are **angels**. The same Greek word translated *harvesters* here is translated "reapers" in verse 30. The two terms—*the evil one* (v. 38) and *the devil*—are used interchangeably in Matthew. *The end of the age* refers to the final judgment when the weeds and wheat will be separated. *Angels* are frequently associated with the final judgment. "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father" (16:27). "He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (24:31). "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,

then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (25:31-32). The Son's angels wait patiently for the Son's command for the harvest to begin.



Explore Further

Read the article "Kingdom of God" on pages 964–966 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. What are the characteristics of the kingdom of God? How is the kingdom of God different from the church?

Heaven or Hell (Matt. 13:40-43)

Jesus explained that at the end of the age He will send His angels to separate believers from unbelievers. Those who have rejected Jesus will enter eternal punishment. Genuine believers will enter the Father's eternal kingdom.

VERSE 40

"Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age."

Jesus now began to address the main point of His parable. The two words **just as** emphasize the nature of the comparison. The weeds being **gathered and burned in the fire** represent what will occur **at the end of the age**. Those who chose the evil one rather than the Son of Man will experience the fiery judgment. "Fiery judgment will be the lot of those who have chosen to follow 'the evil one,' and though they seem to flourish now, at 'the end of the age' the truth will win out."

VERSE 41

"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness."

Usually the **kingdom** is attributed to the Father (the kingdom of God), though occasionally Jesus referred to "my kingdom" (Luke 22:30).

Notably Jesus discussed **his kingdom** with Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world... If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). The Son of Man's kingdom, the kingdom of God, signifies the rule of God in the world in the hearts and lives of His people.

Matthew recorded another description of how Jesus would come: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30).

The task of Jesus's **angels** will be to **gather** the children of the evil one, those who are to be removed from His kingdom: **all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness**. The Greek word translated *cause sin* refers to a trap or a snare that was used to capture something alive. It can also refer to that which causes one to stumble or is considered offensive. Here it probably refers to any person or thing "that trap people and lead them into captivity to sin." The Greek from which the phrase *guilty of lawlessness* is translated literally means "to practice lawlessness." These people are "those who have no regard for God's laws and freely transgress them."

VERSES 42-43

"They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen."

When the angels complete the gathering together of those who freely practiced lawlessness, they will throw them into **the blazing furnace**. At the end of the age, the wicked will justly be subject to fiery punishment. Jesus used the phrase **there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** to describe the intensity of the punishment. *Weeping* probably refers to a sadness at being punished. *Gnashing of teeth* could refer to torment, utter despair, or intense pain. Occasionally the phrase "outer darkness" is added to the description of the wicked person's punishment (8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Jesus left no doubt as to the fate of the sinful and lawless ones. Another image often used to describe the fate of the eternally lost is the Greek term *geenna* (Gehenna; translated as "hellfire," 5:22; "hell," 5:29-30; 10:28; 23:15,33).

Once the angels have separated the lawless for punishment, then **the righteous** will be rewarded. The word *righteous* does not imply earned

status before God (Eph. 2:8-10). Rather, these are children of the kingdom, redeemed by the Son. Their reward will be that they will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. The Greek word translated shine occurs only here in the Greek New Testament. Paul used similar language in describing the Philippian believers: they were "blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world" (Phil. 2:15). Similar language is also found in Daniel: "Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life and some to disgrace and eternal contempt. Those who have insight will shine like the bright expanse of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12:2-3).

The contrast between the lawless and the righteous is stark. The light for those who practice lawlessness is the light from **the blazing furnace**. Their source of light is also their source of punishment. Those who are righteous *shine like the sun*; they reflect the glory of God and will live in His presence for eternity.

The section ends with a call for the people to consider carefully the teaching that they have heard: "Let anyone who has ears listen." The emphasis on listening highlights the importance of heeding Jesus's teaching. It is obvious that those who ignore Jesus's warning do so at their own peril. This parable makes clear that there will be a judgment. Those who heed and act on the words of the Messiah (who by faith in Jesus are made right with God through Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross) will spend eternity in the Father and Son's kingdom. Those who choose to live in sin and ignore both God's call to repentance and His offer of salvation in Jesus will be separated from the Father forever.



Explore Further

What is the significance of the phrase "Let anyone who has ears listen" at the end of this section? What should we be listening for? How should we respond to Jesus's call to listen?

^{1.} Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 534.

Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 357, footnote 99.

^{3.} Osborne, Matthew, 534.

The Sermon on the Mount

BY JOSEPH R. CATHEY

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) is one of the best-known and yet most complex sermons that Jesus preached to His followers. The sermon has received wholehearted praise—even from non-Christians such as Mahatma Gandhi in his struggles with the British Empire and civil disobedience. Interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount are legion in their existence. "One recent survey has itemized thirty-six different interpretations" of what Jesus actually meant when He preached this sermon. While exploring in depth the roots and contextual meanings of the Sermon on the Mount would be fascinating, space will not permit such an undertaking.

Setting

Let us first examine the location and terrain where Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount. Scholars believe the crowd gathered to hear Jesus's sermon on a hillside overlooking the upper northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee.³ If this location is correct, then Jesus preached this sermon not far from Mary Magdalene's home and directly across from the scene of the Gadarene demoniac and the ensuing mass swine drowning. Evidence dating to the fourth century AD indicates that some Christians believed this particular place was indeed the location for the sermon.⁴

The setting would have afforded Jesus both a height to look out over the upper end of the Sea of Galilee as well as a view southwards toward the sloping landscape. The location has a unique amphitheater-type quality. That is, the natural lay of the land forms a distinctive bowl or semi-oval shape just below the crest of the mount. This terrain would have naturally amplified Jesus's voice as He addressed the masses. Picture Jesus sitting just below the crest of the rising hill, His voice echoing into and across the natural amphitheater. This was the setting for one of history's most thought-provoking sermons.

Structure

What many recognize when examining the Sermon on the Mount is the symmetry of a carefully constructed sermon containing subjects that would have been familiar to most Jews of the first century AD. A close examination of the text reveals at least three major sections that give meaning to the instructive nature of the sermon.

The first major section begins with the Beatitudes and receives further illustration by the "salt and light" metaphor (5:1-16). "Beatitudes" is simply Latin for "blessings." Matthew shows how Jesus clearly linked "blessings" with those whose behavior was consistent with a "better" or "deeper" righteousness that He was demanding. Some have argued that the Beatitudes are antitheses of the Law. A close reading of the text, however, shows these not as antithetical but rather fulfilling of Mosaic Law. A surface reading of the Beatitudes could lead one to conclude Jesus was urging His believers to be separate from the world. This ascetic lifestyle was far from what Jesus was advocating, a fact made clear by His salt and light metaphors.

Salt was abundant in the first century AD and had a variety of beneficial uses. Primarily in this context salt was for seasoning food—being mixed in with that which had no or little flavor or being used as a preservative. Clearly Jesus used the metaphor of salt to illustrate the need for His followers to use their redeemed lives to stem the tide of moral decay of their society.

Light, in the biblical text, is one of the more complex metaphors to define. In this case, however, Jesus clearly set the context for His light metaphor. John records Jesus's proclamation, "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). As Christ is the light of the world so His disciples should reflect His function and foci in their lives in order to overcome moral decay. So in these two metaphors, we do not see diverse meanings but rather complementary ideas that spur Christ's disciples to be His agents of change in the world.

The second major section addresses the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law (Matt. 5:17–6:4). Introducing this section, Jesus stated clearly that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but rather to fulfill them (v. 17). In order to illustrate His fulfillment of the Law, Jesus cited issues such as murder, adultery, divorce, lex talionis (the law of retaliation), love for enemies, and giving to the needy—all elements of the Mosaic Law. "Even more fundamental to the six illustrations is Jesus' role as sovereign interpreter of the law, as he himself fulfills it (v. 17). He alone, therefore, has the authority to declare how each part of the law will apply to his followers." He was (and is) the fulfillment of the Law of Moses;

with a booming voice echoing down to the Sea of Galilee Jesus declared the Law fulfilled in Him. As we read the portion of the text that deals with the Law, we are convicted that in order to live up to Jesus's expectations we must be led by the Spirit lest failure seize us as impotent believers.

The third major section (Matt. 6:5–7:27) identifies the righteous acts that Christ's followers are called to do both inwardly and outwardly. This section explains "who" we are as Christians. Teaching on praying persistently (complete with the Model Prayer, 6:9-15), fasting, laying up treasures in heaven, having security in Christ, judging others, understanding the narrow gate to eternal life, bearing spiritual fruit, and recognizing the wise and foolish builders all help us understand who we are in Christ. Jesus used these actions to unite "who" and "what" we are in Him. Rather than contradictory, they are complementary actions of a Christian who is salt and light, who is fulfilling the Mosaic Law (via the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, see Gal. 5:16-23).

One of the most moving and yet clarifying parts in this section is the Model Prayer (also known as the Lord's Prayer). Matthew includes the prayer as part of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Luke, however, describes the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus responded by offering an abbreviated version of the same prayer (Luke 11:1-4). The two accounts show that Jesus, more than once, instructed His followers with this eloquent prayer. In this Model Prayer is the reflection again of being a disciple, salt and light, and of living the Christian life through the power of God.

Significance

At the high-water mark of Jesus's early ministry, He drew a large group of people and began to teach them—near the crest of the mountain. This would change history forever. His voice amplified—carried by the terrain—would carry to them words that would radically challenge their theology and lives. The evidence? "When Jesus had finished...the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes" (Matt. 7:28b-29). Further, His words in this sermon still amaze and challenge us today.

This is an edited version of the article that originally appeared in the Fall 2012 issue of $Biblical\ Illustrator$.

^{1.} Sharon Kay Dobbins, "The Principles of Equity and the Sermon on the Mount as Influence in Gandhi's Truth Force," *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1988): 131–136.

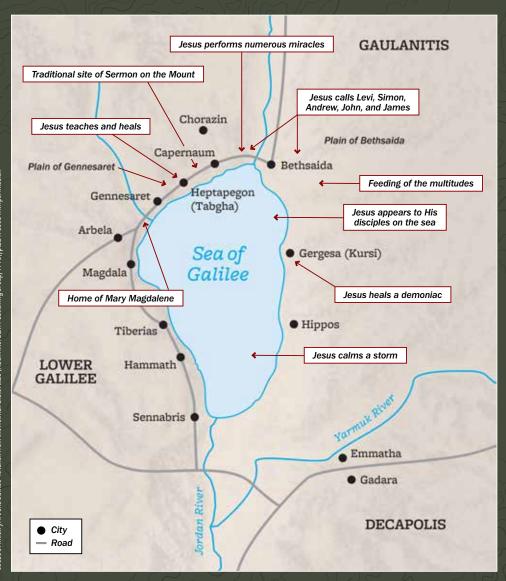
^{2.} See Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 94-95.

See Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 354.
 See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700 (New York: Oxford, 1998), 279-80.

^{5.} Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12)," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 122, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 270.

^{6.} Blomberg, Matthew, 106.

Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee



MATTHEW 1-13

When high school and college students are interested in a certain career path, they often shadow an expert in that field for a day or two. It gives them a better feel for the job's requirements and a clearer understanding of what will be expected. They learn what to do by watching the example of one who's walked that path already. For Christ followers, we have no greater example than what we see in the life of Jesus. By listening to His words and watching His actions, we learn the do's and don'ts of living out our faith. As you study Matthew 1–13, you'll get a firsthand account of what it's like to walk with Jesus each day—and learn what it means to become a citizen of God's kingdom.

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