

## Gospel of Matthew Overview

Matthew is the first of the four gospels found in the New Testament of the Bible. Traditionally it was thought that Matthew was the earliest written story of Jesus' life and that the gospel of Mark was a kind of abridged version of Matthew. Scholars today think that is exactly backwards. They believe that Mark was the earliest of the gospels to be written (probably around 70 CE) and that Matthew and Luke both used Mark's gospel as the template for their own works. Matthew and Luke also share material that is not found in Mark, which scholars call the "Q" source. So, much of what is written in Matthew is also in Mark and Luke.

Though Matthew the disciple who had been a tax collector has long been credited as the author, this seems unlikely as most scholars believe that this gospel was written around the year 90CE, long after Matthew would have died. That Matthew is possibly the author of the "Q" source, which scholars surmise was a collection of Jesus' sayings, seems much more likely.



Based on the perspectives, concerns, and literary style of the book itself, it is likely that the gospel of Matthew was written by a well-educated Jewish Christian living in a Roman city away from Judea (possibly Antioch) well after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple during the Jewish War.

Matthew's gospel is the only one which has Jesus saying that he intends to build a "church" (16:17-19 & 18:15-20). St Peter also figures more prominently in Matthew than in any of the other gospels, and the disciples in Matthew generally come across as more capable. In a similar way, the Jerusalem authorities, as depicted by Matthew, seem more villainous. Matthew's gospel also presents more of Jesus' teachings than any of the others.

## Matthew

### Chapter 1

V1-17 Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus. Matthew's version is different than the one we saw in Luke. According to Matthew, Jesus is descended of David, but through the kings of Israel and Judea. In Luke, Jesus' genealogy was through a son of David who was not king.

Jesus' ancestors are broken down into three groups of 14. Fourteen generations from the Patriarchs to the kingdom, fourteen from the kingdom to exile, and fourteen from the exile to Jesus. One curious aspect of the genealogy is the inclusion of four women (plus Mary), Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah). All four of these women were Gentiles.

v18 Matthew's version of the birth of Jesus leaves out most of what we understand of the Christmas story (that's all in Luke) but it does clearly claim that Jesus' inception was extraordinary.

Given that Mary is pregnant through the Holy Spirit, it is clear that Jesus is not descended from David in the way that we understand genetic descent. Ancient ideas of belonging to a "house" don't take into account such concerns.

v19 Joseph was indeed righteous to seek to merely dismiss her since the Law would allow the stoning of Mary (Deut 22:13-21)

v20-23 An angel (not named) comes to Joseph in a dream and tells him of God's plan for Mary's child.

v21 Jesus is a Greek version of Yeshua, Jesus name in Hebrew. It is the same name as Joshua who led Israel into the promised land.

v23 This is a quote from the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint); Isa 7:14. The Greek uses "virgin" but the original Hebrew said, "young woman."

This passage is also the first of many verses in Matthew that use this same formula ("All of this took place..."). Matthew is especially concerned with connecting Jesus' story with the fulfillment of the Prophets pronouncements.

v24-25 Joseph does what the Angel told him to do.

## Matthew Chapter 2

v1 The “wise men” aren’t numbered – we get three from the number of gifts. Many imagine that these visitors were astrologers of some sort from Persia; the text offers little evidence of any of that beyond the Greek word “magi.” Magi referred to those with access to esoteric knowledge or abilities.

v2 The gospels also subtly undermine the claims of the Roman Empire and this is an example of that. The wise men have come to see the “real” king of Judea, not the Roman appointed puppet ruler.

This is Herod the Great (73BC – 4BC)

Herod’s father, Antipater was high-ranking official in the Roman government. His friendship with Julius Caesar allowed him to get his son, Herod, appointed provincial governor of Galilee in 47BC. He was successful in quelling a bandit problem, but his brutal methods were condemned by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and he was accused and faced trial for murder (he was acquitted).

In 41 BC, Herod was named a tetrarch by Mark Antony under the ruler of Judea. After the ruler was overthrown by his brother with the aid of a Parthian army, Herod was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate and given the task of reconquering Judea for Rome.

v3 Herod’s fear will have significant consequences.

v4-6 (again the formula about the fulfilling of the prophets) this quote is a mash up of Mic 5.2 & 2 Sam 5.2

Mic 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

2Sa 5:2 For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you [David] who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel."

Matthew and Luke both stress that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, even though it was well known that he was from Nazareth. Mark and John do not say where he was born, both begin their stories with Jesus coming to John the Baptist.

v7-8 Herod sets up the wise men to give him the information he needs to undo this “king” whose existence threatens his own

v9-12 The wise men make their way to Bethlehem and to the house with Mary. Note they don't visit her in a manger. In Matthew, the Holy Family aren't visiting Bethlehem, they seem to live there permanently.

Frankincense is an incense material used in worship and myrrh is a perfume used in anointing rites.

v13-15 Angelic intervention again drives Joseph's actions and the family flees to Egypt for safety. Alexandria had one of the largest populations of diaspora Jews in the ancient world.

v15 this prophetic quote is from Hosea 11.1

Hos 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

v16-18 The massacre of the infants is a horrific incident. There is no mention of this atrocity in other historical sources, though Herod's murderous tyranny is well recounted from other episodes.

Jer 31:15 Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

in Jeremiah, this passage is in reference to the Assyrian conquest of the Northern kingdom of Israel.

v19-23 Matthew offers an explanation of how Jesus ended up in Nazareth.

Archelaus was the Roman appointed ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea from death of his father (Herod the Great to about 6CE). Archelaus was removed by Roman Emperor Augustus when Judaea province was formed under direct Roman rule, at the time of the Census of Quirinius. He was the son of Herod the Great and was the brother of Herod Antipas (who executed John), and the half-brother of Herod II (from the book of Acts). Archelaus (a name meaning "leading the people").

“He will be called a Nazorean”

-This prophetic “quote” is not part of the prophetic literature

## Matthew Chapter 3

Chapter 3 (and 4) is, more or less, an expanded version of the first chapter of Mark. It tells the same sequence of actions, in many places, using the exact same words, while adding a little more detail and dialog.

v1 In Matthew (Mark and John too) there is no explicit connection between Jesus and John (as in Luke). Instead, John merely appears in the “wilderness” fully formed.

No one knows for sure where John did his baptizing, but scholars believe it was near to where the Jordan River enters into the Dead Sea, in the vicinity of Jericho.

v2 Only Matthew has John saying this exact phrase, which is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching.

v3 This quote is from Isaiah 40:3.

In the Dead Sea scrolls, this verse is used to justify the community’s choice to live apart in the wilderness in preparation for God’s coming judgment. The place where they lived (Qumran) is also in the “wilderness” near where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea; only about 5 miles from the place traditionally thought to be where John baptized Jesus

v4 The description of John is meant to invoke the memory of Elijah, who was described similarly.

*He said to them, “What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?” They answered him, “A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.” He said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.” 2Kings 1:7-8*

It is worth noting that according to 1Kings, Elijah did not die but was taken into heaven in a chariot of fire on the banks of Jordan, near Jericho - the same place where John appeared.

*As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.*

2Kings 2:11-13

And... According to Malachi, God intended to send Elijah back to Israel in preparation for the coming Day of the Lord.

*Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.*

Malachi 4:5

v5-6 So the people, believing the prophetic and ancient texts were coming to life would naturally have streamed out to see John (Elijah) foretelling the coming end and seek relief from that.

John's baptism, in essence, allows the people to re-enter the Holy Land (as their ancestors had done) in order to mark a new start and to prepare them for the leadership of the new Joshua (Jesus).

v7-11 Here Matthew expands on Mark's bare-bones story and tells us a little of how the religious leaders of the day reacted to Elijah's seeming return.

The Pharisees were people who sought to expand adherence of the Law into every act of daily life. In the aftermath of the Jewish War (70-73CE) the Pharisees, along with the Christians were only remaining sects of ancient Judaism. Modern Judaism is the inheritor of the Pharisaic tradition. In late first century and early second, each of these groups strenuously sought to define how God's people should respond to that disaster and to answer the question of 'how to be God's people without the Temple.' Matthew, remember, was a Jewish Christian and of all the Gospel authors, he especially highlights Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees to show that Jesus' way was the better choice.

Sadducees were a sect of Judaism principally made up the aristocrats and Temple priests. Their highest goal was preserving their traditional rights and place in society within Roman occupation. They saw following God as faithfully fulfilling the Laws about Temple worship and personal righteousness.

v7-9 John's words echo the prophetic tradition in reminding his hearers that following God is about how we honor our relationships and care for each other and not about strict adherence to rituals or ethnic identity.

v11-12 John warns of a time of, coming soon, when important choices with significant consequences will need to be made.

v13-15 Jesus life is given as an example for us and so his baptism, like his death, is a means of showing us how our lives should be lived. Also, as in his death, Jesus goes before us to remove our doubts and fears and to encourage us in following his way

16-17 God the Father confirms Jesus mission and identity so that the baptism is also a prophetic act

## Matthew Chapter 4

v4-11 Matthew and Luke offer almost identical recounting of Jesus' temptations after his baptism, greatly expanding on Mark's simple single sentence; *"He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him"* (Mark 1:13). John's gospel doesn't mention a temptation at all and, in fact, never even says that John baptizes Jesus.

The temptations are the temptation to turn stone into bread, to leap off the pinnacle of the Temple to his death trusting in God to save him, and to be the greatest ruler in all the world.

What is most telling is that, in fact, Jesus actually does all of these things eventually, (He makes food from practically nothing to feed thousands, He goes to the cross to die, and He is acclaimed Lord and Judge of all in His resurrection). But Jesus awaits the appropriate moment in accordance with God's will rather than pushing to exercise his own will in accordance with Satan's tempting.

v12 The actions of Jesus so far have all happened in Judea, near to Jerusalem but in the wake of John's arrest, Jesus returns to Galilee (where there are different rulers) and relative safety.

v13-16 Again Matthew uses the formula to show Jesus enacting the prophets in his choice to move to the more centrally located (and larger) Capernaum rather than his own hometown of Nazareth. Drawing on Luke and John, it is also possible that Jesus had already met Peter, Andrew, James, and John in Judea.

v17 Jesus makes his central teaching known, and the phrasing also signals a change in the story as Jesus enters his most public period of ministry.

v18-22 Jesus calls the first four disciples, two pairs of brothers.

Luke's gospel suggests that they all four already knew Jesus from Synagogue and that the four brothers were partners in the fishing business. I always feel kind of bad for poor Zebedee left in the boat alone to mend the nets.

v23-25 Jesus' primary activities were

- Teaching
- Proclaiming
- Healing

Jesus followers are not all "Jewish" people but also those from Decapolis (a group of ten Greek-speaking cities east and southeast of Galilee and those from "beyond the Jordan.")

## Matthew Chapter 5

Chapters 5-7, collectively, are known as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew draws on the tradition of Moses, who ascended a mountain to bring the Law back to the people, and Jesus who ascends a mountain so that he might deliver his teaching to the people. It was also the tradition that rabbis taught while sitting down.

This contrasts with the story told by Luke who says that these teachings were delivered from a “flat place” and in Luke is known as the Sermon on the Plain. Wherever Jesus was, these teaching are remarkably constant and communicate a different social and economic order while also calling forth an invitation to commit oneself to making Jesus (i.e., God’s) vision for human life real.

v1-11 Jesus offer nine “groups” who are blessed. None of these groups jibe with the traditional understanding of what blessedness means. Jesus doesn’t describe those who are affluent or influential or experiencing good fortune; rather he describes life situations that could best be described as distress or suffering.

Why might these be blessed?

How might we think of our own ministry to those in distress whom Jesus suggests may be more “blessed” than we are?

v13-16 Here Jesus offers three short vignettes, rooted in daily experience of his listeners that highlight the importance of ethical behavior as opposed to lawful observance.

Note, salt can’t really lose its saltiness, sodium chloride is remarkably stable, and no natural reactions can break it down. So, Jesus here could be making a rhetorical flourish here OR it is possible that some salts used in Jesus’ time were highly impure and so as water dissolved the salts within an impure mix, one would be left with a compound that had “lost its saltiness.”

v17-20 Jesus says that he has not come to undermine or overturn the Law. As we know, Jesus draws heavily upon the prophetic tradition and that tradition had long sought to redirect human relationship to the Law and to reinterpret the Law in ways counter to its everyday use in ancient Israel.

In other words, the Law is meant as a guide and not as club; it describes a way of life consonant with God’s desire and human thriving but is too often used as a cudgel to oppress and cajole subjugation.

v21-48 Through the rest of this chapter Jesus seeks to reinterpret the Law concerning anger, adultery, divorce, swearing oaths, retaliation, and enemies. As in Jesus’



summary of the Law (Love God, Love your neighbor) Jesus elevates the importance of integrity in our relationships to one another, to our communities, and to God. It is not so much the acts themselves, but the ways in which our actions erode or devalue those relationships that they are harmful to us and so contrary to God's will.

### Anger

v22 In the original Greek the term translated as "hell" is *Gehenna*. Gehenna was a valley near Jerusalem that in pre-Israelite days was the site of human sacrifices (esp. child sacrifices) [2CHR 28:3 & JER 7:30-34 , 19:1-15] and in Jesus' day was the site of Jerusalem's garbage heap, which was apparently usually burning and so often was used as a metaphor for a place of suffering and extreme unpleasantness.

v22-24 It isn't clear what "council" Jesus might be referring to, though it has been interpreted by many as a means by which comity and fellowship can be maintained within communities.

v26 Prisoners were expected to support themselves while imprisoned

### Adultery

v27-30 Jesus' admonition against adultery has an exclusively male perspective (female "unchastity" is covered under divorce in vv 31-32)

v29-30 Jesus isn't likely to be actually calling for self-mutilation but is using hyperbole to underline the level of importance he attaches to this teaching.

### Divorce

v31 This verse summarizes the Law around divorce found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and probably reflects the common practice in Jesus' day. It is important for us to remember that divorce in Jesus' day was not like our modern experience. Divorce could only be initiated by the husband and many Talmudic writers speak of husbands taking advantage of an ambiguity in the law to divorce women for trifling reasons such as burning dinner or not being considered attractive anymore. Worse, divorce often meant that women were ostracized from community and forced to make their way by disreputable means that further damaged the bonds of relationship. To our ears, Jesus teaching may seem too harsh, but would have been quite radical in his own day.

### Oaths

v 33 summary of understanding drawn from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy.

Drawing from our study of Judges, it should be easy to see where oaths can lead us into destructive actions

## Retaliation

v38 Again, a summary of scriptural injunctions from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy

Here Jesus is again using the hyperbole of extreme examples to make a point. The issue behind this teaching is the cultural diodes of honor and shame. The actions Jesus points out are things that would bring shame or dishonor to one so subjected. Jesus isn't advocating for us to be naked and penniless. Jesus is advocating for us to ignore the dead-end of honor and shame. Especially in Jesus' day, people's relationships to one another were built on an implicit ledger of honor that tended to obscure meaningful relationships substituting instead a kind of tit-for-tat point keeping. Jesus is saying that those who are secure in their relationship with God should have no use for honor and shame codes.

## Enemies

v43 Loving your neighbor is from Leviticus 19:18, while hating your enemy has no explicit scriptural warrant, though that idea is firmly embedded throughout scripture, especially in the Deuteronomic History (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) which regularly the importance of ethnic purity and the desire to kill those not of Israel. It should also be pretty obvious to us from contemporary life, that the desire to define "us" and "them" is a human constant.

Jesus here takes an expansive view of God's "people" suggesting that all are cared for by God and thus all are worthy of our recognizing their inherent dignity.

Jesus' call to perfection is probably the most significant and difficult challenge Jesus offers us. It is directed more at our effort, I suspect, than a real expectation. Mostly it speaks to the idea that our highest ideal should be *internal*, an inherent desire to reflect God in our lives. This is opposed to the Law, which is an *external* force applied to us to ensure compliance.

## Matthew Chapter 6

Chapter 6 continues Jesus' "sermon on the mount" with series of teachings about how to DO righteousness by contrasting the appearance of piety of those Jesus calls hypocrites and the actual work asked for by God

v1-6 This is the traditional Gospel reading on Ash Wednesday

v1 What gets translated as "practicing... piety" in the literal Greek is "doing righteousness."

v2 Jesus throughout this chapter uses the word "hypocrite" though we commonly use Jesus' interpretation to mean someone who falsely claims religious virtue; in Jesus' time a hypocrite (*hypokrites* in Greek) meant a stage actor or someone who played a part.

Essentially, Jesus is asserting that many of the most publicly pious people were the same as actors who pretend to be someone they are not for public consumption. Implicitly, Jesus is speaking of the Pharisees.

v2-4 & v5-6 In each of these comparisons, Jesus draws a distinction between those who do things for the recognition of others and those who do what is right for its own sake who are then "recognized" by God.

v6 Faithful men, in Jesus' time, were expected to pray each Morning and Evening and before and after meals

v7 This is an echo of Isaiah's charge against the emptiness of Temple worship in his day *Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Isa 1:14-15*

Jesus also reminds his hearers (and us) that God knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves. This suggests that prayer is not primarily about presenting our needs before God, but that it does something *for us* rather than *for* God.

v9-15 Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer.

This prayer is an example of the radicalness of Jesus' teaching. Nowhere in the Hebrew scriptures is God referred to as "Father." This completely reoriented the long-held understanding of who God is. Instead of a remote monarch to whom fealty and obligation is owed; Jesus describes God as an intimate reality in our daily lives who is concerned for our personal well-being.

### Matthew

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

### Luke

"When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."

v13 The NRSV leaves out the doxology (for thine is the kingdom...) because the oldest manuscripts do not include it.

v15 Does this suggest that salvation is conditional based on our actions (works)?

v16-18 & v19-21 These follow the same pattern of contrasting behaviors as above

v22-23 This may not make a lot of sense to us. Modern understanding is that the eye is a light *receptor* whereas the ancients believed it was a light *emitter*

v24 Jesus here speaks of the corrupting power of wealth. The original Greek uses the Aramaic word *mammon*, which may have been derived from the name of a Canaanite deity associated with riches. Several ancient writers use the word as a proper name synonym for Satan.

v25-34 Effectively, this long passage serves to expand on Jesus' teaching on wealth in v24, namely that worrying and chasing after material goods is, in the grand scheme of things, unimportant and a distraction from the things that God sees as vital.

## Matthew Chapter 7

Chapter seven closes out the sermon on the mount and contains primarily teachings about maintaining integrity in our relationships with one another and with God.

v1-4 God's role as a judge of humanity's actions is well-established in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Again, this passage serves to highlight the contrast between the truly righteous and those who merely play the part. This also fits in with the Prophet's repeated charge against Israel that its worship was false because its actions betrayed its true inclination towards the injustice of selfishness, self-importance, and greed.

v6 Both dogs and pigs were considered beneath contempt in Israelite society.

v7-11 This teaching, is very similar to Luke 11:5-13

How often do we see prayer work this way in our own lives? What might account for the difference?

v12 The "golden rule" neatly sums up the teachings of the prophets and Jesus. It is also not unique to the Abrahamic faith tradition.

v13-29 Jesus closes out the sermon on the mount with a series of warnings to watch for on the path of faith

v13-14 The idea that the path of righteousness is a narrow one was a long-standing concept even in Jesus day.

This is something worth thinking about for us too. Following Jesus is incredibly simple to understand (Love God and neighbor with all our selves, i.e. the Golden Rule) but also incredibly difficult to actually do. And the experience of our own lives should help us to realize the challenge Jesus sets before us.

v15-20 Those claiming some kind of insider knowledge of the inner workings of the divine mind have always been present. It is, in fact, one of the questions Jesus himself must confront - why should we believe you compared to all the others?

Similar to the test given in the Hebrew Scriptures, the integrity of a prophet is judged by the product of the prophecy.

v21-23 Similar to the parable of the sheep and goats, our commitment to enacting Jesus teachings in our lives has important consequences.

v24-27 The example of His life that Jesus gives us is the rock on which the “righteous” life can be built in confidence.

v28-29 Jesus finishes the sermon and the power of his teaching is recognized as being different in character than other teachings they may have heard.

## Matthew Chapter 8

Chapters 8 and 9 primarily tell of Jesus' healing ministry. In his own time, Jesus seems to have been most famous for his ability to heal. All the gospels speak of people travelling from all points and going to great lengths in hopes that he might heal them or their loved ones. The parallel to Jesus' ten miracles in these chapters is, of course, Moses' ten miracles in the face of Pharaoh's hard-heartedness.

- v1 Jesus is coming down from the Sermon on the Mount, recounted in chapters 5-7.
- v2 Just a reminder that "leprosy" in ancient times was a catchall phrase for unsightly skin conditions and wasn't limited to describing Hansen's disease. Also, actually leprosy is not that contagious, but most societies around the world have feared those with skin conditions and those afflicted were often shunned outcasts.

Lepers were considered unclean:

*But if raw flesh ever appears on him, he shall be unclean; the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him unclean. Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprous disease. Leviticus 13:14-15*

- v3 Jesus healing involves breaking the Law (touching a Leper) which is a way of showing that Jesus, in some way, transcends the limits of the Law.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus is often described as trying to keep his actions secret; scholars call this the Messianic Secret of Mark. Though Matthew's gospel is largely an expansion of Mark's, this Messianic Secret motif is less prominent in Matthew, but here we see it carried through. The basic sense of the secret is that people aren't meant to understand Jesus' messianic ministry until after the whole mission has played out.

- v4 notice that Jesus' command to go to the temple is meant as a testimony of Jesus' own ministry. Jesus is, in some sense, goading the Temple authorities.
- v5 Capernaum was village on the northwest shore of the sea of Galilee (reminder: about the same size as Oneida Lake). Capernaum was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John according to Matthew and it was where Jesus went to live after his baptism by John.

A centurion was a military officer. In the Roman legion, a centurion commanded a century (which oddly, usually consisted of about 80 soldiers). No Roman legions were stationed in Galilee or Judea during Jesus' time. The nearest legions were in Syria (administratively, Judea and Galilee were part of the Roman province of Syria). However, not too far from Capernaum was the city of Tiberias (named after the Roman emperor Tiberius) which was the administrative center of Galilee, and which

was populated almost wholly by Gentile peoples. It is possible a small detachment of Roman legionnaires was posted near there, or the centurion could be a non-Roman soldier of Herod Agrippa's army, or he could have been a retired soldier who was granted land in Judea.

- v6 by "servant" we mean a slave
- v8 Roman centurions were usually of lesser nobility (equestrian class) and would not likely have considered too many people in Galilee to be more worthy than themselves. Matthew means to show in this interaction the growing stature and respect Jesus possessed and that way that Jesus upends the existing social order
- v9-10 Jesus is shifting the meaning of righteousness from adherence to Law and custom to actions rooted in trust of God's promises (faith)
- v11-12 This confirms for us that the centurion is not Jewish, but is likely a "God-Fearer" (a gentile who believes in God) and Jesus draws on the prophetic premise that the people of Israel have a God-given mission to be an example for all people to draw them to God (which they often fail to live into)
- v13 Jesus' healing powers do not require his physical presence to be effective (this is a significant change from Mark where Jesus' healings are almost always physical)
- v14-15 Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law so we can assume that Peter is married and probably has a family. We see this same story in the other synoptic gospels.
- v16-17 Jesus' healing prowess brings many hopeful people to his door, while also fulfilling the prophetic promise. Also notice the repeating formula that Matthew uses to show how Jesus is connected to the prophetic tradition (this is the 8th occurrence so far) see Isa 53:4
- v18 It isn't immediately clear here what is meant from "the other side," but he is talking about the Sea of Galilee
- v19 Scribes are usually depicted in negative terms and their use of "teacher" when speaking to Jesus is usually used mockingly - it isn't clear whether this is a genuine statement on the part of the scribe or not.
- v20 This is the first instance in Matthew where Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man." On one hand "son of man," is a phrase denoting one's humanity, but Jesus also seems to be referring to a title found in the book of Daniel:  
*As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.*



*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* Daniel 7:13-14

v22 Jesus' reply underlines the urgency of his mission

v23 the earlier "other side" phrase now is made clear.

v24-27 Here we get the story of Jesus calming the storm which is largely the same in each of the synoptic Gospels.

v26 Jesus' words as recounted by Matthew are little softer than in either Luke or Mark, suggesting that Matthew was a little more sympathetic to the disciples

*Mark 4:40: He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

*Luke 8:25: He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"*

v27 It was a remarkable leap of faith on the disciples' part to trust in Jesus when they were unclear on who he is or what his mission was exactly

v28-34 Matthew's version of the story differs from Mark's and Luke's versions. To begin with, Matthew says there are two men possessed by demons instead of one. We don't get the names of the demons (Legion) nor do we hear about how the possessed had repeatedly been bound in chains and still escaped, and it leaves out how the now healed man was sitting with Jesus when the townspeople came out.

Different ancient manuscripts refer to either the "Country of the Gadarenes" or "Gerasenes." Both Gerasa and Gadara were cities to the east of the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan. They were both Gentile cities filled with citizens who were culturally more Greek than Semitic. This may be a translation error and the gospel authors may have meant Gergesenes, as Gergasa was a town on the eastern shore of Galilee and was also "Greek" peoples.

## Matthew Chapter 9

Chapter 9 continues the series of ten miracles (mostly healings) begun in chapter 8.

v1 “his own town” is Capernaum as we learned back in chapter 4

v2-8 In this encounter with the paralyzed man and his friends, Jesus further defines his claim to be the Son of Man spoken of in Daniel. This also sets up Jesus’ first confrontation with the religious authorities of His day

v 2 note that Jesus’ perception of their faith precedes His miraculous action. The scriptures continually link the power of God’s work to human faith.

Note also that Jesus, unlike the leper and Centurion’s slave in chapter 8 doesn’t “heal” explicitly but instead forgives the paralyzed man’s sin - explicitly linking his infirmity to his sinfulness.

v3-4 Blasphemy describes actions or words that dishonor God’s name; and declaring that you have a power reserved to God (forgiveness of sins) would surely be considered as something akin to stealing God’s honor. The designated penalty for blasphemy is death.

*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Exodus 20:7*

*And speak to the people of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin. One who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death. Leviticus 24:15-16*

v5-8 Jesus makes an explicit claim that forgiveness and healing are linked

v9 Matthew the Tax Collector is called

Taxes in the Roman empire were levied only in provinces outside of Italy and were assessed by *community*, and not *individually*. Thus, locals were co-opted by the provincial governors to determine how to get the required funds from their communities. These local tax-collectors (*publicani* in Greek) were thus usually reviled by their communities and seen as traitors to the community

v11 The Pharisees saw tax collectors as enemies to be shunned. Jesus saw them as the spiritually sick to be healed. The Pharisees could offer nothing to the tax collectors except a list of rules. Jesus offered forgiveness of sins and the hope of a new life

v12-13 Jesus lays out the purpose of God's mission, to allow a path back to "good-ness" to all who have strayed far away. See Hosea 6:6

v14-17 This series of three "sayings" from Jesus (weddings, patching, and wineskins) all point that what is new cannot be contained into what is old (and worn out).

Jesus is beginning to formulate a new way of being God's people for His followers

v18 Similar to the story of the Centurion, a prominent person (this time a Rabbi) comes to Jesus to heal someone close to them. In this case though, the girl isn't just sick, but has died.

v20-22 In the middle of going to heal the Rabbi's daughter, an unnamed woman manages to get close to Jesus and receives his healing power without his knowledge.

fringe would have been a part of any devout Judeans clothing (similar to a prayer shawl worn by many orthodox Jews today).

The story is not explicit about the source of her hemorrhage, but in any case, another's blood renders one unclean.

Matthew's story is a shortened version of Mark's (and briefer than Luke as well). Matthew does not tell us the Synagogue leaders name (Jairus), nor do we hear of the women's travails with physicians. Matthew also shows Jesus identifying the woman who touched him immediately rather than waiting for her to identify herself.

What's most important though is that it is *HER* faith that causes the healing, and not Jesus' deliberate action

v23-26 Jesus finally arrives at the leader's house and finds the traditional mourning rites already underway, but Jesus dismisses them by saying the girl isn't actually dead.

v25 Again Jesus doesn't *do* anything to affect the healing - this contrasts with Mark and Luke who both record Jesus saying "girl, get up." Remember, Matthew is especially sensitive to avoiding any notion that Jesus is using magic.

v27-31 This story of healing isn't found in other gospels, though it has similarities with stories of giving sight to the blind in the other gospels. Somewhat surprisingly, Matthew records that Jesus touches the blinded eyes, but he also prefaces it by recording Jesus saying that it is the *faith* of the men that enables the healing.

v30-31 Jesus' stern warnings seem to fall perpetually on deaf ears.

v32-34 In the last of this series of miracles, Jesus drives out a demon who had been preventing the speech of the afflicted man. The people recognize God's work but the authorities (the Pharisees) remain unconvinced (or blinded if you will).

v35-38 This chapter ends with Jesus setting the stage for the next step in Jesus' mission which will be the sending out of his followers to expand the scope of his work.

v 35 is a precursor to his reply to John's disciples in the next chapter and define for us the essential core mission of God's people.

## Matthew Chapter 10

Chapter 10 is largely focused on the disciples and Jesus preparing them for ministry in Jesus' name. Scholars call this the "Missionary Discourse"

v1 This is the first we hear of there being Twelve disciples (Matthew only tells of calling five, Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew). Twelve is meant to symbolize Israel, which originally consisted of twelve tribes.

Jesus has imbued His disciples with Power derived from His authority. Notice, Jesus has not granted them authority to preach or teach.

v2 Matthew switches from "disciple" to "apostle" to describe the Twelve. Apostle (*apostolos* in Greek) means "one sent out."

Gospel of Matthew	Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke	Gospel of John	Acts of the Apostles
Simon	Simon	Simon	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew
James	James	James	one of the "sons of Zebedee"	James
John	John	John	one of the "sons of Zebedee"	John
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael	Bartholomew
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas ("also called Didymus")	Thomas
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew/Levi	not mentioned	Matthew
James ("son of Alphaeus")	James	James	not mentioned	James
Thaddaeus (or "Lebbaeus"); called "Judas the Zealot"	Thaddaeus	Judas (son of James, <i>referred to as brother in some translations</i> )	Jude ("not Iscariot")	Judas son of James (referred to as brother in some translations)
Simon (the Canaanite)	Simon (the Cananaean)	Simon (who was called the Zealot)	not mentioned	Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas ("son of Simon Iscariot") <sup>[33]</sup>	(Judas replaced by Matthias)

v5-8 Jesus lays out for the disciples how they are meant to share in His ministry

v5-6 At this point, Jesus confines the work of the disciple only to their fellow Judeans

v7-8 This contrasts with v1 above as now Jesus instructs them to proclaim the good news (preach) and to raise the dead (!!)

v9-14 Jesus instructs his disciples in how they are to interact with those among whom they are doing His ministry. His instructions are meant to leave the disciples vulnerable and require them to trust in the generosity of those they serve.

Shaking the dust off your shoes would be considered a strong rebuke

v15 Sodom and Gomorrah were famously wicked cities which were destroyed (*see Genesis 19*)

v16-25 Jesus makes clear that he understands the vulnerability of the disciples and the potential upheaval that following Him may entail. He is inviting them into sharing his suffering that they might also share in his redemption.

v17 This “them” isn’t clearly defined, but from the following verses, we may infer those opposed to Jesus’ world up-ending message

v18 “Their synagogues” - Judaism in Jesus’ lifetime was divided into various sects just as Christianity today

v19-20 This asks a great deal but also defines for us what it means to “trust” in God

v21 The willingness to follow where Jesus leads has the potential to break up relationships. Jesus rarely supports “family” as an entity deserving of special respect, despite his claims of the fatherly nature of God

v22-23 Jesus warns that following him can be dangerous. Jesus’ call is invitational and not coercive, and he is usually clear about potential costs, but he is equally clear about the benefits of doing so.

v24-25 This directly references the implications of the scribes and Pharisees in the last chapter that the source of Jesus’ power is dark and unnatural

v26-33 After a long discourse on all the potential hazards, Jesus encourages his followers to not be afraid of those things; to keep their attention on the long view. He reminds

them of their inherent dignity and worth and He also defines his role as our direct mediator and intercessor with God.

v34-39 These verses reiterate and speak more deeply what Jesus already said in v21-22

v40-42 Jesus circles back on his expectations for the disciples as they go out in his name to do ministry by summing up the task ahead of them and reminding them of the original source of their authority and calling

## Matthew Chapter 11

Chapter 11 contains a series of teachings from Jesus, presumably while his disciples are away fulfilling the mission they were given in chapter 10

v2-6 Some followers of John have already come to see Jesus to enquire about his piety, but here they come again, this time explicitly at John's behest to reassure John about who he believes Jesus to be.

All the gospel stories show John's heralding of Jesus, though from John's language it is possible that he, like the disciples and many others, believed the deliverance of the Messiah would come in the form of a military campaign. It is [possible that it is Jesus' refusal to lead a revolutionary uprising that gives John pause.

v4-6 Jesus' reply is to tell them to open their eyes to the work of God happening around them and to decide for themselves, showing that he has been fulfilling the mission he defined in 10:35 and which is drawn from the prophetic tradition, especially Isaiah.

*Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. Isaiah 35:4-7*

v7-19 Jesus describes John's role as being the Elijah expected from scriptures come to announce the emergence of the God's promised One (Jesus).

v7-9 Jesus asks, did they go out to see a spectacle or to respond to God.

v10 Jesus paraphrases the prophet Micah in describing John  
*You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 2:17-3:1*

v11-15 Though John is a great prophet, he (like everyone Jesus is talking to) lives under the dominion of evil, but Jesus' mission is to undo our enthrallment to evil and



set us free. But as Jesus warns that overthrow will be a terrible thing to endure since so many are complicit. Or as the quote from Malachi above continues;

*But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?*

Malachi 3:2

v16-19 Jesus explains how the work of John and his mission are related; Jesus brings healing while John brought the diagnosis. In verse 17, the metaphor of the first line is Jesus, while that of the second is John. The comfortable from the status quo always have a justification for rejecting truth and the call to a more just society.

v20-24 Jesus reiterates that their consequence for us in choosing to accept God's call or not.

v25-27 The more capable and competent we are in navigating the world ourselves; the more difficult it can be for us to understand our true vulnerability and reliance upon God for the stuff of life.

v28-30 To paraphrase: Jesus tells us that we are connected to systems - societies, religions, cultures, class, etc. and that there is no escaping our interdependence with others. What Jesus offers is a system unlike all the others because it is the only not built on the stuff of the broken world, but on the goodness of God's will. So, in comparison to all the others, choosing God's system (or burden) will *feel like* no burden at all. Counter-intuitively, the path to freedom lies through submission of our whole selves to God.

## Matthew Chapter 12

Chapter 12 begins with all of the disciples gathered together again with no report of their mission described in chapter 10 and is largely concerned with showing that the authority with which Jesus speaks and the power he wields come from God.

VV1-14 Two stories that speak directly to the need to understand context in application of the Law.

v1-8 Jesus and his disciples absent mindedly pluck off grain along the road as they travel to synagogue on the Sabbath invoking the displeasure of some pharisees. Again, let us remember that the Pharisees are very interested in understanding the impact of the Law in everyday life because their understanding of their history is that destruction follows infidelity to the Law.

v2 Interpretation is everything in figuring out how to apply the law in this case. In contention is how to define “work”.

The Law does allow one to pick grains along the road so long as one doesn't use a sickle

*Deu 23:25 If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.*

However, that it is sabbath complicates things because The pharisee is right, it was unlawful to *harvest* grain on Sabbath because *all work* is banned

*Exo 20:10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work...*

and that *harvesting* is definitely counted as work is clarified later in Deuteronomy  
*Exo 34:21 Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest.*

Perhaps though, Deuteronomy 23:5 is a loophole because one could say it implies that plucking (with the hand) is not harvesting (with the sickle) and thus *not work*.

Notice though that Jesus does not answer this complaint directly. Jesus is not interested in getting drawn into an argument about how to split hairs about the details of keeping sabbath. Instead he points out that needs sometimes outweigh the requirements of the Law by showing that there are already so many exceptions as to make rigid adherence unjust.

v3 this story is from 1Samuel 21:1-6

v5 The Law has numerous requirements for priests to accomplish, even specifically on sabbath days

v6 Jesus here means himself, the very presence of God

v7 Jesus said the same thing back in chapter 9 when the Pharisees complained about his eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. It's a quote from Hosea.

*Hos 6:6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

In the context of the immediate dispute, Jesus is saying that sacrifices are more important than keeping the sabbath (what v5 means) and if mercy is even more important to God than sacrifice, then it is also surely more important than the sabbath rules.

v8 Jesus again refers to himself as the "son of Man" drawing on the imagery of God's coming found in the prophet Daniel.

v9-14 Jesus illustrates his teaching that mercy is the greater goal by healing a man on sabbath in the synagogue.

v11 Just to clarify that even though no one disputes Jesus, it was clearly contrary to the Law to *lift* out the sheep in this case, though feeding, watering, and even lowering a ramp to allow it walk out were apparently all ok according to the Talmud.

VV15-21 In the middle section of this chapter, Matthew reminds us that all of what Jesus does is making manifest the promises of the prophets

v15 Jesus was most famous in his day as a healer

v16 Matthew halfheartedly continues Mark's theme of the Messianic Secret

v18-21 this is from Isaiah 42:1-4 and is part of Isaiah's description of the coming redemption of Israel after their destruction by the Babylonians

V22-30 Tell the story of an exorcism and continues the narrative of growing pharisaical opposition rooted in their fear of Jesus leading the people astray and thus into destruction.

v23 This is a recurring reaction in the gospels to extraordinary healings. We may recall also the Samaritan woman at the well who says something similar when she goes back to her village. "son of David" is meant to imply the Messiah as he was expected to represent a restoration of the Davidic dynasty.

v24 Beelzebul - literally Lord of the Flies and another name for the leader of the demons and other dark forces.

v25-26 Jesus demeans their accusation by showing it as a logical fallacy

v27 Jesus asks how they can tell the difference in discerning where the “power” comes from that either he or the Temples own exorcists draw on to cast out demons And then suggests they will be judged by their own standards.

v29-30 In this example, Satan is the strong man and Jesus is the one breaking in, and thus the one tying up Satan.

vv31-37 Jesus closes out this phase of his dispute with the pharisees,

v31-32 Jesus reiterates that choosing to act contrary to the force that underlies all creation may incur negative consequences.

v33-37 Jesus explicitly states (using language reminiscent of John the Baptist) that it is our choices actions, much more than our beliefs or our communal identity, to which we will be held account.

V38-45 These verses open up a new dialogue with the pharisees and scribes as they ask him to show them he is whom he claims to be.

v38 a “sign” would be any miraculous event and their use of Teacher may be derisive rather than respectful Adulterous here means infidelity in their relationship to God.

v39 the “sign” of Jonah we may remember was especially terse and offered grudgingly. He walked through Nineveh saying it would be destroyed.

v40 Here Jesus draws on the symbolism of Jonah in the fish to speak about his own death and resurrection.

v41 The people of Nineveh, thus are more faithful because they reacted to Jonah’s half-hearted message with sincere contrition and penitence whereas the Judeans are largely ignoring a similar message much more earnestly delivered.

v42 This refers to the story of the Queen of Sheba see 1Kings 10:1-13:2

v43-45 Jesus seems to be saying here that the faithlessness of Israel is so great that it has become a hospitable place for powers that stand in contrast to God and that their evil ways will likely return even if they could shun them for a while. The house remains empty in the demon’s absence because nothing meaningful has taken its place. In a sense

this is the theme of much of the Old Testament, that Israel fails in maintaining fidelity in its relationship with God.

Passages like this though have been used to justify anti-Semitism, so I would urge us to be cautious in how we apply this and see that it applies as much to us in contemporary times, even as Christians, as it does to the Judeans of Jesus' day.

v46-50 We close out the chapter with Jesus defining what it means to be his follower, that our allegiance and devotion to Christ should be our highest commitment.

## Matthew Chapter 13

Chapter 13 is largely made up of a series of seven parables (some of which even get explained!) and is third discourse (or teaching) of Jesus in Matthew (there are five\* all together). The parables in this chapter are some of the best known and most loved.

vv1-9 We begin with the parable of the sower

v1 The traditional position of the teacher was seated and the sea here is Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee).

v2 Matthew regularly reminds us that Jesus attracted large crowds.

v3-8 There is pretty good evidence that in Jesus time, this is exactly how grain fields were planted, someone walked along tossing the seed all around

v9 Given what Jesus says in chapter 11, this phrase seems a little ironic.

v10-17 In these verses, Jesus explains his use of parables, but it also suggests that the disciples were more clued in than the gospels sometimes show elsewhere.

v11-12 Jesus' answer suggests that the disciples have been given a unique calling. From our perspective we know they were being prepared to carry on Jesus' mission and ministry once Jesus was gone.

v13 In other words, Jesus, like the Sower, is planting the seeds for a future harvest

v14-15 this is from Isaiah 6:9-10"

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."*

*Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump."*

**Isaiah 6:7-13**

Jesus not only brings the words of the prophet to life; Jesus' words are reminder to us that the work and challenges of faith are grappled with by every generation.

V16-17 See note on vv11-12 above

vv18-23 Here Jesus explains the parable and the various ways that people experience and respond to the Good News

vv24-30 The Second parable we get is the parable of the weeds and the wheat (which gets explained later beginning with v 36)

This parable is a somewhat depressing reminder that we are deeply intertwined with evil, even against our wishes and desires

vv31-33 These two parables are about how we often fail to understand how small things can bring big and sometimes unexpected results.

v31-32 Jesus here is using hyperbole to make a point

v33 a small amount of yeast makes the bread rise - 3 measures would make about 100 loaves of bread (~50lbs of flour)

v35 Psalm 78:2

v36-43 Again Jesus explains a teaching to his disciples apart from the crowds and other followers

vv44-50 Here we get three more short parables, all revolving around finding an unexpected abundance.

v51-53 The scribes Jesus is referring to here aren't the usual "scribes and Pharisees" scribes. He is referring to the disciples and other who would be teachers of the gospel. Jesus isn't a wholly new thing; He is a new fulfilment or understand of an older tradition.

vv53-58 This last section of the chapter concludes the discourse and brings Jesus on a visit to his hometown.

We get the list of the names of Jesus' brothers, James, Joseph, and Simon. We see a mention of his mother and that he has some number of unnamed sisters. Joseph, however, is not mentioned by name though it does suggest that he is still around.

In this case, we see the truth behind the saying “familiarity breeds contempt.”  
Again, though, Matthew links personal faith to Jesus’ powers.

\*Discourses

- Sermon on the Mount - ch 5-7
- Missionary Discourse - ch 10
- Parables Discourse - ch 13
- Community discourse - ch 18
- Eschatological Discourse - ch 25



## Matthew Chapter 14

Chapter 14 picks up the narrative again with the news of John's arrest and death. It also continues the stories of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water.

vv1-12 John falls afoul of Herod.

v1 "Herod the Ruler"

This Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great from Luke's birth narrative. He was appointed by the Romans as Tetrarch (a local ruler under a Roman Provincial governor) of Galilee and Perea (a region east of Jordan & south of Galilee). He was ruler of Galilee for almost all of Jesus life, until the year 39.

v2 The region where John is believed to have been doing his baptism is in Perea.

v3 Herodias and Herod each divorced their first spouses and apparently married for love, which unfortunately upset the plans and agreements inherent in those marriages - it actually led to a war a few years after Jesus death when Herod's first father in Law, a king of a region outside Roman control invaded Galilee.

v4 notable for us as Episcopalians, Henry VIII came to believe he was cursed (and sought a divorce) because he had married his brother's wife (Catherine of Aragorn)

v7-10 Again we see the unintended consequences of oaths

vv13-21 Feeding the Five Thousand (Matthew also tells of a second mass feeding miracle in the next chapter)

v13 Perhaps wanting to avoid entanglement with Herod or perhaps seeking to save those seeking him from trouble, Jesus withdraws to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to a region not ruled by Herod

v14-15 Jesus' reputation is growing (that's why Herod heard of him) and people are flocking to him, probably mostly seeking healing.

v15-20 The disciples focus on scarcity, Jesus on abundance, the food is multiplied and there is even much left over. The pattern here, Take, Bless, Break, Give is the same pattern we experience in the eucharist.

v21 Note that the 5000 only includes the men and leaves out women and children who were there also.

- v22-34 Immediately after everyone has eaten, as dusk falls, Jesus sends the disciples on ahead and tells them he will join them later
- v23 Jesus' takes time to pray
- v24 Though not large, the winds are working against the disciples and they cannot get the boat back home but have drifted further away. This is the second time that the wind has set upon the disciples while in a boat on Galilee (chapter 8)
- v25-27 Just as he woke up and commanded the weather in chapter 8 here Jesus arrives to rescue the disciples and does so through miraculous command of the elements.
- v28-33 Peter tests his own faith by stepping out of the boat, but the perils of the moment overcame his trust in Jesus, and he began to go under; though Jesus continues on to rescue him.
- v34-36 It isn't clear if Gennesaret was their original destination or just where they ended up. But Jesus returns to the place where back in chapter 8 the residents had asked him to leave, but now he is welcomed, and many are healed

## Matthew Chapter 15

Chapter 15 is largely concerned with the issue of ritual “unclean-ness,” and the ordinances of the Mosaic Law that address one’s physical state when coming before God, especially in the Temple.

v1 Chapter 14 left off with Jesus teaching and healing in the region east of Galilee and this chapter begins with a delegation of pharisees and scribes travelling to where Jesus is to clarify some things. This suggests that Jesus’ fame(or notoriety) is attracting attention far and near.

v2 The “tradition of the elders” is the oral Torah (not the written Law) which Pharisees believed was begun by Moses to help in interpretation of the Law.

As Christians, our doctrines (the Trinity, Sacraments, Atonement, etc.) fulfill the same purpose; they interpret and make meaning of the scriptures for us)

There are no written Laws concerning washing hands before eating; this idea is an extension of expectations for Temple priests before approaching the altar of sacrifice.

see Exodus 30:17-21

*The LORD spoke to Moses: You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it; with the water Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to make an offering by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die: it shall be a perpetual ordinance for them, for him and for his descendants throughout their generations.*

v3 As is often the case Jesus does not answer the question directly but redirects the questioner with another question meant to lead them to question their underlying assumptions.

Also, not washing your hands is kind of icky - just sayin’

v4-6 Jesus’ counter-accusation does not directly address washing one’s hands or not, but is meant rather to highlight the hypocrisy of his accusers. In other words, Jesus says” You complain about me breaking this small Law - WHICH ISN”Y EVEN PART OF THE MOSAIC LAW - but you break this other ACTUAL WRITTEN LAW- ALL THE TIME -because it benefits you.

There was a practice, that the Pharisees must have taken advantage of, that says one could declare some part of one’s goods “sacrificed” to God (called korban) but where the one offering got to keep the items so long as they were only used for the designated purpose. Sort of like a personal endowment fund, but where you get to keep the profits. Jesus here seems to

suggest that some people were declaring some part of their wealth or property as *korban* which meant that if their parents or family were in need they could escape their obligations by saying that they had little or nothing, because what they had was actually God's and not available

v7-9 From Isaiah 29:13

*The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read." The Lord said: **Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;** so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.*

Isaiah 29:11-14

v10 The disputes between the Pharisees and Jesus seem to be taking place as public debates, and here Jesus works to bring the crowd along with him.

v11 This is a pretty bold assertion on Jesus' part as it runs directly counter to several ordinances of the Law.

Some examples

Lev\_5:2 Or when any of you touch any unclean thing--whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing--and are unaware of it, you have become unclean, and are guilty.

Lev\_10:10 You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean;

Lev\_11:58 The rock badger, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you. The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you.

Lev\_11:33 And if any of them falls into any earthen vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break the vessel.

v12 The disciples, who must have been mingling with the crowd, now come up to Jesus and say something super obvious.

v13-14 Jesus again differentiates between those who follow in faith (internal) and those who follow because of the Law (external). Though his tone could be considered pitying.

v15-20 Peter asks Jesus for an explanation, and Jesus seems a little exasperated probably because he thought he was pretty clear there.

But he goes on to explain, basically, that we are right with God when we make choices from a place of Love for God rather than from a place of fear of God.

V21 Jesus is still avoiding entering into territory controlled by Herod Antipas and now goes to visit Tyre and Sidon, which are in Lebanon. In Jesus' day, Tyre was major seaport and city originally founded by the Phoenicians (relative of the Philistines). Sidon was also a large seaport, north of Tyre, about 15 miles. Today, it is the 3rd largest city in Lebanon.

Other than Jerusalem, this is one of the few examples of Jesus working in cities and the only time in the scriptures where Jesus leaves greater Israel. His comfort here though suggests he may have already been familiar with these places.

v21-28 Here we get Matthew's version of the famous story of the Canaanite (or Syro-Phoenician) woman. Generally, Jesus' encounters with unnamed women are turning points in the narrative. There are two key differences between Matthew and Mark's versions worth noting. First, Matthew says that the woman was making a spectacle and apparently drawing unwanted attention to Jesus and his companions, and second Jesus directly connects the woman's "faith" (an expectation of God's actions) to the daughter's being healed. Chronologically, I have to believe though that his encounter occurred much early than either Mark or Matthew relate in their stories because in both cases, Jesus has already provided healing to Gentiles (ch 8 - the centurion's servant & the Gadarene demoniacs and ch14, healings in Gennesaret)

I have always admired her pluck courage

v27: literally, small dogs or puppies

v29-31 Jesus returns to the region near Galilee and does what he is most known for, healing.

v32-39 Here Matthew relates a second feeding story, that is remarkably similar to the feeding of the five thousand in ch 14, including hungry people in a deserted place, incredulous disciples, a handful of loaves and fishes, the Take, Break, Bless, Break, Give pattern, and a mention that they forgot to count the women and children. One difference is that this crowd seems to be made up of Gentiles (v29 - they praised the God of Israel)

v39 It is unclear where Magadan is. Mark's version says they went to Dalmanutha, which is another name for Magdala - a town on the west coast of Galilee and the home of Mary Magdalene.

## Matthew Chapter 16

Chapter 16 represents a shift in Jesus' story as Peter names out loud his belief that Jesus IS the Messiah and Jesus tells the disciples (though they don't want to hear it) that the Messiah was never meant to be a military leader concerned only with the temporal cares of Israel but has a much bigger mission of cosmological importance that can only be accomplished through his death.

v1-4 Here we get a rehash of what we already encountered in ch 12, verses 38-42 (almost word for word)

v5-12 This is one of the most humorous exchanges anywhere in scripture and seems more like a Monty Python script and it really shows the struggle of the disciples to understand.

They forgot to bring bread, Jesus tosses off a teaching using bread as a metaphor, the disciples take it literally, hilarity ensues.

The best is v11 "How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread?"

v13-20 Prompted by Jesus questions, Peter names him Messiah, and Jesus explains what that means

v13 Caesarea Philippi was a city north of Galilee and was most notable for a temple to the Greek god, Pan. The city was the administrative capital of the Tetrarch Philip, who was the son of Herod the Great and half-brother of Herod Antipas (who beheaded John). Its location is in the area known as the Golan Heights)

v14 It is clear that Jesus is something apart from the regular run of healers and teachers, but the source of his powers and his identity is in question.

v16 Once asked, Peter speaks for the others and says they think Jesus is the Messiah. That he adds the Son of God is curious though, as that particular formulation is not part of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The idea of a messiah has its roots in Deuteronomy where it written that Moses said;  
*"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."* Deuteronomy 18:15

v17 Jesus says that their understanding comes not from their brilliance but from God's self

v18 the word "Rock" here is *petras* in Greek, so it is a play on Peter's name *Petros*. "Rocky, you are the stone on which I will build the church" might be how it would be rendered in contemporary English.

*petra*, as I understand specifically means loose, small rocks, not large stones so then, the church is built on the accumulation of many small things (i.e., individual faith like that of the disciples) is probably what Jesus is going for (since Peter is speaking on behalf of the disciples, not just himself) rather than that some office that Peter may occupy in the future will be the ruler of all Christians everywhere.

v19 The meaning of this verse has long been debated, but it seems to be conferring the authority to do ministry and teach in Jesus' name to the community of disciples, of which the twelve are the first.

v20 And then Jesus, again, orders them to keep this secret for now.

v21-28 The rest of the chapter is devoted to Jesus trying to explain to the twelve what His mission is and how it must be accomplished, while also reinforcing to them that Jesus' life is meant as an example or template for our own.

v22 Just like when he sank into the water, Peter gets distracted by his personal fears and the metaphorical storms of the world and his faith, just expressed in v16 is waylaid.

23 Though speaking sternly, Jesus again tries to rescue Peter from his fears and bring him back to safety. I think we can also see that Jesus needs their support and Peter's words are a kind of temptation for Jesus to turn away from His calling.

v24-26 Jesus tells them to follow God is to follow Jesus, even into difficult places. Faith does indeed call upon a great deal from us.

v27-28 But, Jesus continues, in the following there is a destination that is worth the tribulations.

I also think that though some may interpret "Son of Man coming in His kingdom" as being about the eschaton, I believe it to refer to the overthrow of Satan and the breaking of the bonds of evil held over us through Christ's death and resurrection. In other words, the kingdom HAS come, even if not fully realized.

## Matthew Chapter 17

The main event of chapter 17 is the story of the Transfiguration, though that is not all, there is another healing, another confrontation with religious authorities, and the second time Jesus tries to prepare the disciples for what awaits them in Jerusalem.

- v1 Jesus chooses only three (three of the first four called) to journey up the mountain. It doesn't say what mountain, but the episode clearly echoes Moses himself climbing a high mountain to commune with God.
- v2 Jesus is transfigured (metamorphed) before them. Literally, he changed forms, similar to a caterpillar changing to a butterfly.

His appearance, shining skin, and dazzling white clothes is the same as his appearance in the resurrection story in chapter 28. In other words, Jesus takes on his post resurrection appearance as a sign of what is to come. The Transfiguration then, represents a connection point between heaven and earth.

It is one of the five major milestones of Jesus' life that are marked on the liturgical calendar (the others being the Incarnation, Baptism, Resurrection, and Ascension).

- v3 Moses and Elijah join Jesus. That they could do so points to the belief in continuing life after death and the possibility of some sort of other-worldly existence (since Elijah supposedly never died).

Since very early, commentators have seen these two as representing the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), of which Jesus is the perfect symbiosis.

- v4 Then Peter says something nonsensical
- v5 This is very similar to the experience of His baptism, when God also spoke from the cloud. There God had said that he was well pleased with Jesus, but here God goes further and gives a command, "listen to him."

Compare to this passage from Isaiah:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. "



- v6 Fear is the commonest response to a divine presence.
- v7 As in previous incidents, such as the boat in the storm, Jesus' presence dispels the cause of fear
- v9 Jesus here again seeks to keep his true identity and purpose a secret. Remember, in the last chapter (and in chapter 12) the scribes and pharisees asked for a sign but Jesus said none would be given, yet in the Transfiguration an undeniable sign *is given* to these core disciples.

The word translated here as "vision" is the Greek word ὄραμα (*orama*) which is the same word used to describe Peter's vision of the blanket of animals to eat in the book of Acts and Paul's vision of the man in Macedonia begging him to go there.

This could suggest that the experience of the transfiguration was a shared vision (hence no one being there when Jesus touches them as well as explaining Peter's strange response) rather than a physical event. Honestly, the text isn't super clear and Matthew himself may not have known for certain which it was.

- v10-13 A really interesting non-answer answer because it clearly says, as I've mentioned earlier, that John was indeed Elijah.
- v14-20 Tells of a desperate man seeking healing for his son and being frustrated at the disciple's inability to help him in Jesus' absence.

just to be clear, our understanding of science and the mind has advanced to the point where we can confidently say that demons do not cause epilepsy, though this does suggest the limitations of the author's understanding more than it does Jesus.'

- v16 Earlier, Jesus had given the disciples authority to heal and cast out demons, but apparently that power was time-limited to the period of their mission?
- v17 Or as this clearly exasperated Jesus' tone suggests, the disciples just aren't confident enough in Jesus grant to them to be effective. This also, I think, shows why it was necessary for Jesus to ascend, so that we might learn and grow into Jesus' teachings and grant of authority because so long as we could count on Him popping 'round we'll never perfect our faith.

- v19-20 Jesus makes explicit that they must wholly trust in God

You may notice there is no verse 21 in your translation. Later manuscripts added a verse (21 – dropped from more modern translations) that says "*But this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting*"

v22-23 The chapter closes with Jesus again trying to explain how his death is the pathway to life. We see here how their immediate concerns and fears interfere with their trusting Jesus (and God).

v24-27 The chapter closes with a teaching about inclusion in God's family through the metaphor of the Temple Tax.

There are scholars who believe that this short passage was added by later copyists and but does not reflect an historical occurrence. Israelites paid a one denarius tax annually to support the Temple. After the Temple was destroyed, the Romans *doubled* the tax and used to support the temple of Jupiter in Rome. Later copyists, the argument goes, added this to address the concerns of early believers about supporting a Temple other than God's. (the 'children' (i.e., believers) are not *obligated* to pay, but a token of support not because they belief but to be neighborly)

It's a great story and the kind of magical story that Matthew usually works hard to avoid.

## Matthew Chapter 18

Chapter 18 represents the fourth of the five discourses (bodies of teaching) in Matthew, this one concerns the workings of Christian community.

v1-5 Jesus begins by trying to redirect the disciples' ambitions by stressing the needed humility called for in leadership. Children, generally, have low status and can be safely ignored.

v6-9 Jesus continues by speaking of our obligations to one another, and that each of us carries a responsibility to care for the souls of our neighbors. In other words, our faith should be located communally and not personally.

v8-9 Jesus here uses hyperbole to make his point.

v10-14 One of Jesus' most loved parables; the story of the lost sheep.

Of course, in reality, no shepherd would leave 99 sheep in the wilderness to find one that was lost. Jesus here speaks of the reality of the kingdom of God rather than the reality of the world. I expect that they would have been jarring to those who heard him say it.

v10 "their angels" - guardian angels?

*Tobit said to her, "Do not worry; our child will leave in good health and return to us in good health. Your eyes will see him on the day when he returns to you in good health. Say no more! Do not fear for them, my sister. For a good angel will accompany him; his journey will be successful, and he will come back in good health."* Tobit 5:21-22

v15-20 Jesus here teaches about discord within the fellowship of believers. This three-step method is probably familiar to most of us. this verse uses the word "church" but that is a modern interpolation; the original Greek is "a brother." Though this passage suggests a "church" that does not yet exist in the context of Jesus' life.

v17 The fundamental question here is "how do we treat Gentiles and tax collectors?"  
*hint: we don't shun them*

v18 This reiterates what Jesus said to Peter in chapter 16 and reinforces that the "keys of the kingdom" belong to the whole of the church.

v20 This is one of Jesus' most reassuring promises and underscores that following Jesus is meant as a communal experience.

v21 I've always wondered why forgiveness was of such a concern to Peter.

Some manuscripts say seventy times seven and other seventy-seven. At any rate, a lot.

Forgiveness, I believe is not about saying what someone did that harmed you was ok or not important. It is about saying that those hurts and those traumas don't have to hold us back from the abundant life Jesus offers; that we don't have to let those things determine how we see the world and act in it.

v23-35 The chapter closes out with a parable about forgiveness and its transferability. this is echoed in the Lord's prayer, "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"

## Matthew Chapter 19

v1 This is a somewhat confusing construction because no part of Judea is beyond the Jordan (which usually signifies the eastern side). If we might draw from the other Gospels, it's likely he meant that Jesus came to Judea by going through Samaria, crossing to the east side, down through Perea and then across the river again into Judea.

v3 Divorce was recognized by the Mosaic law, though there's not a lot of detail - the passages referring to it suggest it was only done at the man's prerogative. The operative question here is *"for any cause"* or was it restricted only to the instances given in the law?



*Suppose a man marries a woman, but after going in to her, he dislikes her and makes up charges against her, slandering her by saying, "I married this woman; but when I lay with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity." The father of the young woman and her mother shall then submit the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. The father of the young woman shall say to the elders: "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man but he dislikes her; now he has made up charges against her, saying, 'I did not find evidence of your daughter's virginity.' But here is the evidence of my daughter's virginity." Then they shall spread out the cloth before the elders of the town. The elders of that town shall take the man and punish him; they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver (which they shall give to the young woman's father) because he has slandered a virgin of Israel. She shall remain his wife; he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives. Deu 22:13-19*

*If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives. Deu 22:28-29*

*Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife Deu 24:1-4a*

v4-5 Jesus here quotes from Genesis

Gen 1:27 *So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Gen 2:24 *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

v6 Jesus then follows up with a new interpretation of the Law, suggesting that *all* divorce is contrary to the will of God

v7 The Pharisees are rightly puzzled as the Law clear did allow for divorce.

v8 Jesus redefines his reinterpretation by coming down against “for any cause” while still allowing for divorce in the case of unchastity on the part of the woman.

v10-12 It’s kind of sad that the disciples think not being able to get divorced is a reason to not get married in the first place

Also, it should be noted that Jesus is more accepting of eunuchs than the Mosaic Law

Deu 23:1 *No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.*

It’s not clear if verse 12 refers to the acceptance of eunuchs or the teaching on divorce

v13-15 Maybe the disciples are still sore after being told that they should be more like children in the last chapter (18:2-3)?

Jesus’ reference to inheritors of the kingdom of God here speaks to the low status of children but also that they represent the future

v16-22 The parable of the rich young man

In Luke it is a “ruler” and on Mark a “man,” but in Matthew a “young man”

v16 the question has echoes of John’s call to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” (3:8), but it also conveys a kind of transactional view of the relationship with God. It asks, “what externally determined standard must I meet to *earn* my reward.”

v17 Who else might we ask? In a sense this is a mild rebuke about seeking favor from external forces. Nonetheless, Jesus answers that only God the Father is good.

“have life” = enter the kingdom of God.

v18-19 “which ones?” seems a curious question for a devout Judean - surely all of them.

Jesus however, answers with 5 of the ten commandments (6, 7, 8, 9 & 5) plus a verse from Leviticus

Lev 19:18 *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I am the LORD.*

The commandments offered are the ones that deal primarily with our social lives in community, all of which could be summed up as “love your neighbor”

v20-22 Jesus response gets to the crux of the matter. Jesus’ teaching isn’t about how to follow the Law more closely, it is about learning to respond to the world with love.

Following the Law is essentially a self-centered view of the world; it asks, ‘am I righteous or not?’ The Way of Jesus is “other-centered;” it asks, ‘is God’s creation thriving, and if not, how do I make it so?’

v23-30 Jesus talks about how wealth can be a barrier to a “fruit-full” life.

v23-24 Jesus concisely states the concern about the wealth and the temptation to selfishness

You may have heard about a city gate called the eye of the needle that was narrow, and which forced traders to unload their camels to go through. Though lovely, it has no basis in fact and trader then, just like traders today would have made such an entrance larger right quick.

v25 The disciples are astounded because their whole understanding of “righteousness” implied material wealth as its reward. The Old Testament is full of people (well, men mostly) who are rewarded for their righteousness with growing flocks and herds - material goods.

If there isn’t a reward for following God’s dense Law book, what’s the point?

v26 Jesus’ answer points to the reality that our lives are not fully expressed in our earthly lives

v27 Keep in mind that Peter and the disciples still expect the Messiah to usher in an earthly Judean kingdom freed from the shackles of outside rule and depredation.

v28-30 Jesus explicitly says that his Way leads not only to a more just world, but participation in eternal life

## Matthew Chapter 20

Chapter 20 is the last chapter of Matthew that tells of his earthly ministry as the next chapter begins the Passion story of Jesus' final week, leading to his death at Calvary.

v1-16 This is one of the best known parables of Jesus, that of the laborers in the vineyard.

This parable is unique to Matthew and serves as a sort of capstone to the teachings and examples Jesus has been giving since chapter 18 on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and about how following Jesus upends our understanding of "fairness" and "justice" and "righteousness."

In the parable, the "daily wage" represents the gifts of God such as forgiveness and eternal life. At its core, the story is about the centrality of the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment in Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.

*You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Exodus 20:17*

It is a reminder that God does not love the pious more than the wicked. It also supports the idea that grace cannot be earned, but is a gift freely given and available equally to all.

I think this idea still vexes many Christians today; we are all subject to judging others, usually at their expense, and Jesus reminds us that doing so takes us away from God's will and desire for us.

v17-19 Jesus here lays out that they will soon turn towards Jerusalem and that their time there will be difficult, but that God is working through these challenges to bring about God's desire.

v20-28 This section again offers an opportunity to reframe expectations and to continue his teaching about what is expected of the followers of Jesus, especially in their relationships with one another in setting the example.

v20 Their mother is never named anywhere in Matthew, and though she comes across here as the worst kind of stereotype of the pushy mother, we will find later that she is one of the witnesses of the crucifixion, showing us that she was a devoted follower of Jesus as well.

v21 Her request suggest she too envisions Jesus as an earthly king and hopes to secure prestige and position for her sons in his court.

v22 I can almost hear Jesus' pity here. "Cup" as a metaphor for one's fate appears sporadically in the Bible



*Psa 16:5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.*

*Psa 11:6 On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.*

It is more obvious in Greek, but “You” here is plural and is addressed to James and John.

Jesus ask them if they are able to “drink his cup,” presumably meaning to sacrifice themselves for the furtherance of God’s kingdom. They say yes, but it seems they likely didn’t know exactly what they were saying.

v23 Jesus’ words here suggest that James and John will suffer as Jesus is about to suffer. However...

According to the book of Acts, James was martyred (executed by Herod), a little more than ten years after Jesus’ execution, as part of an early persecution that barely spared Peter.

*About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Judeans, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.)*

Acts 12:1-3

By tradition the body of James was taken to Spain, and it is to his grave that the pilgrimage trail, known as the Camino, takes one.

John, on the other hand, is believed to have lived to ripe old age, dying of natural causes.

Whatever their merits though, Jesus reiterates that worthiness in God’s reign is not tied to human endeavor or standing. The Father’s love is prepared equally for all.

v24-28 The others are, understandably, peeved with James and John. But his whole episode underscores the covetousness and self-serving attitudes of all the twelve, who are proxies for the rest of us. Jesus reiterates that “greatness” if such a thing exists in the heavenly kingdom is defined by consciousness of and service to others.

v29-34 The chapter closes with a healing. Nearly identical stories appear in Luke and Mark, though like the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Matthew alters it to suggest that there are TWO blind men instead of one (named Bartimaeus by Mark).

The blind men ask for their sight, and Jesus moved with compassion, heals them. By contrast, in Luke and Mark, their sightedness is explicitly tied to their faith and not Jesus’ emotional state.

## Matthew Chapter 21

Chapter 21 begins the story of the final week of Jesus' life, the fateful week before Passover in Jerusalem which will conclude, as he foretold three times, in his death and eventual resurrection. This story makes up nearly a third of the entire length of the Matthew's story.

v1 The last chapter ended with Jesus and his disciples in Jericho, near the place where John the Baptist had been doing his baptisms. So Jesus has come, in some way, full circle on the story of his earthly life.

The location of Bethphage (which means "house of un-ripe figs" in Aramiac) isn't known exactly, but the Mount of Olives is a ridge just to the east of Jerusalem.

The Mount of Olives is the location where God would appear on the Day of the Lord as recorded by the prophet Zechariah

*See, a day is coming for the LORD, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst...*

*...On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.*

Zechariah 14:1 & 4

v2 The "village" mentioned here is likely Bethany, which John's gospel records as the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and according to Mark, the home of Simon the Leper, in whose house the unnamed woman anointed Jesus' feet.

The colt and donkey are reference to the prophet Zechariah

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9*

Zechariah seems to be using donkey, colt, and foal poetically to refer to single animal, Matthew seems to believe it is two separate animals.

Having owned horses, riding two simultaneously, especially of two different sizes would be difficult and challenging in the extreme.

v3-5 Had Jesus planned this in advance?

The prophetic quote is a mashup of a verse Isaiah with the Zechariah quote above.

*The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." Isaiah 62:11*

v6-8 The response here seems to be a spontaneous echo of the Festival of Booths as prescribed in Leviticus (there is also an approximate alignment with the length of the festival and Jesus' time in Jerusalem)

*Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the LORD, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.* Leviticus 23:39-40

v9 This response of the crowd has roots in the responses used at the most important Israelite festivals, with the middle verse (Blessed...) drawn from Psalm 118, which was a psalm of glory, likely used in important worship services

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.* Psalm 118:26

v10-11 As we have already seen, Jesus is already quite well known for his healing powers and his fame has spread far and wide. His activities and teachings have caught the attention of the religious and government authorities, and that attention is not positive. Jesus' entry in the manner of a king, making the prophets come alive, is surely meant to be provocative as well as celebratory.

v12-17 These verses tell of Jesus first public act after his entry, the scourging of the Temple where he disrupts the business of the Temple in order to make a point about the nature of worship. Jesus' actions are not, it seems, meant to be a condemnation of the Temple or of sacrifices generally, but instead a condemnation of a system that erects barriers to God.

v12 These activities had become accepted compromises in order to efficiently manage the sacrificial system as outlined in the Torah. The purity of the animals was required by the Law, but procuring them could be difficult for individuals, so a system had evolved whereby Temple breeders provided (for a fee) worthy animals without the need of Israelites to bring them from wherever they lived. (It is Passover season, and many in the Temple would have travelled long distances to be there)

Secondly, money needed to be converted from the various currencies in use wherever Israelites lived into the local currency.

Doves would have been the (barely) affordable option for a poor person to make a sacrifice (keep in mind, 90% of the population are likely among the "poor").

v13 Jesus draws this from Isaiah and Jeremiah

*these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Isaiah 56:7*

*Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. Jeremiah 7:11*

It should also be noted that both verses come from longer passages about welcoming the stranger and foreigner.

v14-16 It's not clear whether the blind and lame were already in the Temple (which should have been not allowed, as disability was seen as ritually impure) or whether they were drawn to the Temple in search of Jesus – which would have been another reason for the authorities to be opposed to Jesus.

Remember, the authorities see the situation from a perspective that aligned national suffering to disregard of the Law; and Jesus' actions and reinterpretations, let alone his claims regarding who he was, would definitely looked like disregarding the Law, perilously so.

v16 this comes from Psalm 8 (specifically, the Greek translation from the Septuagint)

*Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. Psalm 8:2*

v17 Jesus, wisely, leaves the city for the night to retreat to the relative safety of Bethany.

v18-22 In Mark's gospel the story of the Fig tree bookends the story of Jesus' cleansing of the Temple; Jesus sees it in the morning and curses it because of its lack of fruit, and it is only later, after he has visited the Temple and driven out the moneychangers, that the disciples pass by the tree again and see it withered. We are meant to see the association between Jesus' ruckus in the Temple and the subsequent denial of Him by Israel with the rise and growth of Christianity. Here in Matthew, the symbolism is a little muted since the event is depicted as happening the day after Jesus' visit to the Temple. Instead Matthew uses it to illustrate the power of faith. Also, this is the only instance of Jesus "cursing" something.

v23-27 Jesus is confronted by the Temple authorities who naturally resent His being on their turf, but they seem unwilling to push things too far for fear of Jesus' popularity.

This short exchange really gets at the heart of Jesus' message that when we are unwilling to fully trust God, we fall short of our potential and invite evil into our lives.

v28-46 The chapter ends with two parables ( more follow in ch. 22) that illustrate the authorities' rejection of Jesus.

v28-32 The parable of the two sons is about hypocrisy and reinforces Jesus' teaching that the choices we make and the things we do matter more than our piety or religious claims

v33-46 The parable of the rebellious tenants speaks to the perversity of Israel's leadership and their unwillingness to participate in the covenant in good faith.

Landowner=God

Vineyard=Israel

Tenants=Leadership of Israel

Slaves=prophets

Son=Jesus

v42: from Psalm 118:22-23

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

**The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.**

**This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.**

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:19-24

v43 "Produce the fruits of the kingdom" Again, Jesus prioritizes action over belief

v45-46 Jesus remains popular

## Matthew Chapter 22

Chapter 22 continues the story of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem offering parables that speak to the local leaders' unwillingness, rooted in their fears, to even consider Jesus' message and the stories of his interactions with those leaders as they attempt to undermine Him.

v1-10 The chapter opens with a third parable (continuing from the two that ended chapter 21) on the consequences of the Israelite leaders' rejection of Jesus' teaching.

This parable, like the one about the wicked talents can probably be understood as an allegory, where the king represents God, the feast is the Covenant, the slaves are the prophets, and the invitees are the leaders of Israel.

v7 The author, writing many years after Jesus' death and resurrection, likely had the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in mind (70CE).

It's hard to overestimate the impact of Jerusalem's destruction on both the early Christians and the surviving Judeans. Both groups saw God's judgment at work in their interpretations. And both sought to answer the fundamental question of what it meant to be God's people in the wake of that destruction. The remaining Pharisees and Christians were, effectively, the only surviving Jews afterwards and there was real enmity between them that we see through the Gospels and Epistles. Christianity didn't so much separate from Judaism as Christianity and modern Judaism are both responses to the destruction of Second-Temple Judaism.

v8-10 This closes out the parable by illustrating God's invitation to the whole world to participate in God's kingdom; not through ethnicity but through a willingness to trust in God (ie; participate in the banquet)

v11-14 These verses, though clearly tied to the preceding parable are actually a separate story. Rather than being about Israel's rejection of God; this one is a caution against arrogance on the part of the newly formed people of God where the robe represents the new life of Christ and the guest represents those whose faith is hypocritical.

v 15-22 The narrative shifts away from Jesus' teaching to telling about Jesus being confronted by the Jerusalem authorities.

v15 Those confronting Jesus do not do so in good faith. They aren't interested in his teaching but instead hope to catch him in "gotcha" moment they hope will expose His ulterior motives and that will cause him to lose the favor of the people

v16 "Herodians" are the supporters of Herod's rule, likely members of his court/administration

Their opening words are meant to be condescending flattery

v17 the question is a double whammy. The essential problem is that the coins have the emperor's image (Tiberius), and the emperor's were granted god-like (or actual divine) status causing a conflict with the 1st/2nd commandments. At the same time, saying that one shouldn't pay taxes is clearly a civil crime and encouraging others to not pay would be considered treasonous.

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

Exodus 20:2-4

v18-21 Jesus' answer reframes the question from one about taxes to one about fealty to God. Jesus answer, more generally, is about our willingness to become complicit in evil for our own convenience.

v22 One assumes their amazement was at how Jesus had made them seem small

v23-33 This is the first time we encounter the Sadducees in Matthew's gospel.

The Sadducees were a sect within Judaism that held that only the written Law (Torah) was what mattered (the Pharisees also believed in the "oral Law" or the series of interpretations and customs that had grown up to define and shape Jewish life. The Sadducees were largely drawn from the priestly and aristocratic families. The main complaint against them was that they had become too cosmopolitan (Hellenized) and out of touch with everyday people as well as a little too cozy with the Roman occupiers. They were discredited and largely wiped out in the Jewish war.

v23 Sadducees did not believe in resurrection because there is no explicit support for it in the Torah

24 Moses is, of course, the traditionally understood author of the Torah

v24-28 The question derives from the practice of Levirate marriage and is meant to make the idea of resurrection seem preposterous by holding up this extreme example.

*When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's*

*name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me." Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, "I have no desire to marry her," then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, "This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." Throughout Israel his family shall be known as "the house of him whose sandal was pulled off." Deuteronomy 25:5-10*

v29-33 Jesus again reframes the debate taking it away from the details about resurrection and instead making it about interpretation of the written Torah, supposedly the Sadducees stock in trade.

honestly, Jesus' interpretation is not intuitively obvious, but it may help to understand that Hebrew has no past tense (or future tense). Instead it expresses either completeness or not completeness - things are either done or are in the process of being done.

v29 Jesus directly challenges their scriptural knowledge

v32 from Exodus 3:6

*When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3:4-6*

v34-45 It isn't clear whether the Pharisees are attempting to entrap Jesus or, once they knew he had bested *even* the Sadducees if they weren't prepared to engage in a more good faith enquiry (I lean towards the latter).

Matthew frames this summary of the Law as Jesus' answer (as does Mark) though in Luke, a scribe offers the summary of the Law as the path to eternal life and Jesus agrees with him.

v37 from Deuteronomy; this is the second verse of the Shema, a daily prayer expected of all observant Jews, that is also the closing prayer of the Yom Kippur observances and the last prayer said at death.

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5*

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ

*V'ahav'ta eit Adonai Elohekha b'khol l'vav'kha uv'khol nafsh'kha uv'khol m'odekha.*

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.



v39 from Leviticus

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.* Leviticus 19:18

v40 Jesus' ministry, as we have seen, has been largely predicated on the words and vision of the prophets, but here Jesus links the two to show that the prophets, were largely ignored at best and oppressed at worst, more truly expressed the *intent or spirit* of the Torah than the priests and kings who ruled.

v41-46 Jesus now asks a question of the Pharisees in order to prompt them to reframe their own understandings of what God wants of God's people.

The question Jesus asks presumes that David is the author of the psalms and that he wrote them from under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

*The LORD says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."* Psalm 110:1

v45 The presumption here is that no father would call his son Lord, that would be a complete upending of the natural order

v46 Realizing that Jesus can't be "compromised" through verbal trickery, the authorities give up and instead begin to plot how they can undo his popularity in another way.

## Matthew Chapter 23

Chapter 23 continues the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes, and is largely a single diatribe against their hypocrisy.

v1 Jesus words are not directed towards the Pharisees but are offered to his followers

v2 Jesus acknowledges the teaching office of the Pharisees as Moses' successors

v3 In other words, they are hypocrites

v4 Jesus here is referring to the ever-expanding oral Torah

v5 phylacteries are the little boxes (still) worn by pious Jews on their foreheads and left arm during prayer that contain scripture verses.

The practice derives from Deuteronomy (part of the daily Shema prayer):

*Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. **Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.***

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

v8-12 These verses speak to the radical equality of people before God and Jesus' vision of a world without oppressive hierarchies. Similar to the "the first will be last and the last will be first" as Jesus said back in ch's 19 and 20.

Mat\_19:30 *But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.*

Mat\_20:16 *So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

v13 By their example, many are led astray away from God's will

v14 At some point a v14 was added that most modern translations now leave out:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour the houses of widows, and pray at length as a pretext. Because of this you will receive more abundant judgment.*

v15 In Jesus' time, Judaism was strongly inclined towards proselytism; actively seeking new converts.

v16-22 Jesus' point is that an oath bound by a small thing should not take precedence to a greater. Also take note that the things Jesus accuses of granting greater importance are things that humans value.

We have seen elsewhere the danger of swearing oaths and generally, swearing upon God's name is frowned upon

*Exo 20:7 You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain; for Jehovah will not leave unpunished the one who takes His name in vain.*

v23-24 small herbs, not even grains

fun fact - gnats and camels both are unclean things to eat!

v25-26 substance over appearance

v27-28 see above

v29-36 Jesus wraps up his denunciation of what he sees as the Pharisee's hypocrisy by puncturing their personal myths.

v29-31 Of course Jesus, too, is a descendant of those who killed the prophets. The point here is that Jesus is accusing them of self-delusion in their belief that they are wiser or possess greater moral courage than their ancestors did.

Even today, we see people assume they would have been braver or more moral than their ancestors.

v32-33 This is really the culmination of Jesus' words here and seems to be meant to be a dismissive gesture; sort of like saying "whatever!" or "ok boomer" (but with more bite and less eye-rolling). "to hell with you, then!" is another contemporary phrase that captures the intent. The gist is that Jesus is, more or less, saying that he intends to no longer bother with them because their evil-ness isn't going to change, they will reap the bitter harvest of their choices and Jesus has better use for his energy.

This dynamic should be familiar to anyone who's ever gotten dragged into a political disagreement on social media or with a family member. Probably better to just shake the dust off your shoes and move on.

v34 Jesus' words prefigure how the early Christian church will face persecution.

v35-36 Jesus is telling his followers that the great conflict between good and evil in the world is coming to a head.

v37-39 Jesus both looks back to the ways in which Israel's leadership betrayed the covenant in the past while also looking ahead to how it will betray God's will again in his own execution. Nevertheless, their betrayal will not be the final word on the matter, as Jesus cannot be contained in death.

## Matthew Chapter 24

Chapter 24 and 25 make up the fifth discourse, or extended teaching of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. Scholars call this the Eschatological Discourse because it is concerned primarily with the coming day of the Lord. In some ways, this section disrupts the narrative because up to this point Jesus hasn't spoken of his "return" so explicitly. It seems to be strongly influenced by the early Christian community's experience in the Jewish War of the 70's that destroyed Jerusalem (and the Temple), threatened the diaspora communities, and upended pretty much every assumption about what it meant to follow the God of Abraham.

Eschatology is the study of the end times, and is derived from the Greek *Eschatos*, which means "last" or "end" and *Logia*, which means sayings or teachings (the English use of *-logy* to define a field of study derives from *logia*)

v1 Jesus is leaving the Temple where, as we saw in the last chapter, he has been teaching and debating with the scribes (Temple employees) and Pharisees (a sect of Judaism).

Apparently, the disciples are gawking like tourists as they depart the Temple Mount.

The Temple (the second) had originally been rebuilt when the exiled priests and aristocrats returned from Babylon, about 500 years before Jesus' time.

However, the Temple had been more or less completely rebuilt and expanded by Herod the Great (who tried to kill the infant Jesus) about 30 years before the time of the story in Matthew (though according to John's gospel, some construction had continued for a period of years until just before the events of holy week).

v2 The Temple was destroyed (and Jerusalem with it) by the Romans in 70CE, during the Jewish War.

Matthew's gospel was most likely written after that war, so Jesus' words here would have seemed even more poignant.

v3-8 Jesus begins his eschatological discourse after the disciples have left the city for the day and returned to the relative safety of the countryside outside the city.

The disciples seem to be speaking about the beginning of the uprising they believe Jesus is going to lead to combat the Romans and their enablers; while Jesus is speaking of something more cosmic in scale.

v4-5 This seems a particularly prescient warning, as division has bedeviled the church from nearly the beginning.

v6-8 Human conflict will continue to unfold.

v9-14 Jesus here seems to be speaking about the tribulations and persecutions of the very early pre-Constantinian church as he is speaking of persecution from outside the Judean community.

Jesus here also is saying that our world has a *telos* or a destination it is moving towards.

One is reminded of MLK's saying that the arc of the universe bends towards justice. This sense of directionality in history is a particular Christian perspective.

v15-31 Some scholars believe this section is an interpolation on Matthew's part, describing the experience of the Jewish war when (by tradition) many followers of Jesus fled from Jerusalem as the Roman legions approached. It would have been understandable that many would have seen the destruction of Jerusalem as a particularly obvious omen. It wasn't, though it did serve to clearly define the Jesus movement as a thing apart from what became modern Judaism.

v28 In other words, the day of Jesus' return will be quite obvious to everyone.

v29-31 This section describes the Parousia, or the return of Christ.

v29 Though set aside as an apparent quote, this actually appears to be Matthew's own original bit of verse, though it has clear echoes in the prophetic canon.

v32-35 This section is about recognizing the signs of God's justice coming to pass

v36-44 Ostensibly, this section is about the Eschaton and its primary focus is on preparedness and watchfulness. It is one of the seeds of the Rapture heresy.

On another level though, it is about how we live our lives in the here and now. How are we watchful? Do we seek out signs of God's justice coming to pass and seek to participate in it or are we complacent and unwilling to be roused from our comforts?

v45-51 The final section of this chapter has Jesus telling a parable about the coming of God into human lives, and it echoes what was said about preparedness in the previous section. It reminds us that there are no superior or inferior persons in relationship to God; all of us are subject to God's will. We have an obligation to look after one another and to help each other to thrive. If we do not, or worse, actively seek others' suffering – we will face the consequences of our choices.

## Matthew Chapter 25

Chapter 25 is a continuation of the Eschatological Discourse begun in chapter 24 and is made up of three parables about preparedness that are unique to Matthew's gospel.

v1-13 The first parable is that of the ten bridesmaids and their lamps. The focus here is on the importance of *individual* commitment. As Jesus said earlier, it is not enough that you are children of Abraham. Jesus here makes it clear that identity is not enough, that one's personal choices matter.

v14-30 This second parable is about how we use the resources entrusted to us. These are the gifts that Paul talks about (most famously in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians)

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

1Corinthians 12:4-10

It is also about the other resources that come under our care, our time and financial resources as well. Are we using them in concert with others to further God's kingdom or not?

v31-46 The third parable is that of the sheep and goats. This parable begins by affirming that Jesus' mission is aimed beyond Israel and that God's desire is the unity of all humanity. It then moves on to focus on our obligations to one another in community.

The poet John Donne (an Anglican priest, btw) captured Jesus' teaching especially well when he wrote;

No man is an island entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as  
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine  
own were; any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

What matters, in fact ALL that matter, Jesus said, is how we treat one another. Do we see each other as God does, as fellow beloved children of God or are we willing to differentiate

those who are deserving of our time and attention and those who are not? Can we see the Christ present in each person; do we even believe that truth?

## Matthew Chapter 26

Chapter 26 represents the great turning point in Matthew's telling of Jesus' story. We begin with Jesus finishing his last discourse (or teaching) and returning to Bethany for the night. But as the Passover approaches, the authorities plans to silence Jesus are moving towards their completion.

v1 Jesus finishes up the discourse that spanned chapters 24 and 25, his teachings on eschatology

v2 Jesus has been very clear about what was going to happen, but here he explicitly links his coming death to Passover, the remembrance of God's sparing the Israelites from the deadly plagues in Egypt and their departure from slavery.

In the Passover, the death of many led to the freedom of Israel; in Christ the death of one will free all humanity from Satan's grasp.

v3-5 Owing to Jesus' popularity, the city authorities plot requires that they move quickly and at a time when everyone is distracted.

According to other ancient writers, festivals often led to rioting. This seems to have been especially so in Jerusalem.

v6-13 As Jesus predicted, the story of Jesus burial anointing before his arrest continues to be told. The symbolism is explicit here.

having oil poured on your head at dinner would surely be an odd sensation.

v11 This is not an excuse to ignore the plight of the poor. The poor are one of Jesus' primary concerns (and of the scriptures, generally). It is a caution though, I think, to ensure we nurture our spiritual lives so that we will have the perseverance to continue Jesus' ministry.

*Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.* Deuteronomy 15:11

v14-16 Judas goes to the authorities seeking to betray Jesus.

The fundamental question, I think, is "why?" We may answer that it was necessary, or that he was tempted by Satan, but Judas was a real person with his own agency and reasons. It's probably fairer to say that Jesus understood he would be betrayed (due to human sinfulness) so that Judas wasn't set up to fail so much as he was simply the one who broke first.



Later we will see that Judas deeply regrets his decision, so why did he think there would be a different outcome? I think the most compelling reason is that Judas was really committed to the idea of Jesus as leading a revolution and when he discovered that wasn't part of Jesus' agenda he came to believe that Jesus was unlikely to be effective in addressing Israel's immediate situation and so he judged Jesus as non-threatening. I think this may have led him to believe that the authorities, once they came to understand Jesus' harmlessness, as he had, they would hold themselves back.

Judas, I think, believed that anger and violence could cleanse Israel's unrighteousness and restore her to the "goodness" of creation. This belief opened his heart to the temptations of indulging his anger to the point of betraying his friend.

v15 The thirty pieces of silver seems like a pretty clear allusion to Zechariah's oracle concerning the coming day of judgment found in ch11 of the prophet's book

*I took my staff Favor and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep merchants, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD. I then said to them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." **So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver.** Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it into the treasury" – this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the LORD. Then I broke my second staff Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel.*

Zechariah 11:10-14

v17-30 The story of the Last Supper

v17 the festival of Unleavened Bread is another name for Passover

This is the first day or the Day of Preparation, the day when the Passover Lamb was slaughtered in the Temple. The Passover meal would have been the next day.

v18-19 It isn't clear whether or not the "certain man" was a follower with whom the meal arrangements had already been planned or not.

Interestingly, it suggests that the disciples themselves prepared the meal.

v20 This meal is a gathering only of the twelve and apparently does not include any of the larger number of followers who usually accompany Jesus

v21-22 Jesus knows already that, as he had expected, he was betrayed already by one of those closest to him.

v23 They are dipping bread in oil most likely, maybe a nice balsamic

v24-25 As I noted already, it is not necessary to assume that Judas was especially wicked or destined to betray Jesus. One of the clear messages of the gospels (as Jesus himself will suggest in a just few more verses) is that all of the disciples (and by extension, us) struggle in our fidelity and commitment to Jesus.

In Matthew, only Jesus' opponents ever call him "Rabbi"

v26-30 Jesus offers bread and wine as symbols of himself and his actions and bids his followers to partake of them so as to take Jesus into themselves. It also serves as a kind of pledge of Jesus' commitments and eschatological promises to return to the company of his followers.

Though Jews did not (and do not, if kosher) partake of blood; blood though is the sign of covenants and was burnt in sacrifice.

An important point to be made: Jesus also invites Judas to participate

After supper, Jesus and his disciples again leave the city

v31-35 Jesus speaks forthrightly of how they will all waver in their commitment to Jesus in the face of great fear and threat.

v31 Jesus again draws upon prophetic imagery to explain what is happening, this time again from Zechariah

*"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate," says the LORD of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, says the LORD, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are my people"; and they will say, "The LORD is our God."*

Zechariah 13:7-9

v36-46 In what I think is the most poignant part of the passion story, Jesus seeks to rest in prayer as he faces what surely must have been a great temptation to choose his own life over and above his mission. And immediately after his closest companions have pledged their lives, they can't even muster the will to stay awake and be with their friend in his darkest hour. It is here in Gethsemane that Jesus becomes wholly and completely isolated and alone, and he will remain so until his death.

The passage ends with him rousing them to at least witness the end.

v47-56 Jesus is arrested by the city and Temple authorities

v47 Judas seems to have slipped away while everyone else was sleeping.

v48 Given Jesus' very public ministry one would think they would recognize him, but it is dark and Judas' kiss ensures that no one can pretend to be Jesus, thus allowing him to slip away.

v51 Matthew had not previously mention that any of the disciples were armed.

Matthew also does not identify which of the disciples attacked the high priest's slave (neither do Luke or Mark, John says it was Peter)

52-54 Jesus reiterates that his mission is not one of violence though also reminding them of his willingness to walk faithfully into his own death.

55 Jesus is calling them out for their fear of trying in broad daylight among crowds to do what they are attempting in the dark of night, far from the city.

56 Jesus reiterates that his earthly ministry is bringing the prophets to life.

Jesus is now truly alone as his followers, so recently boastful of their undying devotion run away to seek their own safety.

v57-68 Jesus faces his accusers from among the city's leaders

57 Caiaphas was the high priest for nearly twenty years (18-36AD). The high Priests were appointed directly by the Roman governor, for annual terms. So Caiaphas clearly was on good terms with the Roman authorities.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas (or Ananias) who had previously been high priest. Ananias was clearly a "power behind the throne" as he was succeeded by his son, his son-in-law, and then by four more sons, the last of whom (also named Annas) was assassinated by zealots for his advocacy of maintaining friendly relations with the Romans.

Many things about this "trial" are extraordinary. First it is held in a private home and not before the public as was usual, secondly trials at night and during Passover were specifically forbidden by the legal code by which Jerusalem had been governed for the preceding 200 years.

v58 Though clearly fearful, Peter finds he can't quite quit Jesus

v59-68 Aside from it being the middle of the night, Jesus' popularity makes it difficult for the council to find some trumped up charges to use against Jesus. The best they can do is to find some willing to twist Jesus' own words against him.

v62-63      What is there to answer really? The High Priest straight out asks if Jesus is the messiah, not because they ask in good faith but because his affirmative would just be used to justify condemning him. It's a Catch-22, if he says nothing they come up with false charges, if he answers truthfully, they twist it to accuse him because they cannot fathom that God would act in any other way than through themselves.

v64    Not a direct quote from anything, but Jesus here draws on the imagery of Daniel, whence the term Son of Man came from.

*As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* Daniel 7:13-14

v65-67      Their bad faith is exposed, their premeditated verdict is announced, and then they openly mock Jesus.

v69-75    Peter here tries to linger around Caiaphas' (very) large house to try to figure out what is happening to Jesus while also trying (unsuccessfully) to blend in and not be noticed. Peter moves from fear to self-awareness to emotional collapse. It will be a while yet before his hope and faith are restored.

## Matthew Chapter 27

Chapter 27 concludes the story of Jesus' life and earthly mission; focusing on his harrowing and traumatic last day.

v1-2 The story continues directly from the previous chapter, with Jesus being held by a group of city leaders.

The text says it is sunrise, so around 6:00am (assuming the sun rose about the same time as it does in Jerusalem in the springtime as it does now), which means the council has been holding Jesus through the night.

Pontius Pilate had been appointed prefect of Judea by the Emperor Tiberius (He wasn't technically a governor – he was subordinate to the governor of Syria, of which Judea was a part) in the year 26/7 and served in that role for ten years until he was recalled due to his extreme cruelty (specifically the slaughter of a number of unarmed Samaritans). Little is known of him outside of his mentions in the gospels/

It seems as though, in this period, the city council (the Sanhedrin) did not possess the authority to impose the death penalty. As we will see, this was an obstacle to the plans of those opposed to Jesus since the Mosaic law was not recognized by the Romans.

v3-10 Judas is gripped with remorse at what his actions have brought about and seeks to make penance by returning the money, suggesting this was not what he had expected would happen. His penance is rejected and he commits suicide.

vv11-24 Jesus' "trial" before Pilate. The gospel writers largely paint a seemingly sympathetic portrait of Pilate, playing up his reluctance; preferring instead to make Judas the greater villain. Yet, Pilate could easily have overridden the council if he had chosen too. What little we know of Pilate suggests that he was continually at loggerheads with Judean authorities and sensibilities; he is also known to have been unafraid to use violence. It seems more likely (to me at least) that Pilate and the High Priest were in league throughout and any reluctance Pilate shows is meant to cover his actions if questioned by higher authorities (which had happened before and which would cause his ouster later).

v11 This suggests that the charge under consideration would have been sedition, since claiming to be king of a kingdom that didn't exist was a sure sign of opposition to the emperor.

v12-14 Jesus' unorthodox response to being accused would probably have been unexpected; most would likely have either sworn their innocence or denied the legitimacy of the proceeding.

v15 There are no extra-biblical corroborations of this claim nor is it mentioned elsewhere than the gospels.

v16-17 Little else is known of Barabbas; his name (*bar abba* or *bar rabban*) means “son of the father” or “son of the teacher;” so Jesus Barabbas could be translated Jesus, son of the father. From the text we get he was *notorious*, so, well known, and a *prisoner*, though Matthew does not provide any information on why he was imprisoned.

v19 Pilate’s wife continues the sympathetic description of Pilate and Roman authority. Matthew’s gospel is the only one that tells of Pilate’s wife.

v20 Remember, this is early in the morning, during a holiday, in the palace of the roman ruler; this most likely is not a random crowd of Jerusalemites; but people specifically rallied by those opposed to Jesus (and perhaps supportive of Barabbas)

v21-24 This all looks seems too pat to me. A hand picked “crowd” shouts for death to Jesus and Pilate, who has not otherwise been swayed by Judean public opinion suddenly believes that there is nothing he could possibly do to intervene.

Dramatically, there is a bowl of water that just happens to be nearby for Pilate to wash his hands of the whole ordeal (even though he is the only person here with real power).

v25 This is one of the key sources for a long history of Christian anti-semitism; whomever this “crowd” was they were certainly not speaking for all Jews everywhere for all time. And more to the point, isn’t the blood of Jesus the atoning sacrifice for all humanity – in other words, don’t we also claim to have his blood upon us and our children?

v26 flogging is the beating of someone, usually with a whip

v27-31 The Roman soldiers are in Jerusalem to maintain order during Passover. Usually the Roman army detachment was not in the city, but at the coast at Caesarea Maritima. The closest Legions were posted near Damascus.

v32-44 This section covers Jesus’ walk through Jerusalem, from the palace of Pilate to Golgotha, the hill outside the city walls where executions took place.

v32 Simon of Cyrene is otherwise unknown, though Mark mentioned he was the father of Rufus and Alexander, who must have been well known members of the community that was Mark’s audience. (Cyrene is a city in what is now Libya. simon was likely a member of the Jewish diaspora)

An assumption would be that Jesus was too weak from the flogging to be able to carry the cross piece himself.

v33-35 All of these actions are manifestations of the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically Psalms 22 and 69.

**Psa 69:21** They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

**Psa 22:18** they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

Crucifixion was testified to in many ancient accounts; it kills through a slow suffocation as the diaphragm becomes too weak to support the lungs. the romans usually reserved it for those who, in some way, dishonored Rome (traitors, rebels, etc)

v36-37 The sign would have named the crime as a deterrent to others

v38-44 Jesus continues to be mocked by high and low, by the bandits (probably rebels opposed to Rome) rightly condemned (Matthew does not record that one asked for forgiveness) as well as by the city leaders who likely felt vindicated by his suffering in believing he was a charlatan.

As we will see just ahead, all of this still happening in the morning, certainly before noon.

v45-54 these verses recount Jesus' last words (at least, according to Matthew), the experience of those in close proximity, and some general supernatural effects throughout Jerusalem.

v45 Jesus is on the cross for a relatively short time before he dies. One of the purposes of crucifixion is that it usually would have resulted in extended suffering before death. Ancient sources record several different methods of crucifixion, such as using ropes or nails to secure the condemned and several different shapes, such as X, T, t, and even a straight pole l.

The gospels do not specify the method or shape (ie, the don't say he was nailed or that the cross was in the form we usually associate it with – most early sources describe it as T).

Generally, there seems to have been a slow method and a quick method; the quick method usually involved the breaking of the legs to hasten death by asphyxiation. None of the synoptic Gospels mentions leg breaking, though John's gospel does.

Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, abolished crucifixion in the Roman Empire in 337 out of veneration for Jesus Christ, its most famous victim.

v46 Matthew here records Jesus last words as this line from the opening of psalm 22 in Hebrew where Mark recorded Him speaking in Aramaic.

Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

Luke and John record different words of Jesus from the cross.

*Luk 23:46 Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.*

*Joh 19:30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

v47 In the popular Israelite thought of Jesus' days it was believed that Elijah (who had never died) was especially concerned with the suffering of the innocent

v50 Jesus dies

v51-54 the miraculous imagery attending Jesus' death

v51 The curtain separated the Holy of Holies, where God's presence was believed to reside from the rest of the Temple and no one was allowed to enter, so its tearing symbolizes that God is now accessible to all

An earthquake also hits the city

v52-53 The dead rise, akin to Lazarus' resuscitation (no mentioned in this gospel), as a prefiguring of the *resurrection* of all believers.

v54 The earthquake and the opening of the tombs (they wouldn't have seen or known about the curtain) would certainly be a remarkable display.

v55-56 This is the first mention in Matthew that Jesus' travelling band also included women. We have encountered the mothers of Zebedee before in this gospel (20:20), but not Mary Magdelene or Mary the mother of James and Joseph (which James and Joseph exactly isn't clear, Jesus' brothers perhaps? see 13:55). These, clearly, were women who were prominent in the early Christian community.

Also note that his 11 remaining disciples are not mentioned

v57-61 Under the Mosaic Law, the bodies of the condemned should not be left up but should be buried, because to leave them on display would be a defilement of creation.

*When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession.*

Deuteronomy 21:22-23



However, the Roman custom was to leave the bodies up as a warning and deterrent and generally, the Romans paid little heed to local custom.

So Joseph (the only named person outside of the twelve who is called a disciple) going to ask for the body speaks both of his righteousness and piety as well as his courage. Because to do so marks him out as suspect in Roman eyes.

Why are so many women in Jesus' circle named Mary??

v62-66 As we will see in chapter 28, this is exactly the story that was often told to discredit the apostles' accounts of the resurrection. A quick Google search will reveal that it continues hold sway for many.

## Matthew Chapter 28

v1 Here is the timeline:

Thursday night – last supper and Jesus' arrest

Thursday night – early Friday morning: Jesus' trial

Friday morning – Jesus' crucifixion

Friday afternoon - Jesus' death

Friday evening – Jesus' burial

Friday night- ??: Jesus in the tomb

Sunday morning: The women go to the tomb and find it empty.

v2-4 As at his death, the resurrection is marked by miraculous events

v5-7 The angels appear to the women at the tomb and tells them to communicate to the disciples that they should return to Galilee where Jesus will meet them. (In Luke and John, Jesus appears to the eleven in Jerusalem)

v8 This is a marked contrast to Mark, where the women left the tomb in fear and told no one.

v9-10 And just to be sure they get the message, Jesus himself appears to the women and again charges them to tell the eleven to go back to Galilee.

v11-15 The leaders who in the last chapter wanted guards to ensure Jesus' body wasn't stolen, now bribe the guards to say that it *was in fact*, stolen.

v16-20 Jesus finally reunites with the eleven in Galilee. Possibly to the mountain where the Transfiguration occurred? It doesn't really say nor does it mention when or where Jesus directed them to it.

v17 Notice how here some doubted, though when the women saw him, all of them just worshipped.

v18-20 The Great Commission, which lays out the purpose of the church as an organization.