

The Gospel Of Matthew by William R. Cannon

Before his election to the episcopacy in 1968 United Methodist Bishop William R. Cannon served as Professor of Church History and then Dean of Chandler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Other books by Bishop Cannon include The Gospel Of John, Jesus The Servant, and The Book Of Acts. The Gospel Of Matthew was published by The Upper Room, Nashville, 1982. This material prepared by Paul R. Mobley.

Matthew is studied in sections, revealing stages in the life and work of Jesus. These stages also show the interactions of Jesus with people, and characteristics about him self. The study will certify that Jesus is the Son of God.

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Promised King

The ancestry, birth and childhood, baptism, temptations, and vocation of Jesus are examined while bringing him to the point of his work on earth.

Chapter 2: The Teacher And His Pupils

Jesus taught and healed many people. During all these events, and in private, Jesus was also teaching those twelve disciples that later are known as Apostles. The interaction of Jesus with everyone he came into contact with is a model we can all use.

Chapter 3: Jesus And The People

Cannon examines the travels of Jesus and some interactions showing how He went to the people in fulfilling His mission, and how many responded favorably. There are good lessons for us today in this study of the gospel as Matthew recorded it, and Jesus as the Son of Man.

Chapter 4: Herald Of The Kingdom

In this section are outlined the basic principles governing life in the kingdom set up by Jesus. Whether in His kingdom or not these are principles that all would benefit from by learning.

Chapter 5: King Of The Jews

Jesus was born king of the Jews first, fulfilling the prophecies. Later He also brought all to the other nations. But there were some who had difficulty understanding that His kingdom was, and

is, a spiritual kingdom rather than a civil kingdom. Yet His entrance into Jerusalem was welcomed.

Chapter 6: The King Of Glory

The passion and crucifixion are the deposition of Jesus as the King of the Jews, yet at the same time, they are His exaltation as the king of glory. He now rules His kingdom enthroned on the right hand of God.

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Introduction

The symbol of Matthew is a man, while the symbols of the other evangelists are animals and a bird: the lion of Mark, the ox of Luke, and the eagle of John. There is a reason why antiquity gave to each of the writers of the Gospels the symbol it did. Each symbol then had reference to a particular wording. But now, when we consider the purpose of the author and the nature of the document he produced, these ancient symbols do not convey the same meaning they conveyed to people of earlier times. We are interested in the impression the evangelist had of Jesus and his motif for the presentation he makes of his Lord. The four symbols are adequate enough collectively since they indicate the fourfold picture of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. Through them we see the same person but from different perspectives. However, in my opinion, they need to be reassigned.

The ox as a beast of burden belongs most appropriately to Mark, who sees Jesus as the servant of the God who sent him, while the man should be given to Luke, who presents Jesus to the Gentiles as the universal man. John's symbol of the eagle is still applicable, for to him Jesus is the divine word made flesh. Many lecterns in our churches carry the Bible on the back of the eagle.

The lion, however, belongs preeminently to Matthew. The lion is the king of beasts. Judah, also, is presented in the Old Testament in the form of a lion. Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. Genesis 49:8-12

Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus as the long expected Messiah. He is the king who has been sent to rule his people. There is from start to finish a royal aspect to this Gospel. The nature of the first Gospel is the good news of prophetic fulfillment. That which was foretold long ago by the prophets has at last come about. Matthew's impression of Jesus is that he is of royal lineage, possesses divine authority, and has the prerogatives and powers of God. The Matthean motif in the presentation of Jesus is his inherent relationship to the Old Testament, showing he is not a contradiction to Judaism but rather the climax and completion of Judaic faith.

When Marcion in the second century tried to sever Christianity from its Hebrew origins and to disavow the Old Testament altogether, the Gospel he used was Luke's. After all, Luke had been written for the Gentiles.

But Matthew shows us that we could not have the New Testament if it were not for the Old Testament and that Jesus would not be Jesus if it were not for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Matthew's is the most Jewish of all the Gospels. We are indebted to this book and its gifted author for maintaining Christianity's continuity with its past. Often, therefore, when Matthew narrates an important event in the life of Jesus, he calls the reader's attention to a prophecy in the Old Testament of which this event is the fulfillment. Indeed, Matthew has devised his own rubric for doing this, and he uses the same pattern each time. "Now," he says, "all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (Matt. 1:22). There are nine other specific instances of this in his Gospel (Matt. 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). But many more times than this Matthew makes allusions to various passages in the Old Testament as he tells his story.

The Gospel was obviously written by a Jew and one who knew his Old Testament well. One British commentator thinks the book is decidedly anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic, as we would say today. I have not been able to detect this in my study of the Gospel. What the British commentator cites as his evidence of anti-Semitism impresses me as being pro-Jewish, an eagerness on the part of a converted Jew to convince his own people of the truth of the message of Jesus and to offer them his savior as their savior, too.

The Gospel of Matthew is probably the fullest and the most well rounded of the four. It is designed especially for use by the growing and expanding church. The early church put Matthew first in the New Testament canon, and it has remained in that position ever since. The early church assumed that it had been written first and by a disciple of Jesus.

There are very close similarities between Matthew and Mark. Most modern scholars, especially

among the Protestants, believe that Mark antedates Matthew by twenty or thirty years and that the author of Matthew used Mark as his principal source. Others think that Mark is a condensation of Matthew from a different perspective. Be that as it may, each Gospel has its own special emphasis. Here in Matthew we meet our teacher and savior as King and Lord, before whom in the end every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess him to be the rightful ruler over all.

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Chapter 1: The Promised King

Chapters, sections, and paragraphs, such as our Bibles display, were unknown in antiquity; so that the divisions we make within the Gospels are artificial. They are ours, not the authors.

Matthew uses the first few pages of his Gospel, which have been designated as the first four chapters, to introduce Jesus to the readers of his Gospel. Matthew wants us to know at the outset who Jesus is and why he is writing a book about him.

1. *Ancestry* (Matt. 1:1-17) What better way to introduce a person than to describe that person's ancestry! Matthew, in keeping with the messianic theme of his Gospel, traces the ancestry of Jesus back to King David and also back to Abraham. The Messiah in Old Testament prophecy would come from the line, or lineage, of David. But before David, God had promised that from the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So Matthew opens his Gospel with the statement: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). This is an echo of what God said to David:

And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore. 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

This refers to Solomon and Solomon's successors. But the proof of its truthfulness had to await the coming of Jesus.

Luke traces the ancestry of Jesus back to Adam. That is because he wrote especially for the

Gentiles and presented Jesus to them as the universal man. But Matthew felt it was enough when the genealogy of Jesus reached Abraham, for he sincerely believed that salvation for everybody would come only through the Jews. They were God's chosen people. God did not choose them just to favor them and bestow all benefits upon them. He chose the Jews to prepare and use them for the benefit of all others. "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:17-18).

The nation faltered and fell. The earthly successors to David and Solomon on the throne of Judah were no more. Nonetheless, the work of God had not been invalidated, nor God's promise forfeited. The Messiah had come. He was of the race of Abraham and of the family of David.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9:6-7

Matthew divides the genealogy of Jesus into three historical eras consisting of fourteen generations apiece. The first era is from Abraham to David, the second from David to the captivity of Judah and the exile of the Jews in Babylon, and the third from the captivity to the birth of Jesus. Each of these three eras has special significance. The first is a period of formation: the development of a small clan into a large society of people; the unification of disparate tribes into a nation; migration in and out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the land of promise. The second is a period of fulfillment and deterioration: the grandeur of David and the glory of Solomon, followed by deterioration and decline under their successors. The third is a period of patience, long-suffering, and expectancy: the captivity and exile, the return and temporary restoration of the nation, and subjugation by Rome.

Within these periods there are three arresting pieces of information. Matthew does not mention the wife of Abraham, the mother of Isaac. Nor does he include the wife of Jesse, the mother of David, or give the wife of Josiah, the mother of Josiah's son who was king when Jerusalem fell. He omits the names of the women throughout the whole genealogy before Joseph and Mary except for three persons. He says that the mother of Pharez and Zarah was Tamar and their father was Judah, and he calls our attention to the fact that the mother of Boaz was Rahab and that Ruth was the wife of Boaz and the mother of Obed, who was the grandfather of David. Why are these three women included when all the others are not?

Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law. Her husband had died. The younger brother of her husband

failed to honor his obligation to take her as his wife and rear children in honor of the deceased. So Tamar disguised herself as a harlot and tricked her father-in-law into committing adultery with her, and the offspring of this act of adultery were twins, Pharez and Zarah (Gen. 38:6-30). Salmon's wife who bore his son Boaz was Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, who concealed and protected the Israelite spies (Josh. 2; 6:22-27). And Ruth was not Jewish. She was a Moabitess, a foreigner, a woman from a despised enemy of Israel (Ruth 1:4).

There are skeletons in the closet of every family, no matter how respectable. But Matthew insures an accurate record. There was an act of incest and adultery in the ancestry of Jesus. One of the progenitors of the Savior was a prostitute. And the blood of the Messiah was not pure Jewish blood but had mingled with it the blood of an alien people.

This draws our attention to the inclusiveness of the genealogy of Jesus. He belongs to the Gentile as well as the Jew. Even the sinner can identify with the ancestry of Christ. Here at the outset of the career of Jesus we are made to realize the strange and unpredictable providence of God.

But then, after Matthew has gone to such pains to lay out this complicated genealogy, we find it is not that of Jesus after all. It is the genealogy of Joseph, who was only the stepfather of Jesus. The Davidic ancestry is lent to him, because he is the adopted son of Joseph. Mary had conceived her son before her marriage to Joseph took place. To be sure, in the eyes of the general public, he was Joseph's son, and Joseph looked on him and treated him as his own boy. But this in itself would not have been enough to confer Davidic sonship on him, nor would it have thrown on his shoulders the true messianic mantle. Matthew would not have bothered to supply his readers with the family tree unless it had been Jesus' true and authentic lineage.

Matthew knew that Mary, like Joseph, was of the house of David. The two came out of the same family and remained within that large family through marriage. This was not unusual in Jewish society in Bible times. Moses' parents, for example, came from the same family. "And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi" (Exod. 2:1). Zechariah realized Mary's Davidic origins when he said: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luke 1:68-70). Though it is not explicitly stated in the New Testament that Mary's ancestry is Davidic, this has been the tradition of the church since its inception; and this is the only way satisfactorily to explain the genealogies in Matthew and Luke who both report the virgin birth of Jesus.

2. Birth and Childhood (Matt. 1:18-2:23) Only two persons had to know of the virgin birth of Jesus, the mother who bore him and the alleged father who realized the child was not his. Indeed, Mary alone might have known the exact circumstances surrounding the event, and her husband could have misunderstood what had taken place. As a matter of fact, this was about to

happen when God intervened in a dream and told Joseph that his pregnant fiancée was still a virgin and that the embryo in her womb had been miraculously conceived.

Betrothal in those days was different from an engagement today. Back then it gave the man extensive rights over and privileges with the woman he planned to marry but left the woman altogether dependent upon the honor and faithfulness of her affianced. If he decided she was unsuited for him, he could nullify the betrothal simply by telling her in the presence of two witnesses. If his fiancée had illicit relations with another man after her betrothal to him, the Mosaic law was that she should be sentenced to death, together with the guilty male (Deut. 22:23-24). Evidently the betrothed couple could have sexual relations with one another. Therefore, had Joseph broken his engagement to Mary without making a public issue of it, people would have assumed that her child was Joseph's. She would have been disgraced but not physically harmed.

Luke tells the story of the conception of Jesus from Mary's point of view, but we are indebted to Matthew for the same account from the perspective of Joseph.

We think of the name Jesus as unique. It was not in that time. Its Hebrew equivalent is Joshua, which is still quite frequently used. The meaning of the word in Hebrew is "God is salvation." Jesus will save his people from their sins. Here in Joseph's dream, Jesus is given his name -- a name with a mission to and in behalf of the people. Immediately Matthew attaches the messianic people to their Messiah. In his thinking, the two are inseparable. The uniqueness today of the name Jesus is as a result of his mission. We seldom name a person Jesus, because only Jesus of Nazareth is able to save us from our sins.

At this point Matthew uses his rubric to introduce a quotation from the Old Testament, which he amplifies a bit by explaining what the name Emmanuel means (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). In Jesus, God will be with the people, for Emmanuel means "God with us." Oddly enough, the word also means "prosperity." If God is with us, we will always be prosperous, not necessarily in material goods, but rather in the spiritual satisfaction of being with God. Then we will be rich indeed.

Matthew gives us information about the birth of Jesus not given by Luke, just as Luke supplies us with details not found in Matthew's Gospel. The two Gospels complement and supplement one another. Matthew tells of the Wise Men from the East who were led to Judea by the light of a wandering star. They came to Herod in Jerusalem and asked him about the habitation of the newborn king. Herod's Sanhedrin gave them the probable place of birth by consulting the Old Testament and finding a prophecy which designated Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah (Mic. 5:2). Herod pretended to be pleased. He sent them ahead but told them to come back for him when they had found the babe. Herod lied, saying that he, too, wanted to worship the Messiah.

The Wise Men followed a star, which means they were astrologers and had received guidance by divining the heavens. Hebrew thought was divided concerning the value of astrology. Some rabbis accepted it as a gift from God. Others condemned it as necromancy and witchcraft. There are the signs of the zodiac in the mosaic floors of some synagogues, though those are later than the first century. More important than their being astrologers is the fact that the Wise Men were Gentiles. In them, people beyond Jewry paid tribute to Jesus. They were rich and powerful, too, which means that Jesus came not to the poor only but to all people, no matter what their class or station might have been. To delimit the work of Jesus to one class or group is to restrict God's mission of salvation.

Herod was in the last year of his reign, and his life was fast coming to a close. His body was ravaged with disease. Indeed, he was infested with worms which were eating away his flesh. Yet his pride had not waned, and he was maniacally jealous and hungry for power to the end. Herod knew he was hated by the people, so he decreed that members of the Sanhedrin be slain when he died in order to guarantee mourning at his funeral. His sister mercifully lied, saying he had countermanded this order on his deathbed, and so spared the religious leaders of the nation. But there was mourning aplenty anyway, for just before his death Herod had slain all the male children of Bethlehem two years old and younger in an effort to kill the little Messiah whose identity the Wise Men had withheld from him. Fortunately Joseph and Mary had already fled with Jesus into Egypt.

If the Wise Men and shepherds had come to Bethlehem at the same time, there would be a conflict in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. Luke says that Jesus was taken to Jerusalem to be circumcised eight days after he was born. But if we allow time for the Wise Men to get from the East to Bethlehem, there is no conflict. Thus Christmas is the day of the shepherds, and Epiphany is the day of the Wise Men.

The holy family stayed in Egypt until Herod was dead. They did not go back to Judea but returned to Nazareth. Herod's murder of the children in Bethlehem reminds Matthew of a prophecy from Jeremiah when Rachel, who is buried near Bethlehem, weeps for her children (Jer. 31:15). Matthew thinks of Jesus as a second Moses, who will add his new teachings to the Mosaic law, making him a second but greater lawgiver. Therefore, it is appropriate that Jesus should, like Moses, come up out of Egypt. This also is fulfillment of prophecy (Hos. 11:1).

3. *Baptism* (Matt. 3:1-17)-For Matthew, John the Baptist is the equivalent in the New Testament of the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament. Elijah preached the wrath of God. He condemned Ahab and Ahab's subjects in the Northern Kingdom for their apostasy and their sins. They worshiped Baal, a Canaanite god of fertility, caring more for their crops and the yield of their fields than for righteousness and the service of God (1 Kings 16:29-22:38).

The Pharisees and Sadducees cared more for their ancestry and tradition than they did for the people. They were like vipers to John, who refused to baptize them. He baptized those who

were genuinely sorry for their sins and wished to do better. In his appearance, his habits, even his diet, he imitated Elijah. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of a voice crying in the wilderness on behalf of God and God's righteousness (Isa. 40:3). His influence over Judea was considerable, so great in fact that he embarrassed Herod Antipas and his corrupt court.

But John's importance to Matthew was that he heralded the coming of the Messiah and that he was the authentic forerunner of Jesus. John is the first to use the phrase "kingdom of heaven," so frequently on the lips of Jesus, and his assurance that the kingdom is at hand provides Matthew with his first opportunity to use that phrase.

Jesus accepted baptism of John in the River Jordan, not that he needed it as a sign of his own repentance for sin, but only to conform to the providential pattern. The children of Israel had experienced the baptism of deliverance along with adversity when they had come out of slavery in Egypt and crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness. The Apostle Paul says that they "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:2). So Jesus was baptized of John and signified thereby his fulfillment of the old dispensation and inauguration of the new, though it meant for him also the experience of alienation and death on the cross.

Matthew says the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and lighted on Jesus, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Was this an event observed by John and those with him? Was this a public announcement of Jesus' mission? Such could hardly have been the case, since Matthew is careful to remark that the heavens were opened unto Jesus, who saw the spirit of God descending. What is seen by him is also confirmed by what he heard. What does this mean?

In my opinion it means that the kingdom of God, which Matthew usually calls the kingdom of heaven, can now through Jesus be seen on earth, for this will be the central concern of Jesus' ministry. The spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters in creation (Gen. 1:2) now lights on Jesus to signify that Jesus will by his life and work effect the new creation. "Therefore," says Paul, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

4. *Temptations* (Matt. 4:1-11)-Even the Son of God had to be tempted. Matthew is careful to point out that God himself led his Son into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The apprentice is not the master, but neither does anyone ever become a master until as an apprentice he has learned the master's art. Aristotle was a pupil of Plato before he became a teacher with pupils of his own. According to William Wordsworth, "The child is father of the man, which is to say that a grown person has no more at his disposal than what he has acquired in the process of growing up. Like Ulysses, we are a part of all that we have met.

Jesus met the devil, and because he did he knew how to cope with him and how to instruct his disciples to do the same. Goodness is not synonymous with innocence. Goodness, if it is

genuine and enduring, comes only after a struggle with evil.

The first temptation had to do with physical and material needs. Jesus had fasted forty days and nights and was depleted and hungry. The devil said, "If you are who people say you are, then your present state should present no problem to you. If you really are the Son of God, then make bread out of these stones" (Matt. 4:3, AP). Jesus answered the devil with a quotation of Moses: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). This shows the inadequacy of material things. The acquisition of goods and the purchase of services, self-indulgence, personal opulence and ease are not consistent with being human. We were created not to please ourselves, but to please God. And knowledge of God and God's will for us is more important than what we can get for ourselves from material things. Jesus would not misuse his divine powers for purely personal ends. He would not employ a miracle to get what he could earn from hard work.

The second temptation had to do with reputation. The devil set Jesus on the pinnacle of the Temple, which is the corner of the wall overlooking the Kidron Valley. "Jump off," he said, "for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone, (Psalm 91:11-12). The devil shows Jesus that he can quote scripture, too. Jesus refuses to jump, recalling another verse from Deuteronomy, 'Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God' (6:16). The quest for fame and notoriety is just as unworthy as the quest for material things.

In the last temptation the devil comes out in the open. He does not flatter Jesus anymore by calling him the Son of God. He shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and tells him they will be his if he will forget who he is and fall down and worship him, the devil. Again the second Moses recalls the first, and Jesus answers with still another statement of the great lawgiver in the Book of Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name" (6:13).

The trial is over. The testing period by the devil is at an end. The threefold temptation of wealth, fame, and power, in ascending order, has failed to seduce Jesus. The voice from heaven heard at the baptism of Jesus has been confirmed. He has proved that he deserves the plaudit: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). 5. Vocation (Matt. 4:12-25)- The student has been graduated. The apprentice has left the master's studio and is now on his own. The new master assumes authority on his own credentials. Just as John the Baptist goes to prison, Jesus goes into Galilee, the Galilee of the Gentiles, where Jews live alongside people of other races and where many of the Jews themselves have been Hellenized.

Jesus establishes himself at Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a city with a synagogue built by a Roman centurion and not far from Julias, a thoroughly Hellenized and

pagan city. As master, he is now in position to have disciples of his own. He calls Simon and Andrew from their fishing nets on the Sea of Galilee, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Later, he sees James and John with their father in a boat. The three men are mending their nets. He calls to them, and they leave their equipment in the boat with their father and follow Jesus. It could be that these four men, the nucleus of the later Twelve, had been disciples of John the Baptist and had been with John when he baptized Jesus. If so, they no longer had a master since John had gone to jail. Also, they would have remembered what John had said about Jesus. This would account for the ease with which Jesus won them. In going to Jesus from John they had exchanged the lesser for the greater.

Shortly it seems the reputation of the new master was established. His fame spread. He healed all manner of sickness and disease among the people, including lunacy and demon possession. Folk came to him in Capernaum from all around: Galilee, the Decapolis (ten Romanized towns), Jerusalem, and even from beyond the Jordan. Jesus had found his vocation, which was to perform in behalf of the people the role of God's messiah and minister on earth. He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He fulfilled before their eyes the prophecy of Isaiah:

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death upon them hath the light shined. Isaiah 9:1-2

Matthew says Jesus is that light, and in Capernaum and the region of Galilee it has begun to shine.

Personal Reflection

1. Do you think of yourself as having a Jewish faith heritage ? Why or why not ?
2. John the Baptist as a prophet in the Old Testament mold, dressing oddly and living a separate life. How might a contemporary prophet signal holiness and complete dedication to God ?
3. Why is a public act of repentance valuable ? Should repentance be a public, one-time act ? Why?
4. Consider yourself and your faith. What of the "old you" has disappeared because of your relationship with Christ ? What about you is new because of your faith in Christ ?

5. The author says that goodness is not synonymous with innocence. What rules of morality seem to equate the two ? How did Jesus deal with the sin and evil around him ?

6. Do you know anyone who proclaims god's truth uncompromisingly ? Is it possible to be a prophet privately ? Is private holiness a different kind of devotion than being a prophet in public ?

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Chapter 2: The Teacher And His Pupils

First Matthew uses the testimony of God, through the virgin birth, the baptism, and the temptations, to establish the identity of Jesus.

Now Jesus offers his own testimony to those about him concerning the purpose of his mission and how it is to be accomplished. If he is the true king, then he must possess a kingdom and have subjects over whom to rule. His subjects constitute his kingdom, and they abide by his edicts and live according to his directives. Matthew portrays Jesus as the sublime teacher. Before the multitudes can be brought into the kingdom, however, the Master must teach his own disciples, who later will teach others and give organization to the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Matthew, in this section of his Gospel, portrays Jesus as he trains his disciples. He recounts both the content of Jesus' teaching and the method of its presentation.

1. *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matt. 5:1-7:29) Just as Moses received the Ten Commandments from the top of a high mountain, gives his gospel in a discourse on a mountain. Matthew is always eager to relate his account of Jesus to the Old Testament. He constantly draws parallels between the old dispensation and the new. The Jews are the children of the law. The followers of Jesus will be the recipients of the gospel. The Sermon on the Mount was delivered to the disciples. John Wesley says that in this instance the disciples not just the Twelve but all who desired to learn from him. Wesley's view is dubious. Since Jesus sat down on the mountainside, there must have been only a small group of people gathered around him to hear what he said. Probably it was only the Twelve.

The Sermon on the Mount, from the literary homiletical point of view, is a perfect document impossible to rearrange it in any way to improve on it. It contains only one hundred nine verses. A little more than half of these verses are peculiar Matthew's Gospel. They cannot be found anywhere else. The others are in Luke's as well, many in so-called Sermon on the Plain. Some modern scholars discount the fact that Jesus delivered the message as we have it and attribute the Sermon on the to Matthew's arrangement of Jesus' thoughts gleaned from many different

occasions. But it is difficult to conceive of a perfect document such as this apart from an author who is perfection itself. To attribute it to Matthew is almost to make the disciple greater than his Master. No doubt Jesus did repeat his ideas under various circumstances. This is demonstrated in Luke's account where Jesus' many sayings in the Sermon on the Mount are preached in a different setting altogether. But repetitions like these do not preclude a full discourse such as the Sermon on the Mount, where the essence of the Master's teachings is set forth. The Sermon on the Mount is a gorgeous mosaic of the mind of Christ.

The sermon achieves its unity by means of an orderly transition from one section to the next, where each major division carries its special message but needs the others in order for the sermon to make its full impact. The discourse resembles a pyramid with a broad base of specificity. The picture of the two houses is the climax as well as the conclusion of the sermon.

The base of the sermon is the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), together with their enforcement in terms of Jesus' expectations of his disciples (Matt. 5:13-20). There are eight beatitudes. They have in common the characteristic of the unlikely and unexpected. How can one who is poor in spirit be happy? The opinion of society then, as now, might be that a person who is not motivated to acquire wealth is lazy. Added to this in Jesus' time was the religious interpretation that the good prospered, while the wicked suffered adversity. Not so, Jesus affirms. Those who possess the wealth of heaven cannot be encumbered with the material things of this world. The reward in the first beatitude is the same as that in the last, for those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake as well as the poor in spirit have heaven as their reward.

How do the meek possess the earth? By refusing to contend with others for it, they enjoy their lot in life to the extent that they believe they have everything. Those who moan because of sorrow and pain and untoward circumstances receive divine comfort which more than compensates for anything that distresses them. Likewise, those who are righteous above everything else, who constantly pray for righteousness, will have their prayers answered. We become, Jesus says, what we most desire. The heart was to the Israelites of Jesus' day the center of understanding and the seat of the will. Therefore, if one's mind was clear of wicked thoughts and one's will anchored in the will of God, there would be no obstruction to spiritual vision. A person could not fail to see God. God loves peacemakers more than any other people; therefore, those who promote peace are called God's own children. What God calls anything, that something invariably is, because in God there is no distinction between appearance and reality.

Secular society has a different set of values. Therefore, Jesus tells his disciples that they shall be happy when society persecutes them, for such persecution only increases their rewards from God. He tells them they are like light, and they shine as examples of goodness to humankind. They are a preservative like salt. When people see genuinely good works, good deeds, they respond by acknowledging God whom those doing such good deeds worship and praise.

The Beatitudes are Jesus' transvaluation of all merely human values. They are the hallmarks of

his kingdom. They are the basic characteristics of his subjects, of those who become true citizens of the kingdom of heaven, even though they continue to dwell on earth.

There is a decided contrast between the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and the law of the old dispensation (Matt. 5:21-48). The latter regulates behavior and conduct, while the former has to do with the riches of the mind, the feelings of the heart, and the disposition of the will. Consequently Moses forbade murder and manslaughter, while Jesus warns against anger out of which such misdeeds emerge. Moses outlawed adultery. Jesus will not even tolerate lust. He equates the inward craving with the external act. The Old Testament abounds in oaths and swearing, but Jesus says one's whole disposition shall be so oriented to honesty that swearing or taking an oath is unnecessary. A person's character is sufficient bond. Moses taught retaliation and retribution-"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life -- but Jesus teaches his disciples to practice nonresistance by enduring wrongs that others inflict on them rather than defending themselves against evildoers. Love in the kingdom of heaven reaches beyond affection for those who have affection for us. We must love even our enemies. Our standard is not goals we set for ourselves. Our standard is the perfection of God. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The only important requirement for a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is that the person please God. One's reward is inward and spiritual with no concern for the recognition and praise of others here on earth. The outward display of piety is distasteful, as it is also counterproductive. People who engage in such acts are insincere. The purpose of almsgiving is to help the unfortunate. It is not to let the general public know one's worth and generosity. Giving a fifth of one's income to charity instead of the prescribed tenth should bring satisfaction in the greater good it does, not in the reputation it establishes. Both prayer and fasting which accompanies prayer are to be done in secret and not openly to advertise one's piety to the world. Only the treasures accumulated in heaven abide. No matter how extensive one's possessions, nor their guarantee by government, nothing is secure here, not even Social Security. Therefore, it does not pay to worry over gains and losses. It is enough to realize that God loves and cares for us. Trust in God is the only cure for anxiety.

The section of the Sermon on the Mount in which these teachings are set forth (Matt. 6:1-34) is among the noblest passages in all literature. The imagery of Jesus in this passage is exquisite. The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13), as Matthew gives it, is the one we repeat collectively in our services of worship. The description of the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field, the grass which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, and Solomon in all his glory, has etched itself forever on the memory of humanity in most of the languages of the world.

The last segment of the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount is a collection of admonitions (Matt. 7:1-23). Our Lord admonishes his disciples to refrain from judging others, censuring their deeds and

scrutinizing their attitudes and behavior in order to find fault with them. Such people are so busy criticizing others that they do not take time to observe their own faults, which generally are more grievous than the faults of those they condemn. Jesus also cautions his followers against assuming good of everyone and wasting their efforts on those who are too indifferent to appreciate them. Do not throw away the pearls of the gospel on a bunch of hogs who cannot recognize their value.

Jesus promises that what we ask of God is what God will give to us. God rewards in keeping with God's own character and is incapable of giving anything less than the best to us.

Everyone on this earthly pilgrimage is presented, sooner or later, with two ways: the easy way of indifference and self-indulgence which leads inevitably to death and destruction and the more difficult way of hard choices and self-denying experiences, the end of which is life. On the journey we will run into false teachings and dishonest advisors. These people must be tested by the effects of their work. Jesus does not want only verbal assent from his followers but a life of obedience where his disciples actually perform in deeds the will of God.

The sermon concludes with the foolish person who builds his house without foundations, and it collapses. In contrast, the wise man sets his house on a rock foundation which enables it to withstand all calamities.

Here before our eyes in the Sermon on the Mount is the picture of the kingdom of heaven, the means of entering it, the rigorous demands of maintaining one's citizenship in it, and the guarantee of its certain rewards.

2. Miracles Around the Sea of Galilee (Mat 8:1-9:38)-The three chapters in Matthew devote to the Sermon on the Mount are followed by two chapters describing the miracles of Jesus. These miracles were not, strictly speaking, all performed in Galilee. At least one was done in the Hellenized region of the Decapolis. We do not know precisely where either the centurion's house was or where the ruler lived, so Jesus may have performed a miracle in the Tetrarchy of Philip as well. But we can be certain that all these miracles took place around the Sea of Galilee, a small body of water only seven miles wide and twelve miles long. Unless the weather conditions are unfavorable, one can see all round it from most any vantage point along the shore. So when Jesus was on the mount with his disciples, he had perspective of all the places where he would perform these miracles.

Matthew, as we will see, alternates his Gospel between teaching and narrative, between the words of Jesus and his deeds. Indeed, Matthew has a little rubric for ending a section of Jesus' teachings and beginning a section of narrative. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings. . . (Matt 7:28). It would appear, therefore, that Matthew intentionally uses the miracles to illustrate and enforce the teaching, and likewise uses the teaching to explain the miracles.

There are ten specific miracles in the two chapters of Matthew under consideration. These ten miracles are divided into three groups, and the groups are separated from one another by further narrative, but these interspersed bits of narrative present incidents that are not miraculous.

When Jesus first comes down from the mount, he is confronted by a leper who tells him that if he wants to, he can cure him of leprosy. Immediately Jesus replies, "I want to; so you are clean." He touches the leper and tells him to report to the priest and receive from him certification that he is entirely well. Leprosy, a skin disease, during the last stages of which members of the body rot away, was considered a communicable disease in ancient society. Lepers were forbidden to associate with other people. There was a stigma attached to the disease. The person was called "unclean." (Leprosy was looked on then the way our society looks on venereal disease.) It was a disgrace to have it. A leper could not mix again in society until a priest assured the public that the leper was ritually clean (Matt. 8:1-4).

In Capernaum Jesus received an appeal from a centurion to heal his servant. When Jesus volunteered to go with the centurion to see the sick servant, the centurion told him that would not be necessary. This Gentile did not want to contaminate Jesus by taking him into his home. "Just say the word," he said, "and I know my servant will be healed." Jesus was amazed and complimented him by saying that he, a Gentile, had more faith than any Jew Jesus knew (Matt. 8:5-13).

The third miracle in the first group is Jesus' curing of the mother-in-law of Peter, who had a persistent fever that would not break. He touched her as he had the leper, and she was cured. Indeed, she immediately resumed her household chores and entertained their guests.

Why do these three miracles form one group? They do not seem to have anything in common. They are put together, it seems to me, to show the catholicity of Jesus' work. He heals a Jew, a fellow countryman -- the leper. He heals a foreigner, a Roman, one who belonged to the nation which had subjugated and now ruled Jesus' land -- the centurion's servant. Finally Jesus heals a close personal friend -- the mother-in-law of his disciple, Peter. This was like curing a member of the family. Jesus no doubt stayed in the home of Simon Peter when he was in Capernaum (Matt. 8:14-17).

This first group of miracles is separated from the second group by two unusual incidents (Matt. 8:18-22). One is Jesus' discouragement of the scribe who wanted to follow him. He tells the scribe that he has no place to take him. Animals and birds have habitations, but Jesus has no home of his own, no place to lay his head. The other is the rebuke he administers to one of the disciples who gives what appears to us to be the most primary of all reasons to be excused temporarily from Jesus' company. He wants to go home to bury his father. Our Lord appears heartless. He does not excuse him. The miracles show the Master's dispersal of power in behalf of all types of people in need. He cures the incurable and does not limit his service just to his

own. The two incidents show the expectations

of discipleship. The catholicity of Jesus' deeds is matched by the exactitude of his demands. A disciple must give up every-thing if he is to have Jesus for his Master. And anyone less than a fully committed disciple, such as the scribe, has no place in his company. Totality of power carries with it totality of obedience from those who will benefit from that power.

The second group of three miracles consists of the calming of the storm, the only nature miracle in this section; the expulsion of devils from two demented persons; and the healing of the paralytic. The storm was calmed for the disciples who were in the boat with Jesus and thought that he and they were about to drown (Matt. 8:23-27). In the second miracle, Jesus exorcised a company of demons residing in two helpless men. The demons had made the men so ferocious that travelers could not safely pass near them. Jesus destroys the demons. Matthew does not tell us anything more about the two men whom the demons controlled and misused. Presumably they got well (Matt. 8:28-34). Jesus performed the third miracle for the friends of the paralytic who carried him on a pallet into our Lord's presence. At the same time, he did it to display his ability to forgive sins. He tells the paralytic, to the horror of the scribes, "Thy sins be forgiven" (Matt. 9:1-8).

These three miracles are all of a class. What they have in common is the element of demonstration. Jesus, the man, demonstrates his divine power -- power to control nature, destroy evil, forgive sins, and relieve the ill effects of sin.

The narrative that follows is in support of these demonstrations (Matt. 9:9-17). Jesus calls a tax collector, a hated and despised publican who raises revenue for the Roman oppressors, and causes him to give up his job in order to be a disciple (Matt. 9:9). He eats with publicans and sinners because they need him. It is his disposition to be merciful. His mission is not to the righteous but to sinners whom he has come to save (Matt. 9:10-13). And finally he answers the disciples of John, saying that there is no need for his disciples to fast for there is nothing for them to fast over (Matt. 9:14-17). What they have fasted for and prayed for has now come about. The Messiah is their Master and Lord. The king resides in the presence of his subjects. God is at home with the people. The old order that John represents has passed away. A new order has taken its place.

The last group of miracles seems almost anticlimactic compared with this middle group. The last group is not followed by any specific incidents from the career of Jesus but only by a general observation. There are in this last group four miracles: the raising of the ruler's daughter from the dead, the healing of the woman with a continuous menstrual hemorrhage, the restoration of sight to two blind men, and the enabling of a dumb man to speak (Matt. 9:18-34). The very order of these miracles is on a descending scale. Matthew starts with the dead daughter to whom Jesus restores life and ends with the casting out of a little devil who had tied a man's tongue so he could not speak until the devil was removed. The last group is made to

correspond with the first group, except in the first group each person cured came from a different category: fellow countryman, foreigner, friend. There are not any such categories in the last group. This group just represents all sorts and conditions of people. Therefore, the narrative that follows supports the same by saying that Jesus went about everywhere in the region teaching and preaching and healing all manner of disease. These four cures are typical examples of all the misery that flesh is heir to. But Jesus is capable of meeting any human demand; he can cope with any and all infirmities.

Now Jesus does all this in company with his disciples. He says that the needs of people are so great that there are not enough disciples to cope with these needs. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matt. 9:37).

3. *The Formation of the Apostolate* (Matt.10:1-42) Though Jesus has done a lot for many individuals through these ten miracles and though the general public has been greatly impressed by his wonderful works, everything that he has said and done around the Sea of Galilee has been in the presence of his disciples and, from Matthew's viewpoint, principally for their benefit. The Sermon on the Mount was preached to them. They, too, were spectators at all his miracles.

At this juncture Matthew makes clear that Jesus has been preparing his disciples for their mission in the world. By precept and example he has been developing them to do the work he has called them to do. The plenteous harvest, which heretofore has had too few laborers to pluck it, will soon have more than enough to gather its crops. The Master will not have to work alone. There will be other laborers to assist him.

Note carefully the chief characteristic of the newly formed apostolate. Jesus first gives his disciples power to cast out unclean spirits and to cure all types of sickness and disease. He does not mention here having given them the gifts either of preaching or of pastoral visitation, regardless of how important these seem to be to us. The first disciples are given by their Master the power to cure diseases and also the power to cope with sin. No matter how strong and vigorous a person is, without a transformed soul that person is little more than an animal.

Matthew is prepared only now to present the roster of the disciples. This roster contains the names of those who are later to constitute the apostolate and govern the church. At the head of the list is the name Simon called Peter. At the bottom of the list is Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

Matthew's roster contains twelve names. Here again his Old Testament predilections are manifested. He is most careful to note this. There were twelve tribes in ancient Israel. There will be an apostle for every tribe. The new Israel of the church will be ruled by them and later by their successors.

This is the first time Matthew enters their names collectively in his Gospel, though he has already mentioned five of them. When Jesus begins his vocation, he calls Andrew and Peter first and shortly thereafter James and John (Matt. 4:18-22). The fifth disciple Matthew mentions prior to this complete list is not one of the greats. He is the publican Matthew, whom Jesus called from his seat at the receipt of custom (Matt. 9:9). If the two Matthews are one and the same person, it is obvious why this fifth disciple would have been named. Matthew just could not resist this allusion to himself and the circumstances that characterized his call.

When we get the list of the names of all the disciples, it is no more than a list. It does not provide us with any information about any of them, not even the so-called greats at the top of the list. The only one about whom Matthew gives any information beyond family identity and vocation is the one whose name is last on the list, and the information given about him is such that he should not have been a disciple at all. Matthew says that Judas Iscariot is the disciple who betrayed Jesus.

More important than who the disciples were is what the disciples became. The means of their becoming, what enabled them to be what they later were, is the content of this section of Matthew.

Jesus at first delimited their mission. They were to work only as Israelites. Evidently our Lord wanted to be sure they could succeed at home before he was willing to risk sending them abroad. A person who tries to function at the general church level when that person is not influential in his or her local congregation has very little to commend him or her to anybody. Many people feel that a person who is not respected at home does not deserve a hearing abroad.

At this point the apostles are admonished to preach, and their theme is that the kingdom of God is at hand. Consequently, their message is one of urgency. The demonstration they give of its authenticity and validity as well as of their own credibility is that in preaching they at the same time "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matt. 10:8). As they have received their call and its gifts without compensation, so they will give what they have to others without price. All they are to expect is hospitality: housing, food, raiment from time to time, and, above all else, receptive minds and hearts from those to whom they minister. When they do not get this, they are to leave immediately, and God will condemn all who do not receive and heed them. Judgment and punishment are emphasized here. Those who are inhospitable to a minister of Jesus Christ and indifferent to Christ's message jeopardize their own salvation and imperil their own souls.

Nonetheless, people do not know what is conducive to their own welfare, and the prospects for the apostles in the hands of those to whom they are sent are not the best. The chances are that they will be mistreated, maligned, persecuted, misunderstood, and condemned. Feuds will break out within families. Siblings will be against siblings, parents against children, and children against parents even to the point of death. The apostles will be hated simply because they are

apostles. All this evil will befall them simply because of their allegiance to Jesus. But if they can stand such abuse and remain loyal through out it all, they will be saved. When they are rejected in one place, they must hasten to another. Their consolation lies in the fact that this cannot last too long, for the Son of man will soon return. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying: "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. 10:23). The nearness of Jesus and the effectiveness of his presence are more than enough to offset the most adverse of all conditions.

The disciples must realize that they cannot expect better treatment than their Master received. A servant has no right to more than his lord. Jesus warns that if society has labeled him the prince of devils, those who belong to him cannot expect any higher label for themselves.

The worst enemies of the apostles are not those who declare themselves to be enemies. The worst enemy of the apostles is fear. It is only natural for them to fear those who hurt them. But there is a limit to any damage a mere human can inflict on another human. If one goes so far as to take a human life, even then that person has not taken everything from the person who has been killed. One person cannot take another person's immortal soul. Jesus says: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The most important thing in life is for a person to acknowledge Jesus. If a person does, Jesus will acknowledge that person before his Father n heaven. But if a person denies him, Jesus will deny that person before his Father in heaven. Fear is relative. Our real concern should be our relationship with God rather than fearing mortals who are bent on inflicting evil.

The very nature of Christianity is divisive. The claims of the Gospel are total; there can be no compromise. There is no way to divide loyalty between Christ and another. The ones who accept Jesus within a family will by that act be set at odds with those who do not accept him. Jesus will tolerate no loyalty above loyalty to him. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Mart. 10:37).

The prediction Jesus makes here that a person's enemies "shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:36) was literally fulfilled time and time again in the days of the early church. Take the family of Augustine, for example; his mother was a devout Christian, but his father was originally a pagan. Roman slaves became Christian. Some slaves were en-trusted as nurses in pagan families. Often they won the children to Christ. The children would then try to win their fathers to Christ, but not always with success. "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Matt 10:35).

The cross is the emblem of Christianity because sooner or later every Christian has to bear it. The glory of discipleship is that the person who receives the disciple and the message at the

same time receives the disciple's Master and Lord.

Personal Reflection

1. Many people in Jesus' day believed that the good prospered while the wicked suffered adversity. Do good things happen only to good people and bad things happen only to bad people?
2. Why is it hard to feel good about being poor in spirit or even being called poor in spirit? What character traits that are valued in our culture (for instance, the qualities that make a good executive) work at cross purposes to being poor in spirit?
3. Does being meek mean refusing to contend with others? Did Jesus refuse to confront and oppose others?
4. Matthew reports Jesus' teachings and miracles as schooling to prepare the disciples for their own ministries. Look back on your own life and name three or four things that you now see as preparation for your life today.
- 5 Why was the decision to follow Christ divisive in Jesus' time? Is it still divisive? Is that good or bad?

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The Gospel Of Matthew by William R. Cannon

Before his election to the episcopacy in 1968 United Methodist Bishop William R. Cannon served as Professor of Church History and then Dean of Chandler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Other books by Bishop Cannon include The Gospel Of John, Jesus The Servant, and The Book Of Acts. The Gospel Of Matthew was published by The Upper Room, Nashville, 1982. This material prepared by Paul R. Mobley.

Chapter 3: Jesus And The People

The territories and towns in this portion of the Gospel are the same as in the last, but the focus is different. Although Jesus had dealt constantly with the people and performed miracles in their behalf the disciples were always present, and Jesus explained to them all that he said and did. Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount was addressed specifically to the disciples. The closing discourse was a "brief" of their apostolate. Even the miracles done for the people were all illustrative of the Master's expectations of the disciples. The situation was similar to a teaching hospital connected to the medical school of a large university today. To be sure, the doctors in such a hospital treat sick patients, but everything they do is in the presence of their students. The enterprise is designed to teach students how to practice medicine. The primary purpose of the previous section of Matthew is to teach the disciples how to practice discipleship and to carry on the work of the Master.

In this section of the Gospel, Jesus shifts his attention from the disciples to the crowds. Here Matthew shows Jesus dealing directly with the masses of the people. After all, they are the ones he came to seek and to save. Keep in mind that this sharp division may not have been Jesus'. Indeed, it is safe to say it was not Jesus'. We do not find such a distinct arrangement of events and teachings in either Mark's or Luke's account. Rather, this is Matthew's arrangement of the materials. All three Synoptic Gospels deal with the same material. It is the way each evangelist presents his message that makes each Gospel unique. Matthew's aim is to present Jesus as the messianic king. In this portion of Matthew's Gospel we will see Jesus in relationship with his potential subjects, the people in whose behalf he came to bring the kingdom of heaven. Even the confession of Peter, which only the Twelve experience, and the Transfiguration, witnessed by Peter, James, and John, are designed as proofs of the kingdom to be proclaimed to all after the Resurrection.

1. *Recalcitrance of the Jews* (Matt. 11.1 -13:58) These three chapters portend ill for the mission of Jesus in his own country. There are signs of frustration and exasperation on the part of the Master. Those who hear his words do not seem to comprehend. The people see the miracles and

even benefit from them, but they have no idea at all what the miracles indicate about Jesus.

Even John the Baptist seems to have forgotten all that happened at Jesus' baptism, including his own words of testimony that the person he baptized was far greater than he, one whose sandals he was not worthy to unloose. He seems to have come to doubt his own mission as herald of the Messiah. From prison he sends to Jesus to ask him if he really is the promised one sent by God or if he and the people should wait in expectation of another. Jesus responds by sending word back to John of all that has happened as a result of Jesus' work. Let John make his own decision about who Jesus really is. Maybe those whom Jesus has helped can supply John with the answer: the poor, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, and even those who were raised from the dead. Jesus affirms that John the Baptist, while he was active, was the greatest of all the prophets. Why was this true? Jesus does not give the answer. But it is simply this: John is the only prophet who lived to see his prophecy fulfilled. Unfortunately he is still unaware that what he proclaimed about Jesus has all come true (Matt. 11: 1-15).

Jesus compares the unbelieving public to children playing games on the streets. At times they play "wedding" and so make music and dance. At other times they play "funeral" and cry and mourn. Jesus says that John the Baptist came with a sad face and preached judgment, but the people did not believe him. They said he was crazy. Jesus continues: "I preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven. I ate and drank and made merry. But then you people thought I had drunk too much wine. There just seems to be no way to reach you" (Matt. 11:16-19, AP). All the big towns around the Sea of Galilee where Jesus worked are more scandalous and reprehensible than was Sodom in Abraham's time, and they will be brought down to hell because of their recalcitrance (Matt. 11:20-24).

If the wise and prestigious members of society will not heed the Gospel, fortunately there are some who will -- the simple, the openhearted, babes, as it were, whose innocence is credulous and believing. There is pathos in this prayer of Jesus, where he thanks God that he has revealed the truth at least to this precious little band of people (Matt. 11:25-26). Jesus, in desperation, tells the people that they have never really come to know him; in fact, he does not think anybody really knows him except his heavenly Father. And he is certain that he is the only one who knows God. If anybody else ever comes to know God, it will be because Jesus reveals God to that person. If people only realized it, they could cast all their burdens on Jesus, and he could give them the rest they need. What he would lay on them in exchange would be a light load. "If you only knew," he says, "I am gentle, and in me you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:27-30, AP). The Jews insisted on complete rest on the sabbath, anticipating perfect rest in the messianic age. Jesus says, "That rest has already come in me. The messianic age has arrived" (Matt. 12:8, AP).

The Pharisees stood aghast when Jesus and his disciples crossed through the grain fields on the sabbath, and the disciples plucked the ears of grain and ate them. This did not bother Jesus in the least, for David and his men ate the consecrated bread on the altar of the Tabernacle, and the

priests changed the twelve loaves on the altar of the Temple every sabbath and ate what they took off. Now, says Jesus, one greater than the Temple is here, and the God of the sabbath can determine how that day will be spent. After all, it is set aside for God. The sabbath was for the benefit of the people. It was made for them. They were not made for it. Consequently, when the Pharisees tested him in the synagogue by pointing to a man with a withered arm and asking whether it was lawful to heal that man on the sabbath, Jesus responded by healing him. His retort was: You would rescue one of your own sheep from the ditch on the sabbath, wouldn't you? Isn't a human much more valuable than an animal? When he withdrew from town, the crowds followed him, and he responded to all their needs (Mart. 12:1-2)]. He asked them not to publicize his miracles. Jesus cautioned silence, Matthew says, to fulfill another prophecy, and then Matthew gives the longest Old Testament quotation in his Gospel (Isa. 42:1-4). Many commentators think that Jesus' withdrawal from the synagogue at this point marked his abandonment of the old Israel and his inauguration of the new Israel through the church. However, this thought is not expressed in Matthew, and the inference is farfetched.

Jesus returns to heal the person who had been made blind and dumb by a devil and to show how ridiculous was the contention of the Pharisees that he performed this miracle through the power of the devil. Why, said Jesus, would the devil destroy his own work and through me tumble his own kingdom? Jesus wants them to look at the results of his actions, which had to indicate a good, benevolent source, rather than an evil source of power. When the Pharisees ask him for a sign to prove the validity of his ministry, Jesus refuses their request. If they can not deduce from what they have already seen who he is and what he is about, no additional sign will help them. The only sign that will be given them is that of the prophet Jonah. Jesus says, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mart. 12:40). Jonah's mission was to preach to Nineveh until Nineveh repented. That is what Jesus has been doing all the while.

Jesus says people can blaspheme against him and be forgiven, but they can never be forgiven if they blaspheme against the Holy Ghost. To blaspheme against the Holy Ghost is to refuse to believe the Gospel.

The people with whom Jesus must deal are like the Ninevites of Jonah's day. They are not different from the Queen of Sheba. However, in the end both the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba will condemn them, because Nineveh did repent, and the Queen of Sheba left her own land and journeyed to Israel to benefit from the wisdom of Solomon (Matt. 12:41-42). These people do not realize that One greater than Solomon is standing before them. Their status will be worse than that of the man who got rid of one devil but did nothing to fill the vacuum the devil's departure had created, allowing the devil to return with seven other devils (Matt.12:43-45).

Even Jesus' own family was not free from the unbelief that afflicted the people in general. Consequently, when he was told his mother and brothers were nearby and wanted to see him, Jesus said sadly that he had no mother or brothers other than his disciples who did believe him

and were trying to do the will of God (Matt. 12:46-50).

After these various encounters, Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables, that is, in stories designed to set forth principles and truths. His parables deal entirely with the kingdom of heaven. There are here recorded seven of them. The first is about a sower who sows seed in various types of soil. The birds ate some of the seed. The rocky soil did not provide enough moisture for some plants, and they withered in the sun. The thorns choked other plants as they grew. But some seed fell on good soil and yielded a good crop (Matt. 13:3-9). Jesus explains the meaning of the parable to the disciples. Some people are too superficial to understand the word and, as its meaning eludes them they forget what they heard just after the message has been given to them. The birds are the evil one (the devil) who snatches the gospel from them. The seed on thorny ground represents those people who rejoice when they first hear the Gospel but accept it only to lose faith when tribulation arises. The thorns represent the pleasures of this life which stifle the Gospel. The meaning of the good yield is obvious (Matt. 13: 18-23).

The second is the parable of the weeds which grow up with the plants. They cannot be removed until after harvest when they are burned. The wicked therefore will be separated from the good at the judgment (Matt. 13:24-30). The third is the parable of the mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds, which grows up into a large tree (Matt. 13:31-32). That is the way the kingdom of heaven is. It starts off small and inconsequential, only in the end to be so large that it controls everything. Like leaven in dough, it lifts society to a higher level (Matt. 13:33). This is the fourth parable. The fifth and sixth parables, about the tares in the field and the priceless pearl, which a man sells all that he has to purchase and own, illustrate the inestimable value of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:44-46). The seventh parable, of the net and the fishes (Matt. 13:47-50), is like that of the weeds and the wheat. It shows that the good and bad exist side by side, the hypocrites with the righteous, but God will separate the one from the other in the end.

Jesus tells these stories to the crowds, but they do not understand them. He explains them to his disciples. Sadly he admits that the crowds in and around Galilee will not accept him and will not heed his message. Seemingly a prophet is without honor in that person's own country (Matt. 13:53-58).

2 . . *Mighty Acts of Mercy* (Matt. 14:1-16:12) In spite of the recalcitrance of the Jews, especially their leaders, Jesus continues to minister to human need wherever he finds it, and the crowds respond to his mercy and kindness. The compassion of Jesus is inexhaustible, but Matthew says explicitly that Jesus "had compassion" only four times in his Gospel: (1) when he saw the crowds who were disorganized and helpless, "as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36); (2) when he fed first the five thousand after healing their sick (Matt. 14:14) and (3) later the four thousand (Matt. 15:32); and (4) when he gave sight to the two blind men at Jericho (Matt. 20:34).

The news of John the Baptist's death at the hands of Herod Antipas, which Matthew treats

almost incidentally (Matt. 14:1-12) in contrast to Mark's detailed account (Mark 6:14-30), causes Jesus to withdraw to a desert place. However, the news of Jesus' successes alarms Herod, for he had thought that only John the Baptist could do these mighty deeds, and so Jesus must be John the Baptist come to life again. Matthew correctly designates Herod as tetrarch, the ruler for Rome of only a small district. He was not a king like his father Herod the Great who ruled over the whole country, but people persisted in calling him king as they had his father. Herod was king to the people who were his subjects but not to the Romans whose subject he was.

The people followed Jesus to the desert place, and he ministered to their needs by curing those who were sick. At eventide the disciples wanted to dismiss the people, so that they could go back to the villages for food. But Jesus said that was unnecessary. He would feed them. He took five loaves of bread and two fish, which they had on hand, multiplied them, and fed the whole lot. Matthew says there were five thousand men in addition to the women and children, whom he does not number. This means we do not know how many were really fed, for surely the women and children ate the loaves and fish just as the men did. The significance of the story lies in what was left over. The remains of the meal filled twelve baskets. There were twelve tribes of Israel, a basket for each tribe. The food of the Gospel is for the Jews, and it is sufficient to satisfy their needs entirely. As Moses kept the children of Israel alive on manna in the wilderness, so Jesus is prepared to feed them now with bread from heaven which will provide them with strength, body and soul, for everlasting life (Matt. 14:13-21).

Jesus dismissed both the crowds and the disciples, whom he told to take a boat and cross back over the Sea of Galilee while he remained alone to pray. This is an interesting point. Here and later in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-45) are the only two instances in the whole of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is shown in the act of prayer. A storm arose. The disciples were in the boat alone. They were in danger. So Jesus walked to them across the water as if it had been dry land. Peter saw Jesus coming and called to him and asked permission and power to come and meet him on the water. In the process of doing so, Peter became frightened and began to sink. Jesus rebuked him for his lack of faith. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). The phrase "of little faith" is peculiar to Matthew. We use it now frequently. It is Matthew's contribution to the language of Christendom. As a result of this miracle, the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying to him: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). Matthew uses this incident to emphasize his theme: the kingship of Christ.

The crowds around Gennesaret sought just to touch his garments, believing that this contact with Jesus would be sufficient to heal their diseases (Matt. 14:34-36). The scribes and Pharisees thought otherwise. They accused the disciples of transgressing oral tradition by failing to wash their hands before a meal. Jesus was outraged at their criticism. The disciples' fault was minor compared to their transgression of the sixth commandment. Moses had commanded them to honor their parents, but they used the so-called "tradition of the elders" to evade the commandment. They put their estates in trust to the Temple. They could use the revenue from this trust themselves, but nobody else could benefit from it. Therefore, they used the law to free

themselves from the Mosaic obligation to care for their parents. "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites" (Matt. 15:6-7). Once again Matthew calls attention to a prophecy of Isaiah by indicating that Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 in his rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees.

The real cause of defilement is not what we take into our mouths but rather what comes out of our mouths, for the words we speak reflect our thoughts and the purpose of our hearts. Murder, adultery, theft, and slander are all acts and expressions of the inner disposition of the heart. Note that these all follow the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments of Moses. Peter asks for an explanation, which prompts Jesus to be so explicit. Before explaining, however, he shows disgust with Peter. "Haven't you got any sense?" he said. "You don't seem to have one grain of intelligence, Peter."

At this juncture Matthew records the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman. The disciples want to send her away, and even Jesus tells her that his mission is limited to the Jews. But when she is so humble as to say that even dogs are fed scraps from their master's table, Jesus cannot deny her. He tells her to go home, for her daughter is already well (Matt. 15:21-28). The power of Christ is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

On the shores of the Sea of Galilee the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many other diseased people are healed by Jesus (Matt. 15:29-31). This time the crowds bringing all their sick people number four thousand men exclusive of women and children. People today must wonder about the male chauvinism of Matthew. Here for the second time he does not count the women and children. In this regard he was typical of the time in which he lived. Jewish society has always been patriarchal, and Matthew leans heavily on the ideas and practices of the Old Testament.

Some think that the feeding of the four thousand was the feeding of the Gentiles -- that the large crowd consisted of Gentiles, not Jews, as in the case of the five thousand. Therefore they say that the seven baskets of food left over represent the seventy gentile nations, and that the four thousand people symbolize the four winds of heaven and the four corners of the earth. All this is allegorizing. There is nothing explicitly stated in Matthew's text to warrant such a fanciful interpretation (Matt. 15:32-39).

Once again Jesus refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees and Sadducees of the authenticity of his mission, telling them that they are skillful enough in reading the sky to predict the weather, but they are blind to spiritual reality and the meaning of his own authority (Matt. 16:1-4). The sign Jesus gives is that of the prophet Jonah. This means that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, so the Messiah will be in the tomb three days. The sign is Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus cautions the disciples to beware of the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees, which he calls leaven. They fix on that word and mistakenly assume that he is criticizing them for not taking

food with them as they once again cross over the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. He is disgusted with them. He could not possibly need food. If he could feed four thousand people as he had just done, he could readily feed twelve and himself. They have focused on material needs. He is warning them against spiritual misunderstanding (Matt. 16:5-12). The leaven of bread is quite different from the leaven of theology. Though Jesus uses leaven in one of his parables in a good sense (Matt. 13:33), it is used here and elsewhere in the New Testament to mean something evil.

3. *Preparation for the Establishment of the Church* (16:13 - 18:35) Technically speaking, Jesus did not establish the church. He lived his life under the ceremonies of the Temple and prayed and taught in the synagogues of Israel. The church did not come into existence until after his death, resurrection, and ascension. The birthday of the church is Pentecost.

However, Jesus conceived the church. He formulated the principles for its operation. His life was its example. His death was the means of the church's forgiveness of sin. His resurrection was its power of new life and the promise of life in the presence of God forever in the world to come. The church was to be the new Israel. It was to be the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was both the cause of and impetus for the church.

In this section of Matthew we receive from Jesus the blueprints for the building of the church. The divine architect himself gives the plan. Here for the first time the word church is used. Literally it means congregation. It is the assembly of the people of God, the followers of Jesus, the representatives of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

The confession of Peter provides the church with its theology. Peter tells Jesus who he is. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This is the first confession of the Christian church. To the Christian, Jesus is God in human form. Jesus not only represents God, he is God. We need not, indeed cannot, go beyond Jesus in our understanding of the divine nature and our apprehension of the divine mind and will.

Christ, meaning messiah or anointed one, is technically the title of an office or position, the designation of the person who holds that office and fulfills that position. The word *Christ* becomes a name, for in Jesus person and office are inextricably one. In the Old Testament we see the change of the name of a person taking place in keeping with a change in that person's work and mission. For example, *Abram*, which means revered father, became *Abraham*, father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5); and *Jacob* became *Israel* a name his progeny keep even to the present day. So Jesus the Christ, the messiah, the king becomes Jesus Christ, for Jesus of Nazareth is the only messiah there ever was or ever will be, and to the Christian he is king forever and ever.

Likewise, he who makes the confession has his name changed from *Simon*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Simeon*, to *Peter*, which means rock. This man, representing the apostolate, is the foundation of the church. His name always and invariably stands at the top of the list of all the

apostles. Indeed, from the very beginning he was the Prince of the Apostles. The apostolate is the heart and soul of the corporate body of the church. It is to become the governing instrument of the church. It is to be the teaching authority, the ruling power, and the pastoral directive of the future church. In some Christian traditions, the episcopacy is considered to be a continuation in history of the apostolate with the bishops regarded as successors of the apostles. In other traditions, the continuation of the apostolate is more diffused among the corporate body of Christians.

The power to bind and loose was given to Peter and to his fellow apostles. This means that the church is commissioned through its organization to forgive sin in the name of Jesus and by God's grace to make believers fit for the kingdom of heaven. The clergy have in this regard a special and peculiar privilege, for in the performance of this office they represent Christ; but at the same time they have an awesome responsibility. When the church is faithful to Christ, the church is indefectible, even infallible. Hell itself cannot prevail against the church, for the church belongs, body and soul, to Jesus Christ. That institution becomes the continuation of his incarnation throughout all history (Matt. 16:13-19).

Peter, who speaks for Christ, indeed for God, in his confession, speaks for his fellow apostles immediately thereafter. In doing so, both he and they make a serious mistake. Just after Peter's confession, Jesus tells the disciples for the first time of his passion and death. They do not understand this. They associate the Messiah with power, triumph, victory. It is inconceivable to them that the Messiah should have any relationship whatever with weakness and defeat. So Peter asks Jesus to step aside. Privately he tells him to correct what he has just said. People will misinterpret it. It will injure his work. Jesus' response to Peter is primarily the same as was his response to the devil at the end of the temptations. He calls Peter the devil, and tells Peter to get behind him. His rebuke is severe. Jesus tells Peter that he is an embarrassment to him and a hindrance to his work (Matt. 16:21-23).

Then Jesus explains the pattern of true discipleship and predicts what may happen to those who follow him all the way. Just as he will be persecuted and killed, the same fate will be theirs as well. Only people who are willing to abandon everything, even life itself, for God will discover what true life is all about. In contrast, those who work for secular reward will in the end lose everything. "Those who follow Jesus will never really experience death at all, for the abundant life is unending in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:24-28).

The next great event after the confession of Peter in the preparation for the establishment of the church is the Transfiguration of Jesus. We do not really know where it took place. We know that it was atop a mountain. Matthew locates the place of the confession of Peter. He tells us it was just outside Caesarea Philippi. This was a pagan city not far from Mount Hermon at the headwater of the Jordan River. Its earlier name had been Paneas, for it houses shrines of the god Pan. Titus came there to give thanks to his Roman gods for the conquest of Judea. Perhaps then Mount Hermon was the site of the Transfiguration, though Mount Tabor near Tiberias is the

traditional place.

Only Jesus' intimates -- Peter, James, and John -- went with him to the top of the mountain. They saw him transfigured, his garments white as snow and his face aglow with the presence of God. Moses and Elijah met him there; and on that mountain with Jesus this world had juncture with the world to come.

Moses and Elijah are two of the greatest character in the Old Testament. Neither died in the presence of his people. God took the life of Moses while he was alone with God on top of Mount Nebo, and angels buried his body so that to this day the site of his grave is unknown. Elijah, in the sight of his successor Elisha, was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire. These two great prophets from the Old Testament came to testify to Jesus and to relate their covenant to his.

Peter and the other two disciples, representatives of this world, see it all, and Peter wants to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus and one for Moses and one for Elijah. God spoke as he spoke at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." As they descend from the mountain, Jesus cautions his disciples to keep silent about what they have seen until after the Resurrection (Matt. 17:1-13).

The Old Testament had predicted that Elijah would come back to earth to prepare the way for the Messiah. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6). These are the words the angel uses to Zechariah regarding the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:17). Jesus told the disciples that Elijah had already come, and they were correct in their assumption that he meant John the Baptist (Matt. 17:12-13).

The Transfiguration confirms the confession of Peter. It validates and seals the theology of Christianity as being primarily Christology. Everything Christianity purports to do and all the good the church is to perform will be in the name and in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The disciples who remained in the valley have been unable to cure a boy victimized by epilepsy. They still lack the confidence to fulfill their mission. This will be the fate of the church too, if and when that institution tries to do anything independently of Jesus and alien to the mission Jesus has given to the church (Matt. 17:14-20). Only through Jesus is the church fully the church. Trust in God is like the grain of mustard seed. Though ever so small, it is great enough to remove a mountain. The disciples had been unable to do what needed to be done because they had too little faith.

Jesus again distresses the disciples by repeating the prediction of his impending death (Matt. 17:22-23). He tells Peter to pay the temple tax for himself and Jesus, though really if the

authorities understood who he was, they would not tax Jesus just as a prince is not taxed because he is the son of the king (Matt. 17:24-27).

Chapter eighteen gives us a concrete picture of Jesus' expectations regarding the attitude and behavior of Christians, requirements of his followers, and discipline for those who will constitute his church.

He uses a little child as an example of greatness in the kingdom of heaven: innocence, dependence, openness to guidance and instruction, no consciousness whatever of self-importance, willingness to be

reproved, always seeking an example for imitation, devotion, and love. The basic element in Christian greatness is humility. Jesus called a little child and stood the child before his followers. "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" Matt. 18:4).

The disposition of the follower of Jesus is to love little children, always seeking their welfare and happiness. Indeed, to do good to a little child is to do good to Jesus himself, while to cause injury or hurt to one is a moral and spiritual calamity, deserving the punishment of death itself. "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" Matt. 18:6).

Influence is powerful and pervasive. Everyone has influence. Good influences are blessings. Bad influences are curses. It is inevitable that some people will exert a bad influence. Damage to others will come because of them, because of their words and deeds, their examples, because of the evil they exert. Damnation will be their end. Therefore, carefully avoid injury to others. At the same time, carefully guard against any occasions for sinning. If a part of the human body causes a person to sin, it would be better for that person to lose that part of the body rather than commit sin. If the eye, for example, should lead one to lust or become covetous, then it would be better to lose one's sight than to yield to unwholesome desire. "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matt. 18:9).

Jesus again defines his mission in the world to seek and to save the lost and that will be the mission of the church after he has gone. Evangelism, though Jesus does not use that word nor does it as a word belong to the Gospel, is the supreme business of Christianity, namely, reclaiming the lost for God. Every person is precious in God's sight. Jesus is the good shepherd who will leave ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold and go out all night on the mountains to find one sheep that is lost. His followers cannot afford to do less. God rejoices over one reclaimed sinner more than over ninety-nine persons who need no reclamation (Matt. 18:11-13).

Jesus provides his followers with the prescription for handling mistreatment and injury at the

hands of others. If a person in any way misuses a follower of Jesus, the injured person shall go quietly and privately to the offender and point out the grievance. If the offender does nothing about it and fails to provide a remedy for the offense, then the injured person is to go again with two or three witnesses. If the offender still does not provide satisfaction, the injured person is to take the issue publicly before the church. When the church renders a decision on the issue, the offender must comply with that decision or be expelled, treated as "an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). Jesus repeats what he said earlier to Peter and this time confers the power of binding and loosing on the church itself. "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). The church, in the plan of Jesus, is definitely his agency for salvation. Here Jesus clearly teaches that outside the church there is little hope for salvation.

Though the church as an institution possesses authority entrusted to it by Christ himself and is expected to exercise that authority, the individual person does not have such authority. For a person to attempt to exercise this authority is presumptuous and dangerous. Peter, for example, asks Jesus "How many times should I forgive another person for sinning against me, say, seven times?" That, after all, is a lot of sinning. Jesus says one must forgive another seventy times seven, that is, indefinitely, just so long as that person asks forgiveness.

At this point Jesus tells the story of the king who went over the accounts of his servants. One highly placed person owed the king ten thousand talents. When the servant could not pay, the king commanded that he, his wife, and his children be sold into slavery and that all his possessions be liquidated and applied to the debt. The man fell on his knees and begged for an extension of time. The king was moved by his pleas and forgave him his debt. He did not have to pay anything. But when this servant began to settle his own accounts, he found that a fellow servant owed him a hundred denarii. This servant also asked for an extension of time, but the man would not give it to him. Indeed, he put the fellow servant in prison until he could pay the debt. The other servants who knew that the king had relieved this highly placed person of his debt reported to the king what had happened.

A talent represented the highest form of currency in Jesus' day. It was a gold piece. Ten thousand talents was an inordinate amount of money, something like a million or more dollars today. It was a fortune. A denarius was one of the lowest forms of currency. The debt of the second servant was about like a dollar today. Yet this wicked man was willing to throw the other servant into jail for this paltry sum of money.

The king was indignant. He changed swiftly from mercy to judgment, from forgiveness to condemnation and punishment. He threw his highly placed servant who owed him so much into jail. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Matt. 18:32-33).

We cannot expect God to be merciful to us if we are unmerciful to others. Forgiveness comes from God only to those who forgive. "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:34~35).

The basic pattern of the church is delineated by Jesus in this portion of Matthew's Gospel. Both doctrine and discipline are explicitly set forth. Mercy and retribution, deliverance and destruction,

forgiveness and punishment all belong to the teachings of Jesus and therefore to the belief of his followers.

Personal Reflection

1. Does it seem strange to you that John the Baptist doubted who Jesus was, even after baptizing him? Do you find it hard to admit your doubts when they occur? What tenets of your faith do you have questions about?
2. Using the parable of the sower, what concerns, preoccupations, or affections are most apt to choke off growth in your life?
3. Have you ever let your involvement with the church take you away from family responsibilities? How may rules be used to escape responsibility, as with the Jews who avoided caring for their parents? How does Peter's question about how many times to forgive- 'Seven times seven?' - show the same attitude?
4. How many of the Ten Commandments deal with observable actions and how many with attitudes? Which are easier to change? (Exod. 20)
5. Have you ever felt "without honor in your own country" in regard to your Christian witness? Is it hard for you to discuss your faith with those closest to you?

The Gospel Of Matthew by William R. Cannon

Before his election to the episcopacy in 1968 United Methodist Bishop William R. Cannon served as Professor of Church History and then Dean of Chandler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Other books by Bishop Cannon include The Gospel Of John, Jesus The Servant, and The Book Of Acts. The Gospel Of Matthew was published by The Upper Room, Nashville, 1982. This material prepared by Paul R. Mobley.

Chapter 4: Herald Of The Kingdom

This is the shortest section in Matthew's Gospel. The material is covered in only two chapters, but it is of crucial importance. It outlines the basic principles which govern life in the kingdom of heaven. In proclaiming these principles Jesus acts as the herald of the kingdom. He does not want people to follow him for the wrong reasons. He does not choose to entice them by false expectations. Whoever would be Jesus' follower should know exactly what following him means. The ethics of the kingdom are the ethics of perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The principles set down and emphasized in this section reflect the teachings already given earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. But here they are applied to those who desire to be subjects of the king and citizens in the heavenly kingdom.

As Matthew presents his account of the career of Jesus, these teachings and pronouncements were made after Jesus and his disciples had left Galilee and were on the road to Jerusalem. "And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings (his discourses relative to the formation of the church), he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan" (Matt. 19:1). This meant he went down through Decapolis and Perea and avoided Samaria. Otherwise, if he had gone through Samaria (the direct route to Jerusalem), he would not have crossed the Jordan at all.

Jesus may have left Galilee, but Galilee did not leave him. Many Galileans followed him to Jerusalem and gave him his large audiences as he taught in Perea and Judea. This was the time approaching the Passover. Some would have gone to Jerusalem anyway for the feast, but they went early to be with Jesus. And some who might not otherwise have gone, went because of him. The sick and the lame went because they knew he would heal them, and they were not disappointed (Matt. 19:2).

1. Sexual Morality (Matt. 19:3-12) Jesus opens his teachings about life in the kingdom of heaven

with a discussion of personal morality as it relates to sex and the use of one's sexual endowments. The kingdom of heaven here means its anticipatory stage on earth, or life in the church, the community of those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. It does not refer to the kingdom of heaven beyond death. In the next life, sex will not be a factor. There, people will not marry or be given in marriage but shall be sexless as the angels (Mart. 22:30). But here on earth sex is a factor in the determination of the quality of a person's life and affects entrance into the kingdom of heaven while a person lives on earth.

The occasion for the teaching is a problem for Jesus by the Pharisees, who ask him if it is lawful under any circumstances for a man to divorce wife. Matthew indicates that the Pharisees raise issue in order to test Jesus. He implies that they are trying to tempt Jesus to give the wrong answer to their question, so that they might have grounds to indict him. Here their ploy would be the same devil's was in the temptations.

There were in Jesus' day disputes among the rabbis over divorce. Some of them questioned its moral legitimacy and doubted that it should be countenanced under any circumstances. Others laid out intricate procedures for granting divorces.

All Jesus says here is, "You know how it was in the beginning. God gave Eve to Adam, and Adam to Eve. They went through trying circumstances terrible ordeals together, but they never sought divorce." God made husband and wife, Jesus to be one -- that is, one flesh. In heart and mind will, husband and wife as they live together and one another shall become one person. This is basic Christian teaching. It comes out of Jesus' own teaching in answer to the Pharisees Jesus says: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man asunder" (Matt. 19:6).

The Pharisees object by reminding Jesus Moses allowed men to issue certificates of divorce and thereby to separate from their wives. "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife" (Deut. 24:1-2).

Jesus replies that it may have been Moses' teaching, but it is not God's teaching. Moses did this not because he believed it was the perfect will of God, but rather as a concession to the demands of human weakness. Even so, it is basically unfair. It gives the prerogative of decision entirely to the man.

Here Jesus delineates the difference between approval and permission. Sometimes we are forced to permit what we do not really approve. Jesus said that Moses gave permission for divorce. He did not thereby give approval. But Jesus is greater than Moses. He teaches that divorce is to be allowed only in the case of infidelity on the part of one or both of the spouses.

The disciples interrupt the discussion by saying that if there is no way to dissolve an unhappy marriage other than by infidelity, it would seem best never to get married. Jesus admits that celibacy is a legitimate and good way of life when it is a voluntary decision and is entered into for the sake of undistracted service to God and God's people. For Jesus, celibacy is not a way to avoid marriage and its obligations, as the disciples suggest. It is rather an alternative lifestyle dictated by calling and vocation. This does not mean that in the teaching of Jesus celibacy is superior to marriage, nor does it mean that the person who never marries lives an inferior or less fulfilling life. Both celibacy and marriage have their own special places in the kingdom of heaven. Each properly understood and rightly used is honored and esteemed.

It is reasonable to assume that many of the apostles were married. Certainly Simon called Peter, or the Rock, was married (Matt. 8:14). But Jesus never married, and the Apostle Paul either was widowed or single. Though Protestant ethics supports marriage for clergy, still celibacy must not be despised any more than marriage by any Christian body.

If Jesus adorned a wedding ceremony with his presence, he also adorned the celibate state by adhering personally to celibacy all the days of his earthly life. Human sexuality is a precious but precarious gift. Whatever use it is put to by a person must be in order to redound to God's glory.

2. *Concern For Children* (Matt. 19:13-15) The intended result of human sexuality is children. The word the Bible uses for the conceiving of children is the word know. "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Gen. 4:1). This does not necessarily mean that sex between husband and wife is reserved exclusively for childbearing. It can be precious as an expression of love between them regardless of its issue. But children are not intended by God to be brought into the world outside the marriage bond, nor is single parenthood endorsed in scripture as a providential way of rearing children. The family is the proper result of the experience of human sexuality, and the family is not a changing or intermittent relationship. It is providentially ordered to be a permanent and abiding institution into which a child is born, nurtured, and developed, until that child reaches maturity and is released in order to marry and form a new family.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and, cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. Genesis 2:18, 21-24

Jesus welcomed the little children when their parents brought them to him, and he was surprised and ashamed when the disciples sought to deny the children admission into his

presence. It was not that the disciples disliked the children. It was simply that Jesus was in the course of his teaching. The disciples felt the children would disrupt his discourse. They thought the children could not understand what Jesus was talking about and that their Master's time could be spent more profitably.

They were surprised, and perhaps a bit hurt, when the Master rebuked them, ordered them to give the little children admittance to his presence, and said that the children belonged to the kingdom of heaven just as much as did the adults.

The church today is wise in its attitude toward children and their place in its ranks. It no longer talks of them as being the church of tomorrow, as if to say they must grow up to church membership and responsibility. Young though they are, they are already members for having accepted Christ, for having come to Christ, and they make their contributions now to the church and to the advancement of God's will. "Be as eager for me and to be in my presence, says Jesus to his disciples, "as these little children are, or else you won't be able to get into the kingdom of heaven."

The family with its children is precious in the sight of Jesus, and its preservation is essential to the kingdom of heaven.

3. *The Hazard of Wealth* (Matt. 19:16-30) Wealth is a hindrance rather than an aid to entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus gives this clear emphasis in the passage before us.

A man came and asked him what good thing he needed to do to obtain eternal life. The very way in which the man phrases his question captures the reader's attention. "Good Master," he says, "what good thing shall I do?" He uses good to characterize Jesus as a person. He uses precisely the same adjective to define the deed he needs to perform. Really the two are congruent. Good characterizes the person who performs the deed. The quality of the deed is derivative of the intention and purpose of the one who performs it.

Jesus does not appreciate the man's greeting. The man does not know Jesus personally and probably has never seen him before. He characterizes Jesus on the basis of his reputation. So Jesus brushes his greeting aside by saying, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good," and by implication, "You do not honestly believe I am God."

But Jesus advises him to keep five of the Ten Commandments, five that he is most likely always to have kept: the proscriptions against murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and the admonition to honor his parents. Jesus saw that this was a self-respecting man and realized that in repeating these commandments he was telling the man what he already knew, as we would say, "carrying coals to Newcastle." Jesus does add another piece of advice not contained in the Ten Commandments. It is a prescription from Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The young man does not catch the significance of the addition. "Why, all of these

have I kept from my youth up." But Jesus knew he had not, for the man did not really love his neighbor at all. Jesus disclosed this by saying, "Sell all you own, and give the proceeds to the poor." That would be proof that the man knew who his neighbors were and that he really loved them. The man did not stand the test. What Jesus said made the young man very sad. He was rich, and he wanted his wealth more than he wanted the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples saw and understood this. They also saw and understood that almost everyone else who had any possessions intended to keep them. That means, they thought, that the kingdom of heaven is open only to the poor. The rich cannot possibly have any place in it. Jesus admitted to them that it would be extremely difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom, as difficult as it would be for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. That, of course, is a figure of speech, an example of oriental hyperbole. No camel could ever get through a needle's eye.

Jesus says, however, that nothing is impossible with God. Therefore, some rich people will be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. Riches can be an aid rather than a hindrance if the person who possesses wealth uses it to God's will. John Wesley, for example, became by eighteenth-century standards a very wealthy man. He had an annual income larger than many wealthy estates. But he lived on the same amount of money he had lived on as a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, and gave all the rest to the enterprises of the kingdom of heaven.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). It does not make any difference how much wealth we have if that treasure is put at the disposal of God and used to enrich on earth the kingdom of heaven.

4. *God's Values* (Matt. 20:1-19) Jesus ends his teachings on wealth with this statement: "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19:30). Then he tells a story to illustrate what he means by this statement, which he repeats at the end of the story. The point of the story is that God's values are not always the same as ours. Frequently, those things to which we attach the greatest importance are not at all important to God. And some things we pass by as being trivial, God looks upon as of inestimable significance.

In the busy season of harvest, the owner of a big vineyard goes to the marketplace to hire migrant workers to harvest grapes. The standard wage is one denarius for twelve hours of work a day. He offers the laborers this amount, and they consent and are employed for one day's work. Later in the morning, the owner realizes that he needs more help and comes back to the marketplace and hires another group. This time the owner fixes no pay but simply promises to be fair with them. The process is repeated off and on throughout the day, until late afternoon when the owner employs workers for just one hour.

At the end of the day, the owner tells the paymaster to compensate all the workers equally, starting with the last people hired. Each worker is to be paid a denarius, including the first ones who had worked all day, for that is the amount the owner had promised them.

The last ones hired are no doubt overjoyed at this high payment. The first are bitterly disappointed. They had not expected more than they got until they heard about the high wages of those who had worked only one hour. Then, they were disappointed and expected more. However, the owner of the vineyard said that they had no right to complain about his generosity. The money was his to do with as he pleased. All this does seem unfair to us, but we are weighing the episode on our scale of values.

Jesus says that this story illustrates what happens relative to the kingdom of heaven. God sets the standards. No one deserves God's grace -- admittance into the kingdom. No matter how hard we work, we cannot earn it. In the end, it is the gift of God. Admittance into the kingdom depends on trust in God and utter dependence on God's mercy. If this comes early in life, that person qualifies and is admitted. But one can also enter just before night falls and life ends. There is no time limit for admittance during one's life. The reward for entering early is the satisfaction of work within the kingdom. One should enjoy the work and not feel that it is "the burden and heat of the day" (Matt. 20:12).

In the kingdom of heaven a transvaluation of all secular values takes place. From God's point of view, winning souls is far more important than the accumulation of wealth. The establishment of a church is more honorable than the organization of a new business or the transformation of a prosperous firm into a powerful corporation with multinational outreach. The heroes in the kingdom of heaven are generals who won battles over the devil rather than over human enemies. Many national heroes will do well to get into the kingdom of heaven at all, while the saints go marching in. The last in recognition here are the first there (Matt. 20:16).

The perfect example of the transvaluation by God of human values is Jesus. The Master calls the disciples aside from the crowd as they are approaching Jerusalem to tell them again what to expect there. Jesus will be rejected by his own people. The chief priests and scribes will condemn him to death. He will be reviled and killed by human beings. But God will raise him from the dead. In the eyes of his con-temporaries Jesus has no value and does not deserve to live. But in the eyes of God he is the epitome of value, the standard by which all other values are assessed. He is the last who becomes first.

5. *The Acceptance of Sacrificial Service* (Matt. 20:20-34) The key to experiencing the kingdom of heaven is sacrificial service. There is no other way fully to participate in the kingdom. One who tries to do so in some other way is a thief and a robber.

The mother of two of the disciples gives Jesus an opportunity to teach this lesson to the Twelve, especially to her two sons. This ambitious woman, the mother of James and John, asks Jesus to promise her that when he establishes his kingdom he will seat her two sons in the chief places, one on his right and the other on his left. Evidently the two boys were standing with her when she made this request. (In Mark's account they asked for the honor themselves (Mark 10:37).)

Jesus says to the mother in amazement, "Ye know not what ye ask" (Mark 10:38). And then he turns to the two boys and asks them if they are able to drink his cup—that is, to endure his suffering and shame with him, for he had just finished telling them what was going to happen in Jerusalem. The two boys self-confidently assert that they are able.

Jesus does not argue with them. No doubt he is shocked by their arrogance. He says that, whether they realize it or not, they will all eventually drink his cup of suffering. However, the determination of greatness in the kingdom cannot be made by Jesus in advance. God will decide after all the work is completed and the quality of it assessed. The standard of determination will be service and self-sacrifice. Jesus himself will be the model, but those who consciously seek greatness and recognition are not apt to attain them. The humble and self-effacing win God's approval.

Jesus points once again to the contrast between God's values and those of society. Look, he says, at the gentile order, at the Romans who control this country of ours. They respect authority. With them the basis of authority is power. The greatest person in honor and respect with them is the one who exercises the greatest authority and demonstrates the greatest power. The lowest person is the slave who has to obey another's orders. But with God, the lowest person is the most exalted, and the highest person is the least. That means that the most important person in Roman society could be the least important person in the kingdom of heaven, and the least important person in Roman society could be the most important person in the kingdom of heaven. God will put down the mighty from their seats and exalt those of low degree (Luke 1:52). So, Jesus says to his disciples, if you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven, you must become slaves to others here on earth. If you want to be first, you must be the servant of all.

As Jesus and the disciples come into Jericho, passing through on their way to Jerusalem, two blind men cry out for help from the crowds, and Jesus touches their eyes so that they can see. Immediately they join him, adding two more followers to his company. In opening their eyes, he has opened their hearts as well. They become disciples.

James and John, though apostles, are spiritually as blind as were these two men on the Jericho road before Jesus touched them. The two sons of Zebedee have desired greatness without knowing what greatness is and the price they will have to pay for it.

Personal Reflection

1. John Wesley believed in "moving on to perfection." Do you think "Be ye perfect" is an impossible command? What does the command mean to you?

2. How could your community of faith include children more fully in its public life?

3. If God were to call you to go to some faraway place and you agreed to go, what would you have to dispose of in order to travel light? How much more do you have than you need -- how many pairs of shoes, how many changes of clothes, how many coats, blankets, dishes, towels, or books?

4. How does your sexuality affect your relationship with God and your response to God's call?

5. How was Jesus contrary to what his contemporaries expected in a messiah? How is Jesus contrary to what our culture applauds?

The Gospel Of Matthew by William R. Cannon

Before his election to the episcopacy in 1968 United Methodist Bishop William R. Cannon served as Professor of Church History and then Dean of Chandler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Other books by Bishop Cannon include The Gospel Of John, Jesus The Servant, and The Book Of Acts. The Gospel Of Matthew was published by The Upper Room, Nashville, 1982. This material prepared by Paul R. Mobley.

Chapter 5: King Of The Jews

Matthew began his Gospel with the reminder of an Old Testament prophecy of the coming of the king and with the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. . . . And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of J uda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matt. 2:2,5-6).

In this section of the Gospel, Matthew completes his description of the fulfillment of that prophecy with the acceptance of Jesus as king by the people in Jerusalem. For a brief span of time, Jesus exercises his dominion by teaching in the Temple and proclaiming in the capital of the nation the edicts of the kingdom of heaven.

As Jesus was born King of the Jews in the land of Judah, where the Wise Men from the East paid tribute to his majesty with their gifts to him in Bethlehem, so he must exercise his reign in Jerusalem as did King David before him.

The Feast of the Passover is the most important and sacred of all religious observances for the Jews. This is the time when Jerusalem is filled to overflowing with pilgrims. This is the season appointed for Jesus' reign as king over his own people. Jews from all over the world are in the capital for the feast. The foreign-born sons of Abraham are assembled here with their brothers who reside in the homeland. All Jews everywhere are therefore recipients of the benefits of Jesus' presence in Jerusalem and of his rule over his people. According to Matthew, Jesus is ordained by God to be the King of the Jews.

We are indebted to Matthew for having preserved more of the teachings of Jesus, and in better order, than any of the other evangelists. He has done this in five major collections. We have examined four of these collections already (Matt. 5:1-7:29; 10:1-42; 13:1-58; and 18:1-35). In

this section of his Gospel Matthew gives the fifth and last collection of the teachings of Jesus (Matt 21:1-25:46). These are words from the throne. They are regal and majestic. They are words addressed by the ruler to his subjects. And the people to whom Jesus speaks these words are all Jews.

1. *Coronation* (Matt. 21:1-16) Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is his coronation as King of the Jews. That is what Matthew intends to convey in his presentation of the event. Just as in the birth of Jesus, Matthew turns back to a prophecy from the Old Testament to confirm his interpretation of that event; so now with the triumphal entry, Matthew turns again to the Old Testament to show that this is the coronation of the Davidic king.

The drama begins at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus designates two of his disciples to go ahead of him to a nearby village to obtain an ass and a colt for his use. Zechariah had prophesied: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:4). The two disciples find the ass and her colt in the village and bring them to Jesus as he commanded. Matthew says explicitly that this was done to fulfill prophecy, and the evangelist quotes the prophecy that is thus fulfilled: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass (Matt. 21:5). Matthew is obviously depending upon memory for the prophecy from the Old Testament, so his statement is more a paraphrase than it is a direct quotation. He refers to Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

This verse from Zechariah is Hebrew poetry. It is an example of parallelism, where one line repeats in different words the idea contained in the preceding line of the poem. Matthew notes that both the ass and her colt were brought to Jesus, but he does not tell us which of the two Jesus actually rode upon.

The people throw their clothes in the path of Jesus as he approaches the city, and they put down palm branches before him in the road. This was a long established act of homage. Kings in the Old Testament had been shown homage by their subjects in the same way. For example, Jehu was recognized by the people of Israel as their king in this identical manner: "Then they hastened, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king" (2 Kings 9:13).

The use of palm branches indicated the solemnity of the occasion. Jesus not only rode into the city of Jerusalem, he went on to the Temple. He was a priestly as well as royal king. His reign was to be messianic. Palm branches had been used at the rededication of the Temple after the return of the Jews from Exile. This was on the Feast of the Tabernacles in 141 B.C. (1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7).

The response of the people was itself a litany. "Glory to the Son of David," they cried. "Glory in the highest" -- that is, in heaven as well as here in Jerusalem. "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." 'Jesus is our king, because God has chosen and anointed him. The music of Psalm 118:24-26 was in the hearts and on the lips of the people: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord."

Matthew says that the whole city of Jerusalem was moved by Jesus' great entry. Immediately after he entered the outer court of the Temple, he drove away the money changers and the merchants who sold birds for sacrifice, giving as an explanation a quotation from Isaiah 56:7: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer." The house of prayer, in Jesus' mind, is the Temple. Haggling, bargaining, and cheating have no place in the house of God. After driving out the money changers and the merchants, he healed the blind and the lame who came to him in the Temple. The little children kept following him about the Temple precincts, singing as they had on the road, "Hosanna to the Son of David," or "Glory to David's heir." Hosanna literally meant "save." In their songs the people were asking Jesus to save them.

The chief priests became angry and upset at Jesus for what was happening. But he told them that the children had more discernment than they had. He quoted to them Psalm 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou . . ." changing "ordained strength" to "perfected praise." With this, Jesus walks away from their presence, leaves the Temple and Jerusalem, and returns to Bethany to spend the night.

Here there is a clear expression of regal power and majestic authority. Jesus exercises his divine rights in ejecting the moneychangers and merchants from the Temple and in pitting his authority against that of the Temple rulers.

2. The Reign of Judgment (Matt. 21:18-22:14) The king is all powerful, but he is all wise, too. Solomonic in judgment, he is Davidic in the execution of judgment. Since the time of the judges, the rulers of Israel had sat at the gates of the cities, hearing the people, settling their disputes with and claims against one another, and meting out justice. The judgment seat is now the Temple. The judge is Jesus himself.

The day after the triumphal entry Jesus returns with his disciples from Bethany to Jerusalem. On the way he sees a fig tree covered with leaves and expects to find fruit on it. He has not had breakfast and is hungry. When he discovers that the tree has no fruit, he curses it so that it withers and dies. Everything in the kingdom of heaven is designed to serve the purposes of the king. Anything that fails to satisfy the purpose for which it was designed is useless and will be discarded. Consequently, the fig tree is cast aside.

"How could this have happened so quickly?" the disciples say, as they watch the little tree drying up and falling apart before their very eyes. "You can do the same thing I did," Jesus replies, "that is, if you have enough faith. By faith you can order a mountain to move out of the way and drop into the middle of the sea" (Matt. 21:21, AP).

Power belongs to the governance of the kingdom. Jesus exercises royal power now in the presence of the disciples. But they will exercise it too, in his name after he is gone; and the church will continue to exercise it in allegiance to him throughout history. With the power to bind is also the power to loose. Condemnation and judgment fall heavily on the disobedient and recalcitrant, just as mercy and forgiveness are the gifts conferred on those who believe and trust. Even nature itself is under the control of God and of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The miracle of the fig tree is unique. It is the only miracle recorded in the Gospels which demonstrates the destructive power of Jesus. There is one other, perhaps closely akin to it, where Jesus lets the devils destroy the swine and themselves as well in the sea. But here Jesus uses his supernatural power to destroy the fig tree because it has no fruit for him to eat. The disciples realize that without fruit to show for their labor, this is an example of what might well happen to them too. Jesus' own people had had their chance. He came to them. The opportunity they failed to take advantage of may now be given to others.

Jesus discredits the sincerity of the priests when they ask him by what authority he does the things he does. Countering with a question of his own, Jesus asks them whether the baptism of John the Baptist was from heaven or from people here on earth. The chief priests and elders are afraid to respond, lest their answer incriminate them with the people, who believed John was a prophet. They certainly did not believe John's baptism was from heaven, because they had ignored him (Matt. 21:23-27).

Jesus now tells two stories, the import of both of which is the same. A father had two sons whom he asks to help him in his vineyard. One son refuses but later regrets his decision and goes into the vineyard to work. The other gladly consents to go but does not do it. Jesus asks which of the two sons obeyed his father? The first one, of course, say the Jewish religious leaders. But you, Jesus says, are like the second son. You pretend to obey God, but you did not heed the warning of John the Baptist. The tax collectors and harlots finally did hear John and heeded him, so, says Jesus to the priests and elders, they will go into the kingdom before you (Matt. 21:28-32).

The other story is about a householder who moves away but rents his vineyard to tenants -- sharecroppers who are supposed to share the produce with him. Instead, when he sends his servants to collect, the tenants beat and abuse them. Finally, he sends his son, thinking they will respect him. But the tenants decide to kill the heir and seize the property. After all, possession is nine-tenths of the law. Jesus asks what will happen when the owner comes back to his property. They answer, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto

other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:41).

The meaning of the two stories is apparent. God will honor those who are obedient. Those who follow their own desires and ignore God's directions will be destroyed, and others will take their place in God's kingdom. The disobedient and indifferent Jews are the wicked tenants who do not give a proportionate share of the grapes to the landowner. God is the landowner. The prophets are the servants. Jesus is the son they kill. The new tenants are the followers of Jesus. The second story is not strictly a parable, as we think of it, but an allegory containing several meanings. The first story is a parable; the story conveys one meaning and has one lesson to teach.

Jesus is the stone which the builders reject but which nonetheless becomes the cornerstone of the building (Matt. 21:42-44).

The chief priests and Pharisees see themselves in Jesus' stories. Therefore, they want to arrest him, but they realize he has won the favor of the people. So for the time being they have to leave him alone (Matt. 21:45-46). They fear they have another John the Baptist on their hands.

In all these encounters Jesus maintains control of the situation. He is the divine judge of the deeds of those with whom he deals.

This discourse comes to a climax with the story of the wedding feast. The son of the king is to be married, and his father sends servants to invite guests to the wedding. Evidently the king is not too popular with his subjects, at least those prominent enough to be invited to court, for they laugh at the invitation and go on about their business, one to his farm, another to his shop. Others mistreat the servants and then kill them. The king, when he learns what has happened, sends his army to kill the rebellious subjects and burn their city. The king sends other servants to collect guests wherever they can find them, so that the wedding is well attended and the house is full. Some of the guests are good, but others are bad. At the wedding the king goes around speaking to his guests. He finds one among them who is improperly clad. He does not have on a wedding garment. "Friend," the king says, "what's wrong with you? You do not have on a wedding garment. What's your explanation?" The poor man is speechless. He has no explanation. The king throws him out. He is bound, hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, where he will suffer so much pain that he will weep and gnash his teeth. Many people, Jesus says, are called, but few of them are chosen (Matt. 22:1-14).

This is a complicated story. It, too, is an allegory. But it has two parts. The original guests, who were thought to be worthy of an invitation from the king, are later pronounced unworthy because they do not accept the invitation. Those who attend the wedding are not invited at all. They are compelled to come. This is the first part of the story. The second part has to do with one person present at the wedding from among those compelled to come. He is not properly dressed, so he is thrown out and even punished for his indiscretion. What does it all mean?

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests, and the Levites are the elite of the people. They are the ones who normally would be expected to receive an invitation from the king. But they make fun of Jesus and ridicule the kingdom of heaven which he proclaims. In the end, they will all be destroyed.

Those left are the poor, the outcast, the publicans, and sinners. There are no others to constitute the kingdom. They then will fill its ranks. But the kingdom of heaven has its standards. The king expects those at the wedding of his son to show proper respect. Sinners cannot remain sinners and be citizens of this new order. When they come to the wedding, they must come prepared. They must discard their old work clothes and put on 'clean white garments for the feast. Those who displace the elite as guests, persons the Pharisees and their kind would never recognize as being worthy of an invitation to the king's palace, must be made worthy. In coming into the king's house these people must willingly subscribe to the king's standards and way of life, or else they too will be excluded and destroyed.

Always, when Jesus represents the kingdom of heaven, he implies its opposite, the kingdom of darkness and of evil. The wedding feast is the messianic banquet, or the kingdom of heaven as a community of saints. The ruler is God. The son is Jesus. The guests who refuse the invitation are the elite of the Jews. The others who take their place are those who believe in Jesus, heed his message, and become his followers. The man without the wedding garment represents those who, after having responded to the message of Jesus, do not live up to his standards and continue in their old way of life. The darkness outside the king's house is hell itself. If there is a heaven, there must be a hell, for the judgments of God are true and righteous altogether.

3. *The Reign of Wisdom* (Matt. 22:15-46) The Pharisees engage surrogates to question Jesus. The surrogates seek to slip up on the blind side of him by flattery. They falsely claim that they know all Jesus has been saying is true, that he teaches what will lead the people to God, and that he is independent of people. There is one crucial question, they say, that we want you to answer. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? Jesus sees that they are out to trick him. Paying taxes to the Romans is not popular with the Jews. In their minds, to recognize the rule of Caesar is to deny the rule of God. But not to pay taxes to the Romans means the confiscation by the Romans of all the possessions one has plus enslavement and possibly even death. "Why trick me?" Jesus says. "You know the answer already. Whose image is on the coin? It is Caesar's. So give him what belongs to him. What you owe God is different. You can still pay taxes and serve God. God does not want your money. God wants your person, your life. You and Caesar both belong to God" (Matt. 22:18-21, AP).

The Greek word for *tempt* or *ensnare*, which Jesus uses to accuse the people who ask him this question, is a hunting term. It literally means "snare" or "trap," as when one snares a bird or traps a bear. The only place the Greek word is ever used in connection with a person is in the New Testament. The disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians sought to trap Jesus as if he

had been an animal. But instead he traps them (Matt. 22:15-22).

The second effort to discredit him was a question put to him by the Sadducees. Jewish custom demanded that when a man died without children, his widow should marry his next oldest brother and seek to have a child to provide an heir to her deceased husband. The Sadducees give Jesus a test case. Suppose, they say, there are seven brothers and the oldest dies without a child and his widow marries the next, who also dies without a child, and so she goes down the line with each new husband dying without a child, until she marries the seventh and youngest brother who also dies childless. After she has buried all seven of her husbands, the widow dies too. In the Resurrection whose wife will this woman be? Here on earth she had all seven of them.

The Sadducees did not believe in life after death. In fact, this teaching is a later development in Hebrew thought. It is foreign to most of the Old Testament. The Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible -- the books of the Law. They assumed that the law concerning remarriage would never have been promulgated by Moses if there had been life after death, because it would cause confusion as to whose wife the widow would be in the world to come. In their minds, the Law and the Resurrection contradicted each other.

Jesus tells them that they do not understand life in heaven. There the nature of personality is different. After death, a person does not have a mortal body. There is no such thing as marriage in heaven.

Jesus also tells the Sadducees that life after death is clearly implied in books of the Law, which they accept as canonical. There God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead. God comes to Moses in this way. Jesus says that the living God would never be introduced in terms of the dead. Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must be alive with God beyond the grave or else they will rise again from their graves at the Resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33).

A lawyer asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment, and Jesus tells him without elaboration:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37,39). It is interesting that a lawyer should have asked him a question about the law. This is the only place where a lawyer appears in Matthew's Gospel. In Mark there is no mention of a lawyer, but in Luke, lawyers appear six times.

Jesus then asks the Pharisees a question. "Whose son is Christ?" And they answer, "Christ is the son of David." If that be so, he says, why does David call him Lord? (see Psalm 110:1). The Pharisees could not answer him.

Jesus was the son of David if we assume that both Mary and Joseph are of the household and

lineage of David. This is what Matthew believed. But Jesus was much more than the Son of David. He was the Son of God. Matthew teaches this through his account of the virgin birth of Jesus.

After this, none of the leaders of the Jews dared to engage Jesus in discussion or debate. They were not his equals. The king reigned over them in wisdom.

4. The Reign of Counsel (Matt. 23:1-39) Jesus realized that a good ruler gives good advice to his subjects. The priests and religious teachers of the Jews are antagonistic and argumentative. They attempt to compete with Jesus. He turns away from them and addresses the people and his disciples. His message now is to the crowds about him.

Jesus tells the people that they have been deceived by their religious leaders. The scribes and Pharisees give good advice, but they do not practice their own precepts. They put the burden of the law with all its requirements on others, but they will not lift a finger themselves. What little they do is for show -- to be seen by the people and to receive their praise. These leaders court all sorts of honors and seek constant attention. They want the people to notice the scriptural verses they have tied on their foreheads and around their arms, so they make the parchment pads on which the verses are written very large. They enlarge the hems of their garments and see that their tassels are long. They want to attract attention as they perform their religious ceremonies.

The scribes and Pharisees take the chief seats in the synagogue, the seats before the ark which holds the sacred scrolls. These seats face the congregation. In that way they can see the people and be seen by them. They delight to fill Moses' seat, the chair in every synagogue where the reader for the day sits as the ruler of the synagogue. From it the law is expounded and taught and the sermon is preached. This means the scribes and Pharisees like to be the preacher on the sabbath in the synagogue.

During the week in the marketplace, these leaders want to be addressed as "rabbi." *Rabbi* means great. It is the equivalent of master or lord. The custom in Jesus' day was that a man would salute another who was his superior in the knowledge of the law. The scribes and Pharisees delighted in the daily recognition given to them in public by the people. The Jews respectfully referred to their great teachers and past leaders as fathers. Jesus instructed his followers to give up all these titles. The only person who ever refers to him as rabbi in Matthew's Gospel is Judas Iscariot. His followers must remember that they have only one spiritual Father and that is God in heaven. They have but one master, and that master is Christ, the Messiah. They themselves are just brothers and sisters. Their hallmark is sacrificial service. The greatest among them will be their servant. Those who exalt themselves will be humiliated by being debased, while the humble will be exalted (Matt. 23:1-12).

Then Jesus pronounces before the people seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees. *Woe* is the equivalent of a warning. Jesus warns the people against the sinful practices of the scribes and

Pharisees. When Jesus says, "Woe to you," he vents his indignation, ashamed for what the scribes and Pharisees are doing. It is an expression of condemnation for their deeds. It is also a curse, indicating that God will punish them for their sins. Jesus is indignant that the scribes and Pharisees (1) will not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves and stand in the way of others entering it as well; (2) will do almost anything to win a proselyte only to make that proselyte twice as much a child of hell as they are; (3) confuse people by senseless oaths, telling them that if they swear by the Temple, their oath is not binding, but if they swear by the gold of the Temple, it is binding-the fools ought to realize, Jesus says, that the Temple includes all that is in it; (4) tithe some of their money but neglect justice and mercy and faith, which are weightier moral matters, when they ought both to tithe and perform these greater acts of righteousness as well; (5) are careful about outward cleanliness but careless about the inward disposition, so that they are filled with extortion and greed; (6) appear righteous but really are hypocrites, because their appearance hides all manner of iniquity inside; (7) pretend to revere the prophets of history whom their parents killed but continue to practice the evil of their parents by rejecting those whom God sends to them now (Matt. 23:13-36).

As a result of all this, Jesus breaks into a lament. His people refuse his ministry of comfort and reject his message of deliverance, and soon Jerusalem will be desolate (Matt. 23:37-39). Regretfully, he says, the inhabitants will not see him again until they are able to recognize who he really is and who it is that sent him. Only then will they be able to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39).

5. The Reign of Prophecy (Matt. 24:1-25:46) When they leave the Temple, Jesus tells the Twelve that that beautiful edifice will be destroyed. When they reach the Mount of Olives, the disciples ask him privately when this tragedy will occur. He does not answer their question but instead begins a discourse on the future and the signs that will mark the end of the world. The phrase "the end of the world" is not actually used in the discourse. But we infer it from the description of events given by Jesus. We equate the second coming of the Son of man with the end of the world.

But if we use the phrase "end of the world" at all, it must have a double meaning. The fall of Jerusalem would have been the end of the world for a devout Jew. It was such for the disciples. That event, Jesus says, will take place during the lifetime of many of the disciples (Matt. 24:34). The present generation will not die before this happens.

Jesus indicates the signs preceding the catastrophe, and he warns his disciples against false teachers who claim to be Christ. He predicts wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilence. He tells them that the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet will be set up in the holy place, namely, the Temple. He gives instructions to his followers to flee, to desert the city, and to hide in the mountains. Just hope, Jesus says, that this tragedy does not occur in winter, and pray that you will be in condition to flee.

All this did happen. Jesus' words were literally fulfilled. Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70. The Temple was destroyed, and the followers of Jesus did flee in advance and were scattered. Jesus did not predict the exact date.

But the end of the world has not yet taken place. Jesus says that it will not occur until the gospel is preached in all the world "for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14). The sun will turn to darkness, and the moon will not shine. The Son of man will appear in the heavens. He will come with power and great glory. When this will happen, no one knows but God, who will not share this knowledge even with the angels (Mart. 24:36).

Be ready for the Second Coming and the end of the world. Live as if your generation were the last.

Jesus' discourse seems confusing as Matthew presents it, because the description of what will take place before the fall of Jerusalem and before the end of the world is meshed and looks the same. However, the lesson conveyed by these predictions is the lesson of watchfulness and preparation.

People would not leave their houses if they knew in advance when the thief would strike. The good servant is constantly good and does not have to anticipate the master's return. It is only the evil servant who has to worry that the master might return unexpectedly. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Mart.24:44).

It is in this vein that Jesus tells the story of the wise and foolish virgins, those five who went to the wedding with oil in their lamps and the other five who came with their lamps empty and could not purchase any oil in time for the feast (Matt. 25:1-13). He follows this with the story of the talents which the master of the house distributed to his servants in keeping with his assessment of their abilities. Two of them, in his absence, doubled the amount he had entrusted to them, while the third did nothing with his but preserve it. We are to be prepared for the second coming of Christ. Also, we are to use our time and talents profitably, so that we have something worthwhile to show for our time on earth.

We glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when we serve others. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

Rewards and punishments are both at the disposal of God who will reward the good and punish the wicked. The kingdom is not for everybody but only for those who love God and obey God's will.

Personal Reflection

1. What emotion was Jesus feeling when he overturned the tables of the moneychangers? How do you usually handle that emotion?
2. How do you react to Jesus' cursing the fig tree? How does this miracle fit in with the way you usually think of Jesus?
3. The guests who were invited to the banquet were told to come just as they were. Do you ever feel you need to "clean up your act" in order to approach God? What do you think God requires of those who seek the Holy Spirit?
4. Jesus mourned for Jerusalem, crying for its people. Do you think God actually longs for closeness with us? How are you affected by this idea?
5. Why did Jesus not clearly draw the lines between what belongs to God and what belongs to the civil government? Who has to decide what goes in each category?

The Gospel Of Matthew by William R. Cannon

Before his election to the episcopacy in 1968 United Methodist Bishop William R. Cannon served as Professor of Church History and then Dean of Chandler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Other books by Bishop Cannon include The Gospel Of John, Jesus The Servant, and The Book Of Acts. The Gospel Of Matthew was published by The Upper Room, Nashville, 1982. This material prepared by Paul R. Mobley.

Chapter 6: The King Of Glory

In Matthew's Gospel, the passion, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ are presented as a single event. Indeed, this is the only way the evangelist can justify his claim that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. To be sure, a king can be deposed by his subjects, and this is what happened to Jesus. A deposed king is generally either exiled or killed. When killed, there is no possibility of the restoration of a monarch. When exiled, there is always the chance, remote though it may seem at the time, that the ruler will come back, destroy his enemies, and take full possession of the kingdom. His reign does not end with his being deposed. Deposition is but an interlude, not a finality.

The passion and crucifixion are the deposition of Jesus as King of the Jews. At the same time, they are necessary preparation for his exaltation as the king of glory. John Wesley used to recite every Sunday from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Thou art the king of glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. . . . When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." Christ was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God only after undergoing the pain of rejection, condemnation, and crucifixion.

Matthew, like the other three evangelists, had the benefit of seeing the end of the story of Jesus. He did not consider each incident in the career of Jesus as it happened, but rather saw it all in general perspective. Consequently he gives a regal cast even to the passion and death of Jesus. They stand not in the dark shadow of the cross but in the rising morning light of the Rtion. The regicide committed by Jesus' contemporaries is, then, the coronation and glorification of God's only begotten son.

1. *Conspiracy and Consecration* (Matt. 26.1-16) Rejection and glorification are delineated together throughout the final section of the Gospel.

Jesus' work as a teacher is over. His oral message is finished. Now he is not so much the subject

of action as he is the object of the action of others: his fellow countrymen and the Romans who destroy him, and God who raises him from the dead and thereby proves that he is indestructible.

Jesus again foretells his crucifixion and warns his disciples that it will be only two days hence (Matt. 26:1-2). The conspiracy against Jesus by the chief priests, the elders, and Judas Iscariot is juxtaposed with the tribute paid Jesus by the woman with the alabaster box of precious ointment.

First comes the conspiracy. The Jewish leaders confer about how they can secretly arrest Jesus and kill him. Then they agree it must not be at the Feast of the Passover, lest their action incite a riot (Matt. 26:3-5). Evidently Jesus is very popular with the people even in Jerusalem.

Alongside the Jews' resolve not to do anything against Jesus during the season of the feast is Jesus' own prediction that he will die after the Feast of the Passover. This is most important in Matthew's interpretation of Jesus. The blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts of the Israelitish homes in Egypt caused the death angel to pass over and spare the firstborn within those homes. Now the Lamb would be sacrificed, and his blood would spare from sin and death those who depend on it. Jesus uses the passive voice in his prediction, saying that he is betrayed in order to be crucified. But the active voice is used throughout in the conspiracy scene. The chief priests and elders take the initiative. Their plan to kill Jesus is carefully considered. The death of Jesus is premeditated.

The scene of the conspiratorial council is interrupted by another action, entirely different from it. While Jesus is eating a meal in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, his attention is drawn to a woman with a very expensive ointment which she pours on Jesus' head. The disciples disapprove of her action. To them this seems a total waste. The ointment might have been sold and the proceeds from it given to the poor. But Jesus appreciated what she did, was grateful for her gift, and said she did this in preparation for his burial. He knew the disciples would not have objected to her action had he been dead. It was customary for loved ones to anoint the bodies of their dead with precious oils and spices. When a king was anointed, oil was poured on his head. This woman by her act had anointed her king. Jesus' crucifixion and burial would at the same time be his coronation. The coronation by the Jewish crowds on Palm Sunday, which they would repudiate on Good Friday, this good woman had hailed and reaffirmed in her act of consecration in the house of Simon the leper.

What the disciples wanted to do with the ointment by selling it on behalf of the poor was laudable, but not as laudable as what the woman did with it. Jesus accepted her act as a dedicatory offering. He rebuked the criticism of the disciples with his own criticism of them. He told them that they would always have the poor with them and that there would be innumerable opportunities to help the poor. But he told them that they would not always have him. If they wanted to do something for him, now was the time.

What this woman has done will be told wherever the Gospel is preached, Jesus said, so that

long after she is dead and gone, her act of tribute will stand as a perpetual memorial to her.

Except in reference to the Last Supper, this is the only time the word memorial is used in the Gospels, and it is used to describe this expression of love on the part of the woman for Jesus. What she did was not a philanthropic act. It was not charity in the sense of giving something to someone in need. It was not done in behalf of the destitute and needy. Instead, it was an extravagance, a waste, a display of luxury on the part of one who could least afford it lavished on one who really did not need it. Yet that act of personal tribute becomes a part of the Gospel, illustrating love for Jesus must be the highest priority in our lives.

Judas Iscariot was there, saw what the woman did, and witnessed its effect on Jesus. Nonetheless, he repaired himself to the chief priests and offered to betray Jesus to them for a price. Even in the action of Judas, Matthew sees the fulfillment of prophecy. "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver" (Zech. 11:12). The chief priests and the elders, the Romans, Judas -- though all evil in their handling of Jesus and worthy of final judgment and condemnation -- are nonetheless pawns of destiny and agents in the fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew remembers Jesus' words: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matt. 18:7).

The anointing of Jesus by the woman on the one hand and the conspiracy of the priests and elders and their contract with Judas on the other hand, though entirely different in motive and deed, nonetheless stand together in the Gospel. Both are essential in the fulfillment of the mission of Jesus.

2. *The Passover Meal* (Matt. 26.17-30) The double motif is apparent at the Last Supper. On the one hand, Jesus observes the Passover with the Twelve and interprets it, not historically, but eschatologically (in terms of the future), where he himself becomes the paschal lamb. On the other hand, he calls their attention to the fact that there is a traitor among them.

The disciples asked Jesus where he wanted to go for the meal. He replied that they should ask a certain person in Jerusalem to invite them home for the observance. This would have been on Thursday of what we now call Holy Week, the day before the Crucifixion. On that day the lambs were slaughtered, and they had to be eaten that very evening. A day started and finished at sunset for the Jews.

Moses prescribed that the Passover would be observed by families. Each household would provide its own meal. However, if a family was too small to consume the lamb, another might be invited in to share the meal. Jesus' family was the disciples. In this instance, it is not likely that they shared the meal with the family in whose house they observed the Passover. Probably the family ate their meal together in one part of the home, and Jesus and the disciples ate theirs in another, say in a room upstairs, the upper room as it has come to be called. Matthew stated that the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them to do and that they prepared the meal (Matt.

26:19). If they had eaten with the family, the members of the family would have prepared the meal.

Matthew recalls that at the beginning of the meal Jesus predicts that one of the Twelve will betray him. This upsets the group. Each protests that it is not he to whom Jesus refers. We translate this response as a question: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I?" But what they really meant was a categorical denial, "Not I, Lord! No, no, not I!" Jesus ignores them. He goes on to say that the person who dipped his hand in the dish with him is the guilty person. In Jesus' day people ate their food by sopping a piece of bread in the dish and taking pieces of food up on the slice of bread. However at Passover, they dipped their hand in the dish and took the food out with their fingers. In all likelihood they had not noticed the person who put his hand into the dish with Jesus. The man himself knew. Jesus knew. Judas said, "You don't mean me, do you?" Jesus simply replied, "You know the person I mean." Here again the others seem not to have caught the meaning of Jesus' response to Judas. Had they understood, they probably would have risen in indignation against Judas.

Immediately Jesus took bread and blessed it and gave it to them to eat with the explanation that this broken bread was his body. He gave thanks for the wine and poured it for them to drink, explaining that this was his blood which he would shed for many for the forgiveness of their sins. He called this the new covenant. He insisted that he would never again drink wine until he had the opportunity to drink it with them in the kingdom of God. What does all this mean?

Bread and wine are the perpetual symbols of Jesus' body and blood. At the Last Supper, Jesus served the disciples the bread and wine which they themselves had prepared for the meal. The bread and wine represented the sacrifice Jesus would later make on the cross for them and for others, so that their sins might be forgiven.

This was a new covenant which would take the place of the old covenant established by Moses in Egypt when the Israelites ate the lamb and spilled its blood on the doorposts of their home so that the angel of death would pass over them. The followers of Jesus would substitute the Last Supper for the Passover meal of the Jews. They would eat bread and drink wine in remembrance that Christ their savior died on the cross for their sins and thereby effected their deliverance from sin and death.

Jesus knew that this would be his last meal on earth. He would eat no more. The next banquet he would host would be with those whom he had redeemed in God's everlasting kingdom beyond all time and all earthly existence. Thus the Last Supper anticipates the messianic banquet in the kingdom of heaven.

After eating bread and drinking wine together, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and walked out of the house, left the city, and came to the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

All the food and features of the old Jewish Passover are here. The ritual observances are in order and are complete. But as the meal progresses, it takes on a new character altogether. It is transformed by Jesus into a Christian sacrament. The prayers and the hymn are the same as they always were, and yet they are entirely different. This feast marks the transition from the old order to the new. The Passover in Jerusalem on the eve of the Crucifixion becomes the Eucharist, the new meal in the new Israel to establish a new world.

3. *In the Garden and before the Sanhedrin* (Matt. 26:31-75) But the old Israel is in power now, so much so that even the heralds of the new Israel cannot resist its sway. Therefore, Jesus' first utterance when he and his disciples reach the Garden of Gethsemane is the lament that they will all desert him before this night is out. Their failure to stand by him in his passion is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, which Matthew is careful to note by including the quotation which Jesus gives when he predicts what his disciples will do. "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zech.13:7).

Peter protests. He says to Jesus, "No matter what these others might do, I will never desert you." Jesus responds, "Why, Peter, you will be the very first one to leave me. Before dawn, you will deny me three times by swearing that you never knew me." "No, no, no," Peter cries, "I will die first. You mean more to me than life itself." And the other ten who are present echo Peter's sentiments.

Jesus turns away from the disciples and walks farther into the Garden of Gethsemane on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, but Peter, James, and John follow him. He stops them and asks them to stay together where they are and pray for him. He tells Peter and the two sons of Zebedee: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). Jesus is so steeped in scripture that he expresses himself with quotations from the Hebrew Bible. What he says here is from Psalm 42:5. He goes farther on but stays in sight of the three disciples. When he is entirely alone, he unburdens his soul to God. He confesses to his heavenly Father that he is afraid and wants to be spared the agony that is before him, but that he is prepared to fulfill the will of God. Here we see how human Jesus really was. His reaction to anticipated pain was the same as ours would be.

He comes back to find the three disciples have fallen asleep. He shames Peter. "Remember what I told you. See, you could not stay awake praying for me just one short hour. Oh, I know your intentions are good, but you are weak. You had better pray that you do not fall into temptation."

Jesus walks away to pray again to God. He still dreads what lies before him. He comes back a second time to the three disciples. This time they are fast asleep, and he does not disturb them. It is after he has prayed alone the third time that he wakes them, for he realizes that the time of his arrest has come. "Get up," he says. "Be wide awake. I am about to be betrayed. Let us go from here."

At that point Judas Iscariot arrives with the guards of the high priest and others forming a motley crew. The noise no doubt drew the other ten disciples to Jesus. Judas had told the chief priests that he would identify Jesus by kissing him. So he rushes up to Jesus, throws his arms around him, and kisses him. Jesus says to Judas, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

Matthew is the only evangelist who uses the word *friend* in his Gospel. Usually he employs the word to mean its opposite. It is used sarcastically or tongue in cheek. Jesus calls Judas friend when his act of treachery shows him to be the worst enemy Jesus could possibly have.

One of the disciples, whom Matthew does not identify, tries to defend Jesus. This disciple cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest with his sword. John tells us in his Gospel that the disciple was Peter (John 18:10). But John wrote his Gospel after Peter was dead. If Matthew wrote his while Peter was still alive, then perhaps he did not identify him for security reasons. He did not want to expose Peter and make him liable for prosecution. Peter probably had acted so quickly that, in the dark, the crowd had not seen who had struck the servant of the high priest.

In order not to diminish Jesus' role as rightful king, Matthew is careful to record that Jesus said he could have called down from heaven more than twelve legions of angels if he had chosen to do so. He rebuked the guards for coming after him in the middle of the night with weapons when they might have taken him at any time while he taught the people in the Temple.

Jesus was brought then before the high priest and the council of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing body in Jewry. The law required that for a person to be indicted there had to be at least two witnesses to the crime. The tribunal produced many witnesses, but the evidence they gave was contradictory and insubstantial. Finally two witnesses did agree that Jesus had predicted that he would destroy the Temple and then rebuild it in three days. But this testimony became irrelevant when the high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus replied, "You have spoken correctly, and you shall see the Messiah in power and coming on the clouds of heaven." This is all the Sanhedrin needed. It condemned Jesus for blasphemy.

The other disciples dispersed and fled after Jesus' arrest in the garden. But Peter followed the master and waited for him in the courtyard outside the high priest's palace. There he was accosted by two different women, each of whom said Peter had been with Jesus. He said he did not know what they were talking about. But others who stood about said, "Your accent is Galilean. You have to be one of his followers." Peter swore that he had never known Jesus. The cock, herald of the dawn, began to crow. Peter remembered Jesus' prediction that he would deny him, and Peter broke down and cried.

Inside the high priest's palace, Jesus was being mocked and abused and spat upon. People would come up behind him and strike him with their hands and then say, "Messiah, prophesy to us and tell us who hit you."

4. *Condemnation and Crucifixion* (Matt.27:1-66) The trial of Jesus is unique. There has been none other quite like it before or since. Jesus was exonerated under Roman law. Nonetheless, it was the Roman penal code that put him to death.

All the Sanhedrin could do was to indict Jesus. It acted as a sort of grand jury. It could neither try a case nor pronounce a sentence. It could recommend, in this case, to indict. It was up to the Romans to make final disposition of a case when the case was grave enough to carry the death penalty.

Early on the Friday morning after Passover, the Jewish leaders took Jesus to the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, insisting that he find Jesus guilty and put Him to death. The evidence the Jews presented was so flimsy and nebulous that Pilate found Jesus innocent.

When Judas Iscariot heard that the Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to death, he regretted that he had betrayed his master, and he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. He admitted to them that he had betrayed an innocent person. "That means nothing to us," they said. They had gotten from Judas all they needed. The traitor flung the pieces of silver on the floor before them and went outside the city and hanged himself. The Jews could not put "blood money" into the Temple treasury, so they bought a field with the thirty pieces of silver and used it as a place to bury strangers. It was known as potter's field or the field of blood.

Matthew says this is the fulfillment of prophecy. He quotes a verse from the Old Testament which he attributes to Jeremiah, but which is from Zechariah I 1:12-13. He knew the verse, but his memory failed him as to its author. The name "potter's field" comes from the fact that Zechariah threw thirty pieces of silver to the potter. Matthew's confusion was due to the fact that Jeremiah went to a potter's house (Jer. 18:2) and later purchased a field (Jer. 32:6-15). The land was also called "field of blood" because the chief priests had purchased it with blood money. Matthew does not specify where Judas hanged himself. Later tradition identifies the place as this same field of blood. If so, the priests purchased the field of Judas' suicide.

Pilate asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews, and he admitted to Pilate that he was. However, Jesus refused to respond to any of the witnesses the Jewish leaders brought to testify against him. Though his life was at stake, he offered no defense. Pilate marveled at his composure and self-control. Pilate's wife warned her husband to take no action against Jesus. She had had a dream about Him, and she was sure Jesus was innocent. Pilate realized that the Jews were trying to kill Jesus because they envied him.

Since the custom was to release a prisoner each year at the time of the Feast of the Passover, Pilate offered to release Jesus. Evidently there was only one other candidate for clemency, a notorious criminal named Barabbas. He was so notorious everyone knew his name. Nonetheless, the crowds chose Barabbas. The people would choose anyone in preference to

Jesus. Only because he feared a bloody riot did Pilate yield to the demands of the crowd. He took a bowl of water and washed his hands, saying that he found no fault whatever in Jesus and could not assume responsibility for his death. The Jews in the courtyard cried out that they would take responsibility for Jesus' death.

The soldiers took the prisoner, stripped him of his garments, put a scarlet cape over him in imitation of the purple robe of an emperor, gave him a reed for a scepter, put a crown of thorns on his head, bowed before him in mockery, and taunted him as King of the Jews. Afterwards they led him out with his own cross on his shoulder. It was so heavy that a Cyrenian, Simon by name, had to be conscripted to carry it for him. Pilate had inscribed over his head on the cross: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37). Even in mockery, Jesus' claim was honored and the truth told.

According to Matthew, of all Jesus' followers, only three women accompanied Jesus to the cross, and Matthew does not include among them Jesus' own mother. The evangelist specifies that Jesus was led out to the place of the skull for his execution. Evidently it was a hill resembling a human skull. It was unclean because it was the place of executions. The sign Pilate put on the cross was the charge made against Jesus, the one charge Jesus admitted to. He was being executed simply because he had said that he was the King of the Jews. The Romans always attached the crime for which criminals were executed to the cross on which they were nailed.

Jesus was executed between two thieves. Here again the Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled. "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). They gave Jesus vinegar to drink mingled with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink. "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21). The soldiers gambled for his clothing. This was the custom in that day, for soldiers were given the personal effects of the criminals they executed. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Psalm 22:18). The crowds around the cross taunted Jesus, saying, "You claim to be able to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. If you can do that, you ought to be able to save yourself now. If you really are the Son of God, you can come down from your cross. Do it! Prove it to us!" The chief priests, scribes, and elders joined the others in reviling Jesus. "Let's see if God will help him. He claimed to be God's son. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from his cross, and we will believe him." The thieves, the two persons crucified with Jesus, also joined in mocking him. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him" (Psalm 22:7-8).

This went on until Jesus in desperation cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). The people about the cross thought he called to Elijah for help, and they said, "We will see whether Elijah will come to save him." Jesus' words are the opening verse of Psalm 22. If not aloud, at least in his heart he said the rest: "For he hath not despised nor

abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard" (Psalm 22:24).

For three hours before Jesus' death, there had been darkness over the land. This often happens when a storm sweeps up from the desert to the east of Jerusalem. It carries dust and sand in its wake. Before the first Passover in Egypt, when God slew the firstborn of the Egyptians, there had been darkness in the land for three days (Exod. 10:22). Amos, too, had prophesied: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day" (Amos 8:9). That is what happened. It was dark on the day of crucifixion from noon until three in the afternoon, when Jesus died.

Just after Jesus' death, Matthew relates that an earthquake occurred. The quake opened graves and the saints of Israel's past awoke from their sleep, and, after the Resurrection, walked the streets of Jerusalem and were seen by many people. The veil of the Temple was rent in two and the Holy of holies was exposed. The Roman centurion and his guards saw all this and were afraid. They said: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). This "regicide," committed by the people of Jerusalem, was the beginning of the new kingdom of the Gentiles.

Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who was a follower of Jesus, got permission from Pilate to remove Jesus' lifeless body from the cross. He deposited it in his own newly hewn tomb, and two women sat opposite the site as a stone was rolled to close its entrance. The Jews set their own guards to watch the tomb and to seal its entrance. All this was done before sunset, which was the beginning of the sabbath day. Jesus had been tried, condemned, crucified, and buried all within the span of a single day.

5. *Glorification* (Matt. 28:1-20) Matthew adds several details in his account of the Resurrection which are not found in Mark's Gospel. The women who sat opposite the tomb know the exact site of the place where he was laid. Matthew mentions but two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and John, whom he calls the other Mary. He tells us that there was a great earthquake, in the midst of which an angel descended from heaven and rolled back the stone. Evidently the earthquake broke loose the seal by which the Jews had secured the stone against the entrance to the tomb. Stones used to close the entrances to the tombs of the rich in Jesus' day were big round slabs in the shape of wheels. They were set in channels, also hewn out of stone, and could, with great effort, be rolled back and forth to open and close the entrances. The stone to the entrance of Jesus' tomb had been sealed permanently by the Jews (Matt. 27:66). The earthquake and the descent of the angel had taken place before the women undertook their journey to the tomb.

Before the women arrive, the guards whom the Jews had set on watch before the tomb have all gone. They were on duty when the earthquake shook the tomb and when the angel descended

from heaven. They actually witnessed what to them was a dread event. The angel's appearance was like lightning, and his raiment was as white as snow. They were so frightened by what they saw that they could not move. They either fainted or else were paralyzed by fear. This was before daybreak.

When the women arrive, the angel is sitting on the stone he has rolled back from the entrance, and the tomb is wide open. The Matthean details which are not in Mark include the earthquake, the descent of the angel, the terror and paralysis of the guards -- the preparation in advance, so to speak, for the coming of the women. Mark leaves all this out of his account, where the women are surprised to find the tomb open and venture inside before they receive news about Jesus.

In Matthew the angel dispels the fear of the two women by telling them he knows whom they are seeking and that Jesus is not here but has risen from the dead. The angel invites them to come into the tomb and see where it was that Jesus had been laid at his burial. Evidently they had not gone into the tomb with Joseph of Arimathea when Jesus' body had been carried there from the cross.

The angel commissions the women to tell the disciples what has happened and to instruct them to return to Galilee in order to meet Jesus there. The women run to bring the good news to the disciples. Jesus stops the women on the way. When they recognize him, they fall at his feet and worship him. Jesus affirms the directive of the angel that they are to tell the brethren that he will see them in Galilee.

At this point in his account Matthew returns to the guards at the tomb. They have recovered from their shock, regained the use of their limbs, and have reported to the chief priests in Jerusalem what has happened. The leaders of Israel bribe the guards to lie and to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus in the night while the guards slept. The Jews promised the guards that if the governor heard about the incident, they would be protected.

The eleven disciples journeyed to Galilee and met Jesus on a mountain. Matthew indicates that was the designated meeting place. No place is mentioned in the instructions given the women, but this mountain was the customary meeting place for Jesus and his disciples during the Galilean ministry. When they saw Jesus, they worshiped him, though Matthew admits that some doubted. This is a serious admission and is evidence of the reliability of the Gospel. The evangelist includes everything, the bad as well as the good, skepticism along with belief, doubt just as much as faith.

The Gospel concludes with the great commission. Jesus assures his disciples that he has all power both in heaven and on earth. In his strength, then, they are to go over the world winning converts, teaching these new followers even as he taught them, baptizing them in his name and in the name of God and the Holy Spirit, and promising them that he will be with them always to

the end of the world.

The great commission is the climax of Matthew's Gospel. It is the culmination of its theme. Jesus of Nazareth was born to be king and was recognized as a king by the Wise Men who came to worship him in Bethlehem. Finally, after being rejected and killed by his own people, Jesus is vindicated and affirmed by God through his resurrection from the dead. He is proclaimed by the disciples as king of the whole world. The church they establish in Jesus' name will be the new Israel, and those they baptize will constitute its members, citizens of a universal kingdom that is coterminous with the whole world. This kingdom as represented by the church is a temporal institution, but it extends beyond time and beyond existence. Christ's is an everlasting kingdom. All power is given him in heaven as well as on earth. The head of the church is the king of glory.

Personal Reflection

1. The disciples were concerned about the wasteful-ness of the woman who anointed Jesus. Do some of the actions called for by your faith seem wasteful or irrational to you? Does your rationality ever hinder you in experiencing or participating in the mystical part of faith?
2. "Jesus' family was his disciples." Is your faith community your family? Why is it necessary for the faith community to fill the roles of family?
3. Jesus admitted his dread and fright in the face of doing God's will. Is it as easy for you to express those emotions about your faith as it is to talk about the comfort and strength and other more acceptable responses?
4. Jesus felt forsaken by God. Have you ever felt that way? When?
5. Matthew includes accounts of doubters and doubting in his Gospel. How is doubting a valuable part of faith? How can we help people explore their doubts more openly in church?