

THE “SECOND” GOSPEL

**A Study of the Gospel of Matthew
2017
Lent**

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Matthew

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A Gospel with No Name!

Sounds strange doesn't it? No one is willing to come forward and take responsibility. No one! It will for all time - remain anonymous. Names were added. Names were not given at the time of writing.

Adding a name to it, adding an identity is just too dangerous. If Jesus was killed and put to a horrendous kind of death – what makes anyone think the gospel writer, the recorder of history will not be next?

Anonymous is safe.

The twelve were in hiding for their safety and no one batted an eye.

A gospel writer – writes anonymously and people go crazy. You do not understand.

We want a name they said. We must know who wrote it? How can we tell it if it is authentic or not? How do we know if this is a valid witness or not? How do we know the author saw and heard such things...?

For his sake, for the sake of his loved ones, for the sake of his entire household he must remain anonymous...

You do of course, realize that all of the gospels are this way, not just Matthew's...names were assigned at a much later time, during the second century or so...and once names were given...they were cemented in place for all time.

I have to tell you, there is new scholarly work that is ongoing. I personally do not put any stock in their work and I may indeed be proven wrong.

Future archeological digs will tell us in the future. Not now, not yet...not today...but perhaps tomorrow or the day after that...

At any rate, there presently is a group of scholars who are making the contention that all four gospels were written and in circulation before the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70CE.

While this is very alluring and indeed wishful thinking, there is no concrete proof. There is absolutely nothing to substantiate these new claims.

And of course, you do realize the “Fall of Jerusalem” is the key to their writings...if these were in fact, written after the fall...where is there mention of the devastation?

If these were written all before the fall of Jerusalem why are there statements about not one stone being

on top of another? All will be thrown down? Does not Jesus prophesize these events before they happen?

Scholars are of course divided. Of course they are. Why wouldn't they be, they are divided on practically everything...

Most scholars say (more than 90 % of them) that the gospels were written after the fall of Jerusalem...Mark's gospel...the first gospel...may just be the exception to that...but then, maybe not!

Many scholars will tell you all of the gospels were written after the fall of Jerusalem...after the 70 CE date.

Mark is the questionable one. Mark is probably the exception to the rule or so most scholars believe.

But Matthew, Matthew was certainly written after the fall...as a matter of fact, dependent upon which scholar you read...Matthew may be dated as late as 80 - 85 CE... which is really quite late...

So, just so you are aware, there is this new thinking out there – that says all the gospels were written before the year 70 CE.

Do with that information, what you will. Feel free to jump into the debate, as you see fit.

What we know:

Matthew or Levi was a tax collector.

Why was this gospel attributed to him?

He was a known person.

He could both read and write. He had to keep ledgers and books for Rome.

He was hated and despised as a tax collector.

Why would Jesus ever select one such as him, to be among the twelve? People could not understand it...they could not fathom the logic behind his being chosen. Tax collectors were chief among sinners. They were notorious. They were unclean. They were doubly hated and despised as they collected exorbitant amounts of money from their fellow Jews and they worked for the hated Romans.

And yet his literacy made sense for an author.

Any name could have been attached to this writing...but Matthew was the chosen name, why?

Whomever the author – he freely plagiarized about 90% of Mark's gospel. Very little is unique to the author.

Some of his writing seems to come from a grouping of various sayings, parables and stories about Jesus from the time.

This grouping if it was ever in written form, has been lost to us. If it was in oral form, we may have some of it in Matthew's gospel. This is usually referred to as "Q" for source. It is an unknown source, at this time. Matthew and Luke seem to have the unknown source in common.

Then there is material here that is not found in Mark, not found in Luke...which scholars believe is Matthew's own source...called "M" for Matthew. This may be first hand eye witness stuff...or then again maybe not. It too could just be fluid stories passed around and not written down.

All of this material is peculiar to the author, because he is the one that takes and shapes and forms it.

One thing most scholars agree upon – is that whoever the author was – he was very likely a Jew himself. He seems to have good knowledge of the Torah or the first five books of Moses. He also knew something of the prophecies of old.

The author liked to do research; he liked to dig a little bit. He liked to make connections where he could.

Again – whoever the author was he believed that much of the life of Jesus was already foretold in the Hebrew Bible. It was right there in black and white. All you had to do, was read it. And if you could not make the connection and draw the dots yourself...then this author was going to help you out. He would connect the dots for you...

The information was all there...you just had to be willing to look for it, which most people were not!

So Matthew did his research, he checked out the ancient scrolls.

He read Isaiah 7.ff, he checked out Micah. He rummaged his way through Hosea and he read Zechariah with a critical eye. It was all there, you just had to read and see for yourself...

So, we know who ever the author was...he knew his way around the Hebrew Bible...

The author saw Jesus as he was really was...dirt poor from his birth on...he liked his humble beginnings...

The author also had a real love for the Jewish people. He wanted them saved. He wanted them to see Jesus as he really was. He wanted them to love his Lord.

The anonymous author was also hard on the Jews, too! He thought they may have to be awakened from their sleep in order to see Jesus in the right light.

They obviously had logs in their eyes and could not see.

The word messiah is best translated as being the “anointed one.” Anointed for what? Anointed one of God...anointed for God...set apart for God. In Hebrew the word is Messiah, in the Greek the same exact word is “Christ.” Both mean anointed one...anointed and set apart for God...

The author of this gospel was concerned both with the Jews and also with the Gentiles. As a matter of fact, this gospel has been called a teaching manual for evangelism...for reaching out to others...and at the same time, it is divided into five distinct books like the Torah or Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses...

So the author has concern for both Jew and Gentile alike...you cannot miss the words of Jesus at the end of the gospel when he sends the disciples “out” to literally all people, all races, all tribes of peoples.

They are sent out to make disciples. This is the gospel of discipleship. This is the gospel that tells you how to do it.

Go out and evangelize. Go out two-by-two.

Take no money, no bag, no walking stick, stay where you are welcomed, if you are not welcomed take back your peace...preach the good news, heal the sick, etc...

Go to every town and village...stop at every shopping mall...take one tunic...but wash it out frequently! Use soap, wash your hands, you've got this! Just go!

For you Jews out there, Jesus was just like Moses only bigger and better than Moses...Moses was not a Son of God, as obviously Jesus was.

Jesus was without sin.

Jesus was God's anointed one.

Jesus was more than a prophet.

Jesus was more than a law giver...

Jesus was more than a spokesman for God.

Jesus was God in the flesh.

God with us...Emmanuel.

Jesus was one with God.

Jesus is the beloved of God.

Jesus is the Son.

You do realize that Jesus forever-altered the law, “resist one who is evil” ...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” ...as this author saw it, Jesus came not to drown the old law out, as the Jews supposed, but to make it sing all new --- like the sound of an angel...

This strange author was a tinkerer – he tinkered around with everything that Mark wrote...

Jesus according to Mark was way too human...way too much like the boy next door...Jesus could have been anybody’s son...

This Matthean author wannabe wanted Jesus to look better, more godly, less like David, the boy next door...he also wanted to eradicate emotionalism out of him.

This is God.

He must act and sound like a God...however it is - that a God is supposed to sound like. God’s do not show trivial emotions...God’s are much more stoic...God’s are not necessarily empathetic...so ever so slightly he changes things...

Nuances matter.

Details matter...but not too much detail.

This is the remake of Jesus of Nazareth – part two! A little shading here, a little bit more shading there...a subtle change every now and again...

It was as if, photo-shop was available to him and the author was utilizing everything he could of it...

I imagine him photo-air brushing...make up...relighting....face and skin tone enhancement, face sculpting and chiseling....teeth whitening and halo straightening...all these things would have been extremely important for this author...

He wanted to get it right...

He hoped to get it perfect.

After all, look who he was dealing with as his main character...you had to be careful!

By the time he ends his story, he makes sure that he ends it the way he wants to...

He ends on the same note that was so important to him in the beginning.

Jesus is God.

Jesus is with us now and forever.

Jesus is Emmanuel.

Jesus sends us out to all people as evangelists...

We are to “Go!”

There is no time for sitting and wondering about anything.

Get up and Go.

**Quit watching TV, quit playing on your cell phone –
Go and make disciples...**

Step away from the computer...

Get up and Go...

What don't you understand here?

This gospel is an action gospel.

Do something...

Make disciples...Go!

Where to Start?

Ramblings and Ponderings...

How about with the babe of Bethlehem...you know, ol' Immanuel. Remember the promise of the angel?

I think it went something like this... "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means or is translated, "God with us."

Immanuel also spelled correctly as Emmanuel. The name is the same Hebrew form - as it was two thousand years ago. And it means the same thing!

"Immanu" means "with us."

"El" refers to Elohim, or to God. And for the record, this is not an "above us – out there God" nor is this a "somewhere in the neighborhood God." (Sorry Mr. Rodgers!) He came as the "with us God." God with us. I think that means always...forever...and even longer...

This is not a "God with the rich" or "God with the 1%"...this is not "God with the super religious" or with "the religious right"...this is not the "God with the underdog" although by my preaching I might confuse some of you on that one!

This is the “God with us” ...I think that means he is all inclusive. The God with all of us!

This means Russians, Germans, Buddhists, Mormons, Evangelicals, Truck Drivers, Librarians and Traffic cops! God with us! All of us, no exceptions...sorry, I know there are people that many of us would not like to see included...but it simply does not work that way!

**This is the realm of God. Not you or I.
God with us! Don't we love the word “with.”**

Will you go with me, we ask? To the hospital, to the doctor, to the store – shopping, throughout life?

**I am with you always, Jesus said, before he ascended into heaven...to the very end of the age...
With...**

1. PREPOSITION

1. accompanied by (another person or thing):

"A nice steak with a bottle of red wine"

Synonyms: accompanied by · escorted by · in the company of

2. possessing (something) as a feature or accompaniment:

"A flower-sprigged blouse with a white collar"

3. indicating the instrument used to perform an action:

"Cut it with a knife" ·

"Treatment with acid before analysis"

4. in opposition to:

**"We started fighting with each other"
God with us...**

1. indicating the manner or attitude of the person doing something:

"With great reluctance"

2. indicating responsibility:

"Leave it with me"

3. in relation to:

"My father will be angry with me"

4. employed by:

"She's with IBM now"

· as a member or employee of:

"He plays with the Cincinnati Cyclones"

· using the services of:

"I bank with the TSB"

5. affected by (a particular fact or condition):

"With no hope" ·

"In bed with lumbago"

· indicating the cause of an action or condition:

"Trembling with fear" ·

"The paper was yellow with age"

6. indicating separation or removal from something:

"To part with one's dearest possessions" ·

"Their jobs could be dispensed with"

ORIGIN

Old English, probably a shortening of a Germanic preposition related to obsolete English wither 'adverse, opposite.'

With love,

Go ahead; search for restrictions on this promise...with you always...see if you can find any restrictions whatsoever...I bet you can't! There aren't any! It is restriction free.

With you...means with you....

You will not find, I will be with you...if you behave...

I will be with you...when you believe enough...

I will be with youwhen you have faith...

I will be with you ...when you pray to me...

I will be with you...on Sunday's in worship...

Nope, none of that is to be found. There's no withholding tax on God's "with" promise. He is with us! He is with all of us. Good and bad alike!

God is with us...

Matthew says it, I believe it, that settles it!

Prophets were not enough. Apostles wouldn't quite do. Angels will not suffice.

God sent millions of miracles our way. God sent a ka-trillion messages are way. It didn't matter. It didn't cut it. It wasn't enough.

So ultimately, he sent himself. He sent his Son. He came and lived among us.

John (my favorite Gospel – ahem!) says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Diaper rash and colic and all...burping baby Jesus...

Can you see Mary sending Joseph out at 11:30 P.M. looking for Aquaphor Baby Diaper Rash Crème, Bayer A+D Original Diaper Rash Ointment, Desitin Maximum Strength, Balmey, Dr. Smith's Diaper Rash Cream?

Ok so the Falcons almost had it...until they fell asleep and rested comfortably on their laurels with a 28-3 lead. The Patriots woke up at half time (that must have been some “talkin’ to” they had- in the locker room) ... 25 (plus) unanswered points and an overtime – sudden death match, too boot! With, yes I said “with” an additional 6 pts thrown on the ending....

Did you know? That Brady's income in 2017 prior to this SuperBowl win was \$14,000,000 with a cap set at \$22,000,000...now add to that his fifth win and 5 titles...and see what the dude is worth now.....Yikes! 4 Super Bowl MVP's!!!!!!!

But I digress... (Far be it for me to do so!)

Sorry, digressions happen!

So, each December Christians look back on the mind-boggling events of that very first Christmas –angel armies, appearing to awestruck shepherds, the star of Bethlehem guiding the Magi, and of course, the star of the whole show – the baby in the manger...wrapped in swaddling clothes...

I was wondering what happens when you poop and pee in swaddling clothes in the first century? And, it's the only swaddling clothes you have...

Does this entail a quick run to the riverbed? Or the watering buckets for the livestock? Did they hang out on a wash-line? Just what did they do? Over the back of a chair? And, just what did you do in the meantime? Was Jesus a naturalist?

Does anybody else ponder about these things...or is it just me?

I wonder how many folks are celebrating what the scripture really says, that God took on flesh and made his dwelling (or pitched his tent) among us?

Or, is it a birthday party for Jesus...with a little Saint Nick thrown in for good measure.

What do we celebrate? Kris Kringle? Santa Claus?

Or is it all about the presents...and just saying Merry Christmas, because that now, apparently, is politically correct again?

Happy Holidays, everybody...seems somehow lacking...

So then, this unknown artist, formerly known as being @\$%^&*^%\$#@! Apparently writes to his fellow Jews, this guy begins his Gospel by demonstrating that Jesus descended (humanly speaking) from both Abraham and King David. He then discusses some of the circumstances surrounding Jesus' virginal birth and stormy infancy.

It has been stated by someone far more profound than I, that if we ever begin to doubt God's love for us, we need to look no further than to the child of Bethlehem.

That's no mere infant lying there in the feeding trough meant for animals – he's the "Deity in a Diaper." I like that! I wonder if that implies that his FATHER-the Ancient of Days is in/on Depends?

It probably would have been so much easier if they had just had: Huggies, Pampers, New Cruiser's (Pampers) Luvs, Honest, Pull ups, Goodnites or Bambo Nature...but nooooooooooooooooooooo, they had to have swaddling clothes...lame!

So I have to say a word or two or 4,389 about the Genealogy. I have to.

Did you know among all the men in this patriarchal male-dominated society there are five female names thrown into the mix?

**And now without good reason...
I love this stuff....**

Why women....

Why these women...

Oh my!

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary! That's four! All women, too...mentioned in a Man's genealogy...but what kind of women were they?

Well it all depends who you read...and their individual takes...

It is of considerable interest to observe that there are the names of these women in the genealogical record of Matthew, and although no historical events are mentioned in connection with a number of the men whose names are there, the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us something of the history of each of these women.

We get why Mary would be there...she is...well, the Christ-bearer, the Mother of our Lord, the Virgin Mary,

Mary with the cherry....you get the point...but the rest...oi vey!

The first of these women is Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah who, it would seem, was a daughter of the Canaanites, like her mother-in-law.

Abraham had been most careful regarding the choice of a wife for Isaac, she was not to be a daughter of the Canaanites;

But Isaac had evidently not interfered with Esau's choice when he took as wives daughters of the Hittites, though they were a grief of mind to him.

Jacob was charged by Isaac not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, but Jacob does not appear to have been concerned when Judah was united to the Canaanites by Shuah, or when he took Tamar to be the wife of his eldest son, Er.

There is much instruction for Christians in all this: how very careful we should be as to our associations, both for ourselves and for our children. [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](#) is a Scripture on which we should ponder in relation to this important subject.

¹⁴ Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? ¹⁵

What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we^b are the temple of the living God; as God said,

**“I will live in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.**

**¹⁷ Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,**

**¹⁸ and I will be your father,
and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”**

Tamar's husband "was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him." His brother, Onan, also invoked the Lord's displeasure, in his dealings with Tamar, and he too was slain.

Tamar had the natural desire for children, and was evidently content to wait till Judah's third son was old enough to be her husband, which seemed to show that she valued her place in the family of Jacob.

But the action of Tamar in waylaying Judah was not one that sprang from faith in God, even if she valued a place in the family where there was the knowledge of the true God.

Humanly speaking, the act of Tamar was more righteous than that of Judah as he confessed; but they were alike morally, partners in a grievous sin.

Conduct such as this might suit the families of the Canaanites, but it was abhorrent to the holiness of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those dang Canaanites, they will fool ya every time! Buyer Beware!

It might be difficult for us to rightly assess the true worth of Tamar.

Her desire for children was a right one, and we can admire her valuation of a place in the family where God's Name was known, and the righteous and trusting qualities evinced in her patient waiting in widowhood;

but her actions to achieve her ends cannot be condoned, both because of the lack of confidence in God and for the unnatural character of the sin.

Her deceit manifested the natural scheming that is only too common among those who have been brought into a place of divine privilege; it savored of the guile that marked Laban, and that came out in Rebekah and Jacob when they deceived Isaac.

How apt we are naturally to seek to obtain divine blessing in our own way. AKA-aint we sumthan'?

In spite of her birth, her deceit, and her grave sin, Tamar received a place in the most honored genealogical line in human history. Ya gotta wonder who she paid off?

It may be that beneath all the activities of the flesh there was a genuine faith in the God of Jacob, and a real, divinely implanted desire to be associated with those who knew the God of Abraham and of Isaac.

Or maybe she was just a cheap whore! Today we get to call a spade a spade.

Whether this was so or not, we do know that in the sovereignty of His grace God marked out Tamar, in spite of all that she was and did, to have her name associated with so many honored names in Scripture, and with the most honored, the Name of Jesus, the blessed Son of God.

Divine grace and mercy can rise above all that we are naturally, and all that we have done, to give us part with Christ before the Father's face even now, and to share Christ's place in the coming day of glory, and in the Father's house for evermore.

Ok fine, there are prostitutes in heaven, that settles that one!

God has not only given the history of Rahab in the Book of Joshua, but the commentary of the Holy Spirit in [Hebrews 11](#), "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies in peace."

What would be accounted an act of treason by men is viewed in its true light, by the Searcher of hearts, as an act of faith.

God like harlots, whores and prostitutes...go God!

Rahab believed that the living God was with the armies of Israel, and that Israel were His people, and she risked her life that she might be saved when the vengeance of God overtook the guilty nations of Canaan.

What a change it meant for Rahab!

She left behind in the judged and ruined city of Jericho a life of sin to have part with the people of God, and to be chosen of God, not only to live in the royal tribe, but to be in the royal line,

the grandmother of Boaz, who was to be the great-grandfather of King David.

No provision was made in the law of Moses for bringing a Canaanite, under any circumstances, into the congregation of the Lord; they were to be utterly destroyed ([Deut. 20:16, 17](#)); but God's sovereign mercy prevailed in Rahab's case to bring her into a place of blessing beyond any-thing she ever could have conceived.

Obviously, exceptions are made to every rule!

And does not Rahab's case indicate what God has done for us? In [Ephesians 2](#) we are called to remember "that ye, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Such was our state and portion before God's sovereign mercy reached us; "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (verses 11-18).

The story of Ruth (Yeah my blessed mother's namesake) --- see the banner up front! ...the Moabitess is well known, the Holy Spirit recording the charming account of how she came to be identified with God's people Israel.

Herself a widow, she chose to be the companion of a broken-hearted, dispirited, lonely widowed-mother, whose sons had died, to share her sorrows and her hardships, and to sweeten the bitter cup of "Marah" by sustaining her with what she gleaned in the harvest fields.

Her noble choice is found in the exquisite words,

"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." This was a song sung at Ruth and Wally's wedding...or so I have been told. (Sorry I wasn't there!) Missed it!

She chose a path contrary to nature; one that could only have been taken by the drawing power of God.

Her sister-in-law, Orpah, took the natural way, returning to her people and her gods, and we hear of her no more.

Ruth, with single-eyed devotion and affection turns to the land of Israel, and to the God of Israel, and her actions are indelibly written in moral and royal glory on the pages of divine inspiration.

Having cast in her lot with Naomi, Ruth was content to leave herself in her hands, first requesting to be allowed to glean in the corn fields, then obeying her mother-in-law in all that she asked her to do.

Her happening to light in the fields of Boaz was no doubt directed, though she knew it not, by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings she had come to trust.

Or, she simply had the hots for the guy and would follow him anywhere...

Little did Ruth realize what blessings were involved in the words of Boaz, when he said to her, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel."

There was no evidence at that time of the blessings that were so soon to be hers in relation to Boaz, or in the distant prospect of her relationship with the Messiah, himself.

A Moabite, says the Law of Moses, "shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever" ([Deut. 23:3](#)); yet Ruth chose to be identified with Israel, and was accepted by Yahweh-God. Truly, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Ruth had a very different character naturally from Rahab, for, said Boaz to Ruth, "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

(Even though she crawled into the sack with Boaz before they were married)...bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves, we will go rejoicing...

bringing in the sheaves...a little Jack Daniels doesn't hurt either!

But it needed the same sovereign grace to bring into the families of Israel, and into the royal line, the dissolute Canaanite, and the virtuous Moabite. Neither had a claim naturally to divine blessing; both were excluded by the law.

It was divine grace that blessed them, and faith that enabled them to seek to be associated with God's people. With them, we have proved that God "is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Like Ruth, we have the present blessings of grace, and in the ages to come "the exceeding riches of His grace."

What happened to Bathsheba's children reminds us of the Scripture, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God" ([Rom. 11:22](#)).

And Bathsheba, the naked chick in the bathtub!

The child that was born of David's sin was smitten by the Lord, and he died; but her second child, Solomon, was chosen of God to succeed David as King of Israel. When this child was born, "he called his name Solomon, and the Lord loved him; and he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah (Beloved of Yah – short for Yahweh), because of the Lord" ([2 Sam. 12:24, 25](#)).

It was God's love for Solomon, sovereign love, that put him on the throne.

Excuse me a minute, time out, my throne is calling....just kidding...

According to the law, as the wife of a Hittite, Bathsheba would have no place in the congregation of the Lord;

And we might have thought that her guilty relationship with David would have for ever excluded her from the privileges conferred by a holy God.

She is not presented to us with the faith of a Rahab, or with the beautiful traits of a Ruth; but as one that in spite of the dishonor that stained her name, was taken up by God in the sovereignty of His grace to bring forth a child to sit upon David's throne, herself through sovereign grace a progenitor of Israel's Messiah.

Funny how they never blame the man...it was all her fault...the King (David) had nothing to do with it....

We might have thought that some other wife of David should have provided the heir to the throne, one without a blemish on her character; but we are taught here, as in many another portion of God's word, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" ([Isa. 55:8, 9](#)).

A blemish on her character, huh?

And David gets a pass???? Hmmmmm.

God often chooses the most unlikely to carry out His will. Who would have thought that God would have chosen unlettered fishermen to be the companions of His Son on earth, and to sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel? Who would have thought that God would choose an erstwhile railing, dying thief, to confess the worth and Name of the Lord while He was on the cross, and to speak of His coming kingdom? Who would have thought that God would call the man at whose feet the clothes of the murderers of Stephen were laid to carry what Stephen had seen, "the glory of God and Jesus," in testimony to the Gentiles, and to lay down his life in fidelity to the One he formerly persecuted?

And who would have thought that God, in His sovereignty, would have chosen such worthless creatures as you and me to live for Christ in this world, and to share His glory in the coming day, and His place of joy and affection in the Father's House for all eternity?

Although Mary, the mother of Jesus, had none of the natural disqualifications of the other women in Matthew's genealogy, the sovereignty of God's grace was manifest in choosing her as it had been in bringing the others into the royal line.

She was not a Canaanite, like Tamar and Rahab, nor a Moabitess, like Ruth, nor had she been united to a Hittite, like Bathsheba: she was of the royal house of David in a descent that the Spirit of God has traced in Luke's Gospel, and she was espoused to one who could show his title to David's throne.

Mary picked well.

Moreover, there were the attractive moral features of Mary. Her ready acceptance of the angelic message evinces her quiet and simple confidence in God and in His word, and her meek and gentle spirit pours out its praise in the delightful words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

We like our women meek and mild, barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen where they belong!

While rejoicing in her blessing, saying,

"From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed";

There is no attempt to magnify herself; all her praise is to God who had so "highly favored" her, the God who acts in sovereign mercy towards the poor in filling "the hungry with good things," and sending the rich empty away. He is a God who helps His servant Israel, "in remembrance of His mercy."

Plagiarism! Plagiarism! Plagiarism!

The counsels of eternity, and many the Hebrew Bible Scriptures were to be fulfilled in Mary's child; and God, in sovereign goodness had chosen a vessel, and a suited vessel, for the conception of "the holy thing."

Even the time of Messiah's coming into the world had been accurately foretold in Daniel's prophecy, and Isaiah had written, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His Name Immanuel."

When Leah had borne her fourth son, "she said, Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah," which means "Praise."

And how much more suitable were the praises that hailed the coming and birth of Mary's child!

Praises from Mary, praises from Elizabeth, praises from Zacharias, praises from the heavenly host, praises from the aged Simeon and from Anna, and the adoration of the magi that God had brought from afar.

Very soon there shall be a universe of bliss, filled with the praises of God and the Lamb, and all resulting from the coming into the world of Mary's child, the blessed Son of God.

While awaiting our part in the praises of that happy day, for us the eternal day, it is our privilege, as knowing the sovereign grace of God that has blessed us in association with Christ to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually," and, in the assembly, to join in the praises that the Son leads to the Father.

Yadda, yadda, yadda...

Was that another digression on my part?

Nah, it was simply informing you about the five ladies, in the genealogy of Jesus...all five were suspect...all five had bad reputations...all five were very sexual for the time...and all five have come down through the ages as being a wee bit promiscuous.

And Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, is added to their number-what's up with that?

And these are mentioned along side of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – who we know of course, were nothing but saints themselves....

We need someone holy...someone righteous...someone good...enter one Jesus of Nazareth/Bethlehem/ Capernaum or wherever he was from?

Dare we add in Egypt? He wouldn't get a passport today, much less a visa, nor would he be welcomed in the United States...he would look too much like an Arab...and that beard – oi vey! Keep him out...him and his types...

He would fit the stereotypes.

Stereotypes play an important role in today's society and particularly in Propaganda. According to the Webster's Dictionary stereotyping is defined as a fixed conventional notion or conception of an individual or group of people, held by a number of people. Stereotypes can be basic or complex generalizations which people apply to individuals or groups based on their appearance, behavior and beliefs. Stereotypes are found everywhere. Though our world seems to be improving in many ways it seems almost impossible to liberate it from stereotypes.

Stereotypes have existed since the beginning of time in our everyday life through religion, politics and the media. Humans have the tendency to "use stereotypes in their humor, their descriptions of others, and even in their beliefs."

So, the Deity in Diapers grows up...but there is at least one adolescent tales to be told first.

It is that pubescent –maturing-zit faced young man of 12 ½ who goes off with his parents for his Bar-Mitzvah in Jerusalem. He leaves a boy and comes home a man with some pretty good tales to tell about the in between time.

**Like where did he go?
Where did he stay?
What did he eat?**

Did he stay ritually clean?

What was that whole discussion thingy with the Rabbi's about?

Who taught whom?

And why doesn't a 12 ½ year old man better communicate with his parents?

To tell you what actually happened in all actuality: This highly motivated, young scholar of all things Biblical was in need of a sabbatical away from his ever droning parents and in very much need of some scholarly stimulation, so being spirit led at the time of his manhood coming into blossom-he was transposed to the Temple Mount to the hall of the wise-ones where he enlightened and was further enlightened himself...by the musings of others. It was a delightful tete-a-tete and he astounded all those with whom he spoke, because of his vast wisdom and knowledge. His parents were both told this would take place in a dream, complete with angelic host, but unfortunately the next morning remembered nothing, save the drool on their pillows.

It was actually not his fault. His parents obviously cared about the young man so much, that they did not even notice his absence for a couple of days journey.

A little less wine before retiring for the night and perhaps a little family time around the table at meal times could have solved this dilemma immediately.

But obviously the parents had other needs to be met at the time.

Then there was the whole baptism thing.

Even more certain than death, hunger and taxes...speaking of which, you have extra time this year...because April 15th falls on Holy Saturday...get them in now, the sooner they are in the quicker the money bounces in your pocket.

Beat the rush, file early!

I think that was another digression. As I was saying even more certain than yadda, yadda, yadda, is temptation. Temptations come to all of us.

Temptations are an equal opportunity problem...Republican or Democrat, KKK, or Southern Baptist, temptations are sure to come...

And even worse than that, as someone has quipped, temptations are like stray cats --- treat one nicely; and before you can blink, it will be back with at least a dozen of its friends.

Describe for yourself – the process of being lured into sin? What is it like? Did the “devil make you do it?” Or did you walk in – wide eyed and bushytailed of your own accord?

Well, Matthew, like the other gospel writers, wastes little time in getting to the Beginning of Jesus' public ministry...but first there is this small little road trip, that is first necessary.

Matthew describes Jesus' baptism and his temptation in the wilderness....even though we realize, Matthew was not physically there at the time, or even called as a disciple yet...that is, if his name is indeed Matthew...

Then, we watch as Jesus chooses some disciples or students and as he begins to publicly teach, preach, proclaim the "good news" about the Kingdom of heaven.

We are voyeurs!

We watch from the outside in...

We are first century stalkers...

We hide in the bushes...

We observe...

We do not want to get caught...

Stealthily we watch what goes on ... from the outside!

We imagine the wilderness temptation as three isolated events scattered over a forty-day period of time.

Would that it have been?

But it wasn't in the cards...

In reality, Jesus' time of testing was non-stop, in spite of what the scripture says, "The devil tempted Jesus for forty days."

Satan got-on-Jesus-like-a-shirt...and refused to leave.

Every step – there was this guy, whispering in his ear. With every step...every step...

Every turn of the path, the voice was there...sowing doubt...always doubt...continual doubt.

Was Jesus impacted by the devil?

Apparently so.

Luke (a different gospel writer) doesn't say that Satan "tried" to tempt Jesus. The verse does not read: the devil attempted to tempt Jesus.

No, the passage is quite clear.

The devil tempted Jesus. Jesus was tempted, Jesus was tested, and it was on-going.

Tempted to change sides?

Tempted to go home?

Tempted to settle down and raise a family?

Tempted to settle for a kingdom here on earth?

Tempted to give up his son ship?

Jesus was tempted and it was on-going...

A wage warred within.

Stress stormed without.

**Stress is not just something of our time and era.
And since he was tempted, he could have quit. He
could have walked away. He could have quit the race.
But he didn't. He kept running...
One foot in front of the other, all over Galilee, Samaria
and then on to Judea.**

He did not jump ship.

**Did he want to? Now there is a question. A question
that we cannot answer.**

29 pages and I am still pondering...a mini-digression!

**Temptation didn't stop him, nor did accusations. Can
you imagine what it would be like to be on this journey
and to be criticized by all of the bystanders?**

**Supposing as you journey you heard words of
accusation and not a word of encouragement from
anyone? It happens. All kinds of people face put-
downs every single day of their life.**

**They are never good enough.
Never intelligent enough.
They have nothing going for themselves...
They are alone...**

In John's gospel, the fourth to be written, people say everything and anything to Jesus...

I can relate.

People have no filters today.

People are mean.

They are horrible.

They say whatever they want – and they think it is ok.

It is not!

In John's gospel, Jesus hears words like:

(John 7.12) – “Hey liar! Why don't you do something honest with your life?”

(John 8. 48) – “Here comes the foreigner. Why don't you go home where you belong?”

(John 8.48) – “Since when do they let children of the devil enter the race?”

People, people, you know better...I know you do.

This is what happened to Jesus. It was continual. Not just one or two or three temptations and then none. It was all of his life...or so we speculate.

You do realize his own family called him a lunatic.

His own brothers and sisters wanted nothing to do with him. Only on one occasion did the family try for an intervention with him.

His neighbors treated him worse than his own family.

When Jesus returned to his hometown, they tried to throw him off a cliff to his death and demise. But Jesus didn't give up. He kept his eye on the prize. He knew who he was; he knew where he was headed...

**Temptations did not deter him.
Accusations did not defeat him.
Shame did not dishearten him.**

**Look to Jesus...he has been there...he has lead the way...whatever it is that you are going through, he understands...
Look to Jesus.**

For some of us, there is great comfort and help in Matthew's account of Jesus' temptations...especially if we see them as on-going and continuous.

**Three temptations are nothing. Temptations are continual. In Jesus' case, it was as if, the whole of creation stood against him.
Can you believe I am still pondering...and all of this is in one sitting? My back is sore and my fingers are tired...but I guess you could say, I am on a roll!**

I would imagine that in his humanity – Jesus was ravenous and exhausted, and the devil slyly moved in to try and exploit his vulnerable condition. Isn't that always the way? When we are the most vulnerable?

Nothing in the text suggests there were only three temptations and that this encounter with Satan was a quick – five minute ordeal. Satan's wilderness attack was tricky and relentless. But Jesus resisted...I guess that is supposed to suggest to us, that we have a victorious Savior who knows and understands – what it is like to be wooed and enticed to do the wrong thing.

Lord knows that I am weary and tired of reflecting and pondering and thinking about the Sermon on the Mount...much less homilizing about it. I think I just made up another word. There is a word – homily, so why can't there be a word homil-izing...apparently it is not a real word. I guess I should have used the word preaching...proclaiming...instead.

I didn't! I like homilizing.

Oh well, the point is, that I need to address the Sermon on the Mount...whether I want to – or not! Because it is that VITAL and IMPORTANT in the gospel of Matthew or Bill or Bob or whatever his name was!

Thirty-three pages but who is counting...and over 5,934 words....I think I am becoming a “wordsmith” today!

This is from the get-go.

Having been introduced by Matthew as the long-awaited Messiah/King/Savior – sent by God, Jesus sets forth the standards of his kingdom in the famous Sermon on the Mount.

The ability to pray effectively is among the God-honoring practices expected of those who follow Jesus.

This is my take on prayer – and on praying: When you pray say, O Lord our God, we would give you thanks and praise for this your day.... (Then add your prayer petitions) and conclude with in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Remember “amen” means “so be it.”

Make it so.

Right on, God!

Engage!

But any prayer, no matter how it is stated is better than no prayer at all.

Prayers do not have to be verbal.

In a kind of interesting article – in a major news magazine a couple of years ago – roughly four out of five adults said they pray at least once a week.

Yikes! I pray throughout the day, every day. My prayers are non-stop, continual. The number of people that I pray for throughout the day is astronomical. Suffice it to say it is a lot. Every day.

I cannot imagine praying once a week.

That same survey also revealed that 85% of those who said that they prayed weekly – claimed they do not regularly receive answers to their prayers.

I am not sure that I expect answers.

I just pray. And I keep on praying. I figure, “thy will be done.” I do not expect an answer to me. I just pray that God will do in each and every situation what is best.

Not my call. Not my decision. No answer required! Prayer is a relationship. It is relational. The ball is in God’s court. But then, isn’t it always?

Sometimes I think, people need to check their expectations at the door. They need to rethink their definition of prayer.

It is not about me.

I am out of the equation. I was never in the equation!

For me, it is more about an awareness of God who reigns supreme. I acknowledge him. I humbly come before him. I pray for his will to be done!

I guess I really do not think of prayer as an activity for God that he has to see to immediately, because of my prayer.

I do not control him.

I do not influence him.

But I am in a relationship with him. I do belong to him. I have faith in whatever his will is. He certainly knows better than I do – in each and every situation of life.

I seek to live with him, to love him and to wait on him.

I am just a rookie.

I attempt to acknowledge his presence wherever I am. I do believe he is everywhere that I am. He is with me. Always.

So, Matthew has this section in the Sermon on the Mount on prayer.

I muse myself thinking about the funny place God and I go. He is in my truck.

He doesn't always like my words. Sometimes I apologize to him out loud as I am driving.

I have apologized to him – while waiting in line at the grocery store.

I talk to him when taking out the garbage and while emptying the dishwasher.

I speak to him often about DDFH (aka Moriah Joy.)

I speak to him a lot on the phone, which is not to say I have a “hot line” but rather to say, that when people are talking to me, I am talking to him and praying for them. It is continuous. It is on-going. We are actually in constant communication.

I have never doubted that he hears or that he is listening.

I consider myself a rookie in the League of Unceasing Prayer...it is an awesome journey of togetherness. Often times my prayers are silent. Sometimes I cannot find the words to say, and I totally expect that God will fill in the blanks for me.

He knows what is in my heart and on my mind. Some say, he even knows before I ask. I ask anyway. And I keep on asking. The Bible tells me to be relentless in my asking, and to not worry about it.

I am aware that countless Christians have been strengthened in the area of prayer by learning to follow the A-C-T-S acronym.

A= Adoration

C= Confession

T= Thanksgiving

S= Supplication.

I spend a lot of time on Thanksgiving and Confession. I suppose my supplication are all those prayers for others...it is a long list...a very long list.

My shortfall is adoration. I savor that three times a week on Saturday's – Sunday's – and Wednesday's. It is always with fear and trembling that I approach the altar...and with fear and trembling when I read the gospel...and with fear and trembling when I preach.

I also have fear and trembling when I approach the sacraments.

Matthew does a lot of focusing on the words of Jesus.

That's why for him, the parables are so important.

I have always taught that there are four main areas of Jesus' ministry: For me, they are teaching, healing, miracles and teachings...

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew focuses on the words of Jesus...

As soon as he is through with that, he changes directions and now focuses on the actions of Jesus. Matthew now shines a Hollywood spotlight on Jesus' actions. Dare I say, "Works?" Yikes, and I am a Lutheran...so the word sticks a little in the throat, even as I say it...

But it through assorted miracles and in his relentless concern for empty, hurting and broken people... Jesus was the greatest with these people. He was present. He was there for them. He was a presence.

Jesus consistently displayed what we believe to be divine compassion for those in any kind of need. His acts of mercy and love only accentuate the heartless indifference of Israel's leaders....

The religious of his day, could care less about the plight of others...or at least, so it seemed. They were out for themselves...

They were lining their pockets; they were fleecing the people, with great regularity. For me, it is all about compassion. The compassion of God. It goes back to that unconditional loving. It goes back to agape-love.

If only, we could be more compassionate.

I believe:

**Jesus felt the limp of the cripple.
Jesus felt the hurt of the disease-ravished.
Jesus felt the loneliness and isolation of the leper.
Jesus felt the embarrassment of the sinful.
Jesus felt the darkness and uncertainty of the blind.
Jesus felt the emptiness in the stomachs of the poor.
Jesus felt the loss of the widow and the orphaned.
Jesus felt the lostness and lack of ease of the
stranger.**

**Once he felt their hurts, he had to respond with
everything that was within him.**

**He had to reach out. He had to touch them. He had to
help them heal their hurts. He was moved deep within
his stomach, in his bowels by their needs.**

**He was so affected by the hurts of others, that he put
“his stuff” on the back burner. It was more important
to help the person that stood before you and who was
in great need.**

**There was no one else there. No one else present.
Only the one in need. And their need was great!**

**There is a Greek word. I know, I know, before you say
it, it’s all Greek to me!**

**The word is “splanchnizomai.” It is not going to
mean a whole heck of a lot – unless you are in the
health profession.**

“Splanchnology” is something to be studied. It is a study of a branch of anatomy concerned with the viscera.

This is going to be way more information than you need to know...but hopefully, it will speak to someone.

Splanchnology is the study of the [visceral organs](#), i.e. digestive, urinary, reproductive and respiratory systems.

The term derives from the [Neo-Latin](#) *splancho-*, from the [Greek](#) meaning "viscera". More broadly, splanchnology includes all the components of the Neuro-Endo-Immune (NEI) Supersystem. An organ (or viscus) is a collection of tissues joined in a structural unit to serve a common function.

In anatomy, a viscus is an internal organ, and viscera is the plural form. Organs consist of different tissues, one or more of which prevail and determine its specific structure and function. Functionally related organs often cooperate to form whole organ systems.

Viscera are the soft organs of the body. There are organs and systems of organs that differ in structure and development but they are united for the performance of a common function.

Such functional collection of mixed organs, form an organ system.

These organs are always made up of special cells that support its specific function. The normal position and function of each visceral organ must be known before the abnormal can be ascertained.

Healthy organs all work together cohesively and gaining a better understanding of how, helps to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Some functions cannot be accomplished only by one organ. That is why organs form complex systems. The system of organs is a collection of homogeneous organs, which have a common plan of structure, function, development, and they are connected to each other anatomically and communicate through the NEI supersystem.

There ya go.

But to put it all in words that I can understand – it is a study of your gut. It is all about the gut. The innards...your innards...

Therefore, when Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion on the people, he is not saying that Jesus felt casual pity for them. No the term for compassion is far more graphic. Matthew is saying that Jesus felt the pain and sorrow and the hurt and the emptiness of others deep within his gut.

It was all very visceral. And he had compassion on them.

And it all goes back to the fact that they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things...

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and he healed their sick.

Jesus was feeling, he was compassionate. He felt it deep within his gut and his sides...he hurt for them. He felt that strongly his compassion...

The clear testimony of Scripture, both the Hebrew Bible and the Early Christian Writings, is that God aches when his people hurt.

God feels your pain.

Exodus 2. 23-25 says this: After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

I believe that God enters into our suffering. He always has.

He enters into our suffering, identifying fully with us in our pain. But far more than just experiencing emotions of pity and sorrow, compelled by his compassion, God acts. Not always as we would have him act. But he acts.

Never forget that he sees the larger picture, we see but here and now.

There is perhaps no better demonstration of this, than the life of Jesus. His whole ministry revealed this deep concern in the heart of God that relentlessly goes to any length to bring comfort.

As his followers today, we are called to demonstrate the same kind of “active compassion” for one another...and especially, for “the other.”

Jesus acts.

Jesus shows us his compassion.

Jesus shows us what God is like.

Jesus also shows us – what it is like to be godlike.

Jesus answered the tough questions of his day...the kinds of questions we are still asking today... I guess we should have listened the first time he spoke!

Conventional wisdom in the first century of the Common Era said that people only suffered as a result of divine punishment.

Had a zit – God gave it to you?

Died to young in life – God was responsible.

Miscarried – God caused it...purposefully.

Leper? You deserved it – it was a godsend. People believed this stuff, they ate it up. For every question there was an answer. Born blind, God did it. Yay, God!

Got difficulty in your life? Well for the record that is conclusive evidence or proof that you must not be living in a way that pleases God...and if it is not your doing, then perhaps it is your father's fault, or your grandfathers fault or your great grandfathers fault or your great-great grandfathers fault --- all the way back in time to the third or fourth generation.

Jesus responded. He tried as best as he could to torpedo this kind of thinking by letting his followers know that they should expect a life of persecution.

Obedience to Jesus will bring trouble from others...

But as to the icky stuff in life, it is not of your doing...bad stuff happens to all kinds of people, believers and followers alike.

The story is told of a man on an African Safari – deep in the jungle area. The guide before him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and all the thick underbrush. The traveler, wearied and hot and anxious asked in frustration, “Where are we?” “Do you even know where you are taking me?” Just where is the path that we are supposed to be following? What are you doing? Making this up as you go along?

The seasoned guide, stopped dead in his tracks and starred back at the man – behind him and said, “I am the path.” I am your way.

We kind of ask the same questions of God. Where are you leading me, where are you taking me? Where is the path I am supposed to be on? Talk to me! Tell me what I am supposed to do?

And very much like the guide in the story...he doesn't tell us. Oh sure, he may give us a hint or two or twenty, but that's all. If he did, would we understand? Would we see the total picture? Would we comprehend and understand our present location and what it would take to get to ---- where we want to go?

Probably not. Again, very much like the traveler, we are unacquainted with the jungle. So rather than giving us an answer that we might not understand. Jesus just gives us a gift.

He gives us the gift of himself. If we accept the gift.

Does he purge all the predators? Lions and tigers and bears oh my! Nope! He even leaves the poisonous snakes and the spiders and other creepy things....

Does he remove the jungle?

Does he zap all the vegetation?

Does he smote (hehehe) everything that stands in our way? Sorry.

Dangers still lurk.

Cliffs still are present...but so are beautiful waterfalls.

Jesus doesn't give us hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us the gift of himself.

And more importantly he promises to stay until the very end. I know I wrote about that before...was that last week or earlier this morning? God only knows, it is 9 p.m. and I have been typing all day.

Kinga asked questions, I typed.

Carolyn came in to water flowers, I typed.

Paul came in and took the garbage around me and I typed. Moriah had to go potty, I got up quickly and flew out the door!

Yep it is Matthew's gospel: "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

There is hope. There is always hope.

We just may be a bend away from the jungle...but wherever the road takes us, Jesus is with us...God is present.

Back to Immanuel...back to Emmanuel...I am bringing this full circle...from where I began...

Sometimes I remember...I am one intersection away from a cemetery.

You never know when you might be moments away from an Emergency Room...or when the phone is going to ring...

I hear an ambulance siren and I always offer up a silent prayer...anytime, any day, wherever I am....it is constant communication and relationship with my God...prayer...full circle again...

There but by the grace of God go I.

I think my ramblings and ponderings for today are coming to an end...47 pages without a break, except to take the dog out and to answer the phone.

God said, Go home! Matthew will be here tomorrow...

Matthew didn't exactly "like" Mark's portrayal of the twelve disciples, so he takes it on himself, to better their image...almost like a PR Man. (Public Relations) So, my fellow scholars we need to remember that the first disciples were ordinary men and women (I am giving women the benefit of the doubt here.) In all actuality I do believe there probably were female disciples. It was just unheard of it and they kept a much lower profile.

All of them were called on an extraordinary mission. I also do not believe that they knew what they were getting themselves into, when they signed up for this gig.

Long before we turned them into stained glass saints in the windows of our cathedrals, Peter, John and all the rest of them were just regular guys and gals simply trying to make a living...and doing as best as the can. Long before we turned them into HEROES and ICONS (yep, I am watching Star Trek Voyager) on HEROES AND ICONS, snicker, snicker they were just plain Jane's and plain John's.

Maybe the guys were John's, I don't know...that would have made the women...never mind...

Suffice it to say they were all just trying to get along in this life; the best that they could...the rest is their business...not ours...

I know this; they were not Rabbinical School Graduates or "spiritual giants." None of them possessed superhuman qualities. The most we can say about them is that their devotion to Jesus certain outweighed – by a hair – all their fears and insecurities.

As a result, God changed them and used them to accomplish all kinds of mind-boggling-things. But I know this – they never wanted and God never intended for them to become stained glass giants.

From about 1250 BCE on - we had the law. But the thing to remember about the law is that outside of the Decalogue, it was quite fluid. It was ever changing.

Ever growing, ever being added to and dare I say, probably deleted, as necessary or as required. The law was pretty harsh. It was very Deuteronomic. It was very black and white. There really were not any “ands” “ifs” or “buts” when it came to the law. It was – well – what it was.

Ever since the days and the times of Moshe, Israel had been in possession of God’s law, including his clear-cut commandments and provisions for the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest, relaxation and reflection.

But over the centuries, the Jewish leaders turned it all into a confusing, soul-destroying system. The law had very simply become a yoke on the shoulders and the people of God had to bear its weight.

And then came Jesus...

This crazy man from Galilee. This absurd prophet. This radical rabbi. This usurper of all things usurpable. (Yep, I made that one up too!) The great Usurper! This Son of the Most High God!

Jesus came with a different take on the Torah, the law, the statutes, the commandments, the way, the Teachings, the ordinances...

His concern was not so much for the “letter” of the law, as it was for the “spirit” of the law...

and of course, he drew the ire of all those who held the law near and dear to their hearts.

He was accused of trying to abolish the law...to rid Israel of it all...

He was seen as being opposed to all 613 Jewish laws, ordinances, statutes, ways and teachings...

He was that radical. He came to turn everything topsy turvey and upside down. Perhaps that is also one of the reasons for seeing him as being demonic.

His stance against the torah was seen as being pure evil.

Why who ever heard of the spirit of the law...the law was the law...and that was all there was to it. There was no such thing as the spirit-of-the-law!

Jesus offered invites galore.

He offered invites to his disciples.

He invited them to follow him.

I guess you should never tell anyone to follow, but rather to simply invite them to join you, to see for themselves...that seems to be what is going on in the gospels.

But invites are offered like crazy.

That's when you gotta pause and realize that the most incredible invites of all are not found in envelopes or fortune cookies or gumball machines, but rather they are found in the Scriptures.

You cannot read about God without finding him issuing invites to someone-somewhere.

He invited Eve to marry Adam.

He invited the animals to enter the ark with old Noah.

He invited David to be King instead of Saul.

He invited Israel to leave bondage and captivity time and time again.

He invited Nehemiah and Ezra to rebuild the holy city of Jerusalem...

Our God is an inviting God.

He invited Mary to be the Christ-bearer for the world.

He invited the twelve to fish for men (people)...

He invited an adulterous woman to start all over from scratch.

He invited Thomas to reach out and to touch his wounds.

He invited you to join him in Holy Baptism.

God is the king who prepares the palace, sets the table and invites his subjects to come in and join him.

As a matter of fact...it seems like one of his favorite words is come...

**“Come let us talk about these things....
Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be made as
white as snow...”**

“All you who are thirsty, come and drink...”

**“Come to me all of you who are tiered and have heavy
loads, and I will give you rest...”**

“Come to the wedding feast...”

**“Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for
people.”**

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.”

**Our God is a God who invites. God is a God who
calls. God is a God who opens the door and waves
his hand, pointing pilgrims to a full table.”
Our God invites...and so should we.
How hard is it to say, “Come?”**

**It is an invite to not just come for a meal....but rather
to come for life...it is an invitation to come into his
kingdom and take up residence in a tearless,
graveless, painless world...**

**Who can come?
Anyone. Everyone.
There is room for all.
The invite is at once universal and personal...**

So the twelve had some direction for the future...and so did the yet to be formed church...

As we know the Bible is filled with Agricultural imagery...and ours is not the agrarian community it once was....

It is interesting because spending on lawn and garden supplies has gone through the roof...and sky rocketed in recent years...

It was obviously an agrarian economy...in an agrarian kind of time...

I have some stats about then versus now...

Agrarian societies began to make their appearance in the fertile valleys of the Middle East some five to six thousand years ago. Their presence was marked by the invention of the plow, the wheel, the sail, the discovery of metallurgy and the domestication of animals.

Agrarian societies covered the eastern Mediterranean region.

In Jesus' day more than 90% of the population was rural.

In agrarian societies 90-95 percent of the population was engaged in what sociologists call the “primary industries.

In the US today, the % is 4.9.

In agrarian societies 2-4% of the population was literate.

The birth rate in most agrarian societies was about 40% per thousand per year.

Life expectancy in the city of Rome in the first century BCE was about twenty years at birth. If the perilous years of infancy were survived, it rose to about 40.

Though population figures for antiquity are notoriously difficult to come by, recent estimates for Jerusalem are about 35,000. For Capernaum, 1500. For Nazareth about 200.

In agrarian societies 1-3% of the population usually owns one to 2/3's of the arable land. Since 90% or more were peasants, the vast majority owned subsistence plots at best.

In agrarian societies the family was the unit of both production and consumption.

More than one half of all families in agrarian societies were broken during child-bearing and child-raising years by death – of one or both of the parents.

The people that Jesus spoke to were for the most part uneducated and unable to read or write...so stories were everything. This too, is a part of agrarian life.

And as we might imagine, the kingdom of heaven was a source of great hope for the Jewish people. And yet, this much discussed subject was also a matter of major misunderstanding. Through short stories called parables, Jesus used common, everyday objects and activities to illustrate various truths about God's kingdom.

In Matthew, Jesus is the master parable teller of all time.

Parables were told not to confuse people, but rather, so that they could visualize the story. It was all about the visualization. You had to see it in your minds' eye. You had to envision it for yourself.

Jesus seemed to love telling stories. He spoke and the people painted the picture in their minds. They saw it. They understood it at their level.

Ah, the stories and there is a whole bunch:

- **The workers in the vineyard**
- **The wheat and the weeds**
- **The mustard seed**
- **The yeast**
- **The hidden treasure**

- **The pearl of great price**
- **The net**
- **New Treasures**
- **What makes someone unclean?**
- **The tenants**
- **The two sons**
- **The kings' wedding banquet**
- **The unforgiving debtor**
- **The fig tree**
- **The ten Virgins**
- **The sower**
- **Good stewards...**

Matthew does not mind including any of them and you might even imagine that the author himself, delights in them. No matter who he is! Or, what his name is...

The gospel writer approved of these stories...

What else can this guy do?

It is Matthew who gives us the answer. Now to be honest, you have to remember that 90% of Mark is to be found in Matthew's gospel, sometimes with slight changes, sometimes with major changes...

It really is Mark who gives us the answer...

**but Matthew or whoever the guy is that is writing it,
borrows heavily from Mark...
It is important to remember that!**

**So it is against the backdrop of Herod's unjust
execution of John the Baptizer, Matthew shows both
the power and the compassion of Jesus. Remember
his compassion comes from deep within his gut!**

**This "carpenter-king" feeds a crowd of 5,000 men,
plus women and children with five loaves of bread and
a couple of salted fish.**

**Next he is going to take a stroll on the top of water
much to the astonishment of his followers...**

**He can calm storms, calm angry seas...he can heal
and preach and teach, I tell you, this guy can do it all.**

**Blind men, no problem.
Lepers, not an issue.
The lame are a snap!
The hungry, you simply feed them. What's the
problem?**

**Life is messy and hard...
People are needy and demanding.
We are called to live lives of sacrifice and love.
Look to the compassionate one...
Look to the one who made the supreme sacrifice...
Life can be scary and uncertain sometimes...**

Look at him who always goes before us...

We know this...

During the time of Jesus, Israel was under the authority of the Roman Empire. Honor, power, pride, prestige, and acclaim...these were the dominant values of Rome.

**They are not bad values, in and of themselves...
It is important how they are applied...**

How is power handled?

Likewise, honor, pride, acclaim and prestige...these are not bad things at all...but what is done with them...

**We know further that Jesus advocated and modeled a completely different kind of value system. The ways of the world...were not the ways of the Kingdom of heaven...nor the Kingdom of God.
Jesus expected more.**

We will either take our cues from the world or from the WORD. The choice, obviously is ours. What other options are there?

**We can buy into the dominant temporal value system that says: Be cut-throat. Compete. See all others as being rivals. Squish them. Promote only yourself!
Whenever possible – tear others down.**

Pursue the acclaim of others...you deserve it! You are number One! Up the ladder you go.

Allow no one to get into your way....be success oriented...dress for success. Live the life you want, NOW! Fame and glory are yours!

Or,

We can embrace the rare and precious eternal value system that says: Be more Christ-like. Be compassionate. Be humble. Submit. Help those in any kind of need. You are a servant of all, master of none. Live for others...walk humbly with your God.

**The first way is the way of pride.
The second way is the way of humility.
Again, the choice is ours...**

What happens next shows us the way of humility.

**It is time to go to Jerusalem in Judea...
Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king...
But not as the expected monarchy that many would have preferred.**

He rode a donkey, an ass, a common beast of burden, a humble menial animal. Not the white horse of a conqueror. Not the expected stallion. No royal stead for Jesus. Nope!

Dismounting he promptly caused a scene at the Temple, incurring the wrath of Israel's religious leadership. It was a disturbance. A minor squirmish. But it quite easily could have been turned into much more if Jesus would only permit it. He would not.

These head-scratching events coupled with all of Jesus' rather odd sayings and unusual teachings and views cause a great many to doubt his messianic claims.

Including one of his own, Judas of Iscariot.

What could have been a major scene, turned into a major disappointment.

Some left that day, having scene another messianic pretender enter into the holy city.

Others left that day, having seen their savior.

What if we would have been there, had been present? In his final week, Jesus gathered his disciples and talked frankly about what lie ahead – including the second coming. Speaking from the Mount of Olives (where incidentally – the prophet Zechariah had revealed the Messiah would stand when he comes again to establish his kingdom)---Jesus urged his followers to be ready for his return to be faithful to the end...

As he sought for a way to explain his return, he went back to the flood of Noah.

For Jesus, parallels were obvious.

For the disciples, not so much!

A message of judgment was proclaimed then. It is proclaimed still. People did not listen then. Many refuse to listen today.

**11,111 words...wanna count them?
Not bad...for a beginner...**

Noah was sent to save the faithful. Jesus came to do the same thing.

A flood of water came them. It is said that a flood of fire will come next.

Noah built a safe place out of wood. Jesus made a safe place on wood.

Those who believed were hidden in the ark.

Those who believe today are hidden in Christ-Jesus.

Most important, what God did and accomplished in Noah's generation, he will do at Jesus' return in glory.

He will pronounce a universal, irreversible judgment. A judgment in which grace is revealed, rewards are unveiled and the impenitent are punished.

When you read the story of Noah you will not find the word judgment written there...but you will find ample evidence of one.

The era of Noah was a sad one. People on earth did what God said was evil and wrong and violence was everywhere to be found....

Hmmm...

Such open rebellion breaks the heart of God, he is compassionate, he feels it in his guts...His heart was and more than likely is filled with pain today....

He sent a flood, a mighty surging-purging flood upon the earth. The skies rained for forty days. The waters rose so much that even the highest mountains under the skies were covered by it. It continued to rise until it was more than twenty feet about the mountains...

Only Noah and his family and the animals on the ark escaped. Everyone else perished. God did not slam a gavel on the bench, but he did close the door on the ark. According to Jesus, "It will be the same when the Son of Man comes again."

And so judgment was rendered.

Christians believe that the Hebrew Bible predicted the first coming of Jesus as the Messiah. And in every case, their prophecies were fulfilled to the letter. Likewise, the Early Christian Writings contain numerous explicit details regarding the second coming of Jesus.

What do we do with this information?

Matthew or whoever, boldly tells us that an extraordinary life, filled with evolutionary teachings and jaw-dropping miracles and ending with a horrific death. Only that wasn't the end.

Matthew like all the gospel writers, concludes his account of the prophet-turned-teacher, the carpenter-turned-king by demonstrating the authority of God – even over death.

Matthew ends with a Messiah who is very much alive...and eager for an entire world to learn about it!

We are left with a vacated tomb. The NO VACANCY sign is not flashing. There is room in the inn.

No one every challenged the vacancy. No Pharisee, no High Priest, no Sadducee, no Scribe or any representative of Rome...isn't that curious?

**It is an accepted given.
The tomb was empty.**

No one was home.

No Roman soldiers ever led a contingency of soldiers back to the burial site and declared, “The angel was wrong, the body is over here...come and look, see for yourselves.”

It didn’t happen.

It was not a rumor.

It was not a mistake.

You know they would have if they could have...all of them would have been on-board, Roman Procurator, High Priest, Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, Sanhedrin, Roman guard...

What quicker way for the enemies of Jesus to shut up the disciples and the followers of Jesus?

All they had to do was to produce the cold, lifeless body, they would have had to display the cadaver...publicly.

It would have ended everything. But they had no cadaver to display...and do not think for a moment, that they failed to look...

When the disciples/apostles argued for the empty tomb, everyone else looked for a rebuttal from any direction. None came.

None was every made...except for the rather feeble attempt that says, the disciples came and stole the body.

Matthew's gospel from start to finish is filled with good news. Immanuel...God Is With Us! The sinless one, impervious to Satan's temptations. The messiah-king who offers citizenship in the now and not yet kingdom of God. The compassionate healer. The ingenious teacher. The almighty miracle-worker. The Lord of the Sabbath. The enemy of false religion. The Son of David. The crucified Savior. The resurrected Lord who possessed all authority in heaven and on earth. The returning Son of Man. Jesus is, was all these things and so much more...

The story isn't finished yet...it is still being written...

Matthew and the Moses Connection

1. Pharaoh killed all the male Hebrew babies, but Moses was saved (Exodus 1:22; 2:1-2).

Herod killed all the male babies in and around Bethlehem, but Jesus escaped (Matthew 2:16-18).

2. Moses fled from Egypt, but later returned (Exodus 2:15; 4:18)

Jesus fled to Egypt and later returned to Israel (Matthew 2:13-23)

3. Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law (Exodus 24:1-3)

Jesus delivered the New Law at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-3)

4. Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant through the blood of young bulls (Exodus 24:8)

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant through His own blood (Matthew 26:28)

5. Moses did not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights (Exodus 34:28)

Jesus also fasted while being tempted in the desert (Matthew 4:2)

6. Moses delivers the first five books of the Bible (Genesis – Deuteronomy)

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives five extended sermons (Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25)

7. Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9)

Jesus said that, in a similar way, He Himself would be “lifted up” ([John 3:14](#)).

Whenever anyone tells the story of Jesus, they impart their own character into the story.

The four Evangelists are no exception.

Though inspired by the Holy Spirit to compose Holy Scripture, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each told the story of Jesus according to their own character and experiences. Each man viewed his Lord through the eyes of their own personal history.

Although each of the Evangelists was a Jew, Matthew presents the Life of Jesus in a particularly Jewish fashion.

For Matthew, Jesus is the new Moses- this is huge!

Consider the birth of each of the men. A tyrannical king ordered the death of both Moses and Jesus. In Exodus, Pharaoh ordered the death of all of the Jewish boys, while, in Matthew’s Gospel, Herod the Great ordered all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and under to be slain.

Both Moses and Jesus escape this death sentence while countless young boys around them are being slaughtered. After the tyrant dies, both Moses and Jesus return to the land of their birth.

Yet the similarities continue

One of the ways that Matthew chooses to structure his version of the life of Christ is based around five lengthy sermons, or what some biblical scholar call “The Five Discourses.”

These discourses are: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the Instructions to the Twelve Apostles (10), a collection of parables (13), instructions to the Disciples (18), and the teaching about the end times on the Mount of Olives (23-25).

One might not feel compelled to believe these were intended to be distinct discourses were it not for the fact that each of these ends with a phrase closely resembling “When Jesus had finished all these sayings...” (See 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, and 26:1) This conclusion is “practically saying” - “Let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit!”

So what? What significance does that have? What has it to do with Moses? The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch, the Torah, or *The Books of Moses*.

Moses gave the five books of the Law to the Children of Israel.

According to St. Matthew, Jesus taught His followers through five discourses.

Keeping in mind that the Sermon on the Mount is only on “the Mount” in Matthew’s version (compare Mathew 5:1 with Luke 6:17ff), we can see another correlation in that Moses went up onto the mountain and brought back the Law for people and Jesus goes up onto the mountain and gives the people the “*completed*” Law.

It is, of course, in Matthew’s Gospel, during the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus proclaims, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (5:17)

This tie between Moses and Jesus even more profoundly illustrated when one recalls that Moses prophesied the coming of a prophet, one who would be like Moses himself, in Deuteronomy 5:17.

Thus, Matthew, in clearly drawing the parallels between Moses and Jesus, shows how Jesus fulfills the promises of the Prophet Jeremiah when he said,

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers [i.e. Moses] in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (31:31-33)

To Matthew, Jesus is the New Moses

Their births run parallel, their teachings run, parallel, but whereas Moses came to give the Law, Jesus came to fulfill it, and whereas Moses wrote the Law on tablets of stone, Jesus has written the New Law on our hearts.

Aside from being interesting trivia, what difference does any of this make?

Christianity did not develop in a vacuum.

While a particular parish or denomination may only have a few decades of history, our shared cultural heritage extends back, literally, millennia.

We not only count Jesus as Our Lord and God as Our Father, but we also count Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, the Kings and the Prophets as our fathers in the faith.

We have their rich cultural inheritance from which to draw upon.

We actually do worship the same God, even though they do not understand Him in exactly the same way we do, we acknowledge all of the mighty acts that he did for the Jews and that they have always been a people close to His heart.

In a day in which Israel is besieged on every side, let us remember how our shared Scriptures call us to pray, and say with King David, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you prosper.” (Psalm 122:6)

Words have no meaning apart from structure. Thus, the way in which we arrange our words are just as important as the words we use. The Gospel of Matthew illustrates this perfectly. The life and teachings of Jesus are intentionally pieced together in such a way that you are forced to consider who Jesus is and how He has come in fulfillment of Old Testament expectations.

You immediately recognize that Jesus is the Son of David who will sit on the eternal throne (2 Sam. 7:12-16), He is the promised offspring of Abraham who will bless the nations (Gen. 12:1-3), and He is the prophet greater than Moses who will speak the words of God (Deut. 18:15-19).

The first two are clearly stated in Matthew 1, but the latter is only evident when you pay attention to meticulous structuring of Matthew’s book.

As you examine the narrative structure, you soon discover that Jesus is the figure prophesied about by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—”

Matthew wants you to understand that Jesus is indeed the prophet like Moses sent by God to speak the truth, enact a new exodus, and set you free.

By writing in the manner that he does Matthew leaves no ambiguity as to what the implication of this is for your life— *you must listen to Jesus.*

THE SAME MOSES . . .

Consider the similarities presented between Moses and Jesus. Jesus is sent by God to deliver his people (Matt. 1:21), pursued as an infant by a murderous serpent-like king (Matt. 2:16), and spared in Egypt through providential means (Matt. 2:13). Next Jesus comes out of Egypt, enters the wilderness for forty days of testing (Matt. 4:1-11), and then goes up on a mountain to deliver a new law (Matt. 5:1-7:27).

Matthew also tells us that Jesus is known to miraculously feed large crowds of people in desolate, wilderness-like places (Matt. 14:13-21) and is spotted by His disciples on a mountain with His face shining like the sun (Matt. 17:1-8). Sound familiar?

If you've read the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures) you know *this echoes Moses' story almost exactly*. Matthew, in the way he structures his narrative, is going to great lengths to show you that Jesus has come as the new Moses. Like Moses, Jesus came up out of Egypt, passed through the waters of baptism, entered the wilderness, and went up onto a mountain to give a new, authoritative teaching. As you note the parallels you realize that Jesus could be none other than the long-anticipated prophet.

... BUT DIFFERENT THAN MOSES

Yet, as you read Matthew, you'll notice that Jesus is a new and *greater* Moses. There's a different quality to His person and work which supersedes that of Moses':

- Whereas Moses was sent to deliver the nation of Israel out of physical slavery in Egypt, Jesus was sent to deliver people from all nations out of spiritual slavery to sin in their hearts (1:21).
- Whereas Moses only spoke the words he received from God, Jesus came as the very Word of God who declared, "I say to you" (5:21-22ff) and it simply was God's words.

- Whereas Moses came as a recipient of the Law, Jesus came to fulfill the Law (5:17).
- Whereas Moses' face shone with the reflection of the heavenly glory he had seen, Jesus' shone like the sun with His own divine glory (17:2).
- Whereas Moses mediated temporarily between God and man by the Law, Jesus mediates eternally between God and man by the shedding of His own blood (27:51).

Jesus is truly the prophet greater than Moses.

He is the new authoritative teacher who came to give us divine teaching, save us from our sins, enact a new exodus out of spiritual bondage, and establish a new and superior covenant between God and His people.

The Gospel of Matthew is written in such a way to say, "Behold, your long-awaited prophet has arrived!" What are we supposed to do when that prophet comes? "*You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you*" (Acts 3:22).

LISTENING TO JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew immediately establishes who Jesus is through the structure of his book because he is going to fill the remainder of it with Jesus' teachings and call you to unequivocally listen to him.

"Listen" here isn't merely hearing his words.

It's the kind of listening which hears, receives, and obeys the words spoken. It's the quality of listening that transforms Jesus' hearers into obedient disciples.

It is imperative we understand the Moses-Jesus relationship and the command to listen to that prophet (Deut. 18:15; Matt. 17:5; Acts 3:22) because Jesus is going to say some radical words in the book of Matthew. (Lol)

He's going to say the kind of things that "get all up in your business."

As a matter of fact, when Jesus arrives on the scene, He is going to give such countercultural and counterintuitive teachings that any would-be disciple might think twice about following him:

He's going to teach that lust is the same as adultery (Matt. 5:27-30).

He's going to tell you not to be anxious about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear (Matt. 6:25).

He's going to say that whoever loves father or mother or son or daughter more than Him is not worthy of Him (Matt. 10:37).

He's going to tell you that you must deny yourself and take up your cross if you desire to follow Him (Matt. 16:24).

He's going to affirm that God designed marriage between one male and one female (Matt. 19:4-6).

He's even going to command you to join His mission by making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

Now would be a good time to honestly ask yourself, *"Am I listening to Jesus?"*

This is no small matter!

You either accept the words from the prophet greater than Moses and experience life in them through His Spirit or reject Him and His words and suffer eternal punishment. Yikes!

The 5 Discourses of Matthew:

1. Sermon on the Mount – Matt. 5-7

Narrative

2. Instructions to the Disciples – Matt. 10:1-11:1

Narrative

3. Parables – Matt. 13:1-53

Narrative

4. Discourse about Children, Forgiveness, Church Discipline Matt. 18:1-19:1

Narrative

5. Olivet Discourse (End Times) Matt. 24:1-26:1

Narrative

These are the parallels to the 5 books of the Law, in the Torah, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Scholars say this was purposefully done by Matthew as a part of his structure, to bring home the idea that Jesus is indeed, the New Moses...

The first discourse

Matthew 5-7

The first discourse (Matthew 5-7) is called the Sermon on the Mount and is one of the best known and most quoted parts of the [New Testament](#). It includes the [Beatitudes](#) and the [Lord's Prayer](#). To most believers in Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount contains the central tenets of Christian discipleship. The Beatitudes are a key element of this sermon, and are expressed as a set of *blessings*. The Beatitudes present a new set of Christian ideals that focus on love and [humility](#) rather than force and exaction; they echo the highest ideals of the teachings of Jesus on [mercy](#), spirituality and compassion.

The second discourse

Matthew 10

The second discourse in Matthew 10 provides instructions to the [Twelve Apostles](#) and is sometimes called the *Mission Discourse* or the *Missionary Discourse* or the *Little Commission* in contrast to the [Great Commission](#). This discourse is directed to the twelve apostles who are named in [Matthew 10:2-3](#). In the discourse Jesus advises them how to travel from city to city, carry no belongings and to preach only to [Israelite](#) communities.

He tells them to be wary of opposition, but have no fear for they will be told what to say to defend themselves when needed: "For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you", as also stated in [Luke 12:12](#).

The third discourse

Matthew 13

The third discourse in Matthew 13 (1-53) provides several parables for the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) and is often called the *Parabolic Discourse*. The first part of this discourse, in [Matthew 13:1-35](#) takes place outside when Jesus leaves a house and sits near the Lake to address the disciples as well as the multitudes of people who have gathered to hear him. This part includes the parables of [The Sower](#), [The Tares](#), [The Mustard Seed](#) and [The Leaven](#). In the second part Jesus goes back inside the house and addresses the disciples. This part includes the parables of [The Hidden Treasure](#), [The Pearl](#) and [Drawing in the Net](#).

The fourth discourse

Matthew 18

The fourth discourse in Matthew 18 is often called the *Discourse on the Church*. It includes the parables of [The Lost Sheep](#) and [The Unforgiving Servant](#) which also refer to the Kingdom of Heaven. The general theme of the discourse is the anticipation of a future community of followers, and the role of his apostles in leading it. Addressing his apostles in 18:18, Jesus states: "what things so ever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things so ever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This power is first given to Peter in chapter 16 after [Peter confesses](#) that Jesus is the "son of the living God". In addition to the powers of binding and loosing, Peter is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and is sometimes considered the "rock" on which Christ built his Church. The discourse emphasizes the importance of humility and self-sacrifice as the high virtues within the anticipated community. It teaches that in the Kingdom of God, it is childlike humility that matters, not social prominence and clout.

The fifth discourse

Matthew 23, Olivet Discourse, and Matthew 25

The final discourse is usually taken to include [Matthew 23, 24, and 25](#).

Matthew 24 is usually called the [Olivet Discourse](#) because it was given on the [Mount of Olives](#), and is also referred to as the *Discourse on the End Times*. The discourse corresponds to [Mark 13](#) and [Luke 21](#) and is mostly about judgment and the expected conduct of the [followers of Jesus](#), and the need for vigilance by the followers in view of the [coming judgment](#). The discourse is prompted by a question the disciples ask about the "end of the age" ([End times](#) or end of this world and beginning of the [world to come](#)) and receives the longest response provided by Jesus in the New Testament. The discourse is generally viewed as referring both to the coming destruction of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), as well as the End Times and [Second Coming of Christ](#), but the many scholarly opinions about the overlap of these two issues, and exactly which verses refer to which event remain divided and complex.

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Jesus didn't invent the parable, but he sure perfected it. It was probably his favorite way to teach, (at least according to Matthew) and it kind of became his calling card for the rest of his time around...

What Is a Parable?

A parable is basically a short and simple story that illustrates a deep and important message. Big things come in small packages, right? But these small packages can be kind of tough to unwrap.

Take this one, for example

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."
(13:31-32)

Here we have a story about a seed that grows into a bush. The biggest bush on the block, in fact. So the moral of the story is that the kingdom of heaven starts tiny but gets really big, right?

Hidden Gems

Yes, kind of. But we're still missing some details. See, Early Christian Writings' parables bring in lots of imagery that we modern folks aren't familiar with, but that Jesus' audience would have known all about.

First, what is a mustard seed? Well, like Jesus says, it's pretty tiny. Like only about 2 mm. When that seed is planted in the ground, it sprouts into a weedy little mustard bush. It also grows super fast and can be really hard to get rid of. If you've ever had a hot dog, you know that mustard has a sort of bitter taste to it. So that's a mustard seed, in a nutshell. Or in a mustard seed shell...hehehe.

Then what is the kingdom of heaven, really? It starts off small, as the tiniest seed possible (think the early Christian church). But it grows quickly and aggressively. Once it takes root, it's pretty tough to get rid of it, too. It's even annoying and bitter tasting to some (see: the Pharisees). And, though you might think it's impossible, this little bush will grow into a huge tree and spread its branches all over the world. Even the birds will want to perch there. That's what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Bam. Apparently, that's all you need to know...at least, for now!

Why Tell Parables?

We can see that parables not only reveal something (the kingdom of heaven is growing), but they conceal things from non-believers, too. After all, the people who heard this must have thought Jesus was crazy. A little mustard bush isn't going to grow into a huge tree! But believers know that God can make the impossible happen. All it takes is faith the size of a mustard seed, right?

This is basically what Jesus tells his disciples when they ask, *Why all the parables?* (13:10). Isn't it better to have everything laid out in the open? But Jesus knows the naysayers won't get it no matter what he says.

They've got eyes, but they don't really see. They've got ears, but they're not listening (13:13). If you believe, the parables are a revelation. If you don't care, then you're the one missing out on the goods.

We just went over the parable of the mustard seed, but let's take a peek at a couple others of Jesus' most popular parables to get a better taste for them.

And, I guess that's what you could say we are supposed to do with them---savor them...

Parable of the Strong Man

It goes something like this: "How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered" (12:29). Sounds easy enough, right? But maybe we should dig in a little bit more.

Right before Jesus lays this parable on us, the Pharisees are going at him pretty hard. (They usually do!)

They see Jesus casting out demons and they tell the crowds that "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons" (12:24). In other words, Jesus is clearly in league with the devil...a buddy of Satan's...friends with Beelzebub!

But Jesus uses this parable to bat down that idea.

Really, Pharisees? Why would Satan send Jesus to destroy his own kingdom?

It doesn't make any sense. You wouldn't invite someone into your house to bust out all your windows, would you? (Hey, I just made a parable!...well kind of....)

The story also makes a pretty important claim. If Satan is the strong man, and Jesus is the one who's breaking into the house, that means that Jesus has already defeated Satan. After all, if Satan hadn't been tied up by Jesus, then he couldn't be raiding his house and casting out all kinds of demons, could he?

Another point in the Jesus column. Check, check and double check!

The parable also reflects other common Jewish wisdom, like this passage from Isaiah:

Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? But thus says the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. (Isaiah 49:24-25)

So like Matthew says, "For God, all things are possible" (19:26).

Jesus can defeat Satan, the strong man, because he's got divine backing. And also because he's just that good!

Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

This one tells the story of a landowner who goes to get workers for his vineyard. At the start of the workday, he finds a good-looking group and offers to pay them a denarius for a day's work. A few hours later, he hires some more workers. Around noon, he brings on some additional crew. Then again at 3:00PM and 5:00PM. We're guessing it was a pretty busy vineyard. Lots of vines...lots of grapes...lots of vino being made...lots of stampin' all over the place...tote that barge, lift that bale...hehehe...

At the end of the day, the landowner calls everyone in to be paid. The ones who were hired last are paid first

and—surprise, surprise—they get a denarius. The workers who were hired first are really psyched. If those bums who only worked an hour get full pay, then they're going to be swimming in coins.

But when they receive their wages, it turns out they only get one stinkin' denarius. *Not fair!* the last paid protest. But, the landowner doesn't understand why they're complaining. After all, they got the wage they were promised. Why should they be mad that he's decided to be generous with everyone else? (20:1-16)

Okay, let's break this one down. The workers who were hired first get a full day's pay.

The workers who are hired last get the same amount. On its face we've got to agree with the workers who were hired first.

Equal pay for equal work, right? Break out the picket signs!

This parable is all about assumptions. You know what we say, when you assume something... ;-)

The workers who are hired first have a lot of expectations about what they're going to get. First, they're cool with the single denarius. Then when they see the "less deserving" getting the same as them, they want more. After all, they've been toiling in this

vineyard all day—they earned it! Those other lazy folks definitely didn't.

But according to Jesus, God doesn't work like that.

God doesn't care who's deserving and who isn't.

He doesn't care who worked the hardest or who was with him the longest.

Sure, God keeps his promises and pays the denarius, but, if you accept his offer to work on his vineyard, his goodness and generosity will overflow. Even if you're one of those people who doesn't seem like they should be in line for blessings.

In the end, this parable is sort of a warning: don't get cocky.

God knows you're doing good work, but don't assume that hard work alone will win you a spot at the top.

God is gracious to everyone, no matter what they've done. So by all means, hope that you're saved.

Just don't assume anything. You know what they say about what happens when you assume, right?

Hungry for More?

Can't get enough of parables? You're in luck

Matthew's got twenty-four gems in his gospel. Collect (and analyze) them all!

- The Lamp Under a Basket (5:14-15)**
- The Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24-27)**
- New Cloth on an Old Garment (9:16)**

- **New Wine Into Old Wineskins (9:17)**
- **The Strong Man (12:29)**
- **The Sower (13:3-9)**
- **The Tares (13:24-30)**
- **The Mustard Seed (13:31-32)**
- **The Leaven (13:33)**
- **The Hidden Treasure (13:44)**
- **The Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46)**
- **Drawing in the Net (13:47-50)**
- **The Householder (13:52)**
- **The Lost Sheep (19:10-14)**
- **The Unforgiving Servant (18:23-35)**
- **The Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)**
- **The Two Sons (21:28-32)**
- **The Wicked Husbandman (21:33-41)**
- **The Great Banquet (22:1-14)**
- **The Budding Fig Tree (24:32-35)**
- **The Faithful Servant (24:42-51)**
- **The Ten Bridesmaids (25:1-13)**
- **The Talents (25:14-30)**
- **The Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)**

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Jesus must have had a good morning the day he climbed up on that mountain and began to preach the Sermon on the Mount. Two thousand years later, it's probably his “most famous” (and by many, “most beloved”) teaching eva... Sure, the stuff about the mustard seed was pretty good, but we'll still take the Sermon on the Mount any ol'day.

What's the Deal with This Sermon?

The Sermon on the Mount gets its name because (a) it's a sermon and (b) it takes place on a mountain.

Simple enough, right? Luke actually has a similar section called "The Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:17-49), but it's obviously not as awesome. Lol

Come on—everyone knows mountains are a way better place to preach about God. Just ask Moses on Mount Sinai.

But the whole speech isn't just one long religious lecture. It's actually a bunch of mini teachings and ideas all rolled up into one plenary session.

Sometimes Jesus is a bad English student and doesn't even use transitions, so you'll just have to imagine him saying, "Oh, and another thing..." between his points. Lol...he probably said that anyway, with a few umm's thrown in for good measure!

Jesus' Album Is Dropping

The teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are a little like Jesus' Greatest Hits. Here's the full track list (see how many you can sing along to):

- The Beatitudes (5:3-12)**
- "You are the salt of the earth." (5:13)**
- "You are the light of the world." (5:14-16)**
- "I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (5:17-20)**
- A Higher Righteousness (5:21-26)**
- On Adultery (5:27-30)**

- On Divorce (5:31-32)
- On Oaths (5:33-37)
- "Turn the other cheek." (5:38-42)
- "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (5:43-48)
- On Giving Alms (6:1-4)
- On Prayer (6:5-8)
- The Our Father Prayer (6:9-15)
- On Fasting (6:16-18)
- Treasure in Heaven (6:19-23)
- "No one can serve two masters." (6:24)
- "Consider the lilies." (6:25-34)
- "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." (7:1-6)
- Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7-11)
- "Enter through the narrow gate." (7:12-14)
- "Beware of false prophets." (7:15-20)
- "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom." (5:21-23)

Whew!!!!!! I think all of them have gone gold, if not platinum...he sure knows how to sing a song...

Totally Radical

Be prepared when you crack open this section of Matthew, because the Sermon on the Mount is pretty radical. Yes, I said radical...no matter what others may tell you! It's shocking, drastic, and extreme. Didn't think Jesus had it in him, did you?

Let's take a look at some of the things he says:

- "If you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire." (5:22)
- "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away." (5:29)
- "Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (5:32)
- "Do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you." (5:42)
- "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear." (6:25)
- "The gate is narrow and the road is hard [...] and there are few who find it." (7:14)

Think about these statements. They seem pretty extreme, don't they?

Calling someone a name gets you sent to hell.

Remarriage is adultery.

Oh, and you should actually cut out your own eye. Um, please do not read that one literally, it is ok to pick and choose here, trust me!

What the heck is going on here?

Reach for the Stars

Jesus' teachings here are aspiration-al to say the least. Or, is that supposed to be in-spire-a-tional.

There aren't many of us who could really live up to everything in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus even

sums up a whole section with the advice: "Be perfect." Yeah ok....

Yeah, fat chance. You talkin' to me?????

But does that mean we shouldn't try?

No way.

Matthew believes that the birth of Jesus has brought about "a new world". The kingdom of heaven is coming and people best recognize it.... Part of that means behaving in "a whole new way." That doesn't mean we should throw the old way (i.e., Torah law) out the window, though. Jesus just wants us to take it to the next level.

In each of his statements on what Jewish law says, Jesus both (a) affirms the law and then (b) requires believers to go above and beyond. For example: it's wrong to murder, right? Then, isn't it also wrong to get angry with someone? If anger can lead to murder, then shouldn't we try to shut that bad stuff down while we have the chance? Makes perfect sense...to God...and it should to you, as well....

Reversal of Fortune

The Sermon on the Mount also overturns our expectations about the world. Take the Beatitudes for instance. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (5:5).

This is classic Matthew.

And classic Jesus for that matter.

**Here you have the meek. The lowly. The downtrodden.
But one day, the whole earth is going to be theirs.**

That doesn't make any sense in what we know of the world. Generally the meeker get meeker and the stronger get stronger, right?

But the kingdom of heaven reverses our typical way of doing things. God is going to fix our problems and right all the wrongs. In fact, the people we think are going to come out ahead

(the rich, the powerful, the mighty) are in for a pretty big shock come Judgment Day.

The lowly, the poor, the sorrowful—well, let's just say God totally has their backs...yours and mine! Woo Hoo!!!!

Shout-Outs Are Mounting

References to the Sermon on the Mount are everywhere:

- Augustine called the Sermon on the Mount "a perfect standard of the Christian life."**
- Thomas Jefferson thought it was "the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered."**
- Barack Obama has been known to sprinkle reference to these three chapters in Matthew throughout his speeches every now and then.**

- **Martin Luther King Jr. quoted the Sermon on the Mount when some religious leaders complained he was an extremist.**
- **The bishop in *Les Misérables* seems to have taken a cue from Jesus' words "Do not resist an evildoer" (5:39).**
- **When Val Jean steals from him, he gives him even more valuable items in return.**
- **The characters in *Life of Brian* can't quite hear the Sermon on the Mount. Did he say, "Blessed are the cheese makers?" Lol, yep that's what he said, "Blessed are the cheeseheads and the Green Bay Packers...I heard him..."**
- **And don't forget about Harry Potter. Dumbledore chooses Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount—"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"—for his mother's and sister's graves.....**

Just so you know, I am calling it for the Falcons...the um, Patriots can deflate or inflate some more footballs to their desired consistency....

Cheater's never prosper...cheater's never prosper...

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

The cross has become one of the most enduring and well-recognized Christian symbols throughout the world. You'd almost never guess that it started out as a way to kill people.

But let me remind you, that it did, just that. And it still does in some areas of our world. Sad.

Imagine seeing a little girl with a pretty electric chair charm around her neck or watching your great aunt hang a decorative noose on her front door. That should give you an idea of how much the symbol of the cross has changed over the years. What was once an exceptionally cruel method of capital punishment has become a sign of hope and inspiration for billions...and billions of people.

Don't Cross the Romans

Pun intended!

I think that's like don't mess with Texas, but I could be wrong...I have been wrong before, you know! The Lone Star state...must stand for sumthan'...don't mess with them...

The early Christians didn't focus much on the cross right after Jesus died—probably because they actually knew what death on a cross would have looked like. It wasn't a pretty sight.

As a matter of fact, it was awful...more than awful...

Crucifixion was a particularity terrible and humiliating punishment used throughout the Roman Empire. Incidentally it was used most often for slaves and servants...and not for people of wealth or means...

A victim would be stripped naked, have nails pounded through their arms, wrists, hands or feet and be placed upright on the cross, and be left to die. Since the nails alone wouldn't kill you, the death was slow.

Victims often died from starvation, suffocation, or shock, and depending on the method that was used, death could take hours or days. The bodies were usually always left on the cross for the birds and wild dogs to devour.

Not exactly something you want to imagine your Savior going through...or anybody else for that matter.

At a Crossroads

Unlike, say, John's Gospel, Matthew's Gospel is pretty big on the humiliation that goes down on the cross.

Though Matthew accepts that the cross is a necessary part of Jesus' journey to God, he doesn't sugarcoat anything: Or, at least much of it...

- The Roman soldiers mock Jesus before he's nailed to the cross (27:28-29).**
- He's crucified beside two bandits who yell rude stuff at him, too (27:38-40).**
- Even the religious leaders rub salt in the already painful wounds: "He saved others; he cannot save himself [...] Let him come down from the cross now!" (27:42).**

Finally, Jesus has had enough and he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46) and dies.

Nothing uplifting about that!

**(Spoiler alert: Things start to look up a few days later.)
LOL but your gotta believe to get there.....**

Now...on to those Magi characters...because I gotta get this all out --- while it is still fresh in my mind...my mind is jumping here a mile a minute at 2:15 A.M.

I probably should have opened a Bible and went in order but this is more fun...I am scatterbrained!

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

It's okay to admit: we all love getting presents. I know I do! And these magi characters – “guys” give some pretty good (amazing) ones—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Trust me these are more than just stocking-stuffers. I wonder if any of them were women? They would have brought chocolates, wine and diapers, and perhaps...drops for the colic...

The Meaning of the Gifts

Why these gifts? Why not a nice gift card to Sandals 'R' Us? Or Cloaks-A-Plenty? The answer: because gold, frankincense, and myrrh are gifts fit for a king.

- It's easy to see why you'd give gold—it's valuable. Kind of like getting a big wad of cash in your stocking.**
- Frankincense is a lovely, fragrant incense that was often used in religious ceremonies. Think scented candles. Think cathedral smells...I miss those days...**

- **Myrrh is oil that was sometimes used for anointing. Sort of like a bottle of fancy, designer perfume. Eu du- terlet....snicker, snicker...**

Overall, it's a pretty sweet haul. No Mercedes...but still pretty sweet!

There's a lot of debate as to what the gifts mean.

One theory, proposed by 2nd-century Christian writer, Origen, is that gold is for a king, frankincense honors a god, and myrrh represents death.

All three are aspects of Jesus' story, so those could definitely fit. Or, it could all just be baloney. You decide.

Most Ironic Christmas Ever

Don't forget the irony of the wise men's gifts. Here we have three foreign, non-Jewish guys, who have traveled from afar on the hunch that something good is about to happen.

They bring gifts and bow down to honor "the King of the Jews," while the *actual* Jews in the story (Herod and the power-hungry creeps in Jerusalem) are desperately trying to kill their messiah.

Not exactly what God intended to happen.

Or is it? I mean who knows the mind of God?

The Gift of Shout-Outs

The magi's awesome gift-giving abilities have inspired loads of writers and artists:

And even parents, in modern day times...

- O. Henry wrote a story called "The Gift of the Magi" about Christmas gifting gone wrong.
- The wise men and their gifts are commemorated in the Christmas hymn, "We Three Kings."
- In T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Journey of the Magi," a weary wise man travels to see the baby Jesus.
- And no nativity scene would be complete without the three wise men, bowing down,
- and holding out their haul out for baby Jesus to see. But for the record...the Bible says "some" wise men, not three...

Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

How do you go about ruining a lovely gesture like a kiss?

Just ask Judas.

A "kiss of death" is basically something that seems okay on the surface but actually leads to your ruin...it is wrong on so many levels...

For example, it might NOT seem like a big deal when your friend comes up to you and kisses you on a lovely night in a garden. Happens all the time, right? Okay, maybe a little overly touchy-feely, but we're not

worried...no worries here...we can take it...besides that we live in such an advanced age!!!!

Of course, when this happens to Jesus, it signals the end for him.

Judas is “giving him up” or “handing him over” to the authorities.

And even though Jesus is embracing death, he's also a little hurt...obviously, It was one of his posse – after all...one of the boiz...

After all of this, it was this sign of friendship that has marked him as a dead man. Jesus is a marked man.

And that, Biblical scholars, is Irony 101.

Sealed with a Kiss

We don't recommend trying the “Kiss of Death” at home. Instead, check out these incarnations all over pop culture:

- *Kiss of Death* was an Oscar-nominated movie in 1947.
- The movie must have been good since it got rebooted in 1995 with the likes of Samuel L. Jackson and Nicolas Cage.
- Rachel Caine uses the phrase as the title for one of the books in her Morganville Vampire series.
- Rapper Jadakiss titled his 2004 album "Kiss of Death" and has a track with the same name.
- In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jesus mournfully sings the line, "Judas, must you betray me with a kiss?" Yes. Yes, he must. And, yes he did!

- **And our favorite allusion to the Kiss of Death: Harry Potter. Granted, that kiss can be warded off with a swift "Expecto Patronum!"** (It is an incantation that produces a patronus, at first in the form of mist, but it becomes fully fledged after you work out a happy enough memory and practice it. It is a shield of happy thoughts that the dementors feed on instead of feeding on your emotions, keeping you safe. It is like a shield. Each patronus is unique to the wizard who conjures it, and may look like a variety of things. Harry Potter's is a stag, representing his father, one of the Marauders) ...**but the basic idea of a smooch that sends you to your grave is still there.**
- *******KISS*******

Where It All Goes Down 1st-Century Judea

Matthew's Gospel is set mainly in the Roman province of Judea sometime between the years 26 and 30 CE.

Who cares? Well I do for one...

Well, Jesus and his disciples lived and worked right smack in the middle of what are disputed Israeli and Palestinian territories today.

Sadly, not much has changed since the 1st century: the people back then were pretty frustrated with their living situation, too.

They were opposed to each other even then. We are better...No, we are better...Judeans are goofballs! Galileans are intermingled, intermarried and not real Jews...why, they are no better than the Samaritan dogs...

It was a real rivalry. And Jesus got caught up in it!

Jews and Romans

The people of Judea were mostly Jewish and had been conquered and occupied by the mighty Roman Empire.

This was no big deal to Rome—they had more important things to worry about than some insignificant Jewish province—but it was a huge issue for the people of Judea...

Many of them resented Roman rule. Dare, I say most? The vast majority??? All? Some? Many?

After all, the Romans had complete control over the land, laws, and government, and forced everyone to pay tons in taxes. They even affected daily religious routine!

The Jews were hoping (and praying) that God would send a messiah or "anointed one" to reclaim Jewish rule of Judea and to kick out the Roman occupiers.

For Christians, that messiah was Jesus.

For other Jews...well, they were still waiting.

It's a Revolution

In 66 CE, about forty years after the death of Jesus, (give-or-take) everything came to “a boiling point in Judea.” The Jews blamed the Christians. The Christians blamed the Jews...

and the Romans blamed ‘em both! A war broke out between the Jewish people and the mighty Roman Empire. But even though they were up against the most powerful army in the world, the rebel fighters were able to make a little headway.

But, not for long...

In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the temple. Remember the temple?

Yeah, it's the center of Jewish religious, social, and political life. The Jews had fought long and hard to protect it from Roman influence, but in the end, they watched it burn to the ground while the Romans killed and plundered all throughout Jerusalem...burning everything to the ground.

The After Fight

Matthew's Gospel is written in the aftermath of all this, probably sometime around 70-85 CE.

Not only is Christianity trying to take root throughout the Roman Empire, Judaism is also trying to figure out “where it goes” after this tragic defeat. What do you do when there is NO TEMPLE anymore? How do you worship? Where do you worship?

Enter the Pharisees. These guys had much more moderate views than other Jewish groups. If the Sadducees represented the far right wing and the Zealots (whom Matthew doesn't mention)

represent the far left wing, then the Pharisees were right in the middle. They were also the dominant group that emerged after the war with Rome.

The Pharisees wanted to help the Jewish people move into a new stage of life together, but to do this, they had to solidify what it meant to be a Jew.

Promoting unity in the Jewish community helped the Jewish people thrive and survive in this difficult time.

Unfortunately, this newfound emphasis on cohesive beliefs didn't work out too well for the up-and-coming Christians.

Jewish-Christians

Though the followers of Jesus would have still considered themselves Jewish, the Pharisees did not.

They rejected the idea that Jesus was the messiah they had been waiting for, so they had little tolerance for Christian ideas and theology.

Christians were banned from the synagogues. They were called heretics and blasphemers. And, in the eyes of the orthodox Jews of the day, they were.

This is probably why Matthew hates the Pharisees so much. He thinks they're hypocrites who've turned their back on God.

But, from their point of view, they're just continuing to faithfully guide the religion that was handed down to them through the generations.

There's No Place Like Judea

Okay, that's all the historical stuff, but what about the actual places where Jesus lived and preached and died? Like in Kansas...there's no place like home, there's no place like home, Todo...I don't think we are in Kansas anymore!!!

Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

That's mainly because the Hebrew Bible says that the messiah will be born there (Micah 5:2).

A nice Jewish writer like Matthew couldn't have his messiah born in Nazareth, even though that's where the Messiah's parents lived and where he would

spend most of his life. No way. Mary and Joseph book to Bethlehem the first chance they get, and Jesus gets another notch in his belt.

Other travels in the beginning of the Gospel tend to fulfill biblical prophecies as well.

Jesus heads to Egypt to escape Herod and there just happens to be a corresponding Bible verse to explain that.

Then he returns to Nazareth and—guess what?—there's a prophecy for that, too. Go figure.

Now that's not to say he didn't do these things or go to these places...it is just to say, that Matthew has this way about him – where he can find a fulfillment anyplace and anytime. Look, there's a fulfillment over there!!!!

Home Sweet Home: Galilee

But Jesus spends most of his life in Nazareth, which is in the province of Galilee in Northern Israel. It's also where he begins his ministry.

For the most part, his neighbors in Galilee don't seem so thrilled to have the Messiah living next door.

In his hometown, he's questioned pretty aggressively. *Aren't you Mary and Joseph's kid? Didn't you used to eat paste in kindergarten?* Jesus even has a hard time performing miracles there because the people are so

skeptical. Jesus finally sighs and tells us, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house" (13:57). In other words, he's not exactly being hailed as a hometown hero while in Galilee. But Galilee is home, just the same...he definitely is NOT A JUDEAN. Even the sound of that, leaves a nasty taste on the tongue.

Next Year in Jerusalem...Or Maybe Not

When Jesus finally ventures down south to the capital city in Jerusalem, things don't go very well. The folks in Galilee occasionally get annoyed with him, but the religious authorities in Judea are completely enraged by his presence. While he's in town Jesus

- throws the money changers out of the temple (21:12).**
- curses a fig tree (21:18-19).**
- provides way-too-smart answers to questions (22:15-22).**
- gives a huge speech on how awful the scribes and Pharisees are (23:1-38).**

So maybe that has something to do them not liking him.

Within a few days of Jesus arriving in town, the people "in power" are plotting to have him killed. They succeed and Jesus is put to death in Jerusalem.

OK technically it has to be outside of the city of Jerusalem...because you cannot put anyone to death inside the city walls....so haul his butt threw the gates.

But wait a second—Jerusalem - it's also where he rises again.

Take that, Pharisees. Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah!

Gospel

The Greek word for "gospel" is *evangelion*, (I remembered that from Seminary days!) which roughly means "good news." And that's what all four of the gospels claim to share: the good news that God has sent Jesus into the world.

A gospel is different from a standard [biography](#) because it isn't just a record of a someone's life.

Nope, a gospel has a clear purpose: it wants to make you believe. If you walk away after reading one of the gospels and your life hasn't been changed, then the gospels will hang their papery heads in sadness because they've failed to do their jobs.

The early Christians (Mark????) invented the idea of a gospel; up until then, nothing like it had ever been written. And their invention worked. Big time. In the last 2,000 years, the gospels have helped convince billions of people all over the world that Jesus is someone worth putting your faith in.

But hey,

What's up with the Title?

This one's pretty easy to wrap our minds around.

The title lets us know that the story we're about to read is a gospel (read: "Genre") and that it was written by someone named Matthew. Ta-dah! Or Phil, Jack, Bill or Sam...some guy wrote it...

Christian tradition has always regarded this Matthew as one of the twelve disciples (check him out in 9:9).

Of course, this theory doesn't really make much sense. Why would one of the original disciples, an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, have copied nearly 90% of his stories from Mark and other sources?

You'd think he'd have tales of his own to tell. And that they'd be pretty good ones. And he would tell 'em...so why all this plagiarism and borrowing?

What's clear at least is that the author was a Jewish Christian. He quotes from the Hebrew Bible all over the place, ALL OVER THE PLACE... and he knows his Torah inside and out, and has really specific thoughts about different Jewish groups.

But we'll probably never know exactly who he was, how he became Christian, or what his relationship to Jesus was...that is just being honest...the work is attributed to someone named Matthew.

Looks like the "Matthew" of our title is a bit of a mystery...and...he is going stay a mystery for a while longer...

What's up with the ending?

He came. He saw. He died and rose again. Now Jesus is planning on heading home to his Father in heaven, where we're guessing he'll get a pretty sweet welcome party.

But before he bounces, Jesus has one more thing to do: pass the ministry torch onto his disciples.

All throughout the Gospel, Jesus says that he came mainly for the Jewish people. It's like he tells the Canaanite woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). Right. But that doesn't go so well in the end.

Now Jesus is looking to branch out.

In the last lines of the Gospel, he gives one final command the remaining eleven in the posse: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:19).

That's *all* nations.

Including the Gentiles.

That's Matthew setting the stage for the future growth of the church right there.

The way Jesus presents himself here is also pretty interesting. He comes right out and says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18).

That's a lot of responsibility. It's quite different from the Jesus who dodges the messiah questions from high priests (26:64) and completely refuses to answer Pilate (27:14).

Looks like the Resurrection really agrees with the guy. Now he can just say whatever is on his mind...

Matthew's Gospel is the only one that features this "Great Commission" at the end.

It's also the only one that instructs the disciples to baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19). Fun fact: these are the words that are still used in most Christian baptisms today.

Way to make history, Matt.

And of course, as we know, Baptism is a sacrament...but we also know that Baptisms (Christian Baptisms) came along, and happened quite early. Before there were gospels, there were Christian Baptisms, including books that tell you "how to baptize."

Brain Snacks: Tasty Tidbits of Knowledge

Thanks to a prophecy (1:23), Matthew sometimes calls Jesus "Immanuel." In Hebrew, that means "God with us." And hey, remember how some of Jesus' final words to his disciples were "I am with you always"? Yeah, we have a feeling Jesus did that on purpose. What is stated in chapter one – in the beginning – is also stated at the end in chapter 28. It looks kind of cohesive to me. Well thought out and well tied together...good job, Sam!

Five women (including Jesus' mother, Mary) are included in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. Head on back to the Hebrew Bible to get the full scoop on these ladies.

Each gospel author has a traditional symbol attached to it (commonly attributed to Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7). Matthew's is a winged man symbolizing Jesus' humanity and reason. It's possible that Matthew had a name change, too. In Mark and in Luke, when Jesus calls Matthew to follow him, his name is Levi. Yep, just like the jeans...

Exactly how violent and steamy is this story?

PG-13

The Gospel of Matthew is pretty tame when it comes to sex.

We mean, come on—Mary doesn't even have to do the deed to conceive Jesus.

But there is a bit of violence with the massacre of innocents courtesy of King Herod. A massacre is one thing, but little kids? That's a whole new level of brutality. It definitely makes Judas betraying Jesus and getting him arrested and killed pale in comparison. But at the same time, crucifixion is a torturous death, so tack that one onto the violence tally, too.

Technically, the Bible is probably the most alluded to work, ever.

Let's take a closer look.

***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis** With one of the most beloved Christ-figures in literature, C.S. Lewis's book gives us one lion of a metaphor depicting the ministry and passion of Jesus. Lewis

also uses the Narnia cornerstone as a commentary on Christian virtues. But as a kid, it's easier to just focus on the adventure.

***Lord of the Flies* by William Golding**

Hello Simon! Or should we say Jesus? Portraying another [Christ-figure](#) within a great work of literature, *Lord of the Flies* speaks volumes on the topic of human nature.

Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling

This one's definitely up for debate, but some people, like the folks over at [Emory University](#), have compared the [popular wizard](#) to the Son of God.

***The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner**

In this doozy, Faulkner [shouts out to Matthew with his Easter sermon](#), and in doing so, calls attention to Christ-figure, Benjy.

***Pearls Before Swine* by Stephan Pastis**

Now onto the comic relief. While [the comic strip](#) isn't heavily focused on religious themes, its title does come directly from Matthew 7:6.

"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry

This [short story](#) shows how love is the greatest gift that can be given. And how the wise men basically invented Christmas presents.

Getting Biblical in Daily Life

“The Theological Point Of View”

This one's about Jesus. But I'm guessing you already knew that. Matthew's Gospel is one of four books about Jesus' life and teachings that wound up in the official Bible. Sure, there are three other books that sound pretty similar, but this one's still unique. Matthew puts his own special spin on Jesus that's a lot different from his friends [Mark](#), [Luke](#), and [John](#). What can I say? Matthew's just a special snowflake..

Author, Author!

Christian tradition has always held that Matthew's Gospel was written by none other than Matthew, one of the twelve original disciples (9:9). If that's true, it's a pretty big point in its favor.

An eyewitness to the life of Jesus writing about exactly what happened during the Messiah's lifetime? Score!

Wait, not so fast. Most scholars don't think the Gospel was written by the disciple Matthew, let alone by someone who actually knew Jesus.

After all, if a member of Jesus' inner circle wrote this book down, why would he have included the same stories as the other gospel writers? You'd think he'd

have his own material and that he wouldn't be copying from Mark so much. Hehehe ;-) Yay, Mark!!!!

Intellectual Property 101

But that does bring up a good point. Matthew's stories are pretty similar to Mark's and Luke's. In fact, these three are known as the *synoptic* gospels because they're all kind of the same. (John, on the other hand, is just out there in his own little world. He's just a rebel.) I guess you could say, he too, is a snowflake of his own making....

Why are the rest all so similar? Well, scholars have a theory for that, too. Coming up with theories is sort of their thing.

One possibility is that Mark was the first gospel to be written (probably around 70 CE at the latest). Once Mark had a chance to circulate around Christian circles—and people gave it the big thumbs up—or in some cases a **BIG TWO THUMBS DOWN**...other authors got the idea to write their own versions of the story of Jesus. To improve on Mark! How dare they????

Yep that's what they did alright!

Enter Matthew and Luke

These two gospels are probably written around the same time (80-90 CE) and include lots of the same exact stories as Mark.

Matthew has put over 90% of Mark's stories in his gospel for example.

But, don't worry. It's only plagiarism if God doesn't give you permission. (Don't try that excuse at school or at work, though.)

The trouble is, there are some stories and sayings that don't appear in Mark, but that do show up in both Matthew and Luke (such as "ask, seek, knock" [7:7]). That makes scholars think both Matthew and Luke used another source. They call it Q.

Q is for the "Stuff" You Don't Copy from Mark

Q stands for "quelle," which is the German word for "source" (and since German biblical scholars came up with it, they got naming rights. Try harder next time, English-speaking scholars).

Basically, the thought is that there was once another document that was just a collection of things Jesus said and did. Sadly, if this ever existed, it is lost to us now. Papyrus just isn't meant to stand the test of time.

So what did Matthew do? He took some stories from Mark, some stories from Q added them all together, spiced it up with a bit of his own commentary, and—voilà—a biblical masterpiece was born.

So Mark's Gospel wasn't good enough for Matthew, was it? And why not?

Well, he does make some changes from the original.

High Holy Book

Matthew is writing mainly for a Jewish-Christian audience in transition. These folks embraced Jesus as the messiah, but still wanted to hold onto their Jewish roots. However, many Jews didn't think that the followers of Jesus were properly Jewish anymore.

Matthew's community had probably been kicked out of the synagogue and called “heretics” or worse yet, a “cult” by their fellow Jews. So, they were pretty down about that.

Because Matthew still sees himself as Jewish, he's very focused on making a case for Jesus as the Jewish messiah. He's got Jesus fulfilling biblical prophecies, quoting the Torah, arguing the law with the Pharisees, and living a fully Jewish life.

If only there'd been some matzo ball soup at the Last Supper, he'd have been all set.

Churching It Up

At the same time that Matthew is looking at his the past and his roots, he's also moving toward the future. His gospel is the only one that goes into detail about the emerging Christian church. He gives rules for being in a Christian community with others. Good stuff like, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone" (18:15). It's clear that the people needed a little instruction in these areas.

His stories are also chock full of encouragement for the early church. Sure, there are tough times ahead. Sure, everyone in the church "will be hated by all because of [Jesus'] name" (10:22). But, fear not. Their reward in heaven is coming. Just hold on for the end of time, guys. You've got this – you can do it!

Matthew is branching out a bit past the Jewish community.

Other Jews have rejected him and his friends, so now they're beginning to look to Gentiles to spread the good word about Jesus. Yes, Jesus came primarily to save Israel, but that didn't totally work out as expected. Now, we're going to Plan B: non-Jews, you're up.

A Style of His Own

Style-wise, Matthew is on his own. His writing is more polished (at least I think it is—but then my ancient Greek is sort of rusty). His stories are often shorter and clearer than Mark's, and he also adds in a lot of commentary. In fact, Matthew's typical pattern is to have a whole bunch of stories or parables, followed by a section of theological reflections.

Matthew also turns up the volume on the characters quite a bit.

The good guys, like Jesus, Peter, and the disciples, get a whole lot more awesome.

Jesus is much more dignified and authoritative, and Peter gets added responsibility (though Matthew can't completely ignore important things, like the time he denied knowing Jesus. Whoops).

Meanwhile, the bad guys, like the Pharisees, get a whole lot worse. Think of the curse they place on themselves at Jesus' trial. Matthew's not so much for leaving in shades of gray. He tells it – his way.

Getting Biblical in Daily Life

The Gospel of Matthew is primarily embraced by Christians. But does that mean that people of other faiths have nothing to say about it? No way.

Jewish Perspective

Though contemporary Jewish people don't accept Matthew's main proposition—that Jesus is the Jewish messiah—Judaism is still front and center in this gospel.

As Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine puts it, "I think Jews need to know this material, because [...] much of the New Testament is actually Jewish literature".

Reading Matthew's Gospel is like peeking through a window into the state of 1st-century Judaism. You have a picture of a community that was once part of Judaism, but is slowly breaking off. You also have a portrayal of a popular Jewish group—the Pharisees—from an entirely different perspective. Pretty fascinating stuff.

The one big negative about Matthew's Gospel is the way it's been used against the Jewish community over the years.

For example, the moment during Jesus' trial when Matthew portrays the religious authorities and the other Jews in the crowd calling out, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (27:25) has been used by anti-Semites throughout history. It not only lets them label 1st-century Jews as "Christ killers," but they think it gives them license to blame all Jews (past, present, and future) for the crime.

Um, we're gonna go out on a limb and say they're wrong. **WRONG!** Wrong! **WRONG!**

If you think that Matthew's Gospel is anti-Jewish, then you're forgetting one tiny little fact: Matthew, Jesus, and his followers were [Jewish](#).

You'll see Jesus mixing with other Jews, teaching in the temple, quoting the Torah, debating Jewish law, and even celebrating Passover. So, yeah, we're pretty sure that Matthew was not intending to lump all Jews for all time in with the mean group at Jesus' trial.

Muslim Perspective

Most Christians probably don't know how much Muslims dig Jesus. In true name-dropping form, the Qur'an mentions him about 25 times, as 'Iesa, a prophet and messenger.

Muslims claim that the gospels actually lay the groundwork for Muhammad to introduce Islam to the world ([3:3](#)) and that all Muslims must believe in what Jesus has revealed ([3:84](#)).

But there is that whole crucifixion discrepancy. What's the difference? Well, Muslims don't think Jesus was ever crucified. Here's how it goes down in the Qur'an:

[The enemies of Jesus would boast,] "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble

him to them. [...] And they did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. (4:157-58)

Basically, Muslims think Jesus is far too cool to have been executed.

Instead, Islamic tradition teaches that Allah just made it *look* like Jesus died on the cross, even though he actually ascended into heaven unharmed. The whole crucifixion story means that someone faithful would be allowed to suffer and die, and Muslims don't think God would let that fly.

One other thing. You know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit situation that the Gospel of John goes on about?

Muslims don't agree with that tenet of Christian faith either. They tend to be pretty firm about there being only one God:

Do not say, "Three," desist—It is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. (4:171)

Translation: it's a no-go for the Trinity.

Roman Catholic Perspective

Catholics are into Matthew's Gospel because it's the basis for a lot of great Catholic doctrine.

Take the special authority Jesus gives to his favorite disciple:

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church [...] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (16:18-19)

Catholics think of this moment as the institution of the church. This is the exact point at which Jesus decided that this whole messiah thing should keep on going. Jesus even appointed Peter as the first Pope in there somewhere.

HMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM....

Or at least that's what Catholics believe.

(Psst. Don't tell the current Pope, but Peter was married when he took the gig.)

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) also says that "The power to 'bind and loose' connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church."

This means that the Church is effectively Jesus' divine enforcer on earth. It's a pretty big responsibility.

Of course, Matthew also mentions the virgin birth, which is a huge deal to Catholics.

Again, the Catechism says, "The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility." Okay, that's sounds like what we're used to hearing. But, Catholics also take the whole virgin thing a little bit farther.

Not only do they believe that Mary conceived without ever having sex, but that even *Mary herself* was conceived without the "stain of original sin."

It's called the Immaculate Conception and its one of the four dogmas the Church teaches about Mary. It also means one extra vacation day in Italy. But then, we are not in ITALY, ARE WE? (sorry about that, my caps got stuck momentarily!) hehehe...

On top of that, Catholics believe that Mary is "ever-virginal." The basic idea is that, even after she had Jesus, and even after she married Joseph, Mary never, ever (even once in her life as a married woman) had sex.

As the Church puts it, "The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man." So there you go. She shudda been a nun!

Protestant Perspective

Protestants have quite a bit to say about the Catholic interpretation of these passages.

Sure, Protestants are down with the virgin birth, but they don't think that Mary abstained from sex for the rest of her life.

We're guessing Joseph wouldn't have liked that so much. Matthew's Gospel is probably on their side for this one, too.

Matthew says that Joseph "had no marital relations with [Mary] until she had borne a son" (1:25).

Most Protestants would say "until" is the key word there. He also mentions Jesus' brothers by name—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (13:55). Unless those were virgin births, too, that's some pretty tough evidence to refute.

Many Protestants also point to this passage, unique to Matthew: "Call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven" (23:9). They believe this contradicts the Catholic tradition of calling priests "Father."

Of course, Protestants still call their male parent a "father," too, so they're slacking a bit on this one. Slackers!!!!

Protestants also find some support for the idea of (big theological idea alert!) *justification by faith* in Matthew's Gospel.

This just basically means that Protestant Christians (like Lutherans^{í like us}) tend to believe that all you have to do is put your faith in Jesus, and God will be happy.

If you're happy and you know clap your hands....

Catholics, on the other hand, think you need to believe *and* do lots of good stuff here on earth. Just being faithful won't cut it. You gotta have works....

Matthew's pretty divided on the issue.

At times, he seems to support the idea that good deeds alone won't get you to the pearly gates: "Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not [...] do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers'" (7:22-23).

There's also the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where the landowner gives generously to those who haven't worked as hard (20:1-16).

On the other hand, Matthew also emphasizes our actions a whole lot. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works" (5:16). There's also this gem:

"The Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done" (16:27).

Who's right? Who's wrong? Only the Big Guy knows for sure. So until we get there, we're all just guessin'

Baha'i Perspective

Baha'i places Jesus in a group alongside some other huge names in the business like Moses, Buddha, and Muhammad... Some real heavy-hitters.

And they all get to be part of a pretty exclusive club: manifestations of God. This basically means they're divine messengers who have a little something extra that regular human being don't.

But Baha'i makes a point to [note the difference](#) between the spirit of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus. And as for the divinity of Jesus, Baha'i is pretty much [on board with that, too](#).

The oneness of religion is a *huge* concept in the Baha'i faith.

So it makes sense that the sacred texts of the world religions would also be important in Baha'i. One of their sacred scriptures, The Kitab-i-Iqan, even talks about the second coming of Jesus as described in The Gospel of Matthew ([The Kitab-i-Iqan, 24](#)). It's always nice to get a shout-out.

Getting Biblical in Daily Life

Wealth and Poverty

For a guy who doesn't have much money, Jesus sure talks a whole lot about it. Wealth and money, that is...

On second thought, maybe that's *why* he mentions it so much. So what does Jesus think about income inequality?

Blessed Are the Poor

Time after time, Jesus comes down pretty firmly on the side of the have-nots. Here are just a few select verses that don't look so highly on the rich:

- "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (6:19).
- "You cannot serve God and wealth" (6:24).
- "The cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word" (13:22).
- "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor" (19:21).
- "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (19:24).

Those are some pretty firm words.

It's clear that Jesus is really suspicious of those who put their effort into making money, rather than serving God. Get your nose out of those checkbooks and into some scripture, guys.

Free Market Messiah

It's not that wealth, in and of itself, is immoral. Take the Parable of the Talents (25:14-30). A master gives his slaves some money (or "talents," in the biblical parlance). The ones who invest and double their money are rewarded, but the ones who fearfully squirrel their money away are thrown into the darkness where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (25:30).

Does this mean Jesus wants us to put all our money in the stock market? Just point us toward the right ticker symbol. (I don't suggest JCP)

Jesus also seems to shrug off the problem of poverty at one point. He tells the disciples, "You always have the poor with you" (26:11). It sounds like, try as we might, there's nothing we can really do about income inequality. Heck, even God is throwing his hands up.

Who's Right?

Though Jesus doesn't seem to be saying that money is the root of all evil, he does pretty much agree with another biblical author: "Love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus wants us to put all our energy toward God, and that can be pretty hard if we're busy counting our piles of cash.

Sure, rich people can be socially and morally responsible. It's just a lot harder for them.

And, naturally, everyone thinks they're the generous rich guy. Even Ebenezer Scrooge thought he was nice for giving Bob Cratchit one day a year off with pay.

So, are the wealthy doomed? Are the poor going to inherit the earth? It remains to be seen.

Divorce

When speaking of the sacred bonds of marriage, Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (19:6). Yeah. Tell that to the 52% divorce rate...presently in our country....

Quit Being a Quitter

Jesus is pretty clear when it comes to divorce—just don't do it.

He acknowledges that Jewish law has permitted a man to divorce his wife in the past, but then says that, from here on out, that's not how we should roll (5:31). He even goes on to say that anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else is nothing more than a big ol' adulterer (5:32).

Even the disciples are taken aback by this teaching. No divorce? Then, "it is better not to marry," they tell Jesus (19:10). Wow. They really seem kind of commitment-phobic for a group of guys who are prepared to go to their deaths for what they believe in.

Exceptions, Exceptions

But there is some wiggle room with this rule. We like wiggle room, taxes are going to be due soon....so do all the wiggling you can – NOW!

Jesus says not to divorce your wife, "except on the grounds of unchastity" (5:32, 19:9).

So there's a loophole. If you catch your lady cheating, feel free to throw her to the curb. This seems to make sense even in the case of Joseph and Mary.

When Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant, he plans to break off their engagement because she's been unfaithful...or so he thinks (1:19).

Does this mean that Jesus would recognize other exceptions to this no divorce rule? What if your spouse is physically abusive? Verbally abusive? An addict? A criminal? Or what if, after lots of trying, you just can't get along anymore?

Should Christian couples be released from their marriage bonds if, like adultery, something else crops up that harms the relationship?

And what about those crazy Catholics and all that paper work and extra money given to the church – for the annulment?

How Do Christians Sort All This Out?

Though most Christian denominations frown upon divorce today, many of them also accept the view that sometimes stuff just happens.

Catholics, for one, don't allow divorce and regard remarriage after divorce as adultery. But you can also be awarded an annulment which means that, according to Church law, "a marriage was invalid from the beginning." But you gotta pay for that conclusion to be reached...it costs thousands of dollars today...

Though this is not considered "divorce" per se, it does show that many denominations are willing to bend the rules past what Jesus said. Naturally, the Catholic church would be first among them...and then, turn it into a money maker to boot!

Slavery

This one seems like a no-brainer. How could anyone think slavery is a good idea? It's not something Jesus could have supported, what with his love for the poor and downtrodden, right? Well, let's take a look.

Jesus Said What?

Jesus actually talks quite a bit about slavery in Matthew's Gospel.

- He tells several parables that feature slaves and their masters. One involves a slave who is punished by his master for being unforgiving (18:23-35). Another features a whole bunch of slaves who are killed, and no one bats an eye (21:33-41).**
- He also tells us that "slaves are not above their masters" (10:24).**
- And then there's this gem: "Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives" (24:46). Yikes.**

Jesus never once takes any opportunity to condemn slavery. Even a little bit. Jesus talks about slaves as if they are a fact of life. People are just owned by other people. No big deal. Nothing to see here. Carry on.

He's a Slave for You

Okay, but there is one verse where Jesus compares *himself* to a slave. Now we're getting somewhere. He says, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (20:28). Here Jesus seems to be saying that a life of servitude is laudable and that slaves have a Christ-like quality. Sure, it's not the same thing as abolishing slavery, but it's a start.

How Christians Have Handled It

Sadly, these verses from Matthew and elsewhere in the Bible have been used to defend slavery in the past. Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States of America said, "[Slavery] was established by decree of Almighty God [...] it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation" ([source](#)). He's right that slavery was around in biblical times, but you know what? Too bad.

There were also Christians who used the Bible to support abolition efforts. Eventually, the majority of Christian churches would come out against slavery as well:

- In 1696, Quakers in Pennsylvania stood in opposition to the slave trade.

- **John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and life-long opponent of slavery, declared that "liberty is the right of every human creature."**
- **In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI issued a statement saying that slavery was "contrary to the laws of justice and humanity."**
- **Northern and Southern Baptists even severed ties with each other over the issue of slavery.**

Though slavery is more or less a thing of the past in developed countries around the world, there are still places where [the institution lives on](#). Even in the United States, human trafficking, a type of slavery, is still a terrible problem. We're guessing Jesus wouldn't have been down with it, either.

Bring on the tough stuff - there's not just one right answer.

- 1. If The Gospel According to Matthew wasn't the earliest Gospel written, why does it appear first in the Bible?**
- 2. Matthew 16:13-23 shows Peter flip-flopping from faithfully proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah to then rebuking Jesus' prediction of his death and crucifixion. Because of this, Jesus goes from promising Peter the keys of heaven to calling him Satan and a stumbling block.**

Why are these two very different stories placed one right after the other in the Gospel?

- 3. Why does Jesus use his power to curse the fig tree so that it dies instead of just causing it to bear fruit (21:18-22)?**
- 4. Jesus tells his disciples that with faith they could tell a mountain to be lifted up and thrown into the sea (21:21). Who in the Gospel shows the greatest amount of faith? Why?**
- 5. When Jesus prays in Gethsemane before the crucifixion, he asks that God to "let this cup pass" (26:39). What does this indicate about the identity of Jesus?**
- 6. On multiple occasions, Jesus heals someone but then requests that they not tell anyone. Why the hush-hush?**
- 7. What if Judas had never betrayed Jesus to the chief priests? Would things have ended differently?**
- 8. Which of Jesus' miracles seems most, well, miraculous?**
- 9. What do you think would be included in the Gospel according to Jesus?**

Summary

Although the Gospel of Matthew was not the first gospel written, it is generally regarded as the most important and was placed first in the collection of writings that constitute the Early Christian Writings...

In addition to materials found in the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew contains a large number of Jesus' sayings and discourses and also a group of stories not found in any of the other Gospels.

Matthew contains an extensive account of Jesus' teachings and as such is considered the most authentic and fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion.

Readers of the gospel are impressed with certain general characteristics that distinguish it from other writings in the Early Christian Writings, one of which is the systematic way in which the contents of the gospel have been arranged.

For example, the document as a whole falls into five distinct divisions, with an introductory section preceding the first division and a concluding section following the last.

Each of the five divisions is composed of a portion of the narrative concerning Jesus' activities, together with a group of his teachings.

The words "When Jesus had finished saying these things" end each division.

This five-fold division of the Gospel of Matthew corresponds in a general way to the divisions found in various parts of the Hebrew Bible.

The sayings and discourses of Jesus are apparently taken in large part from an older document known as "The Sayings of Jesus," or the Q source, and are combined with the narrative found in Mark in the following manner:

The author of Matthew uses the same sequence of events that are recorded in Mark, but at appropriate intervals he interrupts the narrative and inserts a group of sayings.

One example of this kind is usually referred to as the Sermon on the Mount.

The materials included in this sermon also can be found in the Gospel of Luke, but they are scattered throughout Luke instead of being grouped together.

When Matthew reaches that place in the Marcan narrative where Jesus teaches the people, he inserts this group of sayings.

The organization of these sayings into a single sermon thus appears to be the result of Matthew's arrangement.

Another rather striking characteristic of the Gospel of Matthew is its high regard for the teachings of the Hebrew Bible.

There are approximately fifteen instances in which Matthew interprets some event in the life of Jesus as a fulfillment of a prophecy in the Hebrew Bible.

Evidently the author of Matthew did not think of Christianity as something that involved a definite break with the Jewish religion.

Instead, he considered Christianity as a continuation and fulfillment of that which had been set forth in the literature of the Hebrew Bible. Not for a moment did he think that Jesus changed or set aside the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

Rather, Matthew supplements and interprets the requirements in a manner that accords with their original purpose.

In his zeal to show a close relationship between Jesus and the Hebrew Bible, Matthew appears at times to make references to incidents in the life of Jesus for no other reason than to document them as fulfilling the Hebrew Bible prophecy.

A third characteristic of the Gospel of Matthew is its interest in ecclesiastical affairs.

As the only gospel that makes a direct mention of the church, much of the instruction recorded in Matthew is especially appropriate for particular situations that arose in the Christian churches of the first century.

Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus that traces his ancestry as far back as Abraham. The ancestry is traced on the side of Joseph, although the author later definitively states that Joseph was not Jesus' father. Duh! So why would use Joseph's family tree??????

Following the genealogy is an account of the wise men's visit to Jesus' birth site, Herod's attempt to destroy the newborn child, and the flight into Egypt for the child's protection. After the death of Herod, the family returned and settled in the Galilee town of Nazareth, which, according to Matthew, fulfilled another Hebrew Bible prophecy.

Following these introductory stories, Matthew continues his gospel by narrating the events in Jesus' public career in the same sequence as they are found in Mark.

As mentioned before, this sequence is interrupted at appropriate intervals for the insertion of discourses that Jesus delivered on various occasions.

This scheme enables Matthew to combine Jesus' teachings and events in one continuous narrative. While the author of the Gospel of Mark seems to have been impressed most of all with the wonderful deeds that Jesus *performed*, Matthew places the major emphasis on the marvelous things that Jesus *taught*.

Some of the teachings were spoken directly to the inner group of disciples, but at different times and places Jesus addressed the multitudes, among whom were many who gladly heard him.

Often Jesus spoke in parables, for in this way he could communicate his ideas concerning the kingdom of heaven in language that the people could understand because the parables were drawn from people's own experiences.

One of the important issues in the early history of the church was the attitude that Christians should have concerning the laws that are recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

Paul insisted that salvation is obtained by faith and not by obedience to laws. This insistence led some Christians to believe that whether or not these laws should be obeyed was a matter to be decided by an individual's own conscience.

Many Jewish Christians did not agree with this individualistic attitude. The author of the Gospel of Matthew appears to have been one of them.

According to his version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." And he also said, "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

Some scholars maintain that this last passage directly refers to Paul and his followers. Of this we cannot be sure, but evidently Matthew was far more sympathetic toward the religion of Judaism than was true of other writers.

In the story of the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus imploring help for her daughter, who is possessed by a demon, Jesus says to the woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." When the woman responds, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table," Jesus commends her for her faith and heals her daughter.

This narrative of the woman and her daughter represents only one aspect of the Gospel of Matthew.

Many other passages indicate that the gospel was intended for all people and not merely for Jews. In the parable of the householder who plants a vineyard, rents it to tenants, and leaves his servants in charge of the rent collection while he travels to another country, we have a clear indication that the scope of the gospel is inclusive of Gentiles. In this parable, the servants are beaten, stoned, and even put to death by the tenants. Then the householder sends his son to collect the rent, but when the tenants see the son, they cast him out of the vineyard and kill him, clearly a reference to the fact that Jesus was put to death because of his Jewish enemies. The parable concludes with the words, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

While Matthew insists that the laws of God are eternal and that Christians and Jews are obligated to observe them, he recognizes that formal obedience in itself is not enough.

This recognition is discussed in various parts of the Sermon on the Mount, as indicated by use of the expression "You have heard that it was said. . . . But I tell you. . . ." The point of the contrast in each instance is that not only the overt act but the *motive* that lies behind the act is of primary importance.

This point is emphasized again in many of the discussions that Jesus held with the Scribes and Pharisees.

Replying to their insistence about following certain regulations concerning eating and drinking, Jesus made it clear that the inner motives of the heart and mind are of far greater importance than following customs regarding table etiquette.

The early church seems to have entertained two different views concerning the coming of the kingdom of God.

One view held that it was strictly a future event, to be established at the end of the age but not until after the earthly kingdoms had been destroyed; the other view held that the kingdom was already present insofar as right principles and motives were established in human hearts.

In the Gospel of Matthew, certain passages support each view. Perhaps the author felt that these two opposing beliefs could be harmonized by regarding the kingdom within as a kind of preparation for a more complete establishment in the world without at some future time.

In the chapter in which the sayings of Jesus concerning the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem are identified as predictions concerning the second coming of Christ and the end of the world, we find a group of statements that discuss the signs that will portend when Jesus' return to this earth is near at hand.

These signs include wars and rumors of wars, and famines and earthquakes in various places. The sun will be darkened, as will the moon, and the stars will fall from the sky.

The gospel will be preached in all the world, and then the end will come. Jesus will descend to earth on the clouds of heaven in power and great glory. Then the kingdom of God will be established, of which there will be no end.

Matthew's gospel closes with accounts of Jesus' resurrection and his appearance to the disciples. Early in the morning of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and another Mary came to the tomb where Jesus' body was placed. They were met by an angel, who told them that Jesus was risen and asked them to look where Jesus' body had been. The women were commissioned to go and tell Jesus' disciples that Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee.

Because Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, was dead, there were only eleven disciples left.

The disciples met with Jesus in Galilee as they had been directed to do, and there Jesus instructed them, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

My Analysis – Runnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn

According to a very old tradition, the author of the Gospel of Matthew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

This view was expressed by Papias toward the middle of the second century, but what basis he had for this view we do not know.

That Jesus did have a disciple who had been a tax-collector is evident from the accounts given in the different Gospels.

In Mark, the name of this tax-gatherer is Levi, but in the Gospel of Matthew, he is called Matthew.

However, most Early Christian Writing scholars agree that the Gospel of Matthew was not written by one of Jesus' disciples, although it is quite possible that Matthew the Apostle may have had something to do with one or more of the sources that were used.

One of the main reasons for rejecting the traditional view concerning the author is that several passages in the gospel itself indicate quite clearly that the gospel was not written until after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.

The date of its composition is generally regarded as somewhere between the years 70 and 85 A.D.

The Gospel of Matthew, like the others in the Early Christian Writings, evidently is based on sources that were in existence for some time. The two sources on which most of the material is based are Mark and the *Logia*. The latter is sometimes called "The Sayings of Jesus" and is often referred to as the Q source. In addition to these materials, another source, sometimes called *M*, seems to be necessary to account for the unique portions of the gospel.

The introductory section, for example, contains several stories that are not found in any of the other Gospels.

These stories include an account of the birth of Jesus, the visit of the wise men from the East, the meeting of these men with King Herod, Herod's decree calling for the death of male infants, the flight into Egypt, and the settlement in Galilee.

Whether these stories were based on oral or written sources is unknown, but they are not found in either Mark or the *Logia*.

All that ancient Israel had looked for with hope and high expectation is now to be fulfilled in the Christian church.

Ancient Israel was given the Law through Moses, and now the new Israel has received another and even higher law in the teachings of Jesus.

The basis for membership in the new Israel is neither race nor color nor nationality nor anything other than the character of individuals who believe in Jesus and put their trust in him. Believers will come from both Jews and Gentiles and from all parts of the world.

In his selection and use of source materials for the writing of his gospel, Matthew represents different points of view. Some critics have argued that he was pro-Jewish in his outlook, but others have insisted that he was pro-Gentile.

Some scholars regard him as a thorough-going legalist, while others find a strong element of mysticism in his writings.

He was, according to some accounts, a disciple of Jewish apocalypticism, but others see him as one who believes that the kingdom of God will be established gradually in the lives of people.

These different interpretations do not constitute evidence that Matthew was confused in his thinking or that he contradicted himself on these various topics; rather, they indicate that he tried to be fair with each of the different points of view, recognizing that there was truth to be gained from each of them.

The result is the composition of a gospel that presents a balance between opposing conceptions and does so without destroying the element of harmony that brings them all together.

Matthew is Matthew and what you see is what you get, he is obviously no Mark, in spite of the fact that more than 90% of Mark's writing can be found in Matthew.

For me, quite personally, Matthew will always remain the second of four gospels...