

MATTHEW: THE TEACHING GOSPEL

By

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9. Matthew 13:1-13:53

Parables of the kingdom: teaching

Acknowledgments

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STUDY 1: Introducing Matthew; The Messiah: His genealogy (1:1-17)

PREPARATORY READING

Who wrote the gospel of Matthew?

Who was Matthew?

Matthew 9:9

Matthew 10:2-4

Matthew 17:24-27

Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16

Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32

Why did Matthew write this gospel?

Matthew 22:16

Matthew 16:16

Matthew 28:11-15

Matthew 28:19-20

The basic structure of the gospel

Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1

The Messiah: His Genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17)

His genealogy 1:1-17

Who wrote the gospel of Matthew?

Like all the gospels, Matthew is anonymous. The ancient historian Eusebius refers to a quotation from Papias who said that Mark wrote down Peter's reminiscences and that Matthew wrote a collection of sayings or oracles, though his precise meaning is difficult to establish. What is more certain is that early Church tradition unanimously attributes the gospel to Matthew.

Who was Matthew?

In the gospels, Matthew is a former tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus (9:9; 10:3). After his conversion he gave up his tax collecting and found new fellowship with Simon the Zealot (10:2-4), when previously they would have been sworn enemies. Because of the Roman occupation and their own corruption, tax collectors were despised and were alienated from the Law and worship of the God of Israel. A person of considerable ability with great organisational skills undoubtedly wrote Matthew's gospel. A tax collector would have been a person of some ability. This is the only gospel to record Jesus' teaching about the Temple tax (17:24-27), a story of obvious interest to a former tax collector. Particular themes such as mercy and forgiveness are emphasised. The apostolic name 'Matthew' rather than the name 'Levi' is used in the call of the disciples (Matthew 10:2-4; cf. Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16). The account of the place, where Matthew entertained Jesus for dinner, omits the word 'his' (Matthew 9:9-13; cf. Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32).

Why did Matthew write this gospel?

The fine editorial arrangement of the gospel, with its emphasis on discipleship, suggests that Matthew wrote it as a teaching and training manual for disciples (22:16). One of his aims was to persuade Jews that Jesus is the Christ (16:16). Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus through Abraham and David (1:1-18). In a reverential way, suggesting a Jewish readership, Matthew uses the periphrasis 'kingdom of heaven' rather than 'kingdom of God' (the only writer to do this). By 'kingdom of heaven', rather than a geographical area, he means God's kingly rule. He does not always explain Jewish customs. He begins with a very clear account of the birth of Jesus and counters the Jewish charge that the disciples of Jesus stole his body (28:11-15). Yet the gospel is not exclusive, it has a universal outlook. Matthew records the visit of the Gentile *Magi* to worship the King of the Jews (2:1-12) and the great commission to all nations (28:19-20).

The basic structure of the gospel

THE MESSIAH

- A HIS GENEALOGY AND NATIVITY
- B HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS
- C HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Matthew divides the section 'The Messiah: His ministry in word and works' into five great teaching sections. We are not imposing a map on the text. Matthew wrote it that way.

The Sermon on the Mount	3-7
The commissioning of the twelve	8-10
Parables of the kingdom	11-13
The life of the kingdom community	14-18
The Little Apocalypse	19-25

The more detailed structure of the gospel

THE MESSIAH

A	HIS GENEALOGY AND NATIVITY		1-2
B	HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS		3-25
	The Sermon on the Mount	3-7	
	The commissioning of the twelve	8-10	
	Parables of the kingdom	11-13	
	The life of the kingdom community	14-18	
	The Little Apocalypse	19-25	
C	HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION		26-28

Actually, it is not quite as simple as that - but as it would be extremely difficult to memorise the 'even more detailed' structure, it is best to try and memorise the structure above. This is not imposing a pattern on the gospel. This is the way that Matthew wrote it. The key verses are Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1 but each of these is close enough to the breaks in the teaching sections above to be able to find them once you have memorised the round numbers.

The even more detailed structure of the gospel!

THE MESSIAH

A	HIS GENEALOGY AND NATIVITY		1-2
	His genealogy 1:1-1:17		
	His nativity 1:18-2:23		
B	HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS		3-25
	The Sermon on the Mount	3-7	
	(Narrative 3:1-4:25)		
	(Teaching 5:1-7:29)		
	The commissioning of the twelve	8-10	
	(Narrative 8:1-9:34)		
	(Teaching 9:35-10:42)		
	Parables of the kingdom	11-13	
	(Narrative 11:1-12:50)		
	(Teaching 13:1-13:53)		
	The life of the kingdom community	14-18	
	(Narrative 13:54-17:27)		
	(Teaching 18:1-18:35)		
	The Little Apocalypse	19-25	
	(Narrative 19:1-22:46)		
	(Teaching 23:1-25:46)		
C	HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION		26-28
	His sufferings and death 26:1-27:66		
	His resurrection 28:1-28:20		

The Messiah: His genealogy (1:1-1:17)

The opening of Matthew is quite different from the other gospels. After a one verse title the gospel launches straight into a genealogy of Jesus. This seems odd to us but the Jews were very interested in records of descent. The word that NIV translates 'record' (1:1) (Gk *genesis*) means something like account or 'book of history' (Zahn). The familiar name 'Jesus' is the Latin form of the Hebrew *Jeshua* which is a shortened form of *Jehoshua* (the LORD is salvation). Though Matthew uses the personal name 'Jesus' 150 times, he uses the full name Jesus Christ very sparingly (1:1; and possibly 1:18 - as NIV - and 16:21 - not in NIV - though there are MS variations). 'Christ' (Gk *Christos*) means 'Messiah' or 'anointed one'. The title was used so often by Christians that in time it became a proper name, but Matthew's sparing use of 'Christ' suggests that this was not the case in Jesus' lifetime.

Two extremely important things are shown through the genealogy. Firstly, Jesus is shown to be 'son of David' (which can mean 'of the line of' as well as the direct son) and therefore, significantly, of royal descent. Matthew makes frequent reference to King David, a mighty warrior and the greatest of the Kings of Israel and notes how people appealing for help called out to 'son of David' (9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31). It also appears in the Palm Sunday story of the triumphal entry (21:9, 15, 31). Secondly, Jesus is shown to be 'son of Abraham'. Abraham was the one to whom the great promises of the covenant were first given (Genesis 12:2-3; 15:17-21; 17:1-14) and all Israelites took great pride in being descended from the patriarch. Abraham means 'father of a multitude' and Paul singled out Abraham's faith as an example to Christians ('Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' Romans 4:3 cf. Genesis 15:6). The promise that all nations will be blessed through Abraham is restated at the end of the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).

A major difficulty comes when we compare the genealogy in Matthew with the genealogy in Luke (3:23-38). Apart from the obvious differences (Matthew goes from father to son, Luke goes from son to father; Matthew goes back as far as Abraham, Luke goes back to Adam), there are other problems (e.g. Matthew speaks of Joseph as the son of Jacob but Luke speaks of Joseph the son of Eli). The suggestion that Eli died childless and his brother Jacob married Joseph's mother is clever but lacks evidence. A possibility is that one genealogy gives the legal descendants (heirs to the throne) while the other gives the line to which Joseph actually belonged (Machen).

The arrangement of the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations means that Matthew omits some names in the line (comparing Ezra 7:1-5 with 1 Chronicles 6:3-15 shows that this was not uncommon). These omissions are of no particular concern as 'father' could be used when speaking of any descendant. Unusually, four women appear in the genealogy (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba). These women are probably all Gentiles and three of the four have a dubious reputation, which might imply that the gospel is for all, including Gentiles and sinners. Matthew carefully designates David 'the King'. The theme of 'kingship' is very important to Matthew. A 'son of David' or a 'son of Abraham' owes his origin (*genesis*) to God.

STUDY 2: The Messiah: His nativity (1:18-2:23)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His nativity (Matthew 1:18-2:23)

<i>The birth of Jesus</i>	1:18-1:25
<i>The visit of the Magi</i>	2:1-2:12
<i>The escape to Egypt</i>	2:13-2:15
<i>The slaughter of the innocents</i>	2:16-2:18
<i>The return to Nazareth</i>	2:19-2:23

The Messiah: His nativity (1:18-2:23)

Matthew opens with a section ‘The Messiah: His genealogy and nativity’ (Chapters 1 and 2). The first part of this section (Matthew 1:1-17) deals with the genealogy, which, though not important to our way of thinking, was important to Matthew and many of his early readers. After the genealogy, Matthew quite naturally moves into an account of the nativity of the Messiah. He is particularly interested in God’s protection of the child Jesus and his account shows that God works his purpose out despite the opposition of sinful people.

This ‘nativity’ section of the gospel (Matthew 1:18-2:23) has five narrative incidents:

<i>The birth of Jesus</i>	1:18-1:25
<i>The visit of the Magi</i>	2:1-2:12
<i>The escape to Egypt</i>	2:13-2:15
<i>The slaughter of the innocents</i>	2:16-2:18
<i>The return to Nazareth</i>	2:19-2:23

Again, this is not a matter of forcing our pattern onto Matthew’s Gospel, rather it is a matter of following the pattern that Matthew has given to us. Each of the five narrative incidents has the common theme of ‘fulfilment’ (1:22-23; 2:5-6; 2:15b; 2:17-18; 2:23b) and is presented as a key fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy. Matthew saw Jesus, as Jesus saw himself, to be the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In this way the gospel presents a two-way conversation, so that the reader may see Christ in the light of the Old Testament and the Old Testament in the light of Christ. In a very real sense, therefore, it would be better if there were not those blank white pages between the Testaments. The New Testament reader who claims not to need the Old Testament does not get very far in the New Testament before being proved wrong!

The birth of Jesus 1:18-1:25

After the genealogy, Matthew gives this section of the gospel its own subheading (v 18). While Luke tells the story from the viewpoint of Mary, Matthew tells the story from Joseph’s viewpoint. In these verses, Matthew addresses the question ‘who is Jesus and why did he come?’ Emmanuel (1:23) means ‘God is with us’ (Isaiah 7:14). The staggering claim of the gospel is that God has come *in person*. It is not a matter of our getting through to God but his coming to us. Although Matthew is the gospel that emphasises the teaching of Jesus, from the outset Jesus is not simply a great teacher, he is ‘Emmanuel’ (God with us). The other great name given to the child is ‘Jesus’ (‘the LORD saves’). In British society Jesus is rarely used as a given or Christian name, though the practice is different in many other countries. Our very particular use of the name ‘Jesus’ should not cause us to miss that in Bible times it was a common name (e.g. Old Testament Joshua, which is the same name). In the Old Testament, God promised that he would rescue his people from their sins (Psalm 130:8) and in Jesus he has come to do it. In this way Christianity can never be limited to good moral teaching. It is good news about God and what he has done for us. The theme of fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy shows Matthew’s view of Old Testament scripture. The child to be born is God with us, God come in person to rescue us.

Unlike our modern ‘engagement’, betrothal was a solemn contract that could only be terminated by divorce (see Deuteronomy 22:24). Marriage was complete and consummated after a year of betrothal. This explains how Joseph, though not married to Mary, considered divorcing her. Matthew explains how an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, but he does not elaborate on anything, he just gives the message. Speaking with reverent reserve,

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is not the natural son of Joseph. God the Father reveals himself through his Son, Jesus Emmanuel. All this is through the agency of the Holy Spirit. We do not need to get very far in the New Testament to have something to say to those who contend that they cannot find the Trinity in the Bible. Matthew consistently emphasises that the child that Mary has conceived is from the Holy Spirit. By giving the child his name, Joseph took legal responsibility for Jesus who was therefore legally in the line of Joseph and his forefathers. The special destiny of the child is encapsulated in the name. He (and none other) will save his people from their sins (Psalm 130:8). Although Matthew is interested in the kingship of Jesus, he does not miss that Jesus came to be 'Saviour', and makes reference to Jesus' coming as the fulfilment of prophecy.

The virginal conception of Jesus is certainly a Christian teaching that has attracted some attention and sceptical criticism. Those who allege that the story is similar to pagan narratives of mythological gods lusting after and having relationships with human girls must take account of the difference of tone in this account, which is measured, restrained and pure. It is true that the word Isaiah (7:14) uses can be translated 'virgin' or 'young woman'. However, a young woman having a baby is hardly a sign, so it is a matter of translating according to context. The section comes to a close with Joseph doing as he was commanded, naming the child and thus legally adopting him.

The visit of the Magi

2:1-2:12

Unlike Luke, Matthew does not spend long on the account of Jesus' birth. He simply states the bare minimum that Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Herod was King (this is Herod the Great, Herod being a name similar to Caesar). King Herod, a puppet of Rome, reigned from about 40 BC until his death in about 4 BC (calculations to fix the date of birth of Jesus and the year AD were made by Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century and now appear to have been inaccurate, a matter which is a little confusing to the uninformed but of no great concern). As far as Jews were concerned, Herod's genealogy, his mother was an Arabian and his father an Idumean, was hardly impressive. Nevertheless, he did achieve some things to gain the title 'the Great', including building works to the Temple. The expression 'After Jesus was born' (2:1) indicates that this is some time after the birth of Jesus. About five miles south of Jerusalem, Bethlehem (meaning 'house of bread' or 'granary') was the ancient seat of the line of King David. In Old Testament history it was the place where Rachel, who died giving birth to Benjamin, was buried (Genesis 35:16-20) and it was here that Benjamin's descendant, David, was born (1 Samuel 16). About 700 years earlier, the prophet Micah prophesied that a great descendant of David would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

In actual fact, Matthew gives us very little detail about the *Magi* (traditionally 'wise men' or 'kings') so there is plenty of scope for speculative additions. In the absence of further information, we cannot say who these visitors were or how many of them there were. We simply know they had come 'from the east' because they had observed heavenly portents, believing that a new king had been born. It was not an unreasonable assumption for them to journey to the royal palace at Jerusalem. What they had seen was possibly a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, which happened three times in the year 7 BC. Watching the skies for signs (Numbers 24:17) is very different from 'reading your stars' in the newspaper and scripture gives no justification for the modern practice of astrology. Their question 'where is the one who has been born king of the Jews' is rather different from 'born to be king'. Their initial statement that they want to worship him could simply mean give homage (as to a human dignitary) but the worship of Jesus as divine is an important theme in Matthew (2:2-11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9; 28:17). The quotation indicating the birthplace

of the Messiah is a composite quotation from three different scriptures (Micah 5:2; 2 Samuel 5:2; 1 Chronicles 11:2).). It is in Bethlehem that the Shepherd King is born (2:6). Herod had no reason to think the *Magi* would not return and lead him to his new enemy. How they followed the star is not clear. What is clear is that the *Magi* found ‘the child with his mother Mary’ (always in this order, vv 11, 13, 14, 20, 21). There are clearly contrasts in the response to the birth of Jesus between the jealousy of Herod and the worship of the *Magi* and their giving gold (for a king - *who he is*), frankincense (for a priest - *what he does*) and myrrh (used to embalm the dead and, therefore, an early notice of a significant death - *what it cost*). Herod was appointed ‘King’ by Rome. Jesus was born ‘King of the Jews’ (a title that will not appear again until it is fixed to his cross). Being warned in a dream (Matthew does not amplify but what follows serves as explanation) the *Magi* return home by another route.

The escape to Egypt 2:13-2:15

Matthew’s account continues with three references to Old Testament scriptures. Joseph was warned in a dream to take the child and his mother to Egypt. Egypt was quite a natural refuge for Jews in New Testament times but it was also a highly significant place in Israel’s history. Matthew sees this as a fulfilment of the words of the prophet ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’ (Hosea 11:1). This prophecy originally referred to God’s calling Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus but Matthew sees a deeper meaning and applies it to Jesus.

The slaughter of the innocents 2:16-2:18

There are clearly parallels between Pharaoh’s slaughter of the Hebrew infants and the preservation of Moses and Herod’s slaughter of the innocents and the preservation of Jesus. Here Jesus is seen as the counterpart to Moses and Jesus’ teaching will be, in part, an exposition of the Law of Moses. The slaughter of children is in keeping with the character of Herod who executed his own wife, her mother, and three of his own children. He left orders that on his death one member of each family should be executed so that the whole nation would be in mourning. He was a man of ruthless cruelty and serves as a reminder of how opposition to Jesus can be deeply rooted. Again Matthew sees a deeper meaning in all of this. Bethlehem was the place where Rachel (mother of Joseph and Benjamin) died. Many years later, thousands of exiles would pass her tomb on the way to the Babylonian exile. Yet God’s purposes were fulfilled through the Exodus and the Exile. Now Jesus is the one who brings hope in the midst of weeping (as with Jeremiah 31:15).

The return to Nazareth 2:19-2:23

Herod died in 4 BC. After his death his kingdom was divided. Archelaus became ruler of Judea and so, having been warned in a dream, Joseph took the child and his mother to Nazareth in Galilee, an area under the rule of Antipas. This time Matthew makes a rather more vague reference to ‘the prophets’ that Jesus will be called ‘a Nazarene’ (2:23). This is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament and it is difficult to know exactly what Matthew had in mind.

STUDY 3: The Sermon on the Mount: narrative preparation (Matthew 3:1-4:25)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

(a) Narrative

The baptism of Jesus 3:1-3:17

The temptation of Jesus 4:1-4:11

The authority of Jesus 4:12-4:25

B THE MESSIAH: HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew arranges his gospel into five main teaching blocks. These may be broadly divided into 'narrative' and 'teaching'. Although the Sermon on the Mount proper begins in chapter 5, chapters 3 and 4 are preparatory narrative.

(a) Narrative (3:1-4:25)

Giving 'catchy' titles to sections of the Bible has a certain attraction, especially as it is helpful to be able to navigate your way around. However, the titles can sometimes be so significant in determining what we look for or see in the passage that these need careful consideration. If the gospel is rightly about the Messiah, and this section is rightly about his ministry in word and works, then it is important to make sure that our section headings reflect that the central character throughout the gospel is Jesus.

The baptism of Jesus

3:1-17

Matthew must now spend some time setting the scene for the ministry of Jesus. In all the gospels the ministry of John the Baptist prefaces the ministry of Jesus. The passing of almost three decades is not mentioned as Matthew begins his account of the ministry of Jesus with the simple phrase 'in those days'. Two important themes are immediately introduced, the theme of 'repentance' and the theme of 'the kingdom of heaven'. Repentance literally means 'change of mind' but it is a change of mind that spills over into word and deed. 'Kingdom of heaven' is a special emphasis in Matthew.

Matthew's description makes it clear that John the Baptist is a prophet, emerging from the Judean wilderness (sometimes called 'desert'). The overtones of this for the first readers would be clear enough. In the history of Israel, the wilderness had been an important place for meeting God. It was from the wilderness that the prophet Elijah had burst onto the scene when Ahab was the King (2 Kings 1). The Jews believed that Elijah would return as forerunner to the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). This does not mean that John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah, but he came with the spirit and message of Elijah (Matthew 17:10-13). Matthew does not think it necessary to give any background details about John the Baptist, perhaps suggesting that his readers would have been familiar with the fiery prophet, whose simple lifestyle was in such stark contrast to the religious leaders of the day. The recent centuries had not been an era of prophets. The last of the Old Testament prophets had spoken 400 years earlier. John the Baptist came to fulfil the scriptures (Isaiah 40:3). The 'voice of one calling in the desert' (in human terms an odd place to be calling, suggesting that the meaning might be spiritual as well as geographical) suggests that it is the message rather than the messenger that is of importance. These scriptures, originally given to offer comfort in the exile, speak of the advent of the Messiah, the end of hard labour and forgiveness. John's mission was to prepare the way for God's kingly rule, which would be brought in by Jesus the King. Before the age of the mass media, it was important that people knew who was coming. In order to make the passage of the one coming as smooth as possible, it was necessary to prepare the way.

When Gentiles became proselytes to Judaism they had a ritual bath. This was symbolic, not only of the washing away of the impurities of the old life but also of Israel's passing through the water of the Red Sea. What was striking about John's ministry was that he was baptising Jews. In the passive mood the word 'baptised' literally means to 'be drowned'. The very nature of baptism is that it is something done to the candidate, not something the candidate

can do for him or herself. Their motive was to show a desire ‘to flee from the coming wrath’ (Matthew 3:7). ‘Wrath’ is the opposition of God’s holy nature to everything that is evil. In all this John is confirming the need for personal repentance. Jewish ancestry is not enough (Matthew 3:9); fruit in keeping with repentance is required. If John seems too stern, it bears noticing that Jesus also spoke sternly. ‘No gospel is needed if there is no judgement’ (Filson).

John the Baptist does not say that he is bestowing either forgiveness or the gift of the Spirit. Instead, he speaks clearly of one who will come after him, more powerful, whose sandals he is not fit to carry (Matthew 3:11). ‘Carry’ and ‘untie’ (or ‘take off’) are both possible translations of the same Aramaic word (both tasks are rather menial, the latter considered as appropriate only for a slave). The one who follows will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). The fact that John the Baptist immediately speaks of threshing (separating the grain from the husks on a threshing floor, often by means of treading oxen), winnowing (tossing the separated grain and husks into the air, whereby the grain fell to the ground but the husks were blown away) and burning the chaff in the fire suggests that the Spirit (‘wind’) and fire are part of this symbolism (wind and fire are the important symbols in the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost).

All four Gospels record the baptism of Jesus. As Jesus had been growing to maturity in his home at Nazareth, so John the Baptist had been preparing people for the ministry of Jesus. For Jesus to be baptised meant that he identified fully with sinful humanity, though it did not mean that Jesus was a sinner, it points to his being fully human (similarly, Isaiah 53:12 says that ‘he was numbered with the transgressors’ which is different from saying that Jesus, himself, transgressed). Jesus said that it was proper for him to be baptised ‘to fulfil all righteousness’. Others who had been baptised had done so to show God’s claim on their life and their consecration into his service. In his baptism, Jesus did the same. As Christian baptism looks back to the death and resurrection of Jesus, so the baptism of Jesus looked forward to his death and resurrection (he would later speak of his death on the cross as ‘his baptism’, Mark 10:38).

There seems little reason to doubt that Jesus was immersed (rather than water being sprinkled or poured upon him) in the River Jordan. Immediately after the baptism, Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and a voice from heaven (clearly the voice of God but rendered in a very reverent way) spoke, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ It is not clear whether this was heard and seen by everyone present or by Jesus alone. Although the dove appears in the Bible on many occasions the precise meaning of the descent of the dove is unclear. On the other hand, nothing could be clearer than God’s new speaking, firstly through the voice from heaven and also through his Son, the Messiah. In this passage reference is made to the Father (God) and the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. Matthew is undoubtedly interested in such references (Matthew 28:19).

The temptation of Jesus

4:1-11

The parallel of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness for 40 days with the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years is inescapable. It is also a truism to say that after a spiritual high comes a spiritual low. The presence of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee immunity from temptation or difficulty. Jesus, as the true representative of Israel, faced the same temptations personally as Israel had faced as a nation. The difference is that Jesus is victorious over the temptations whereas Israel so often failed. The temptations are to do with selfishness, sensationalism and compromise. The Gospels do not say why Jesus fasted, but

fasting often accompanied serious reflection and prayer. Making bread out of stones is not wrong in itself, but using authority and power for self-gratification is wrong. The motive for and the timing of doing things is as important as what is actually done.

Jesus showed a consistent response to the temptations replying each time with the words 'it is written' (literally 'it stands written') and quoting from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16). Jesus was familiar with the scriptures and in the power of the Spirit was able to use these scriptures and apply them. His temptation was different from ordinary human temptation but the means he used to overcome it are readily available. A life sustained by food only is a very poor life. There is no need to conclude that Jesus physically removed from the wilderness to the Temple as the essence of temptation is inward. Jesus resists such a spectacular miracle as a means of self-glorification. The compromise to do good in the world but that which is dishonouring to God in worship is one that Jesus will have nothing to do with. When Jesus worshipped God alone 'all authority in heaven and on earth' was given to him (Matthew 28:18).

The authority of Jesus

4:12-25

It appears that some time elapses after the period of temptation before Jesus begins the next part of his work (some details of this period are filled in by the early chapters of John's Gospel, the work of John *the Evangelist* not John the Baptist). The public ministry of Jesus continues where John left off. Jesus continues to preach the message of repentance 'for the kingdom of heaven is near' (Matthew 4:17).

Participation in the kingdom of heaven, beginning with repentance (a change of mind about sin, self and God) involves a humble assessment of ourselves (poor in spirit, 5:3), an internal rather than an external righteousness (surpassing that of the Pharisees, 5:20), obedience to the will of God (7:21), a child-like spirit of dependency on God (18:3-4), and a rejection of any sense of dependency on other sources (it is hard for a rich man, dependent on other things, to enter the kingdom, 19:23-24).

(Price: Matthew, 49 - references in italics mine)

The area around the Sea of Galilee was fertile and, with a ready supply of water, supported nine or ten thriving towns and many smaller villages in a densely populated area. Again the theme of prophetic fulfilment is important, as Jesus begins to preach in the very area that the prophet Isaiah had spoken about (Isaiah 9:1-2).

We have a particular concept of preaching (shaped by our personal experience). The word used here means the work of a herald in a Greek city. It meant that it was news that was important and announced with boldness and clarity but it also meant proclaiming a message that had been given and not simply announcing the speaker's own ideas. The preaching of Jesus was a message that demanded a response. In Judaism the disciple chose his teacher but Jesus chose his own disciples. The first recorded responses were those of Andrew and Peter, rugged fishermen, who left their belongings, jobs and families behind in order to follow Jesus; a step that prosperous, religious and educated men seemed to find harder to take. Again John's Gospel gives more details.

Jesus would continue (Matthew 4:23) teaching (challenging the mind), preaching (challenging the will) and healing (of disease, inner hurts and oppression). Every Jewish community had a synagogue (gathering place), a place of worship and teaching. Jesus taught in the synagogue and on this basis people learned something. Knowledge and understanding are important. 'To be swept along by the emotions of a moment, without adequate roots in an understanding of God and his truth, will prove itself to be superficial in time' (Price: Matthew, 51). If teaching is about something 'to know', preaching is about something 'to do'. Jesus also healed people of their infirmities. Matthew notes that the message of Jesus spread. Though large crowds followed him, it seems that we are to understand this more in terms of sightseers than disciples.

STUDY 4: The Sermon on the Mount: teaching (Matthew 5:1-48)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

(b) Teaching

Kingdom character 5:1-16

Kingdom conduct 5:17-48

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew sets the scene for the public ministry of Jesus (the Messiah) with a section on his genealogy and nativity. A much longer section that concerns Jesus' ministry in word and works follows this. Matthew divides this teaching section into five main blocks. These five main blocks can be divided into narrative preparation and teaching. The first main block of teaching is normally referred to as 'The Sermon on the Mount'. To prepare the reader for the teaching of the Messiah in this block, Matthew gives an account of Jesus' baptism, temptation and authority. Through his baptism Jesus identified with humanity. The Holy Spirit descended upon him and set him apart for his ministry. Jesus was immediately subject to a time of temptation but was victorious. Matthew refers to Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing but only in a general way. After this, Matthew records the greatest block of Jesus' teaching that is available to us.

(b) Teaching (5:1-7:29)

Some of today's readers of the Sermon on the Mount will be very much like the first readers of Matthew's Gospel and not be familiar with the teachings of Jesus at all. Other readers will be over-familiar with the content of the Sermon so as to be immune to its truly radical promises and demands. Worse still, perhaps, are those people who do not spend any time reading the Sermon on the Mount because they are confident both as to its content and meaning.

The Sermon has a very clear beginning (5:1) and ending (7:28). 'Sermon' is not a biblical word and that can be misleading. Although reading the three chapters that make up what we call the Sermon on the Mount may take about as long as the kind of sermon that we hear on Sundays it seems reasonable to conclude that Matthew is giving us a very compressed account of the teachings of Jesus. Though the crowds were not excluded, the sermon is for disciples (5:1) and we know that they often spent days with Jesus, perhaps the modern equivalent is a teaching weekend or convention. It is not without significance that Jesus went up the mountain, as Matthew is interested in the law that Moses received on Mount Sinai. Matthew also had the task of translating the words of Jesus from Aramaic into Greek. As a travelling preacher, it is more than likely that Jesus used much of the same material on more than one occasion (see Luke 6:17-49). The Rabbinic method was to present teaching in a memorable form so that it could be memorised. In sitting down, Jesus is following the convention of the time that the teacher sat.

Matthew has made reference to the fact that Jesus preached about the 'kingdom of heaven'. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Sermon on the Mount gives considerable attention to this theme. In particular, Jesus defines the nature of the kingdom of heaven and explains how people may become members of it. He also relates the new treasure of the kingdom of heaven to the old treasure of the law.

Kingdom character

5:1-16

The Old Testament stresses that it is God who is truly king of his people, Israel. It was God who delivered Israel from Egypt. Not only is God creator but also he is Redeemer. The united kingdom of Israel only really had one great king, King David. The successive failures of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah resulted in the exile. The great hope of Israel was that a king, like David, would come (Daniel 7:13-14). Increasingly, these hopes seem to have focused on direct, divine intervention. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is about to appear (at hand). Large crowds of people followed Jesus and he began to teach them what it

means to live under his kingly rule. In all of this there is an implicit emphasis on the grace of God.

The Beatitudes teach us that while we are not able to live like this, the grace of God makes such discipleship possible. The word traditionally translated 'blessed' is a difficult word to translate into English. Primarily it is related to the gift of salvation - God makes a 'blessed person' happy (joyful). The Beatitudes ('blessed sayings' from the Latin '*beatus*') must be interpreted in the light of the Old Testament. There is a sense of progression through them. 'Poor in spirit' is quite the opposite of works-religion or spiritual arrogance (Isaiah 66:2). The mark of being a member of the kingdom is realising spiritual poverty (Psalm 34:6) and our need to 'crawl to Christ' (Luther). Those who mourn for their sins (when the world at large is light-hearted about such matters) are the very ones that Jesus comforts (Isaiah 61:1-3, Psalm 119:136). The meek will inherit the land (Psalm 37:11). The appetite for a right relationship with God (righteousness) is filled only in the kingly rule of Jesus. Mercy being shown to the merciful echoes the strong reciprocal theme of the Old Testament (Psalm 18:25-26). Jesus identified the heart as the source of sin. It is necessary to have a pure heart to be in the presence of God (Psalm 24:3-4). Children of God must show the characteristics of their Father. This does not mean peace at any price (appeasement) but overcoming evil with good. If we think that we live in a world where good is rewarded and evil is punished we must note it is not always the case.

To know that I am spiritually bankrupt, to mourn for my sins, humbled under God's mighty hand, to hunger for righteousness, to show mercy to others, to be undivided in my heart's desire to see God and willing to be a peacemaker, when all that happens, will it not be heaven on earth? 'No,' says Jesus, 'it will mean persecution.'

(Jackman and Philip)

It is difficult to say whether or not the ninth blessed saying is one of the 'Beatitudes'. What is clear is that Jesus moves from the general to the particular, 'blessed are you' (Matthew 5:11). The disciples are to be salt and light. Salt was used as a preservative and a disinfectant. Disciples are called to be in the thick of things, purifying and illuminating. This was the historic role of Israel, especially when it was given the Law on Mount Sinai. Disciples are the new Israel, called upon to be light-bearers to the whole world (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). The world desperately needs to see an authentic discipleship lived out in the lives of ordinary believers.

The Christian gospel is not about outward religious conformity but about inward spiritual reality. It is this that will be the main sticking point between Jesus and the Pharisees (Matthew 23:5-7). Jesus teaches that how we behave depends on what we are like inside. It is by becoming the right person that the disciple is able to do the right things. The essence of discipleship is to be perfect, even as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). This is something that we cannot achieve by working hard at it. This is something that God works in the heart.

Kingdom conduct

5:17-48

The key word in Matthew's understanding of the coming of Jesus is that he has come to *fulfil* and not to abolish the law and the prophets. In his baptism Jesus *fulfils* all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). What was anticipated in the Old Testament is now coming to pass. Jesus comes to fulfil the law because we could not do it. The law pointed forward to the coming of

Christ, who would fulfil it. Yet 'fulfil' it has a different emphasis from 'keep' it. The *ceremonial* law of Israel, sacrifice, priests and temple (tabernacle) was fulfilled by Jesus. The *civil* law of the nation of Israel is not addressed in the Sermon on the Mount, because the earthly nation will be superseded by a spiritual nation. The *moral* law of Israel (the Ten Commandments) has a universal application and it is to this that Jesus turns his attention.

The Pharisees were the most religious people of their time. They interpreted the law with a vast superstructure of rules and regulations (*Mishnah*). These rules and regulations were further interpreted by commentaries (*Talmud*). To say that it was necessary for anyone's righteousness to *surpass* that of the Pharisees was profoundly shocking. Jesus showed a different understanding of the law from that of the Pharisees. For the Pharisees the law was a religious burden, keeping its letter but ignoring its spirit. To keep the law outwardly but not inwardly is not what the kingdom of heaven is about, as Jesus will show through his exposition of some of the commandments.

When speaking of murder, Jesus shows that the cause of murder lies in the hateful thoughts of the heart. Hating in the heart might not be an offence in the land but it is in the kingdom of heaven. Insulting another person and writing off that person as an idiot will also be judged. A heart full of bitterness cannot offer acceptable worship. When speaking of adultery, Jesus shows that the act has its source in the attitude. Self-mutilation would not seem honourable to God. Consequently, it is reasonable from the context to conclude that Jesus used such dramatic figures of speech to show the seriousness of sin.

The next issue that Jesus deals with is divorce. This is not an easy subject, partly because the biblical teaching in this area is complicated, partly because marital breakdown in our society is so prevalent and partly because we live in a post-Christian society where people who are not practising Christians still seek Christian ministers to conduct occasional offices (baptisms, weddings and funerals) either in church or at other available venues. In short, it appears that the Old Testament did allow divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1) as a concession to fallen humanity. The precise meaning of the grounds for divorce ('indecency') created a controversy among the rabbinic schools. Paul would later write on the subject to the church at Corinth. Christians are profoundly divided about the legitimacy of divorce and the possibility of remarriage. There seems little point in allowing divorce if remarriage is not a possibility thereafter. The real issue is therefore whether a marriage 'made in heaven' can be 'dissolved on earth'. The two easy answers are those normally associated with Roman Catholics (and some very conservative Christians) which say that no marriage made in heaven can be dissolved on earth and the civil registration system which more or less adopts the policy that marriages are made on earth and therefore can be divided on earth (the various civil divorce rules seem now to amount to divorce on demand).

Leaving aside the very difficult question of the interaction between the church (or its ministers) and contemporary society, the issue of divorce between Christians is a very delicate area. On the one hand, scriptural teaching is clear that even divorce and marriage can be abused in such a way as to become 'legalised adultery'. On the other hand, grace and forgiveness must extend to those who have had unhappy and broken marriages, including those who later realise that they were major contributors in making their marriage unhappy and broken. The more recent trend of couples living together (in a semi-permanent state, perhaps with children and a joint property interest) poses its own questions as to whether an application from one of the former partners in that relationship to be married (by a Christian minister) should be treated differently from the application from a person who has been

through almost the same experience but married and divorced. The danger is to add a full code of 'Pharisaic' interpretation to the teachings of the scriptures.

Following his teaching on divorce, Jesus turns to the not unrelated subject of oaths (think of the marriage vows). The scribes devised a variety of escape clauses from binding oaths, making any oath that succeeded in avoiding the name of God as not absolutely binding. Some have interpreted the teachings of Jesus that his disciples should speak plainly and honestly as an injunction against taking an oath in a court of law. However, in scripture, God often bound himself by an oath and at his trial Jesus responded to the oath of testimony (Matthew 26:63-64).

The often-quoted 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' scripture (Exodus 21:24) was never intended to require or even to justify retaliation. Private revenge is not part of the attitude of Christ or his disciples. In a judicial sense this teaching could be interpreted as the punishment fitting the crime. Clearly, the punishment cannot exceed the crime. In all their actions, Christians remember first the love and grace of God that has been shown to them.

'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy' is a description of natural, human emotions. It is not teaching that is found in the Old Testament, rather it is a scribal variation of scriptural teaching. The disciple is called to love as God loves. Jesus uses the very special New Testament word for love, 'agape' (a-ga-pay). The world at large knows about love in friendship, in families, in sexual relationship, but 'agape' was little-used word, meaning a self-giving love.

The disciple is called to be perfect, even as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). This captures the relationship between law and love. The Old Testament story of the fall (Genesis 3) illustrates how human beings, male and female, having been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), fell from his glory. Consequently, sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). The law came not to make us sinners but to convict us of sin (Romans 7:7). Sin is falling short of the target (rather like an arrow that misses the mark). It is 'straying from the path' (trespassing) and it is disobeying the commandments. Although we are inclined to think of sin as what we do, in actual fact it has much more to do with who we are. The first man sinned and became a sinner. We are born sinners and because of that we sin. We can only stop sinning when we are re-born by the Spirit of God. Before sin entered into the world, the man and the woman lived together without sin, for they were created in the image of God. The Ten Commandments revealed the nature of God. When Jesus, who was and is in nature God, came into the world, he lived the perfect life. Law and love are complementary and in Jesus are perfectly fulfilled.

STUDY 5: The Sermon on the Mount: teaching (Matthew 6:1-7:29)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

(b) Teaching

<i>The disciple's devotional life</i>	6:1-18
<i>The disciple's ambitions</i>	6:19-34
<i>The disciple's relationships</i>	7:1-12
<i>The disciple's service</i>	7:13-29

Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount

(b) Teaching (5:1-7:29)

Matthew devotes a major section of his Gospel to recording the teaching of Jesus, dividing Jesus' teaching into five main blocks. These main blocks can be divided into narrative preparation and teaching. The first block is normally called 'The Sermon on the Mount' and consists of narrative preparation (Chapters 3 and 4) and teaching (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Not surprisingly, much of Jesus' teaching is concerned with the kingdom of heaven and consequently the body of teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount opens with what is, in effect, a description of kingdom character and kingdom conduct (Chapter 5).

The chapter and verse divisions in the Bible help us to navigate our way around but are not always equally helpful. Chapter 6 continues with many of the themes that have been introduced in Chapter 5. The righteousness which must exceed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (5:20) is clearly something that comes from within rather than from external show. 'True righteousness is not expressed in the ability to avoid what is wrong, but in the ability to do what is right' (Price). This is expressed in the disciple's devotional life, ambitions, relationships and service

***The disciple's devotional life* 6:1-18**

The three chief acts of Jewish piety were alms-giving, prayer and fasting. If these are done with ostentatious formalism just to win the approval of other people ('men') then the approval of others is the reward. If they are done from the heart to please God (note the periphrasis 'your Father in heaven', 6:1) then it is the Father who will give the reward (6:4), though even this is based more on his grace than on an individual's merit. Jesus clearly expected his disciples to give, pray and fast for each section begins 'when' and not 'if'.

Disciples are expected to give generously. This applies to Christian work ('the church'), to Christian charitable work and to charitable work that is not specifically Christian. In the Old Testament the people were commanded to give one tenth of their income to God. This is not New Testament teaching. In the New Testament it is not one tenth that belongs to God but all of it. God loves those who give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

By its very definition the Christian life is a relationship ('knowing him'). There should be a simple directness about the disciple's prayers. In New Testament times verbosity ('heaping up words') in prayer was a common failing. Both Jews and pagans thought that God could be battered into submission by lengthy prayers. Though it is not forbidden, public prayer could be for the benefit of the audience, so private prayer ('in secret') is really important. There is nothing that we can tell God in prayer that he does not already know. What praying does is to open the channels of communication between us and God. He does not always give us what we ask but he always gives us what is best.

The Lord's Prayer comes in a rather different form in Luke's Gospel (Luke 11:1ff). If we accept the interpretation that Luke was writing primarily for Gentiles and Matthew primarily for Jews then the variations become more understandable. In Matthew Jesus is teaching people who already pray how to pray correctly. A great deal of fuss has been made in recent years about the proper name of the prayer. Some have pointed out, quite correctly, that it was not a prayer that Jesus prayed himself and have therefore questioned the name 'The Lord's Prayer'. Others have pointed out, quite correctly, that it is a prayer for disciples and have proposed the name 'The Disciples' Prayer', though that hides the origin of the prayer. In

point of fact, it is really, as some old-fashioned ministers used to say, ‘The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples’ or perhaps better still ‘the pattern of prayer that Jesus taught his disciples’. The danger with saying this prayer regularly is that it can simply become mechanical. The danger of not saying this prayer regularly is to lose sight of the pattern.

‘Our Father in heaven’ is a prayer that comes naturally to Christians. We should not miss the revolutionary nature of the teaching of Jesus who demonstrates the nature of our relationship with God through the opening of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Father’ probably translating the Aramaic word ‘*Abba*’, (Father, dear Father; see also Paul’s use of *Abba*, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). The disciple has a family relationship with God because the disciple has been born anew.

The prayer could not be much simpler. In its traditional English form (the one that most of us say regularly) it runs to just 70 words. It contains six simple petitions, three about God and his glory and three about us and our needs. The order in which these come is important.

The prayer Jesus gave his disciples begins by focusing our minds upon God. His name is to be ‘hallowed’ or revered as holy. This does not simply mean speaking about God and the things of God in hushed tones (though I sometimes think that in our informal society a renewed emphasis on that would do no harm); it means God being honoured in our lives, in the church and in the world. The kingdom is not about a geographical area but it is about the Kingly rule of God, in our lives, in the church and in the world. It is only in this way that the will of God can be done in earth as it is in heaven.

The prayer proceeds with three petitions for ourselves, asking for daily bread, forgiveness and deliverance from evil. Daily bread is the most basic of human needs. There has already been a mention of our need for bread in the narrative preparation about the temptation of the Lord Jesus (4:3-4). In responding to the temptation Jesus states that ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ We should therefore understand the petition for ‘daily bread’ to mean more than physical sustenance. It is a serious mistake to make God’s forgiving us a reward for our forgiving others. Rather, ‘if we are to open our hands to receive his gracious pardon, we cannot keep our fists tightly clenched against those who have wronged us’ (Green). The word translated ‘evil’ could also be translated ‘evil one’. Again, with recent reference to the personal temptations it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus had such a real, spiritual battle in mind.

The third element of Jewish piety, fasting, comes next. Fasting is an important, though very neglected element, of the Methodist tradition. Although some people might need to be very careful about fasting because of their health (e.g. diabetics), the majority of people would benefit from a little abstinence (which could be something as simple as going without breakfast and lunch for a day, or going without luxury and indulgence for a period – as some Christians have traditionally done in the ‘penitential seasons’ of Advent and Lent). Some people who fast seem to do so simply to be stoic. The key thing is not to draw attention to ourselves but to allow ourselves to be drawn nearer to God in humility and prayer.

The disciple’s ambitions

6:19-34

To be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven affects our priorities. For many people (though by no means all), a decisive area is ‘worldly wealth’ (sometimes personified as ‘Mammon’ a pagan god of money – treasure that becomes the master). The fact that this is a notoriously controversial area in the church today shows that money is still very important (though for some people time, energy and relationships are equally or more difficult to consecrate to

God). Clothes wear out, metals rust, earthly possessions can be stolen but treasure in heaven is secure. To be wholly devoted to God means looking at things in a new way.

It is true to say that the more material possessions and worldly wealth that people have, the more time they spend worrying about them. Jesus simply speaks of three common things on which people spend their money, food, drink and clothes, even life itself. To be worried is a destructive emotion. We tend to associate it with the heart but the Bible associates with the mind. To 'worry' about a sick relative (in the heart, as we would say) is so different from being consumed by anxiety (in the mind) about material things. In this context, 'worry' is something that we do when we are not focused upon God and his goodness (6:33).

The disciple's relationships 7:1-12

Rather like the Lord's Prayer where the first part was about the disciple's relationship with God and the second part about the disciple's relationship with others, after considering three elements of Jewish piety, Jesus now turns to relationships with others. Firstly, Jesus points out that the faults that we recognise in the lives of others are faults that we fail to see in ourselves. This is not about expressing a value judgement but about condemning. It is about getting our own lives in order first. A rebuke or helpful criticism is different from this (Proverbs 9:7-8). However, Jesus also points out that there is little point in being persistent (about the kingdom of heaven) with people whose minds are set on other things (7:6).

Returning to the subject of prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples the importance of prayer in a believer's relationship with God. God will not refuse the prayers of his children and certainly will not mock their prayers, though there are occasions when God gave people what they asked for to show them the error of their ways. There is no particular formula or 'magic word' but there are conditions to answered prayer.

It is assumed that I am a disciple. It is assumed that I pray, seriously and persistently (notice the present imperative in 'ask, seek and knock', indicating continuous prayer to show that we mean business). It is assumed that God may answer in a way I did not want or expect: he is sovereign, and he knows what is best. It is assumed that I ask in filial faith and expectancy. It is not a case of '*anything* you ask'. There is no suggestion that if only we ask hard enough and believe passionately enough it will turn out as we ask. What we are promised is that it will turn out for our ultimate good.

(Green)

The disciple's service 7:13-29

The Sermon on the Mount consistently moves us away from rules and into a relationship. There are people who seem happy enough to acknowledge that 'relationship with God' is more important than 'religious observances' and yet want their relationships with others to be arranged according to rules, whereas Jesus sums this up in what might be termed the golden rule ('do to others what you would have them do to you', 7:12). Again, this is not something that can be externally imposed by legislation; this is something that comes about through the inner transformation of the heart. 'God wants to see his characteristics embodied in his servants' (Green).

The sermon concludes with a challenge (7:13-29) presented through a series of contrasts, two roads, two kinds of fruit and two houses. The way to the kingdom of heaven is through a narrow gate and the road that leads to life is also narrow. There is no 'third way', no middle ground and no easy option. The clear challenge is to be sure that we have entered into the kingdom. The very purpose of a fruit tree is to bear fruit. The very essence of any kind of counterfeit is that it is *like* the real thing. Some imitation flowers are so good that it is hard to distinguish them from the real thing – but they do not grow. It is by the very lives that they are living that the true disciples of Jesus Christ will be recognised. The kingdom is not for people who have the trappings of religion but those who have truly rooted themselves in the faith of Christ. The clear challenge is to be sure that our lives are different. The familiar story of the wise and foolish builders has a dramatic ending that can obscure its beginning. The one building on the rock is the one who hears the words of Jesus and puts them into practice (7:24). The test of discipleship is obedience (James 1:22; 4:17). Jesus calls the disciples not only to hear the word but also to put it into practice. By doing this Jesus puts himself on the same level as the law-giver, who is God. There is, therefore, the two-fold issue of the identity of the speaker as well as obeying what he says. The authority of Jesus and his teaching amazed the people (7:28-29).

STUDY 6: The commissioning of the twelve: narrative (Matthew 8:1-9:34)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 2: The commissioning of the twelve

(a) Narrative

<i>The man with leprosy</i>	8:1-4
<i>The centurion's servant</i>	8:5-13
<i>Jesus heals many</i>	8:14-17
<i>The cost of following Jesus</i>	8:18-22
<i>Exorcising two men</i>	8:28-34
<i>Healing forgiving the paralytic</i>	9:1-8
<i>The calling of Matthew</i>	9:9-13
<i>Questions about fasting</i>	9:14-17
<i>A resurrection and more healings</i>	9:18-34

B HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS (continued)

Matthew is a Gospel about the coming of the Messiah. The basic structure of Matthew's Gospel falls into three sections:

- A The Messiah: His genealogy and nativity (1-2)
- B The Messiah: His ministry in word and works (3-25)
- C The Messiah: His death and resurrection (26-28)

Matthew divides the section 'The Messiah: His ministry in word and works' into five great blocks. We are not imposing a map on the text. Matthew wrote it that way. The first block of teaching 'The Sermon on the Mount' ends with the story of the wise and foolish builders. Matthew then closes this block with these words, 'When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law' (Matthew 7:28-29). These last verses of Chapter 7 indicate very clearly that one teaching block has come to an end. As with the first teaching block (The Sermon on the Mount), the second teaching block will begin with some narrative.

Part 2: The commissioning of the twelve

(a) Narrative (8:1-9:34)

The great themes of the narrative account in this second main block are miracles and faith. Jesus was not the only person, even in the Bible, to do such miraculous things, but such works accredit Jesus to the people (Acts 2:22). The healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13) is a fulfilment of the great promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. However, it is also an instrument of confrontation between Jesus and unbelieving Israel ('I have not found anyone in Israel with such faith', 8:10). Jesus demonstrates that what really matters in the kingdom of heaven is not the external characteristics of ceremony and ritual but inward faith. A perversion of scriptural teaching was that to be a descendant of Abraham was a guarantee of eternal salvation and security. Jesus challenges this falsehood. Those who reject Jesus will be excluded (8:12) and many original subjects of the kingdom thrown outside. On the other hand, many Gentiles, through faith in Jesus, would enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew does not overlook the point that Gentiles also rejected Jesus (8:34). The main point is plain. The distinguishing mark in the kingdom of God is not whether a person is Jew or Gentile (or as Paul will later add, male or female, slave or free). The distinction is between those who accept Jesus the Messiah (Christ) and those who do not. The identity of Jesus (who is this man?) is crucial.

Following the healing of the paralytic (9:1-8), the crowd praise God and see the unique authority of Jesus as God-given. When Jesus heals the blind and mute the crowd was amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel' (9:33). Jesus does not follow any particular formula. He treats each individual and each case differently, according to their need. It is a profound mistake to think that all we have to do is to do what Jesus did. The power that Jesus exhibited was, first and foremost, to do with his relationship with his Father.

Alongside the theme of fulfilment is the theme of confrontation ('this fellow is blaspheming' 9:3; the teacher 'eats with tax collectors and sinners' 9:11). After all that Jesus has done and said, the considered opinion of the religious leaders is that 'it is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons' (9:34).

The man with leprosy**8:1-4**

Leprosy in the New Testament can mean a broad range of skin ailments, making the sufferer ceremonially unclean. To heal a leper was considered as difficult as raising the dead (2 Kings 5:7, 14), which in some senses is not surprising as in many ways leprosy is a 'living death' and is a physical parallel to the spiritual condition of the sinner. The leper had great faith prompted by Jesus' healings throughout that district. Although the leper did not dare come close to Jesus, Jesus reached out his hand to him (becoming ceremonially defiled himself, Leviticus 13-14). Jesus was not contaminated by touching the disease but the disease was cleansed by the touch of Jesus. The command not to tell others has given rise to the theory of the 'Messianic Secret' (Wrede) but an alternative interpretation is that Jesus is not presenting himself as a mere wonder-worker (Stonehouse) who can be pressured into becoming the kind of political messiah that the people want. As the Gospel unfolds it will become clear that Jesus came to die upon the cross and not to vanquish the Romans. It is difficult to know whether 'to them' (8:4) refers to the priests or the people. More importantly, the testimony or witness points to Jesus.

The centurion's servant**8:5-13**

This is Matthew's second mention of Capernaum (cf. 4:13), which in Jesus' time was an important garrison town. Centurions were the military backbone throughout the empire, maintaining discipline and executing orders (difficulties in reconciling differences between this account and John 4:43-54 suggest these are different events). As John the Baptist felt unworthy to baptise Jesus, so this centurion felt unworthy to entertain him in his home. The centurion believed that Jesus' word was sufficient to heal his servant. The centurion spoke with the authority of the emperor and saw that as Jesus obeyed God's authority, when he spoke God spoke. The greatness of his faith did not rest in the mere fact that he believed Jesus could heal from a distance but in the degree to which he had understood Jesus' authority. Jesus insists that many will come from the four points of the compass (Ps 107:3; Isaiah 43:5-6; 49:12) and join the patriarchs at the Messianic banquet, while those who see themselves as 'sons of Abraham' will find themselves outside. Such a reversal is not absolute, of course, for the patriarchs and early Christians were Jews.

Jesus heals many**8:14-17**

Matthew continues to explore the theme of Jesus' authority. Fever was considered to be a disease and not a symptom. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law with touch for his touch did not defile the healer but healed the defiled. If these events took place on the Sabbath (see Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41), it was not surprising that people waited until the sun had gone down (the end of Sabbath) to come to Jesus to be healed.

The cost of following Jesus**8:18-22**

Jesus' imminent departure to the east side of the lake could have prompted certain people to beg him to include them in the circle of disciples going with him. People divide around the absolute claims of Jesus. "Nothing has done more harm to Christianity than the practice of filling the ranks of Christ's army with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession, and talk fluently of experience" (Ryle). True discipleship is not comfortable and should not be undertaken without counting the cost. The nature of Jesus' mission kept him on the move and would keep his followers on the move. Various solutions have been offered to make Jesus' words seem less demanding (e.g. the would-be disciple was stalling waiting for the funeral of a parent who had not yet died). More likely is the conclusion that this dramatic saying (rather like 'cutting off your hand') demonstrates that even the closest family ties must not be set above allegiance to Jesus and the proclamation of the kingdom.

***Calming the storm* 8:23-27**

Jesus' authority over nature is now displayed. Jesus crosses the lake to escape the crowd. Violent squalls develop quickly on the Sea of Galilee. It is God who controls and stills the seas (Job 38:8-11; Psalm 29:3-4, 10-11; 65:5-7; 89:9; 107:23-32). It is not only clear that fear and faith cannot live together but that Jesus speaks with the voice of God. Matthew is greatly interested in the answer to the question, 'What kind of man is this?' (8:27).

***Exorcising two men* 8:28-34**

On the other side of the lake was the town of Gadara and the village of Gerasa (hence some textual confusion), in the predominantly Gentile territory of the Decapolis. On the adjacent hillside are ancient tombs. Jesus has withdrawn here, not for ministry, but to avoid the crowds (v. 18). The theme of authority continues as the demons are shown to be subject to Jesus. The question as to why Jesus would grant the demons their desire and let them destroy the herd of pigs is difficult to answer. The pigs' stampede dramatically proved that the former demoniacs had indeed been freed and the loss of the herd became a way of exposing the real values of the people in the vicinity. Apparently, because of the loss of the pigs they pleaded with Jesus to leave the region, proving that Gentiles did not always welcome Jesus.

***Healing forgiving the paralytic* 9:1-8**

It seems that Jesus has returned to Capernaum (4:13), his Galilean base, on the western shore of the lake. When recounting a story, it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice precise historical sequence in order to consider a particular theme. There is probably a chronological break here so that the important theme of Jesus' authority can receive a fuller consideration. Jesus implies a close link between sin and sickness (perhaps in this case a direct one) though sin and sickness are not always directly linked (John 9). Jesus told the man 'your sins are forgiven' (9:2). As it is God alone who forgives sin (Isaiah 43:25; 44:22), since it is against him only that men commit sin (Ps 51:4), it is not surprising that some of the teachers of the law deduced that Jesus was blaspheming by claiming to do something that only God should do. To think that Jesus is saying that 'forgiveness' is easier than 'healing' is to misunderstand the passage. Jesus is claiming that because he can do the greater deed (forgiveness) that he can do the lesser deed (healing). The onlookers simply saw a man exercising the authority of God, but Matthew wants his readers to see the authority of Emmanuel, "God with us" (1:23), sent to "save his people from their sins" (1:21).

***The calling of Matthew* 9:9-13**

Having demonstrated his authority to forgive sins, Jesus now called to himself a man whose occupation made him both a sinner and an associate of sinners. Matthew may have been a Levite, which would explain his other name 'Levi' (Mark and Luke use both 'Levi' and 'Matthew' but Matthew uses only the latter). The theme of associating with sinners continues. 'Sinners' could simply include ordinary people who did not share the scruples of the Pharisees but certainly included harlots, tax collectors, and other disreputable people. Although eating with such people entailed dangers of ceremonial defilement, Jesus and his disciples did so. The thrust of the Pharisees' question (9:11) was more criticism than enquiry. In reply, Jesus connects his healing ministry with his 'healing of sinners'. The sick need a doctor and Jesus has healed them. Sinners need mercy, forgiveness and restoration and Jesus has met their need too. By quoting from Hosea, Jesus might be alluding to the prophet's theme of the contrast between mercy and mere ceremonial piety. Jesus is not suggesting that there are some who do not need his ministry. There are some who do not recognise their need of him.

Questions about fasting

9:14-17

It appears that some of John the Baptist's followers did not accept the supremacy of the one to whom their teacher pointed. In the previous story the accusers had confronted the disciples about Jesus' conduct. In this story the accusers confront Jesus about his disciples' conduct. John the Baptist saw himself as the 'best man' and Jesus as the bridegroom (John 3:29). Jesus describes the disciples as 'guests' who are so overjoyed at being with him that it is not the time to fast. A piece of unshrunk cloth tightly sewn onto an old and well-shrunk cloth would be no more use to a garment than putting unfermented wine into an old skin bottle, which would split the brittle container and ruin both bottle and wine. The dawning of the new kingdom cannot be contained within the old forms.

A resurrection and more healings

9:18-34

The introduction to the new wine is followed by Jesus performing new kinds of miracles, raising the dead, healing a woman with a haemorrhage, healing the blind and mute. In this narrative, Jesus' messianic credentials are grouped together. A 'ruler' (9:18) is likely to be a synagogue ruler (Mark tells us that his name was Jairus, Mark 5:22, and the slight variations from Mark's account are the inevitable consequence of Matthew's much abbreviated form of the story). The faith of the ruler, who felt that Jesus needed to go to his house, could be contrasted with the faith of the centurion, who did not (8:5-13). If the woman's haemorrhage was caused by chronic bleeding from the womb, she would have been ceremonially unclean and, therefore, avoided. Tassels were sewn onto the four corners of every Israelite's cloak (Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 22:12) and it is likely that it is one of these that the woman touched.

Flute players (9:23) were employed at celebrations and at funerals (Jewish funeral customs required even a poor family to hire two flute players and one wailing woman). The "noisy crowd" was made up of friends mourning, not in the hushed whispers characteristic of our funerals, but in loud outbursts of grief and wailing augmented by cries of hired mourners. Jesus' miracle not only brought a corpse to life (v. 24) but hope to despair. The crowd mocked Jesus, laughing at him, not just because he had said, 'The girl is not dead but asleep' (9:24), but because they thought that, having arrived too late, he would fail with the finality of death. Matthew notes that Jesus touched the corpse; and the body, far from defiling him, came to life. The miracle proved that Jesus was at least a prophet, but for Matthew the miracle showed that Jesus' authority as the Christ extended even over the dead.

As he was returning from the ruler's house, it is likely that a large crowd including two blind men followed him. This is the first time Jesus is called 'Son of David' (9:27), and there can be little doubt they were acclaiming Jesus as Messiah (Isaiah 35:5-6). Again, Jesus did not want people to have misplaced hopes about the nature of his messiahship.

It is possible that this man was both deaf and mute (the Greek word can be interpreted that way). Here not being able to speak is attributed to demon-possession but this is not always the case in the New Testament (Mark 7:32-33). The frequent connection between the two is not based on primitive superstition but presupposes a real ability to distinguish between natural and demonic causes. When the mute man speaks, the crowd is amazed. If nothing has been seen like that in Israel (9:33), the implication is that nothing like it has been seen anywhere. The same amazement sets the stage for the Pharisees' cynical response that Jesus drives out demons (they don't dispute that) 'by the prince of demons' (9:34). The tide of opposition, which later brought Jesus to the cross, now becomes an essential part of the background to Jesus teaching.

STUDY 7: The commissioning of the twelve: teaching (Matthew 9:35-10:42)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 2: The commissioning of the twelve

(b) Teaching

The workers are few 9:35-38

Commissioning the twelve 10:1-4

General instructions 10:5-16

Warnings of future sufferings 10:17-25

Do not be afraid 10:26-31

Characteristics of discipleship 10:32-39

Response to disciples and to Jesus 10:40-42

Part 2: The commissioning of the twelve

(b) Teaching (9:35-10:42)

The concluding verses of Matthew 4 prepared for the first block of teaching (sermon). Now the concluding verses of Matthew 9 prepare for the second block of teaching. A summary of the work of Jesus is given but the work is so great that many workers are needed. This leads to the commissioning (10:1-4) and to the related teaching, ‘the commissioning of the twelve’.

The workers are few 9:35-38

Like the Lord in the Old Testament, Jesus showed compassion on sheep without a shepherd (Ezekiel 34). The shepherd of the Old Testament can refer to God but it can also be used of the Messiah that God will send. Compassion comes by seeing things as they really are. In order to stimulate similar compassion in his followers (probably not just the twelve ‘disciples’), Jesus used another picture of the harvest. Although harvest is used in other symbolic ways in Matthew’s Gospel (e.g. judgement), it is likely that here the main point is simply that there is much work to be done for the kingdom. By reference to the Lord of the harvest, Jesus demonstrates that this is not just a human enterprise; it is the work of God. True vision leads to compassion and compassion leads to intercession. Through prayer the disciple is prepared to be the faithful witness that God desires. Personal evangelism is not simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time but of the disciple being ‘the right person’ in the right place at the right time.

Commissioning the twelve 10:1-4

It seems that the twelve became a recognised group earlier in Jesus’ ministry (Mark 3:13-16) and the parallel between this group and the twelve tribes of Israel should not be missed. They were given authority to drive out evil (lit. ‘unclean’) spirits and to heal every disease and sickness (which was the work that Jesus had been doing, 4:23, 9:35). Interestingly, the twelve are here called ‘apostles’ (which can mean either messengers or ones who are sent). One of the remarkable things about the twelve disciples is their ‘ordinariness’. Lists of the twelve are found here and in three other places. In all the lists Simon (Peter) is first. Matthew says ‘first Simon’ though this does not imply any higher status given to Simon. Indeed, the first four names on all four lists are the two pairs of brothers (4:18-22), Peter and Andrew, James and John. All the lists continue with two further groups of four. In these two further groups, Philip (not to be confused with Philip the evangelist) and James the son of Alphaeus come first. There are some variations in the order of the other disciples but Judas Iscariot is always last. Matthew puts himself last in his group of four and mentions what he was before he was a disciple. Thaddaeus is another name for Judas (not Iscariot). The Zealots were nationalists, strong upholders of Jewish traditions and religion and this nickname, indicating something of past, distinguishes the second Simon (possibly a contraction of ‘Simeon’) from Simon Peter. The exact meaning of ‘Iscariot’ is uncertain but it possibly refers to Judas’ occupation or home village, though other possibilities that it means ‘zealot’ or ‘traitor’ have also won some support.

General instructions 10:5-16

The commissioning of the twelve has many similarities with the sending out of the seventy-two (or seventy) and could represent part of the greater commission. The twelve disciples were given authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness. There is no reason to assume that they did not begin this work immediately but this work obviously grew after Pentecost (Acts 2:22, 5:12). However, ‘it is a mistake to assume that

miracles were performed by almost any believer after Pentecost' (Price). The ministry of Jesus and the twelve must be considered exceptional rather than normal.

The sermon itself is presented in one block but that need not prevent us from concluding that it represents a condensed summary of teaching given on more than one occasion. Jesus was an itinerant preacher who said the same things many times in similar words, which might explain some variations between the Gospels.

Jesus told the disciples not to go among the Gentiles or the Samaritans but to minister to the people of Israel. Jews despised Samaritans because they operated a separate religious tradition and owed their origin to intermarrying between the poorest Jews and Gentile peoples who had not been deported at the time of the Exile. The lost sheep of Israel was an Old Testament expression (Isaiah 53:6, Jeremiah 50:6). Although some Samaritans were ready to respond to the ministry of Jesus (John 4) it seems likely that the disciples were not ready to cope with Samaritans that did not receive the message (Luke 9:52-56). Even more importantly, though the mission of Jesus had worldwide aims, Jesus was the Messiah bringing salvation and judgement, first to the Jew and then to Gentile.

Jesus expected the twelve to be supported by those to whom they were to minister but they needed to understand that what they had received they had received freely. 'Do not take along' could mean 'do not procure' (see Acts 8:20), that is do not accept money. This could help to solve the variations between Matthew's account (which does not allow the *procuring* of sandals and staff) and Mark's account (which does not allow the *taking* of sandals and staff). Therefore, Matthew's account assumes that the disciples already have certain things (one cloak, sandals, a staff) and forbids them from 'procuring' anything more, relying simply upon God to provide for them.

The disciples were not to shop around for the best accommodation but to stay with a person who welcomed them and their message. They were to give the house their greeting ('peace to this house', Luke 10:5). If the house were not welcoming then the disciples could let their greeting return, not needing to stay there. As representatives of the Lord Jesus the point of reference for everything was their relationship with him. What was true for an individual home was applied equally to the town. Returning from Gentile territory, a pious Jew would shake dust from his feet and clothes. For the disciples to do this would show that they regarded the towns that rejected them as pagan (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6). Awful judgement awaits those who reject the Messiah and those sent in his name. From the beginning, the disciples needed to learn that the kingdom of heaven is divisive. The disciples are defenceless, located in a dangerous environment. In several ancient cultures serpents were proverbial for prudence, while doves carried the notion of innocence. The disciples were not to be cunning. Neither were they to be naïve. They were to be innocent yet prudent.

Warnings of future sufferings 10:17-25

The Jewish persecution of Christians is envisaged. 'Flogging' was a court sentence implying that suffering was a result of a judicial decision rather than mob violence. The words 'their' and 'them' suggest that Jesus considers these actions of the Jews to be similar to those whom the prophets denounced for their unbelief and disobedience. It is often from within the religious community that most persecution comes. The spread of the gospel is anticipated by reference to governors and kings. Opposition depends not because of who the disciples are but because of Jesus is. Jesus tells the disciples that they will be given words of witness when they are arrested. Paul's testimony at his trial is a good example of this.

The extent of the disciples' future sufferings extends to persecution by members of their own families. Reference to divisions in the family anticipates the quotation from Micah 7:6 (10:35-36). 'All men' does not mean all men without exception but all men without distinction (i.e. Jews and Gentiles, family and non-family). It is a sad commentary on 'all men' that the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven should result in an eruption of such hatred because the disciple is a follower of Christ ('because of me'). 'Standing firm' is more about patient endurance than active resistance. Verse 23 is notoriously difficult to interpret. An attractive interpretation that takes account of the coming of the Son of Man and the urgency of the task suggests that this 'coming' reflects his coming against the Jews, culminating in the destruction of the temple. The coming of the Son of Man refers to the same event as the coming of the kingdom, of heaven but even the latter appears to come in stages. Jesus was born a king (2:2); has all authority as a result of his passion and resurrection (28:18) yet in another sense his kingdom has still to come. In this view, the coming of the Son of Man marks that stage in the coming of the kingdom in which the judgement repeatedly foretold falls on the Jews. All that said, disciples do not have to be either stoic or foolhardy. If persecution comes they must flee from it.

These two brief analogies, the student-teacher and the servant-master relationships, are found in other parts of the New Testament (Luke 6:40, John 13:16, 15:20). Jesus tells the disciples not to be surprised when they suffer persecution. If they follow him, they should expect no less. "Beelzebub" may have come from the Hebrew *baalzebub* ("lord of flies"), a mocking takeoff of *baal zebul* ("Prince Baal"), a pagan deity (2 Kings 1:2-3, 16). Whatever the origin of the word, it is identified with the prince of demons and Satan. The charge is shockingly vile - the Messiah himself rejected as Satan! The picture of Jesus as 'teacher' is also an important one. In our time there seems to be a false distinction between classroom learning and putting it into practice. The early disciples were 'apprentices'.

Do not be afraid 10:26-31

Jesus teaches the disciples not to be afraid of those who persecute them. Firstly, the truth and the gospel in all its fullness will be made known. Nothing will remain hidden forever and the disciples had the opportunity to declare the truth openly. Flat rooftops in Palestinian houses provided excellent places for speakers. Secondly, the worst that their persecutors could do is nothing to the power and authority of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). If God is truly feared then no one else need be. The soul and body distinction here simply means the whole person, the implication being that the persecutors could only bring suffering to the body. Thirdly, if God ('your Father') cares for sparrows, which are worth a halfpenny each, and knows you in such detail as to be able to count your hairs, then that knowledge and care should convince the disciple not to be afraid.

Characteristics of discipleship 10:32-39

Although Jesus is speaking to the twelve the saying also has wider relevance ('whoever acknowledges me'). To be a disciple, it is necessary to confess Jesus publicly (Romans 1:16, 10:9). Consistently to disown Christ is to be disowned by Christ. Our entire position in eternity is entirely dependent upon our relationship or attitude to Jesus, an exclusivity that the disciples include in their preaching (Acts 4:12). A disciple will also recognise the truth of the gospel. In the Gospel narratives, some people equated the Messiah with political peace and material prosperity. Perhaps, in our generation (and certainly in the last century) some people misunderstand the Messiah's message in terms of polite respectability. Jesus insisted that his mission entailed strife and division. Men and women will divide over the one who is the

Prince of Peace and the peace he leaves with the disciples (John 14:27) will be against the backdrop of a hostile world.

If earlier Jesus had warned his disciples of the world's hatred of his followers, a hatred extending even to close relatives, now Jesus invites the disciples to consider their own priorities. The Semitic idiom sees things in absolute terms (Luke 14:26). This is rightly interpreted by Matthew. Of course man must love his wife, family and friends – even his enemies – but he must love Jesus supremely. Such sayings are either true (and it is the Messiah who speaks) or they are the crazed ramblings of a maniac. Always, at issue in the teachings of Jesus is not simply the value of what he says but the person of the one who is saying it.

The expression 'take his cross' does not, as commonly thought, put up with some awkward or tragic situation in life. Rather it means the cost of dying to self. In that sense, every disciple of Jesus must bear the same cross. After Jesus' death and resurrection such sayings carried an even greater significance but, even before his crucifixion, the reference to the cross would vividly call to mind the shame and pain of such a sacrifice. Those who lose their life (*psyche*, 'soul') in this age, whether in actual martyrdom or disciplined self-denial, will "find" it in the age to come. Those who live for themselves and refuse to submit to the demands of Christian discipleship lose it in the age to come.

Response to disciples and to Jesus 10:40-42

Jesus never pretended that to be his disciple would be easy. Nevertheless, the final section of the discourse is more encouraging. The treatment meted out to his followers is effectively treatment meted out to Jesus because the faithful disciple is in union with Christ. It is not clear if Jesus intended us to make a fine distinction between 'prophets' and 'righteous men'. Possibly, Jesus intended the progression from 'prophets' through 'righteous men' to 'little ones' (i.e. the least in the kingdom) so that from the most prominent to the least prominent, all can be targets both for the world's enmity and a more positive response. A cup of cold water, the least courtesy demands, given to the least disciple just because that person is a disciple does not go unrewarded.

STUDY 8: Parables of the kingdom: narrative (Matthew 11:1-12:50)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 3: Parables of the kingdom

(a) Narrative

<i>Jesus and John the Baptist</i>	11:2-19
<i>The condemned and the accepted</i>	11:20-30
<i>Lord of the Sabbath</i>	12:1-14
<i>Jesus, God's chosen servant</i>	12:15-21
<i>Confrontation with the Pharisees</i>	12:22-37
<i>Jesus' mother and brothers</i>	12:46-50

B HIS MINISTRY IN WORD AND WORKS (continued)

Matthew is a Gospel about the coming of the Messiah. The basic structure of Matthew's Gospel falls into three sections:

- A The Messiah: His genealogy and nativity (1-2)
- B The Messiah: His ministry in word and works (3-25)
- C The Messiah: His death and resurrection (26-28)

The second block of teaching 'The commissioning of the twelve' ends with these words, 'After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went to preach in the towns of Galilee' (Matthew 11:1). This verse indicates very clearly that a teaching block has come to an end. As with the first teaching block (The Sermon on the Mount) and the second teaching block (The commissioning of the twelve) this third teaching block (Parables of the kingdom) will begin with some narrative.

Part 3: Parables of the kingdom

(a) Narrative (11:1-12:50)

Unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew skips over the account of the return of the twelve, as his purpose is to give as full an account as he can of Jesus' teaching. This block 'Parables of the kingdom' considers the theme of the rising opposition to the kingdom of God. The Galilean cities, where Jesus performed most of his miracles, become hardened in unbelief and conflicts with Jewish leaders begin to intensify. Nonetheless the kingdom of heaven continues to advance.

***Jesus and John the Baptist* 11:2-19**

Matthew, who had previously noted the imprisonment of John the Baptist (4:12) and will give further details later (14:3-5), brings into contrast the questionings of John the Baptist with the conviction that Jesus is the Christ. If the question seems out of character for John, we should remember that he was imprisoned at the time. Jesus showed the messianic visions of the Old Testament were being fulfilled in his ministry (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1-2). It is a matter of going back to the scriptures and seeing that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Jesus took this opportunity to speak to the crowd about John. Though their emphases and style are different, there is no personal conflict between them. John had not been ashamed of Jesus and Jesus acknowledges that. The gently ironic questions reveal something of the nature of John the Baptist. A reed suggests a weak, fickle person easily swayed in his judgement by the winds of opinion or personal circumstances. 'Fine clothes' (one might even paraphrase the expression as 'a dandy') is in stark contrast to the rugged prophet. The one in 'fine clothes' in the king's palace is in fact the one keeping John in prison. Despite his need to learn about the nature of the Messiah, John is neither fickle nor weak. Crowds had flocked to see the first true prophet that had appeared for hundreds of years. Jesus confirms that John was a prophet – but goes further by saying he was 'more than a prophet', presumably because the scriptures foretold the one who would be the unique forerunner, announcing the great 'Day of the Lord' (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6). John was the greatest of the prophets because he pointed unambiguously to Jesus, but the least in the kingdom is greater because he or she can testify to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and may, by the work of the Holy Spirit, have the character of Christ formed within (Galatians 4:6, 19). It is

difficult to say whether ‘forcefully advancing’ (NIV) or ‘being attacked’ (11:12) represents the better translation but the sense seems to be that a violent struggle is being waged even as Jesus speaks (John’s imprisonment is a sign of that struggle) and anticipates further conflict. Jesus makes it clear that the whole of the Old Testament (Prophets and Law) have a prophetic function. John the Baptist was the prophesied Elijah (i.e. a prophet of the same character).

Comparison is an important theme in the parables of Jesus. John the Baptist lived ascetically and though he drew crowds many people ultimately rejected him. Jesus came eating and drinking and was charged with gluttony, drunkenness and keeping poor company. Jesus uses the title ‘Son of Man’ as veiled allusion to his identity as Messiah.

***The condemned and the accepted* 11:20-30**

Despite the fact that most of his miracles were accomplished in the Galilean cities, the people there would not repent. Tyre and Sidon were large Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean, not far away, and often denounced by Old Testament prophets for their Baal worship (Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26:28; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9-10; Zechariah 9:2-4). Sackcloth was worn to express grief or sorrow (2 Samuel 3:31; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Kings 6:30; Joel 1:8; Jonah 3:5-8). In cases of deep emotion people put ashes on their heads (2 Samuel 13:19; Lamentations 2:10), sat in them (Jonah 3:6), lay on them (Esther 4:3), or even rolled in them (Jeremiah 6:26; Micah 1:10). The sobering message is that judgement takes opportunity into account. Even a favoured city like Capernaum will be brought down, lower than Sodom (Genesis 19).

Jesus addresses God as ‘Father’ and ‘Lord of heaven and earth’. The former indicates Jesus’ sense of sonship (11:27) and the latter recognises God’s universal sovereignty (11:25-26). In his sovereign will God has revealed things to ‘childlike disciples’, who are willing to be taught, that are hidden from the wise and learned, who think they know it all already. It is a mistake to think that God is acting arbitrarily. That God conceals things is not an act of injustice but an act of judgement. The surprise is who the recipients of that mercy and judgement are. Jesus refers to himself as ‘Son of God’. Although this was probably not clearly defined at the time, Matthew is in no doubt as to its true meaning (3:17). The relationship between Son and Father where the Father is God indicates a very special sonship.

Jesus is the one who alone reveals the Father, inviting not the ‘wise and learned’ but the ‘weary and burdened’ (11:28). ‘Weary and burdened’ could refer to the burden of sin but it could also refer to legalistic efforts to secure ‘rest’ (i.e. pardon and heaven; Jeremiah 6:16). The ‘yoke’ put on animals for pulling heavy loads is a metaphor for discipleship. This yoke is not the law but the teaching and revelation of God that comes through Jesus. On more than one occasion (18:1-10, 19:13-15), Matthew refers to Jesus as ‘gentle’. Even with his great authority, Jesus treats those coming to him with the gentleness of a ‘servant’ (Isaiah 42:3).

***Lord of the Sabbath* 12:1-14**

Matthew introduces an example of burdensome legalism. Jewish rules about the Sabbath were extremely detailed. Matthew has already noted opposition to Jesus (9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:25; 11:19) but this issue will result in a murder plot (12:14). It appears that Jesus and the disciples were taking a gentle stroll on the Sabbath. The right to pluck grain casually was established (Deuteronomy 23:25) but to the Pharisees this was ‘reaping’ and therefore forbidden. Jesus refers to an incident from the time of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6). A legalistic, Pharisaic interpretation that did not condemn David would be impossible. It was a special case. The disciples were not working on the Sabbath, so what commandment was really being broken? Jesus, therefore, questioned their approach to the law. The conclusion seems

to be that Jesus is at least as special as David (Israel's greatest ever king). Similarly, there was a sense in which the priests in the temple broke the Sabbath every week since changing the consecrated bread (Leviticus 24:7-8) and offering the doubled burnt offering (Numbers 28:9-10) was work. Jesus is greater than both King David and the temple (26:61; cf. John 2:20-21). Just as the authority of the temple laws shielded the priests from guilt, so the authority of Jesus shields his disciples from guilt. Again, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their failure to understand the scriptures and, as earlier (9:13), quotes from Hosea (Hosea 6:6). The claim to be Lord of the Sabbath is a messianic claim.

Confrontation about the disciples' actions is soon followed by direct confrontation with Jesus. Many Jews permitted healing on the Sabbath when life was in danger but Jesus' question, 'is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' was more basic. Again Jesus uses a contrast between animals and people (see 6.26; 10:31) and concludes that it must be lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath, especially to one more valuable than a sheep. This healing confirms Jesus' Lordship over the Sabbath. The hostility of the Pharisees has become murderous.

***Jesus, God's chosen servant* 12:15-21**

The hatred of the Pharisees is contrasted with the tranquillity and gentleness of Jesus, who often withdrew when opposition became intense (cf. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; 16:5). The quotation (Isaiah 42:1-4) is Matthew's longest. Jesus is God's chosen Servant, the one on whom God has poured out his Spirit with a specific mission in view (cf. Matthew 3:17). The ministry of Jesus is gentle and compassionate. Through such a ministry justice will be victorious and in this chosen servant and in his name the nations (Gentiles) will put their hope (Isaiah 11:10).

***Confrontation with the Pharisees* 12:22-37**

Although blindness and muteness are not always attributable to demon possession it appears to be the case here. The healing is described briefly for confrontation with the Pharisees is the main point. The astonished crowd asks 'Could this be the Son of David?' (i.e. the Messiah). The Pharisees did not deny the miracle but renewed their accusation that Jesus was acting by the authority of Beelzebub. In Jesus' reply the argument is clear. Any kingdom, city, or household that develops internal strife will destroy itself. The rule even applies to the kingdom of Satan. The logic is simple - why would Satan cast out the very demons that were doing his work? It was not uncommon for Pharisees to perform exorcisms. If Jesus is doing a similar but greater work, how can the authority by which that work is done be different? Only here does Matthew use the expression 'kingdom of God', presumably to reinforce the message that the work is done by the Spirit of God.

Some Jews looked forward to the binding of Satan by the Messiah. Jesus uses this metaphor to show his authority. If, as he has already demonstrated, his exorcisms cannot be attributed to Satan, then they reflect authority greater than that of Satan. By this authority Jesus binds the 'strong man' and plunders his house - forcefully advancing the kingdom of heaven.

It is not possible to be neutral in our relationship to Jesus for to be indifferent or apathetic towards him is to be on the side of those who do not confess that he is the Messiah who brings the kingdom of God. Jesus is the one who will harvest in the last days, a function the Old Testament regularly assigns to God. The blasphemy against the Son of Man is rejection of the truth of the gospel (for which there can be repentance and forgiveness), whereas the second sin is rejection of the same truth being fully aware of exactly what one is doing (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31). In real terms, the distinction between the Son of Man and Spirit

is relatively incidental. The New Testament reveals how close one may come to the kingdom and yet ultimately reject it.

Just as a tree is recognisable but its fruit, Jesus teaches that conduct, especially speech, reveals character. 'Brood of vipers' probably refers to the Pharisees in the crowd. What a person truly is determines how that person behaves and speaks. Evil people cannot say good things (cf. Ephesians 5:3-4, 12; Colossians 3:17; James 1:19; 3:1-12). It is not a matter of changing speech. What is needed is a change of heart.

The request by the Pharisees and teachers of the law for a 'sign' was not simply that Jesus should perform another miracle but some action that would confirm his authority. This is reminiscent of the temptations (Matthew 4). Jesus says that signs are denied to 'this wicked and adulterous generation,' because they are not performed on demand. However, Jesus says that they will be given the sign of the prophet Jonah. Jonah's preaching of repentance was important but it seems that the sign here has more to do with his deliverance from the great fish. Jonah spent 'three days and three nights' in the fish (Jonah 1:17) but Jesus was only in the tomb for about 36 hours. However, since these hours included parts of three days, by Jewish reckoning Jesus was buried 'three days', rising on the third day (Matthew 16:21). Even the suggestion that Jesus died on the Wednesday does not give a solution compatible with 'three days and three nights' and rising on the third day. The most satisfactory understanding of 'three days and three nights' is to view it as a figure of speech.

Jonah and Jesus were both delivered from death and this deliverance attested the trustworthiness of their preaching. However, the responses of their hearers are contrasted. The Ninevites repented but the implication is that this people will not repent. The followers of Jesus will believe in his death and resurrection, while those who do not believe are more wicked than the Ninevites. The Queen of the South was the Queen of Sheba who came to Jerusalem to see Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13). Jesus is greater than David, greater than the temple, greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon, for Jesus is the Messiah. The Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba will testify against the unbelieving Pharisees.

The comparison Jesus draws between himself and other exorcists is not meant to prove his superiority but to show that even Jewish exorcists achieve some success in their work by God's power. Those who through the kingdom power of God experience exorcisms must beware of neutrality toward Jesus the Messiah, for neutrality opens the door to seven demons worse than the one driven out. Commitment to Jesus is essential. That said, the story of the return of the seven evil spirits has more application to the nation than to the individual, showing that the exorcism of one evil spirit in the 'wicked and adulterous generation' will, if rejected, bring judgement on the nation.

***Jesus' mother and brothers* 12:46-50**

Despite the Roman Catholic dogma about the perpetual virginity of Mary, the most natural way to understand 'brothers' is that they were the children of Mary and Joseph. Through this occurrence Jesus teaches what it really means to be his disciple, to be totally committed to him and to do the will of his Father.

STUDY 9: Parables of the kingdom: teaching (Matthew 13:1-13:53)

PREPARATORY READING

The Messiah: His ministry in word and works

Part 3: Parables of the kingdom

(b) Teaching

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Part 3: Parables of the kingdom

(b) Teaching (13:1-13:53)

Introducing the parables 13:1-3a

Immediately after the controversies with the Pharisees, Jesus begins to teach in parables. The most natural reading of the text suggests that these eight parables were all given consecutively. Each of the eight parables (rather like the eight beatitudes) is part of a set. The whole picture, of the kingdom of heaven, is not gained from one parable on its own, any more than the complete Christian character was gained from one of the beatitudes. Sitting was the normal position of a teacher (Matthew 5:1) an observation important to Matthew in his teaching gospel. The note that Jesus went out of the house (13:1) is complemented by the statement that Jesus went back into the house (13:36). Jesus going back inside the house is significant as it marks a break between the first group of four parables, addressed to the crowds, and the second group of four parables, addressed to the disciples. The first six parables also appear to be pairs. Matthew gives two reasons for the parables, one related to their function for outsiders and the other related to their function for the disciples. It seems likely that rising opposition to Jesus encouraged his greater and greater use of parables. Those who opposed the kingdom could only become more and more confused by the parables, while those who embraced the kingdom grew in understanding. Failure to understand was not due to poor teaching but to the hearer. There was only one teacher and one message but a variety of hearers. The character of the right hearer is, of course, the character of the disciple (Matthew 5:1-12).

How we interpret the parables depends to a large extent on what kind of teaching we think they are. Older commentators tended to interpret the parables in a more or less allegorical style (the idea being that every item in the parable had a hidden meaning) leading to some absurd results. In 1910, Adolph Julicher contended that Jesus told not allegories but parables, which were simple stories with one main point (Dodd and Jeremias followed in this tradition), which leaves the problem of some of the more allegorical interpretations in the scripture text itself. More recently, Matthew Black and Raymond Brown have suggested that the distinction between allegory and parable is too simple, for it is not always possible to distinguish between those parts of the parable which are necessary just to complete the story and those parts which are significant to the main point or points. Anthony Thiselton points out that the parables challenge the listener to question even the most basic values, though not everyone will come to the same conclusion as to the meaning of the parables.

The Hebrew word *masal* (often translated 'parable' in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, LXX) was a word referring to proverbs, maxims, similes, allegories, and a variety of stories embodying some truth. Not surprisingly, therefore, in the New Testament, 'parable' can have a wide range of meanings. Most, though not all, parables are extended metaphors or similes.

The parable of the soils 13:3b-9

Though commonly called the 'parable of the sower' the main concern of the parable is the type of ground onto which the seed (which is distributed by 'broadcasting') falls. The farmer scatters the seed which falls in various places; the path (too hard to receive the seed which is eaten by birds), rocky places (little depth of soil and so lacking in moisture as the rainy season ends and the sun's heat increases, so after an initial promising growth the plant dies), among thorns (which deprive the plants of sun and nourishment). Happily, some seed falls

on good soil and produces crops of various yields, which are not extraordinarily high but within normal expectations. In short, the same seed produces no crop, some crop, or much crop according to the soil's character. The final exhortation warns Jesus' hearers and Matthew's readers that the parable needs careful interpretation.

The first explanation

13:10-23

The disciples (the twelve and others; Mark 4:10) ask why Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables and not what the parables mean. However, as Jesus later explains the parable, we cannot understand this request for a reason as to why Jesus spoke in parables to imply that the disciples understood the meaning of the parable. The key issue seems to be why the revelation is given to some and not to others. It appears that at least one of the functions of parables is to conceal the truth, or at least to present it in a veiled way. The expression 'the secrets of the kingdom of heaven' is not explained. However, in the Old Testament such 'secrets' (or 'mysteries') are divine plans or decrees, typically relating to the end times. George Eldon Ladd interprets this passage as meaning, "*the kingdom which is to come finally in apocalyptic power, as foreseen by Daniel, has in fact entered into the world in advance in a hidden form to work secretly within and among men.*" The warning against taking spiritual blessings for granted (13:12) is proverbial.

Jesus then relates his answer to those who are not his disciples (13:13 ff). Part of the problem with interpreting this difficult passage is its relationship to Mark (4:11-12). The issue of interpretation is whether the reason for speaking in parables is to do with 'election' or 'spiritual dullness'. The Bible does not show great concern over the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Matthew affirms that what is taking place in the ministry of Jesus is both, on the one hand, the decreed will of God and the result of biblical prophecy and, on the other hand, a terrible rebellion, gross spiritual dullness, and chronic unbelief on the part of the people. This places the responsibility for the divine rejection of those who fail to become disciples on their own shoulders while guaranteeing that none of what is taking place stands outside God's control and plan. It is clearly not the case that Jesus told parables so that everyone might more easily grasp the truth, and it is simplistic to say that the sole function of parables to outsiders was to condemn them. If Jesus simply wished to hide the truth from the outsiders, he need never have spoken to them at all. The parables spoken to the crowds do not simply convey information, nor mask it, but challenge the hearers with the claims of the inaugurated kingdom (in the ministry of Jesus) and the prospects of its apocalyptic culmination (at the end of time).

The parable of the soil implicitly challenges hearers to ask themselves what kinds of soil they are. In the varied responses given to the challenge of the parables, God's act of judgement and his self-disclosure in Jesus are both seen to be taking place in exactly the same way that various 'soils' respond to the 'seed'. The quotation from Isaiah reveals that the proclamation of the kingdom to people who do not want to see or hear succeeds in dulling what little spiritual sense that they might have. The disciples were blessed by God and privileged above the crowd because they saw and heard 'many prophets and righteous men longed to see but did not' (13:17). The reference is to Old Testament prophets and others who were just before God. The crowds stand in succession to the wilfully blind in the Old Testament but the disciples stand in the line of the prophets.

When Jesus interprets the parable, not every point is interpreted allegorically. No meaning is attached to the sower, the path, the rocky ground, or the diverse yield and what may be termed the 'allegorical points' (some people hear the message about the kingdom; but like

hardened paths, they do not let the truth penetrate, and before they really understand it the devil, like the birds, has snatched it away) emerge naturally from the story. The main point is that the ‘message about the kingdom’ (13:19) receives a varied reception among various people. The person (rocky places) who receives ‘the word’ in a thoughtless way might show immediate signs of life and promise to be the best of the crop but external pressures (like the hot sun beating down on a rootless plant) soon reveal the shallowness of this soil and make such a person a ‘temporary disciple’. The person (thorny ground) simply has too many other commitments (the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth). The interpretation, like the parable itself, ends positively and even the small crop is ‘good’.

The parable of the weeds 13:24-30

Jesus now returns to the crowd. The literal meaning is ‘the kingdom of heaven has become like the situation of a man’. The sleepers are not here at fault but the enemy is cunning. If the ‘weeds’ (Gk *zizania*) were bearded darnel they would have been very difficult to distinguish from the wheat when young and the roots would become entangled. Therefore, the servants are not to pull up the weeds but to wait. When the heads of grain appear on the wheat, there is no doubt which plant is which. The wheat can then be harvested and the weeds gathered up and burned (a common picture of judgement). For the meantime the kingdom is inaugurated but has not fully arrived.

The parable of the mustard seed 13:31-32

In Matthew, Mark and Luke this parable begins with a mustard seed, the smallest seed. This tiny seed seems the most inappropriate picture for the kingdom of heaven. Yet, this tiny seed becomes the largest of garden plants, large enough for birds to nest in its branches (Ezekiel 31:6). Similarly, the great kingdom, in all its future glory, has this small beginning. Charles Price offers an alternative explanation based on his presupposition that all the images in the parables must normally mean the same thing – but this produces a conclusion that appears very convoluted.

The parable of the leaven 13:33

A similarly strange choice of image is ‘leaven’ (leaven was a piece of last week’s dough slightly different, therefore, from yeast). Charles Price and others maintain that leaven and yeast are associated with evil and that the same must be the correct interpretation here. However, though often associated with evil, leaven was sometimes used for sacrificial offerings (Leviticus 7:13, 23:17-18) and is not, therefore, exclusively evil. Any attempt to identify the woman in this parable would be entering an allegorical cul-de-sac (as much as any attempt to identify the man in the previous parable). The leaven does not grow but it permeates, the main point of this parable being the same as that of the mustard seed. The kingdom produces ultimate consequences out of all proportion to its small beginnings.

The second explanation 13:34-43

Parables were an essential part of Jesus’ ministry (Psalm 78:2). Jesus reveals things that had previously been hidden, ‘the righteous acts of God in redemption’ (his teaching, miracles, death and resurrection). Away from the crowds, the disciples are not distinguished by their insight but ask Jesus for an explanation of the parable of the weeds. Jesus uses the lesser known title, Son of Man, to refer to himself as Messiah. Jesus is the one who both sows the good seed and directs the harvest. ‘The field is the world’ shows that his mission will extend beyond Israel. Unlike the parable of the soils (more familiarly the ‘sower’), the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom (a reminder that images can mean different things in different contexts), while the weeds are ‘the sons of the evil one’. The harvest is the end of

the age (Jeremiah 51:33; Hosea 6:11; Joel 3:13); and the harvesters are angels (Matthew 24:30-31; 25:31; Luke 15:7; Hebrews 1:14; 1 Peter 1:12). As in the first explanation, a number of features in the parable are not given any interpretation.

As the weeds are ‘pulled up’ so it is at the end. The kingdom of heaven is also the kingdom of the Son of Man, Jesus. It is Jesus who has divine authority at the end of the age (Zephaniah 1:3). In contrast to all who do evil ‘the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Daniel 12:3).

The parable of the hidden treasure 13:44

The kingdom is not simply like a treasure, but its situation is like the situation of a treasure hidden in a field. When the man buys the field at such sacrifice, he possesses far more than the price paid. The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship, and those who know where the treasure lies joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.

The parable of the expensive pearl 13:45-46

The connection with the previous parable is the supreme worth of the kingdom. Unlike the man in the last parable, the merchant, though he sells everything he has to purchase the pearl, apparently pays a full price. Although he is an expert in pearls, this single find so far surpasses any other pearl the merchant has ever seen that he considers it a fair exchange for everything else he owns. However, Jesus is not interested in religious efforts or in affirming that one can ‘buy’ the kingdom; rather he is saying that when we comprehend the true value of the kingdom, even our greatest interest, our life’s work, our heritage (particularly for his hearers ‘Jewish heritage’) will be gladly exchanged to follow him.

The parable of the net 13:47-50

This parable is parallel to the parable of the weeds and has a somewhat similar meaning. Rather than consider the co-existence of wheat and tares this parable simply describes the situation at the last judgement. A ‘drag net’ was drawn along between two boats or tied on shore at one end and put out by a boat at the other end, which was then drawn to land by ropes. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ fish refer to those that are edible and those that are worthless. Both the parable and its interpretation point to the final judgement, not in terms of the basis for judgement, but that there will be a final sorting out.

The parable of the householder 13:51-53

This is the only place in this chapter where the disciples themselves are explicitly said to understand, and they say it by themselves. The small parable is notoriously difficult to interpret. The ‘owner of a house’ is a frequent figure in Jesus’ parables. The point seems to be that the treasure includes both the new and the old and that he can use both. If that is the case then a teacher of the law who embraces the kingdom of heaven is doubly blessed. The new has not done away with the old but the old has been transformed, finding fulfilment in the person, teaching and kingdom of Jesus.

Jesus’ disciples claim they have understood what he has been teaching. The disciples have a major responsibility in evangelism and in making disciples. They are told to teach (‘disciple’) the nations all that Jesus has commanded them. ‘Therefore’, they must themselves bring out of their storeroom the treasures now theirs so as to teach others. This teaching section concludes with the familiar phrase.