



**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE
THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY - 3:1-4:25
SPRING 2012**

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WELCOME TO A COMMUNITY GROUP

Welcome to a Holy Trinity Church community group! You may be asking, “What is a community group?” Well, community groups at Holy Trinity Church help us connect on four levels:

- *Connect to God:* All people were designed for relationship with God, and God has always been gathering a people to himself. If our community groups excel at the other three points of connection below, but fail to connect people to the one true and living God, then we’ve failed. Ultimately, the only thing that will matter in this life is if our relationship with God has been restored. Through God’s acts in history, He has provided for our redemption through the person and work of Jesus Christ. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, the others in your community group will be journeying alongside you by studying God’s Word, and collectively you will be learning how to be re-connected with God.
- *Connect to the Word:* We at Holy Trinity Church are confident that God has spoken to humanity through the Bible, and since God has spoken we need to listen! Therefore, the study of God’s Word is paramount in your community group experience. We believe as Jesus said in Luke 24:44-47, that all of God’s Word is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Through our study of the Word, we will always connect the text back to the larger story of God’s redeeming acts, culminating in Jesus Christ.
- *Connect to other people:* Most of us reside in the bustling city of Chicago, but we are often isolated from authentic community. We were made for relationship with each other. Participation in a Community Group will allow you to connect to other people through our common exploration of the Bible and related times of fellowship.
- *Connect to the city:* We believe God has called Holy Trinity Church to be on a mission for his kingdom. This desire comes from what we have experienced through being in communion with God, and the

resulting joy and hope in our life. We want to include as many people as possible to experience our community. God cares about each and every Chicagoan! Consequently, we give of our own time and resources to serve others in Chicago so that everyone in Chicago can be part of God's community. Community Groups will endeavour to develop participant's hearts with a desire to serve the poor and disenfranchised.

Community Group gatherings

Community Groups meet weekly in homes from mid-September to early May. Each group may take a slightly different approach, but generally the time (typically 2 hours) is broken down between discussion of a previously assigned Biblical text, prayer, and social interaction over dessert or periodic dinners.

You are most welcome!

SPRING 2011 COMMUNITY GROUP CALENDAR HTC DOWNTOWN

Week of:

Jan 8	Group Study #1	Matthew 3:1-12 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>
Jan 15	Group Study #2	Matthew 3:13-17 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>
Jan 22	Group Study #3	Matthew 4:1-11 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>
Feb 5	Group Study #4	Matthew 4:12-17 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>
Feb 12	Group Study #5	Matthew 4:18-25 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The individual studies were written by Joel Miles (study #1, #2, and #3), Luke Raad (study #4), and Craig Devereaux (study #5). Jon Dennis, Joseph Kim, and Tom Barrett provided feedback and direction to the project. Joel Miles took on the additional role of Project Manager and General Editor, and helped shape a significant amount of the final product, including writing the *Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew*. Any mistakes are mine.

For God's Glory,

Joel Miles

LEARNING MATTHEW TOGETHER

Starting January we will be studying the Gospel of Matthew together. We are excited to continue this format of pairing up our sermon texts with what we study individually and discuss in our Community Groups weekly. We believe this approach will better help us understand the text, God and our ourselves, as well as to help us better apply the text to life.

Objectives of this study guide

Greater growth

We believe that the frequent study of God's Word is critical for your spiritual growth. We are providing you with materials to study in an accountable context to foster greater growth in the Gospel.

Greater application

We believe that the opportunity to study the scripture a number of times personally, hear a sermon preached on the text, and to then discuss in your Community Group will allow for a deep richness of understanding and application.

How it works

We are asking you to engage the Biblical text through:

- *Personal study* - Study each passage on your own three times,
- *Sunday study* - Hear a sermon preached on the text, and
- *Community Group study* - Discuss and apply the passage with the others in your community group.

Note: While we recognize that each person will develop their own rhythms for studying this material, we suggest you complete the three readings associated with the personal study prior to the related Sunday sermon.

Personal Study

To grow spiritually one must be committed to reading God's word. We suggest that you find a regular time and place for 30 minutes each day to learn from the Scriptures. Bring a pen or pencil, your bible, a notebook and study materials. In the following pages, each study suggests three readings

for each text, along with a set of questions for each reading. The questions that follow the readings each have a slightly different focus explained below:

- *Observations:* The same series of five questions is given for each text to help the reader dive into the passage.
- *Taking a Deeper Look:* These are more in-depth questions specifically tailored to the passage being addressed. Within this section we will periodically give certain information with the questions, be it historical, contextual or interpretive, which will hopefully help the reader understand the passage. The writer will usually not, however, simply tell why they think this is important.
- *Concluding Study:* In this section we simply ask the reader what they believe is the main point (theme) and main application (aim).
- *For Those who want more:* This contains no questions, and does not need to be completed. Furthermore, this section is not meant to be viewed as the correct answers to the questions. Please use this section for further information on the passage, and for ideas of how the writers may have answered these questions.

Sunday Study

Typically each Sunday you will hear a sermon based on the same text the Community Group study is based on. The sermon is another supplement to assist us in better understanding and applying the Biblical text we will be studying privately and in our groups. The Sunday sermon will also be available online at www.htcchicago.org for those unable to make the service, or if you would like to listen again.

Community Group Study

Most weeks you will have a chance to study and discuss the text together in your community group (see calendar on next page).

Resources

Resources provided through Holy Trinity Church:

In order to help you grow in God's word, we will provide you with the following resources:

- *The Biblical text* – the attached studies have the applicable Biblical text printed at the beginning of each study. All of our study efforts are primarily a study on the Biblical text.
- *Personal study questions* – the attached studies contain three sets of questions for each study. Please prioritize your time during the week to allow for three separate daily readings of this text, attempting to answer the questions to the best of your ability, and pray over prayer requests that come to mind as you interact with the Biblical text.

Additional optional resources:

The following list of books were consulted and used to help the authors write this study. Therefore, if you would like to study Matthew at a more in depth level, we recommend the following commentaries and resources:

Less technical commentaries/resources:

- Carson, D. A. *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995.
- France, R. T. *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2004.
- Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel Of Matthew: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Matthew As Story*. Philadelphia, Massachusetts: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Osborne, Grant R. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010.
- Turner, David L. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.

Technical commentaries/resources:

Hagner, Donald Alfred. *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993.

Pennington, Jonathan T. *Heaven And Earth In The Gospel Of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007.

Background Resources:

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1998.

Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011.

Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Many of us come to the Gospels for the purpose of learning the story of Jesus. We spend time reading through and studying Matthew, Mark, Luke and John so that our understanding of what Jesus did during His life will become more familiar to us. This, of course, is a good thing. For Christians, Jesus Christ lies at the center of our faith and is the foundation upon which the Christian life rests. Thus, knowing the story of our Lord's life is tantamount to following Him well. Moreover, the Gospels are the most detailed accounts we have on what Jesus Christ did during his life. Therefore, if you are coming to Matthew so that you may come to know Jesus' story better, you have come to the right place.

However, I want to encourage you that the Gospels, or Matthew, actually provide so much more than simply telling the story of Jesus. For while the Gospel of Matthew tells the story of Jesus' life, it also explains the significance of His life. In fact, I would argue that Matthew is more concerned with displaying the significance of who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished, than simply relaying His life story. We must remember that while Matthew does include Jesus' birth; Jesus' childhood, adolescence, and early adult years are completely absent in the Gospel. The reason for this lack of biographical information is that Matthew was concerned with more than the life story of Jesus. Richard Bauckham explains that the Gospels were written "in order to evoke or to inform faith in Jesus."¹

In other words, as we approach Matthew we need to be aware that the purpose of knowing this story is so that we would be formed and transformed by the reality of what Jesus Christ accomplished. In reading and studying Matthew I have grown in my love and devotion for God, Jesus Christ and His Church; in my understanding of the salvation offered through Jesus Christ; and in my desire to see others come know this truth. And I believe this can happen to you as well. Therefore, I want to encourage you to read Matthew so that you may both know the story of Jesus better, but also so that you would know why this story matters.

¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

But how do we do this? In other words, while we may have the desire to have the message of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew transform us, lead us to salvation, and to a deeper love for Christ's Church, how should we actually "read" the Gospels? To help answer this question, I want to point out a few different interpretive elements we should keep in mind as we read the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew is a Complete Book

The amount of stories that are known about Jesus by the general public is remarkable. Stories such as the virgin birth of Jesus, feeding of the 5000, walking on water, betrayal by Judas Iscariot, death on a Roman cross, resurrection, etc. Each of these stories appear in the Gospel of Matthew, and each of these stories are used by Matthew to display who Jesus is and the significance of His coming. However, each of these stories is also a part of the entire book and thus comes to the reader in a certain context. In recent years I have come to consider the Gospels as some of the most fun, intriguing, important and powerful books within the Bible. Yet this love for the Gospels only began when I started to read the individual stories in their context within the entire book. The way I used to read the Gospels is what I like to call "parachute" reading. While being unaware or unconcerned with where a certain story is placed, I would "parachute" into the middle of a Gospel, read a passage, and feel as though I would be able to interpret or understand the passage well. This type of reading, I believe, is quite common. And although looking at individual passages can be helpful, when we take a passage away from its context within the book, we immediately limit (usually substantially) the passages ability to communicate, and strongly run the risk of misinterpreting the passage. I will give two examples from the book of Matthew.

First, Matthew 2:8 reads: "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." This is speaking about the wise men going to search for Jesus, and taken on its own would be a great Christmas verse. In fact, I once read (but regrettably cannot remember where) that a person saw this verse posted on the front of a Christian bookstore. The problem with this is that this verse is spoken by Herod who we learn in the next two passages wants to kill Jesus,

and that he is lying to the wise men. This is an extreme example, but shows the dangers of “parachute” reading.

Second, in a great scene at the end of Matthew 9, Matthew records that Jesus feels compassion for the crowds of people because they are like “sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Jesus thus tells His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37). If one “parachutes” to this passage it is possible for some good interpretation and application to be made. For at a glance one could see that Jesus feels compassion for the people of Israel because their leadership has not led them well. Furthermore, one could gather that Jesus is teaching His disciples that there are numerous people that need to hear the message of the Gospel, but there are few who are bringing it to them. However, this “parachute” interpretation and application is also limited. Prior to this passage, Matthew tells of Jesus healing a leper (8:1-4), a Gentile’s servant (8:5-13), a woman (8:14-17), a demon-possessed Gentile (8:28-34), a paralytic (9:1-8), a young girl and another woman (9:18-26), and two blind men and a mute man (9:27-34). Moreover, Jesus calls a tax collector to be His disciple, and even states that He came to call not “the righteous but sinners” (9:9-13). All of these people were the outcasts, the rejected, the unclean, and the sinners of society. But in context, it is they that Jesus has compassion for and sees as being “like sheep without a shepherd.” It is the leaders neglect of the outcasts, rejected, unclean and sinners that is being criticized. Therefore, a deeper meaning in this passage is found through noticing the entire context. Moreover, a “parachute” reader would also miss the implications of Jesus’ calling and sending out of the 12 Apostles which follows that verse. Thus this prayer for the laborers begins to be fulfilled with the 12 Apostles, who are consequently shown as being the new leaders or shepherds of God’s people.

Matthew is Intentional - So Allow him to Speak

Richard A. Burridge has convincingly shown that the genre which the Gospels falls under should be understood as “ancient biography” or “lives.”² Knowledge of this is important, because the way these ancient biographies function is something we are not familiar with. For example, ancient biographies were not nearly as concerned with “strict chronological sequence.”³ This does not mean that they were not historically accurate. But rather that the placement of true events within an “ancient biography” was often more dependent upon the message the author wished to convey, rather than the exact chronological order something took place. Thus Matthew, Mark and Luke all include the story of Jesus being rejected in His hometown of Nazareth. However, while each of the writers includes the story, all three of them place it differently within their Gospel, and the Holy Spirit still inspired them to so. Again this does not mean that they are not historical events, they are! And it does not mean that the writers are not trustworthy, they are! Rather, the Gospel writers were intentional in what stories they choose to include in their Gospel account and where they placed these stories.

Therefore, we need to allow Matthew to speak for himself. This is more difficult than it sounds. There are times when Matthew will leave out details that the reader wishes were included. In search of these details the reader can sometimes respond by assuming these details, such as what a character was thinking or feeling. In fact, there are times when these assumptions become the basis for our interpretation and application. Though I believe there is a place for discussing how the historical events in these books would have impacted the people involved, we need to let the text itself lead us to our interpretation and application. This also means that we even need to be cautious with importing information to the stories in the Gospel of Matthew that we only learn from the other Gospels. For example, while Matthew is a longer Gospel, he often has shorter versions of stories compared to Mark. Thus a temptation we often feel when studying these

²Richard Burridge, “About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences” Pages 113-145 in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1998), 113-145.

³Ibid., 122.

shorter stories is to fill out Matthew's lack of detail with Mark. Of course, there are instances where this can be illuminating for Matthew. But doing this again can cloud our ability to interpret. For when we do this, we actually assume that Matthew's telling of the story is not sufficient. In fact, we are either assuming (consciously or unconsciously) that our reconstruction of the story allows for a better message than Matthew's, or we end up studying the book of Mark rather than Matthew. Therefore, we must remember that Matthew is intentional. There is a reason that Matthew included and excluded certain details, and the Holy Spirit inspired him to do so. Thus, I encourage you to do your best to let Matthew speak to you in the way he and the Holy Spirit saw fit.

Matthew is Part of the Story of the Bible

From the first verse in the Gospel of Matthew one thing is very clear: whatever Matthew is going to say about Jesus in the rest of Gospel is intricately tied to the story of the Old Testament. However, it is not simply that Matthew wants to show that Jesus is related to the story of the Old Testament, but that Jesus is the climax or the fulfillment of this story. Thus R. T. France believes that Jesus as fulfillment of the Old Testament is a summary of Matthew's message and writes, "Jesus is for Matthew not only the fulfiller of the promise of the Son of David, he is not only the Son of Abraham, the incarnation of Wisdom, the Son of God, but he is also the fulfiller of the prophecies about Bethlehem, Galilee, etc., about the Messiah, the King of Israel or rather the King of the Jews, about the gentle King, the suffering Servant of God, and also about the Son of Man..."⁴

This means that knowing the story of the Old Testament will greatly assist in understanding the significance of Jesus Christ. However, if you do not have a deep knowledge of the Old Testament, do not be alarmed. This study is written with the assumption that many of the passages Matthew either alludes to or directly quotes from the Old Testament are not familiar to the reader. Nonetheless, I want to encourage you to be prepared to look at the Old Testament as you read through Matthew. Not only will it help you grasp the Old Testament, it will greatly enable you to better understand how

⁴ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 167.

Matthew is leading us to think about Jesus Christ and the significance of His life, death and resurrection.

If we keep these interpretive elements in mind, I believe the message of Matthew will become much clearer. And the message of Matthew is something that every single person in the world needs to hear. For the Gospel of Matthew is not simply a story of one man's life, but of a life that changed the course of human history. For Jesus' life fulfilled promises that Israel and the whole world longed for; was the Son of God who died and rose again; founded His Church which the gates of hell will not overcome; restored God's people to Himself and the Father; and revealed that God's Kingdom of Heaven has broken and is breaking into this chaotic world.

Joel Miles
January 7, 2011

Study #1: Matthew 3:1-12

Week 1 - Week of January 8th

Community Group calendar: Study #1

Text: **Matthew 3:1-12**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study (we recommend three separate readings)
- Listen to sermon preached on January 8th
- Group discussion during week of January 9th

Matthew 3:1-12 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **2** “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **3** For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’”

4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. **9** And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

First Reading: Observations

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this passage relate to the surrounding passages?” “Why did Jesus respond in this way?”
2. What is the context? What has happened before this passage? Does this passage seem to be starting a new section in the book? Or is it continuing what has gone before?
3. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.
4. How do these characters relate to Jesus? What do they call him? How do they respond to him? How does Jesus respond to them?
5. Where does this scene take place? (You may have to look at the surrounding context.)

Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look

1. Write down how the text summarizes the content of John's message and what the quote in verse 3 explains as being the purpose of John's ministry. Why is this significant?

In Matthew 3:3, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 40:3 and explains that John the Baptist is the one who is talked about in that text. This is important to note, not only because Matthew is claiming that John fulfills Isaiah 40:3, but also because when New Testament writers quote from an Old Testament verse, the entire context surrounding the Old Testament verse is also being referenced. Thus in order to properly understand Matthew's quote of Isaiah, we must look at Isaiah 40:1-11, which are the verses that surround Isaiah 40:3. Isaiah 40:1-11 is a pivotal point in the book of Isaiah. David Pao explains that Isaiah 40:1-11 prophetically "signifies the beginning of a new period that is characterized by the salvific work of God in history...Isa 40:3-5 forms the center of this message of comfort; and 'the Way of the Lord' (Isa 40:3) becomes a phrase that points to the coming salvation of God. Significantly, in the context of Isaiah 40-55(66), Isa 40:3-5 stands as a promise for the arrival of the new era yet to take place."⁵

2. Read Isaiah 40:1-11. In light of that passage and the information above, what is the significance of Matthew saying that John is the one spoken of in Isaiah 40:3? What else is Matthew showing as being fulfilled?

⁵ David W. Pao, *Acts And The Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 41. Pao also goes on to show that Isaiah 40:1-11 was a well-known text among the Jewish people of Jesus and Matthew's day, which was often quoted in reference to God's future saving of Israel.

3. In verse 3:4 Matthew gives a description of John's clothing and diet. Compare this verse with the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8. See also Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 11:13-14 and 17:9-13. In light of these verses how should we understand both who John is and the significance of his coming?

4. How do your answers to the last two questions influence the way we should understand John's proclamation that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand?"

If one reads through the book of Genesis they will quickly notice that much of the book is dedicated to tracing certain characters lineage. This tracing begins in Genesis 2:4 and mainly "traces a distinctive line of seed [or offspring], which begins with Adam [and goes through Abraham and his descendants]." ⁶In fact, T. D. Alexander explains that the seed that is traced in Genesis is associated with "a number of important divine statements, the first of which comes in Genesis 3:15 (*italics added*)."⁷ However, while the divine statement in 3:15 is a promise that gets connected to Abraham and his descendents, there is also another line of seed that is talked about in Genesis 3:15.

⁶ T. Desmond Alexander, "Seed" Pages 769-773 in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2000), 769.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 769.

5. In Matthew 3:8 John calls the Pharisees and Sadducees “brood of vipers” which could also be translated “offspring of snakes.” Read Genesis 3:14-15. Based upon the above information and these verses why is this insult significant?

6. Many scholars have noted that Matthew 1:1-17 purposely alludes to the tracing of lineage in Genesis and “shows Jesus to be the new and final milestone in this foundational system.”⁸ Thus Matthew’s introduction to his Gospel immediately introduces Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham, the patriarch of Israel in Genesis 12:1-3. In light of this, how does Matthew’s introduction of Jesus compare to John’s words to the Pharisees and Sadducees in 3:8-9?

7. Rather than rely on their descent from Abraham, what does John tell the Pharisees and Sadducees to do?

⁸ Jonathan T. Pennington, “Heaven, Earth, and a New Genesis: Theological Cosmology in Matthew” Pages 28-44 Edited by Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 39.

8. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, what are things that you wrongfully rely on? How does this text speak into that?

9. When John speaks about “he who is coming after me is mightier than I,” he is actually speaking about Jesus. Thus, looking at verses 10-12, how would you characterize the way Jesus is described?

10. How does this description of Jesus affect or change the way you normally think about Jesus?

Third Reading: Concluding Study

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

For Those Who Want More

Summary of the Plot

Matthew 3:1-12 introduces the reader to John and Baptist and Jesus' primary opponents. John is in the wilderness proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and having people repent and be baptized. However, when the Pharisees and Sadducees arrive John sharply rebukes them and warns them of the coming judgment, specifically upon those who rely upon their descent from Abraham.

Important Points from the Text

This is the first time we are introduced to the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven and John the Baptist. In fact, though John is an important character in Matthew, he is not a prominent one. Nonetheless, Matthew's introduction of John to the reader is extremely significant since Matthew draws upon Old Testament imagery to explain the era of God's salvation has come.

Matthew quotes from Isaiah 40:3, and specifically says that John "is he who was spoken of" in Isaiah 40:3. Thus the reader can first see that Matthew wants us to think of John's arrival and proclamation of the impending Kingdom of Heaven into history as the fulfillment of Isaiah 40. In the study above, directly before question 4, an explanation is given regarding the significance of Isaiah 40:1-11. Though not all the prophets include a passage on their call to be God's prophet, Isaiah does. However, what is interesting is that unlike Jeremiah or Jonah, Isaiah does not put his call to be a prophet at the beginning of his book. Instead, the first five chapters rebuke Israel for their disobedience, so that when one comes to Isaiah's call in chapter 6 it is not surprising to hear God tell Isaiah that though Isaiah will preach, the people will not understand (Is. 6:8-10). And when Isaiah asks "How Long, O Lord?" God responds, "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land..." Thus, much of the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are filled with judgment proclamations. But with Isaiah 40:1-11 there is a promise that a time is coming where things will be reversed, and salvation

will come. So for Matthew to explain that John is the one who is spoken about in Isaiah 40:3, it means that the era of God's salvation has arrived!

Matthew also alludes to 2 Kings 1:8 with his description of John in verse 4 which mirrors that of the prophet Elijah. In fact, this link with Elijah is further supported by Jesus' explanation in both Matthew 11:13-14 and 17:9-13 that John is Elijah. Though this link may seem to odd to many, it is significant since the last verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6, quote God saying, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." Thus, the arrival of John as the Elijah figure should be seen as the precursor to God's future judgment and salvation.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has already been displayed as the true son of Abraham and the fulfillment of His promised offspring (Matt. 1:1-17). However, what is important to note is that in Genesis the promises given to Abraham are founded upon promises from earlier chapters in the book. T. D. Alexander explains that the offspring of Abraham that is traced in Genesis is associated with "a number of important divine statements, the *first of which comes in Genesis 3:15* (italics added)." Consequently, the genealogies are actually the tracing of the promised seed first promised in Genesis 3:15 as those who would oppose the serpent's seed. Therefore, it is significant that Matthew first introduces Jesus main opponents in the Gospel by calling them "brood of vipers," or "offspring of snakes," and tells them not to rely on their descent from Abraham. As we continue through the book of Matthew this association with the Pharisees and Sadducees with Satan will become even more apparent.

The last words by John display Jesus as being a judge. In our North American culture Jesus is often emphasized as being a nice guy who would never harm a fly. However, though Jesus is merciful, gracious, and went to the cross for us, Matthew is sure to include John's explanation of Jesus as judge. In fact, this is important for us to recognize especially since to prepare the way of the Lord John preaches repentance! He tells the Pharisees and Sadducees that they must not depend upon their descent from Abraham but "bear fruit worthy of repentance," and then explains that Jesus will judge if you are not apart of his wheat. Repentance, therefore, is a necessary for

those who follow Christ. But what is even more important is that since Matthew has already established that Jesus is the true son of Abraham, aligning yourself with Jesus becomes the thing necessary to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ways This Speaks Into Our Lives

What do you rely on? The Pharisees and Sadducees clearly believed that the fact that they were descendents of Abraham meant that they would be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, John exposes that because of their false reliance, the Pharisees and Sadducees were actually descendents of snakes. Thus John calls them to repentance. What are things that you depend on? Perhaps it is your ability to be successful at work, or your good parenting skills. Perhaps you depend upon the fact that you go to church, or that your parents are Christians. Though these are not bad things, reliance upon our abilities or actions will always fail to enable us to receive God's salvation. Rather we need to repent of this and align ourselves with Christ, the true son of Abraham.

Theme:

God's promised salvific Kingdom is at hand, but finding yourself among His wheat is not through birthright.

Aim:

Repent and align yourself with Christ!

PRAYER REQUESTS

Study #2: Matthew 3:13-17

Week 2 - **Week of January 15th**

Community Group calendar: **Study #2**

Text: **Matthew 3:13-17**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on January 15th
- Group discussion during week of January 16th

Matthew 3:13-17: *English Standard Version (ESV)*

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.

16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

First Reading: Observations

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this passage relate to the surrounding passages?” “Why did Jesus respond in this way?”
2. What is the context? What has happened before this passage? Does this passage seem to be starting a new section in the book? Or is it continuing what has gone before?

3. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.

4. How do these characters relate to Jesus? What do they call him? How do they respond to him? How does Jesus respond to them?

5. Where does this scene take place? (You may have to look at the surrounding context.)

Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look

1. Quickly look through who the main characters are in each of the sections in 1:18-3:12. In light of this, what do you notice about who the main character is in this passage? What could this signify in terms of the importance of this event in the Gospel of Matthew?

2. Compare verse 3:14 with John's words in 3:11. What do you notice? What does this communicate about Jesus' identity?

One of the most difficult aspects to understand in this passage is Jesus' explanation that His baptism by John is to "fulfill all righteousness." The reason why this is difficult is because of the word "righteousness," and the different ways it can be used within the Bible. Many of the interpretations put forward often assume that the word "righteousness" is used in Matthew's Gospel the exact same way the Apostle Paul uses it in his letters. D. A. Carson explains that this wrongful importing of Paul's use of righteousness could lead one to interpret this passage as Jesus anticipating "His own baptism of death [on the cross], by which he secures 'righteousness' for all."⁹ However, Carson continues on to explain that one should not read "Paul's use of 'righteousness' back into Matthew, who in fact never uses the term [the same way as Paul] but always meaning 'conformity to God's will' or the like."¹⁰

3. In light of the above information how do you think we should understand Jesus' explanation to John in 3:15?

4. In the context who is the "us" in verse 15 referring to? And why do you think this could be important?

⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

Another difficult aspect about this passage for us to understand is the activity of the Spirit of God and the proclamation by the voice from Heaven. However, some of the links and allusions in this passage to the Old Testament should be illuminating for our interpretation.

5. The phrase “heavens were opened” occurs two different times in the Old Testament, Genesis 7:11 and Ezekiel 1:1. First of all, this link with Ezekiel could be seen as important, because when the phrase “heavens were opened” is used it refers to Ezekiel seeing visions from the Heavens. Nonetheless, the Genesis allusion may also be significant. Genesis 7-9 tells the story of God’s flood of the world and His subsequent “recreation” of the whole earth. Read Genesis 7:6-11 and 1 Peter 3:18-21. What aspects do you see in the Genesis passage that parallel aspects in Matthew 3:13-17?

6. Read also Genesis 8:9-12. Craig Keener points out that in Genesis 8:9-12 “the dove appears as the harbinger of the new world after the flood, which other early Christian literature employs as a prototype of the coming age ([Matt.] 24:38; 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 3:6-7).”¹¹ In other words, references and allusions to the flood narrative of Genesis in the New Testament appear in contexts that speak of the world to come, with judgment upon the wicked and the recreation of the world. If Matthew is purposefully alluding to Genesis 7-8, what do you think the Spirit’s coming to Jesus in the form of a dove indicates about the significance of Jesus’ coming into the world, who He is and what He will accomplish?

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel Of Matthew: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

7. Think through your answer to question 6. How does this effect the way you think about the world? How does this effect the way you think about your friends? And how does this effect the way you think about yourself?

8. Read Genesis 22:1-2, 9-12. What similarities do you notice with this passage and Matthew 3:17?

9. Again, if Matthew is purposefully alluding to Genesis 22 and Jesus as the beloved Son of God, like Isaac was the beloved son of Abraham, what does this communicate to the reader about Jesus' identity and what the Father is sending Jesus to do?

Third Reading: Concluding Study

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

For Those Who Want More

Summary of the Plot

Jesus comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. After Jesus explains to John that performing this baptism is to fulfill all righteousness, John consents. But when Jesus comes up from the water the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove and a voice from Heaven identifies Jesus as being the beloved Son.

Important Points from the Text

This is the first place in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus is the main character of a narrative passage. Thus special attention should be given to what this text communicates about Jesus, especially since Matthew has already introduced Jesus as the main character of the entire Gospel in verse 1, and from this point on almost exclusively keeps Jesus as the main character in all passages.

Moreover, though the text has already communicated how the author desires the reader to think about Jesus' identity (1:1, 23; 2:15), in this passage the author uses the characters within the story to explain the significance of Jesus. Thus John the Baptist is shown to understand that he has a need to be baptized by Jesus; the Spirit is clearly shown as anointing Jesus; and the Father from Heaven declares that this is His beloved Son.¹²

Nonetheless, perhaps the most important point to make in this passage is the connection Matthew makes with Genesis. In fact, there is reason to believe that Matthew uses three different Genesis allusions in order to paint a clearer picture of who Jesus truly is, and how He will accomplish His task. The first Genesis image is taken from Genesis 1:2. Hagner points out that "the [Jewish] rabbis likened the Spirit's brooding over the waters in Gen 1:2 to a bird nestling her young (and in one instance specifically to a dove...)." ¹³ Hagner, therefore, concludes that Matthew purposely describes this historical event in language that alludes to the Spirit in Genesis 1:2 and explains, "the

¹² See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, (Philadelphia, Massachusetts: Fortress Press, 1988), 52.

¹³ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993), 58.

[Spirit] here signals the beginning of a new creation.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Matthew has already referred to the Spirit in Matthew 1:18, 20 and 2:11 where he calls the Spirit “the Holy Spirit.” However, in this passage Matthew chooses to refer to the Spirit as the “Spirit of God,” which is the exact way Genesis 1:2 refers to the Spirit hovering over the face of the deep. Therefore, Matthew seems to be presenting Jesus as being anointed by the Spirit of the original creation, and thus presenting Jesus as the one who will bring about a new creation. In other words, Jesus is the one who will be able to bring about the original intention of all creation.

The second Genesis allusion also points to new creation ideas. Greg Beale has pointed out that the flood narrative in Genesis 7-9 should be understood as a “new creation” or a “recapitulation of creation in Gen. 1.”¹⁵ This is significant since there are strong reasons to see Matthew as evoking the flood narrative in Jesus’ baptism. Of course, one way this is done is through Jesus being baptized, which Peter connects with Noah’s flood in 1 Peter 3:20-21. However, Matthew also has three different phrases or words that connect with the Greek translation of the Old Testament Genesis flood narrative: “from the water” (Genesis 9:11; cf. Is. 54:9) “the heavens were opened” (Genesis 7:11; 8:6) and “dove” (Genesis 8:9-12). These allusions would once again reveal Jesus as the one who would bring about a new creation.

The last Genesis reference is through the Father’s words in Matthew 3:17. First of all, the Father speaks “from heaven,” which one could argue allude to Genesis 22:11 and 15 where the angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham “from heaven” and tells him not to harm Isaac. However, the Father’s words that “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” clearly recalls Genesis 22:2, 12 and 16, where Isaac is described as Abraham’s “beloved son.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, what is so significant about that passage is that each time Isaac is referred to as Abraham’s beloved son, the text also speaks of Abraham being will to sacrifice his son. Thus for Matthew to

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 925.

¹⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven And Earth In The Gospel Of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 213.

allude to Jesus as the beloved Son like Isaac, would also point to him as the Son who would be sacrificed. Therefore, Matthew's three allusions to Genesis in this section present Jesus as the one who will bring about the original intention for creation through being the sacrificed son.

Ways This Speaks Into Our Lives

We all long for a new creation. Since the entrance of sin into the world, man has continually struggled and toiled longing for the original intention of creation. We all feel these effects when we are sleep deprived from trying to finish something for work, or find ourselves in an argument with our children or parents, lie to build ourselves up, have others talk behind our backs to bring us down, are tempted to find fulfillment through pleasure, feel hatred towards others, etc. This is not the way things were meant to be. The world was meant to be full of God's blessing (Gen. 1:28; 2:3; 9:1; 12:1-3; cf. Matt. 5:1-12; 25:34). Thus if Jesus is presented as the one who brings about the original intention for creation we must be aligned with Him! Moreover, it means that those who follow him (His Church) are those who should be living in a way that reflects the original intention of creation.

Theme

Jesus is fulfilling all righteousness and displayed as the inaugurator a new creation through being the sacrificed Son.

Aim

Trust in Jesus and follow the one who will lead you to live in a way reflective of the purposes of the original creation.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Study #3: Matthew 4:1-11

Week 3 - **Week of January 22nd**

Community Group calendar: **Study #3**

Text: **Matthew 4:1-11**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on January 22nd
- Group discussion during week of January 23rd

Matthew 4:1-11 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “It is written,

“Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and
“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.”

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

First Reading: Observations

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this passage relate to the surrounding passages?” “Why did Jesus respond in this way?”
2. What is the context? What has happened before this passage? Does this passage seem to be starting a new section in the book? Or is it continuing what has gone before?
3. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.
4. How do these characters relate to Jesus? What do they call him? How do they respond to him? How does Jesus respond to them?

5. Where does this scene take place? (You may have to look at the surrounding context.)

Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look

1. Look through the titles that have been attributed to Jesus prior to this passage (ex. Christ, Son of David, etc.). What is the only title used by God?

2. What other figures in Biblical history also have this title attributed to them by God? (Ex. 4:18-23; Deut. 8:5; 2 Sam. 7:12-14; Hos. 11:1-2, etc.)

3. In light of the first two questions, what is the significance of the way Satan begins the first two temptations?

4. Both the Gospel of Mark (1:12-13) and the Gospel of Luke (4:1-13) include the temptation story of Jesus. In each of them the length of Jesus' fast is included. However, Matthew adds in one more detail concerning the length, namely it was for "forty days *and forty nights*." There are 10 other

places in the Bible where this term is used (Gen. 7:4, 12; Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10; 1 Kgs. 19:8). But, Jesus has just been baptized in the *water*, has now been led into the *wilderness* to be *tempted*, and responds to each temptation from Satan with a quote from *Deuteronomy 6-8* where Moses is recounting parts of the story of the Exodus. Therefore, at what background do you believe is being evoked or alluded to? In other words, what history is Jesus being displayed as essentially recapitulating or reenacting?

5. In response to the first temptation Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses is recounting Exodus 16. Read Exodus 16:1-5 and Deuteronomy 8:1-5. How many parallels do you notice between these passages and Matthew 4:1-4?

6. Based on what you saw in the question 5, compare how Israel responded to their test in Exodus 16 with how Jesus responded in our text.

7. In the second temptation Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16. Here Moses recounts Exodus 17:1-7. Read both Exodus 17:1-7 and Deuteronomy 6:16. How does Exodus 17:7 summarize how the Israelites were testing God? How does this relate to how Satan tempts Jesus?

8. Once again, compare Jesus response to Satan and Israel's response in the wilderness. What do you notice?

9. In the last temptation Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:13. Read Deuteronomy 6:10-13. Here we see Moses give a stern warning to serve the Lord when the Israelites enter into the land that the Lord is *giving* them. What parallels do you find with Satan's final temptation to Jesus in Matthew 4:8-11?

10. Look at Matthew 3:2 and 4:17. How does this relate to the third temptation?

11. Compare Satan's temptation with Matthew 28:18. Here we see that Christ has authority over the Kingdom's of the World. Read Matthew 16:13-23 and 28:18-20. In light of this, what do you think Satan really tempting Jesus with? In other words, what did Jesus do to get to Matthew 28 that Satan is tempting Jesus to avoid?

Third Reading: Concluding Study

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

For Those Who Want More

Summary of the Plot

Matthew 4:1-11 tells the story of the three fold temptation of Jesus. Directly after Jesus' baptism in water, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days and 40 nights. Satan comes to Jesus and tests him with three temptations that line up with Israel's sins during the Exodus out of Egypt. Jesus responds to Satan's temptations by quoting from corresponding passages to Satan's temptation in Deuteronomy 6-8. After the final temptation Satan leaves Jesus and angels come and minister to him.

Important Points from the Text

Matthew sets up this scene to push the readers mind back to the Exodus. This is a theme that has already arisen in the book of the Matthew. In fact, the second chapter of Matthew mirrors many things from the Exodus closely from Moses' birth, a wicked King who kills infants, Israel's flight out of Egypt, etc. In this passage the Exodus motif is heightened as Christ reenacts the failures of Israel in the wilderness. This is shown through numerous parallels: (1) Wilderness, (2) forty days and forty nights, (3) Son of God, (4) bread when hungry, (5) second temptation of whether God will be faithful, (6) temptation for idolatry, (7) giving of land, and (8) all quotes from Deuteronomy.

In light of this it is important for us to be able to understand the context of the Deuteronomy passages so that we can understand the temptations. In the first temptation Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 where Moses recounts Israel's failure in the Wilderness in Exodus 16. Moses explains that the reason God tested Israel was to "humble" Israel and teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes

from the mouth of the Lord. This is something Israel had to learn. In fact, in Deuteronomy 8:5 it says, “Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.” God was teaching Israel as he teaches a Son. When Satan comes to Jesus and says, “If you are the *Son of God* command these stones to become *loaves of bread*.” Jesus’ hunger does not push him to obey Satan. Because Jesus already knows that it is not bread that sustains him, but God’s Word Jesus prevails where Israel failed.

The second temptation is similar to the first. Here we find Satan also use Scripture to tempt Jesus. However, once again the question is ‘what exactly is Satan tempting Jesus with?’ And ‘How does Jesus’ quote make sense in this context?’ In Deuteronomy 6:16, where Jesus quotes from, it says “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” The Massah event recalls Exodus 17, where in verse 7 it reads, “... because they tested the Lord by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not.’” With this background, one should not see this temptation as relating to Jesus revealing himself (especially since no spectators are mentioned). But rather, Satan is tempting Jesus to test whether or not God really is with Him. If Jesus is the Son of God, then God should rescue him if He casts Himself down. Thus, Jesus once again reenacts Israel’s history, but prevails where Israel failed.

The last temptation is the most interesting. First of all, Luke 4:1-13 places the second temptation in Matthew last, probably because Luke has a strong temple motif. Matthew, however, wishes to highlight something else. This temptation deals with Satan giving the Kingdom’s of the World to Jesus. In response, Jesus quotes from both Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20. Deuteronomy 10:20 focuses on God as the King of the universe and has ties to Israel’s failure with the golden calf in Exodus 32. Thus another one of Israel’s failures in the wilderness is evoked in the temptation account, showing Jesus as succeeding where Israel failed.

However, one must also look at the connection with 6:13. Deuteronomy 6:13 records Moses’ warning to the people that after they enter into the land that God is *giving* them, they must worship and serve God alone. This is especially interesting since we have already noted that Matthew records Satan as offering to *give* the Kingdom’s of the World to Jesus. Looking at the Old Testament we know that Israel did not obey this warning from Moses. After God *gave* Israel the land they fell deep into idolatry, and

did not serve and worship God alone. Therefore, not only is the wilderness failures being evoked in the comparison with Jesus, but Israel's entire history. Thus Jesus life prevails where Israel history has failed and we see this through the rest of Matthew.

In Matthew 28:18 we see Jesus has essentially received what Satan tempted Him with, saying that "all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been *given* to me." However, to receive this *gift* Jesus served and worshiped God alone, which took Him on a path that led him to the cross! Israel had been called to worship God, but instead they built a golden calf and failed in the wilderness. Israel had been called to worship the only God when they entered the land, but instead committed idolatry and were thus exiled. Christ however, when offered to be given the Kingdom's of the World through abandoning God, refuses. Thus Jesus follows God's will to the cross, and there bridges the gap between Heaven and this earth, so that He is not simply the King of all Kingdom's of the World, but over the glorious Kingdom of Heaven on earth!

Ways This Speaks Into Our Lives

Matthew purposely reveals Jesus as both reenacting Israel's history and succeeding where Israel failed. Though it is easy to look down upon Israel's history because of this, one must remember that it took the Son of God becoming a man to succeed where they failed. Jesus knew that it was God's word that sustains Him, that God was with Him and did not need to be tested, and that worshiping and following His Father was more rewarding than all the Kingdom's of the world. But we often forget these things. We depend upon food, rest, and money to sustains us. We doubt that God is really helping His followers, and so put Him to the test. And we give into temptation thinking that the pleasures and gifts this world has to offer is superior to anything God can offer. We are wrong. So we must look to Christ to show us how we must live.

However, what is even more important is that Matthew is showing the reader who we must follow, who we must align ourselves with, if we desire to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Jesus mimicks Israel's history and succeeds where they fail, Jesus is shown as being the superior Son. It is not through being aligned with the nation of Israel, but with the

fulfillment of their history. This text calls us to follow Christ, the one who has actually succeeded where Israel failed.

Theme:

Jesus succeeds where Israel failed, and serves God in all things.

Aim:

Follow the one who fulfills the history of Israel, for it is through your alignment with Him that salvation is found.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Study #4: Matthew 4:12-17

Week 4 - **Week of February 5th**

Community Group calendar: **Study #4**

Text: **Matthew 4:12-17**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on February 5th
- Group discussion during week of February 6th

Matthew 4:12-17 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. **13** And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14** so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the
Gentiles — **16** the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

First Reading: Observations

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this passage relate to the surrounding passages?” “Why did Jesus respond in this way?”
2. What is the context? What has happened before this passage? Does this passage seem to be starting a new section in the book? Or is it continuing what has gone before?
3. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.
4. How do these characters relate to Jesus? What do they call him? How do they respond to him? How does Jesus respond to them?
5. Where does this scene take place? (You may have to look at the surrounding context.)

Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look

Geographical markers play a prominent role in Matthew's introduction of Jesus. Jesus is born in Bethlehem (2:1), travels to Egypt (2:14), returns to the land of the Israel and goes to Nazareth (2:20-23), leaves Galilee to go to the Jordan River (3:13), and is led by the Spirit into the wilderness (4:1).

1. Read 2:1-6, 15, 23. In each of these texts how does Matthew explain the purpose or result of Jesus traveling to these various locations (cf. 3:13-15)?

2. What does Matthew explain as the purpose of Jesus' travels in 4:12-17? Along with question 1, why is this significant?

Matthew 4:13 speaks of the "the territory of Zebulun and Nephtali," which are two tribes of Israel. When the Jews first entered the Promised Land, these tribes received the territory that came to be known as Galilee for their inheritance (Joshua 19:10-16; 32-39). Yet this portion of the Promised Land was often occupied by Israel's enemies (2 Kings 15:29), and hence came to be called "Galilee of the Gentiles." In Jesus' day Galilee remained the title of this northern part of Israel, and remained a diverse region.

3. After 4:12-17 virtually all of Jesus' time until 19:1 takes place in Galilee. Because this marks the end of Matthew's high use of geography within the first 4 chapters it helps the reader know that a transition is taking place with

these verses. However, there are other textual markers that show that a transition is taking place in this text. What do you see in the text as reveals this transition? And what do you think this transition is?

In Matthew 4:17 Matthew records that Jesus' message is the same as John the Baptist (3:2). Matthew also explains that the prophet Isaiah prophetically spoke of John in Isaiah 40:3 (Matthew 3:3) and Jesus in Isaiah 9:1-2 (4:14-16). In our study on Matthew 3:1-12 it was explained that Matthew's quote of Isaiah 40:3 should be understood in light of all Isaiah 40:1-11, and if done so reveals that John the Baptist's arrival indicates that God's foretold salvation has begun. This point is important to emphasize for two reasons. First, because Matthew again quotes from a significant text in Isaiah and claims that Jesus is the fulfillment. And secondly, because in our present passage we must once again be sure to look at the context of Isaiah 9:1-7 in order to fully understand what Matthew is claiming Jesus' arrival means or will fulfill.

4. Read Isaiah 9:1-7. What is the "great light" that the people in Galilee witness? What does Matthew seem to be claiming this "great light" is?

5. Again in light of Matthew's quote of Isaiah 9:1-7, what positive changes is Matthew displaying as associated with the coming of Jesus?

6. How do these images of prosperity and peace in Isaiah 9:1-7 contrast with the Jewish people's current situation? And what would Matthew's explanation that Jesus fulfills and will fulfill Isaiah 9:1-7 mean to them?

Many theologians have pointed out that the Bible actually presents Jesus' fulfillment of many prophecies as "already not yet." This means that while Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecies such as Isaiah 9:1-7, the full fulfillment of these promises is still yet to be brought to pass. This is important, because while Jesus' work in life, death and resurrection has guaranteed that peace and restoration will come, we still await the final fulfillment of these promises.

7. Think through the chaos that surrounds our world today. In light of the above information, how does Jesus being the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-7 speak into the chaos of our world today?

8. Think through your own life. Do you feel at peace? Do you believe that justice and righteousness are things that characterize your everyday actions and experiences? How does this passage speak into your own life?

9. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 and Matthew 4:17 again. As we have already noted, both John and Baptist and Jesus' message is recorded as "Repent, for the *Kingdom of Heaven* is at hand." This parallel clearly shows us that the coming of the *Kingdom of Heaven* is an important theme in the book of Matthew. In light of Matthew's quotation of Isaiah, how does this help us think about what the Kingdom of Heaven is? What would one expect this Kingdom to look like? And who is Jesus in relation to this Kingdom?

Third Reading: Concluding Study

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

For Those Who Want More

Summary of the Plot

When Jesus hears that his forerunner John has been arrested, Jesus leaves Judea and travels to Galilee. Matthew shows that Jesus' new home is to fulfill yet another Old Testament prophecy which speaks of the long-awaited Kingdom. Matthew then finishes by recording the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a message that parallels John's message in Matthew 3:2.

Important Points from the Text

It is likely that Jesus initially leaves the land of Judea because this is where he would have been in the most danger from the Pharisees and other Jewish authorities. This is the first of several times in Matthew where Jesus removes himself from danger (2:13-15; 4:12; 12:15; 14:13; 15:21), which is striking given that He will eventually march with purpose to Jerusalem to

meet His end on the cross. This should first remind us that Jesus was not *just* coming to die, but was coming to build a church. His work of healing, teaching, and discipleship was laying the foundation for the growth of the gospel after His death and resurrection. In addition, Jesus' life and death was designed by the sovereignty of God to fulfill certain prophetic expectations of the Old Testament. One of which is explicitly mentioned as being fulfilled by Jesus in this passage.

Matthew quotes from Isaiah 9 as being fulfilled through Jesus traveling to Capernaum. The city of Capernaum is located on an ancient road that would have been used by the Jewish exiles when they were returning from Persia in the Sixth Century B.C. This "way by the sea" would have been an entry point for the exiled Israelites returning to their homes in the Promised Land. This led some ancient Jewish commentators to interpret the "great light" of Isaiah 9:1-2 as the return of the Jews from exile. Yet even these commentators admit that nothing in the history following the exile could be identified with what follows in Isaiah 9:3-7. No permanent kingdom was ever established, and no lasting peace was ever won. This, of course, poses a major problem for this ancient interpretation since Isaiah 9:3-7 is directly related to the "great light" of 9:1-2. In light of this, Matthew may be implying that the beginning of Jesus' ministry can also be identified with the *true* return of the Jews from exile. However, what is important is that Matthew follows the quote of Isaiah 9:1-2 with Jesus' proclamation that the "Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." This connection should lead us to think about the Kingdom of Heaven in light of the Kingdom in Isaiah 9. It will be a global Kingdom (Isaiah 9:7), will establish peace on earth (9:5), and will be ruled by a just and righteous Son of David King for eternity (9:7).

Other Ways this Speaks Into Our Lives

Israel had waited for over 700 years since Isaiah had prophesied about this coming King, but he still had not shown up. God's people had seen governments and would-be kings rise and fall, yet still they lived without peace or security, under the authority of exploitive rulers. Waiting this long would be enough for anyone to lose hope, yet God never abandons His promise to send Israel her king. For us, it is often easy to let the "darkness" of our lives surround us, and to forget the hope and promise that is found in Jesus. The sudden appearance of Jesus in the first century, and all the hope

that he brought with him, should remind us that God is both true to His word, and that He can turn “darkness” into “light” in an instant.

Main Point of the Passage

The hope that Israel has longed for, which the world also needs, emerges in the person and ministry of Jesus.

Final Application Summary

Align yourself with Christ, for His promised Kingdom is breaking into this world.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Study #5: Matthew 4:18-25

Week 5 - **Week of February 12th**

Community Group calendar: **Study #5**

Text: **Matthew 4:18-25**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study
- Listen to sermon preached on February 12th
- Group discussion during week of February 13th

Matthew 4:18-25 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. **19** And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

First Reading: Observations

1. What questions do you have concerning this text? For example, “Why is this point important?” “How does this passage relate to the surrounding passages?” “Why did Jesus respond in this way?”
2. What is the context? What has happened before this passage? Does this passage seem to be starting a new section in the book? Or is it continuing what has gone before?
3. List all characters in the text and whether they are major or minor.
4. How do these characters relate to Jesus? What do they call him? How do they respond to him? How does Jesus respond to them?
5. Where does this scene take place? (You may have to look at the surrounding context.)

Second Reading: Taking a Deeper Look

Matthew 4:17 is an important marker in the Gospel of Matthew. In 1:1-4:16 Matthew gives background information about Jesus and tells the story of Jesus' forerunner John the Baptist. But in 4:17 Matthew records that "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" This essentially marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and thus Matthew 4:18-25 records the initial steps of that ministry. As can be seen from the text, His first step was to call disciples. However, Craig Keener points out that "early Jewish and Greek tradition most frequently assumes that disciples are responsible for acquiring their own teachers of the law or philosophy."¹⁷

1. In light of the above information, what is the significance of Jesus calling His own disciples? What does this communicate about Jesus?

2. Read Matthew 4:18-22. What are both sets of brothers doing when Jesus calls them? How do they respond?

3. What is the significance of how both sets of brothers respond? What does this tell us about Jesus? How should we respond to Jesus?

¹⁷ Keener, 150.

4. Because of both Matthew 3:2 and 4:17, John and Jesus' ministries are displayed as parallel. However, compare Matthew 3:3, 11-12 with 4:18-22. What do you notice as different about John and Jesus' ministries?

5. How does Jesus explain that the brothers' job descriptions will be altered?

6. D. A. Carson points out that "there is a straight line from this commission [i.e. to become fishers of men] to the Great commission (28:18-20)."¹⁸ Read Matthew 28:18-20. With this in mind, how should we understand what it means to be a 'fisher of men'?

Many commentators point out that Jesus may be purposely alluding to Jeremiah 16:16-21 when He says that his disciples will be "fishers of men."¹⁹ What is interesting about this possible allusion is that in Jeremiah 16:16 the fishers are catching men for the purpose of sending the Israelites into exile. In other words the fishers of men in the book of Jeremiah are sent out for the purpose of judgment. In fact, what is important to note is that in the time of Jesus' day many Jews considered themselves to still be in exile, or

¹⁸ Carson, 119-120;

¹⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 149; Carson, 119; David L. Turner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 136.

under judgment. Even though many Israelites had returned to the land, they still looked for what was called the “age to come” where God would restore His relationship with the people of Israel, liberate them from their oppressors, and set up the true King over them.²⁰

7. In light of the above information and your answer to question 6, in what way is Jesus’ call to his disciples reversing the “fishers of men” in Jeremiah 16:16? What is the significance of this reversal?

8. In light of your answer to question 6 and 7, do you think there is any significance to Jesus sending his disciples “to all nations” in Matthew 28:19?

9. How do you think your answers to the last three questions help us understand how we should think about the Kingdom of Heaven?

²⁰N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 299-307.

10. What are different aspects Matthew lists as being a part of Jesus' ministry in verse 23.

11. We mentioned above that 4:17 marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry. What do you think is the significance of Jesus' ministry beginning with the calling of disciples and then the summary of Jesus' acts in verses 23-25?

12. The geographic spread listed in 4:24-25 includes both Jewish and Gentile regions, and shows that though Jesus was in Galilee, His ministry was extending far beyond that region. How does the geographic spread and the aspects of Jesus' ministry from question 10 inform how we should think about the Kingdom of Heaven?

Third Reading: Concluding Study

1. What do you think the main point/message of this passage is?
2. How do you think this passage primarily applies to your life?

For Those Who Want More

Summary of the Plot

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus calls two sets of brothers who leave everything behind to follow Jesus. In this call Jesus promises that in following Him they will become "fishers of men." Matthew then depicts Jesus as also preaching and healing so that His fame spreads through various regions.

Important Points from the Text

With the call of the disciples to be fishers of men Jesus has assembled the means through which He is going to call God's people out of exile and into restoration. Better said, Jesus here is marking the reversal of the roles of the fishermen. Instead of being used by God to gather Israel for exile (Jer. 16:16), they are now being used by Jesus to gather His people into a restored relationship with Him. This understanding is supported by the fact that Matthew has spent a great deal of time making references to the exile in the first four chapters. This is first found in the genealogy of 1:1-17 where Matthew draws our attention to the end of David's sons' reign with the deportation of God's people to Babylon. Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15 in Matthew 2:18, which in its context speaks of the return from exile. In Matthew 3:3 Isaiah 40:3 is quoted, which speaks of the future salvation of the people out of exile. And Isaiah 9:1-2 is quoted in Matthew 5:14-16, which speaks of a son of David King sitting on Israel's restored throne. Thus, before this passage Matthew has already established that Jesus will fulfill the promised restoration. And so with the call of the first disciples

Jesus has begun the gathering of God's people out of exile and into the restored relationship that they have been longing for. However, Jesus says that they will be fishers of "men," not just "Israel." Moreover, in the great commission Jesus calls His disciples to "make disciples of all nations." The Kingdom of Heaven, or the return from exile, therefore reaches far beyond the borders of Israel and includes all people. Since the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, all people can now be restored to God!

The global scale of the Kingdom of Heaven is further seen in verses 23-25. Here we see Jesus both preach and heal in Galilee. However, while Matthew records that Jesus only remained in Galilee, His fame spreads through Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, from Jerusalem to Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Ways This Speaks Into Our Lives

Since the exile did not just mark the removal from Israel's land, but the severing of Israel's relationship with God, the end of the exile marks the restoration of this relationship. However, Matthew shows Jesus' restoration with God reaches a global scale, and that Jesus also offers to restore all people's broken relationship with God. The entrance of sin into the world, and the presence of sin in our lives, means that each one of us has been separated and alienated from God and are under His just judgment. But in following Jesus Christ, our broken relationship with God can be restored.

Theme:

Jesus' ministry marks the beginning of the restoration with God.

Aim:

Follow and bring others to follow Jesus Christ, who offers to restore all people to God.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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