

Introduction

PROVENANCE

Most questions about the origins of the First Gospel can only be answered tentatively. *Who* wrote the narrative? We do not know. All of the Gospels were authored anonymously. The attribution to Matthew came later, based on the fact that the Gospel changes the name of the tax collector called to be a disciple by Jesus from Levi to Matthew (contrast Mt 9:9 with Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27). Answers to questions that follow, however, prove this answer to be untenable. Still, for convenience's sake, scholars continue to refer to the author as "Matthew," and we shall follow this convention as well.

Where was the First Gospel written? Again, we don't know. Biblical scholars have made many suggestions over the years. The most popular is Syria, specifically Antioch. The initial reason for considering Syria is interesting but not very reliable: Matthew 4:23–24 is a summary of Jesus' healing ministry in Galilee and the spread of his fame that follows the initial call of the fishermen as disciples. Mark, who narrates the same call story of the fishermen (Mk 1:16–20), does not have this summary afterward. So Matthew's paragraph would potentially hold unique clues to the author's interests. The structure of the comment that catches scholars' attention is this: Jesus did many healings in Galilee and thus his fame spread throughout Syria. Syria could be used in two different ways in the ancient world. Romans called the entire area of the eastern Mediterranean, "Syria," as a governmental region. Locally, and more traditionally, "Syria," referred to the part of this governed region on the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea (north of Galilee). If in 4:24, Matthew is using "Syria" the first way, the passage makes sense. If he is using it the second way, it is odd that Jesus performs miracles in one region and his fame spreads throughout another. This would signal that Matthew might be referring to his home region—the location of the community from, to and for which he writes. This scholarly discussion does not add a lot of helpful information for preachers seeking to use a passage from Matthew as a lens through which to view God-in-Christ with us in the world today, but what it does add is important. First, it would put the author close enough to have some familiarity with the regions of Galilee and Judea without necessarily having intimate knowledge. This would explain some of the ways geographical and cultural details are named at times. Second, and more importantly, one of the reasons

Antioch in Syria makes sense is that it was a large city that in the later first century had both a large Christian population and a larger Jewish population. The tension between the synagogue and the church that is prominent in the First Gospel (see below) makes sense in such a setting. Knowing and sharing this can be important for the preacher because it helps avoid anti-Semitic, supersessionist *eisegesis* of Matthew in contemporary interpretation.

When was the First Gospel written? The label “First Gospel” refers only to canonical order, not chronological order. Almost all scholars agree that Mark was written first, around the year 70 C.E. in relation (at least in part) to the impending or just occurred destruction of the temple and the crisis of faith (i.e., theodicy) that it would have caused for Christians. Matthew uses Mark as his main source for writing his narrative. Approximately 90% of Mark appears in Matthew and about 50% of that shared material is word for word or nearly word for word. In addition to using Mark’s content, Matthew seems to follow Mark’s basic ordering of this material and thus the structure of his plot. Moreover, about two hundred of Matthew’s over nine hundred verses are paralleled by Luke but not Mark. Most of this material is sayings/teachings of Jesus, and so most scholars agree that Matthew and Luke share a sayings source (commonly called Q) that they use independently to supplement Mark. (While I find comparison between Matthew and Luke’s shared sayings material extremely helpful for preaching in conversation with Matthew’s unique theology, I find claims about whether Matthew or Luke’s version of a saying represents the original Q and discussion of the shape of “the Q community” based on insufficient evidence, forced and ultimately unhelpful for interpreting the text.) In sum, Matthew’s composition looks something like this:

- 66% comes from Mark
- 22% is shared with Luke
- 12% is unique to Matthew

So Matthew likely wrote ten years or so after Mark (giving Mark time to have spread and become known by Matthew’s community), editing Mark’s material and adding material to Mark as he felt needed to meet the new situation of his community of faith in a new day.

The struggle to explain the relationships between Matthew, Mark, and Luke is called the synoptic problem. Every seminarian since the beginning of the twentieth century has learned about it. Yet hardly any of our laity have ever heard of it. When I first learned of it in college I was angry that none of the pastors I had grown up with had ever mentioned it. So I called them and asked why they had not explained in it the pulpit. Overall, the

answers came down to a fear that such knowledge would weaken people's faith in scripture instead of build their faith. What happened for me in that first Introduction to New Testament course, however, was that my understanding of scripture was broadened and my faith in God was deepened. There is so much more of Matthew's theology from which to preach if the congregation learns that Matthew edited Mark and differs from Luke in the way in its attempt to faithfully present the gospel for a church facing particular circumstances in particular sociohistorical context. This knowledge sharpens the preacher's ability to draw analogies between Matthew's situation and ours, and the congregation's ability to follow the preacher in making that analogy and seeing God-with-us. Whether it be using a synopsis in a Bible study or a projection screen in worship, pastors can show laity the following kinds of things:

Matthew's concern for the fulfillment of scripture: point out that in contrast to Mark's version of the entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-11), Matthew edits it so Jesus rides two animals at the same time (Mt 21:1-11);

Matthew's redemption of the portrayal of the disciples: for example, where Matthew adds in Jesus' praise for Peter after the good confession before he rebukes him and calls him Satan (Mt 16:13-23; cf. Mk 8:27-33);

Matthew's approach to Jesus' theology in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) as compared to Luke's presentation in the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:17-49) especially as illustrated, say, in the beatitudes (Mt 5:2-12; Lk 6:20-26); and

Matthew's approach (My 28) to dealing with Mark's open-ending and lack of a resurrection appearance (Mk 16:1-8) in contrast with Luke's approach to the same problem (Lk 24).

By offering these sorts of examples over the course of preaching on Matthew throughout a year, laity likely will not feel threatened by them, will become convinced by the power of the cumulative evidence, and will learn to read Matthew (and the other Gospels) as theological narratives instead of trying to anachronistically press them into the service of modern journalistic, historical concerns.

SOCIOHISTORICAL TENSIONS IN MATTHEW

Much of biblical scholarship since the Enlightenment has focused on historical criticism—trying to answer questions about the historicity of references to events and characters in the biblical texts and the historical situations out of which those biblical works arose. (We have addressed some of those typical to Gospel studies in the previous section.) It has not always been clear to either scholars or preachers how or to what degree this historical research is useful to the proclamation of the gospel based on reading the Gospels as scripture. The answer preachers give to this question lies to a great degree in their theological orientation and that school of thought's view of the role of God in history and history as revelation.

For instance, in Gospel studies one of the long-debated historical issues relates to the historical Jesus—which stories and sayings come from the historical Jesus, which from the early church, and which from the hand of the author himself. To use classical theological terms, what is at stake is the relation of the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. Does a miracle story, for instance, have authority in the pulpit today because it reflects what Jesus really did or because it makes a symbolic/metaphorical theological claim about Christ? Or does a particular parable have authority for the church because Jesus actually said it or because it reflects the church's understanding of the implications of living faithfully in the name of Christ? It is beyond the scope of this work to deal with this issue thoroughly, but it is important to name my approach. Without denying that there are historical elements to be discovered in the Gospels, I assume the best way to approach the text in service of contemporary proclamation of the gospel is to read the Gospel of Matthew as ancient proclamation rather than history. In other words, we will be focusing on the final form of the text's presentation of Jesus Christ instead of the historical issues behind the text.

This does not mean, however, that historical issues will never come into play in our reading of Matthew. Matthew did not offer his proclamation in a vacuum any more than today's preachers do. Understanding how Matthew shaped his presentation of his understanding of Jesus as the Christ to address his specific context will help us shape our sermons based on the First Gospel to better address our contexts. What drove Matthew as an author can (and should) influence our driving forces as preachers. Historical criticism in the latter part of the twentieth century shifted from dealing primarily with finding historical facts in and behind the biblical texts to consider the sociological, political, and cultural contexts out of which those texts arose and which is addressed by them. There are three such contexts—specifically, situations of tension—that are

especially important for understanding Matthew's driving forces and that will come into play in lection after lection during Year A.

Rival Interpretations of Christ within the church: As we noted above, Matthew uses Mark as his main narrative source, but *edits* the Markan material significantly. Often scholars and preachers present Matthew and Luke's redaction of Mark in terms of the natural expansion of traditions. But let's be clear: Matthew did not expand Mark in some neutral manner by simply adding teaching materials to his narrative material. Matthew found Mark's narrative wanting when it came to meeting the ongoing needs of his church. Matthew's heavy dependence on Mark shows a great appreciation for Mark's presentation of the Christ event. But his willingness to omit some of Mark's material, change most of Mark's material he used, and add loads of material to what Mark compiled also shows Matthew's critique of Mark's final product. Even if the RCL takes a harmonizing approach to the synoptic material it selects over three years, preachers should not approach the lections using a harmonizing hermeneutic. Highlighting the different context in which Matthew wrote (as contrasted with the other Evangelists) and thus the different elements of content of the First Gospel (as compared with the other Gospel narratives) offers the congregation more gospel, not a divided gospel. By offering a congregation Matthew's unique theological approach to the Christ event, the hearers' understanding of God-in-the-world (that is, of God-in-their-lives) is expanded, whereas to only emphasize the theological elements the Gospels have in common distorts each Gospel's message and takes a reductionistic approach to the good news of Jesus Christ as proffered in the New Testament canon.

Throughout the commentary, however, on individual passages, we will examine specific redactional elements in Matthew's version of scenes and sayings that have parallels in Mark and/or Luke, but it will be good to examine a few of the more significant redactional elements in advance. First, Matthew changes the way the gospel story begins. Mark begins with John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism, so that Jesus *becomes* the messiah when God pronounces him to be God's Son at the baptism (Mk 1:1-11). Matthew extends the narrative backward to Jesus' ancestry and birth (Matthew 1-2). This addition does not simply represent biographical interest. Matthew changes Mark's christology, presenting Jesus as God's Son from his miraculous conception on. This identity (and the events confirming this identity) is a fulfillment of scripture. The narrative addition of the first two chapters changes the significance of Jesus' baptism and the interpretation of the stories that follow.

Similarly, and secondly, Matthew extends Mark's ending. In Mark the resurrection had been foretold and foreshadowed, but instead of narrating that

resurrection Mark concludes with an open ending that presents only an empty tomb but no resurrection appearance (Mk 16:1-8). This is a major element of Mark's corrective christology in which the evangelist is reemphasizing the cross for a community that has been over-emphasizing the resurrection, perhaps in relation to Christian hopes and expectations related Jewish Revolt of 66-70 C.E. Their theology would have been seriously challenged when the Romans destroyed the temple, the strongest symbol of God's providential concern for the Jewish people (including Christians who saw themselves as related to Judaism—see below). Mark's surprise ending in which the women tell no one about the promise to meet the risen Christ back in Galilee works parabolically because all of the original hearers/readers presumably already knew and believed a story of the resurrection. Matthew, however, is not writing such a corrective narrative in relation to a crisis of theodicy. The author fills out the promised appearance of the risen Christ—the women tell the disciples of the open tomb, and they meet Jesus on a mountain in Galilee where Jesus gives them the “Great Commission” (Mt 28). Moreover, Matthew tells the story of guards placed at the tomb to counter charges presumably made by Jewish religious leaders, that there was no resurrection, only a stolen body (27:62-66; 28:4, 11-15).

Third, Mark often refers to Jesus' teaching in a way that gives it great narrative and christological importance. Oddly enough, however, Mark provides little content of that teaching. Matthew's redactional element that has received the most scholarly attention is the addition of a great deal of sayings of Jesus. Matthew collects most of these teachings into five discourses (perhaps modeled on the parables and eschatological discourses in Mark 4 and 13, and to a lesser degree on the mission instructions in Mark 6:6b-13). Each of the first four discourses end with a transition statement like, “When Jesus had finished saying these things . . .” (8:1; see also 11:1; 13:53; 19:1), and the last one ends with, “When Jesus had finished saying *all* these things . . .” (26:1) The five discourses, therefore, are as follows:

1. Ethical Discourse (Sermon on the Mount): Matthew 5-7
2. Mission Discourse: Matthew 10
3. Parables Discourse: Matthew 13
4. Community Discourse: Matthew 18
5. Eschatological Discourse: Matthew 24-25

At times in the past, scholars have tried to equate these five discourses with the five books of the Pentateuch, assuming Matthew is presenting Jesus as the new Moses. While there are significant elements of a Moses typology

in Matthew's christological presentation of Jesus (especially in the first two chapters and the mountain setting that recurs in Ethical Discourse (chapters 5–7), the transfiguration (17:1–8), and the resurrection appearance (28:16–20; see also 14:23; 15:29) scholars generally agree that Matthew does not have a christology primarily shaped by a Moses typology and does not extend the elements of the Moses typology that are present to the structure of the discourses themselves. They are thematically connected discourses.

Rivalry between church and synagogue: As we mentioned earlier, Matthew was likely written ten or so years after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The destruction of the temple itself was not the immediate sort of crisis for Matthew at this later period as it had been for Mark. But as went the temple, so did the sacrificial system in Judaism. The *torah* and its principles and practices had to be interpreted in new ways for the new context. The priestly class of Sadducees essentially disappeared, and so did the Essenes (who argued they were the rightful priests to serve the temple over against the Sadducees). That left two groups to vie for the role of heir and interpreter of the Jewish traditions—the Pharisees and the Christians.

Matthew has been rightly described as the most Jewish of the four Gospels. It has also been rightfully described as the most anti-Jewish (although this title could also be given to John). On the one hand, Matthew presents Jesus in the lineage of Abraham and David (1:1–17), narrates events in Jesus' life as the fulfillment of ancient scriptural prophecies using multiple, formulaic citations from the prophets (for example, the first such citation is found in 1:22), and has Jesus himself claim not to abolish the law and the prophets but fulfill it (5:17–20). On the other hand, in material unique to Matthew, Jesus attacks the Jewish leaders with great force (see especially 23:1–36) and presents the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, spurred on by the religious leaders as calling for Jesus' execution while saying, "His blood be on us and on our children" (27:25).

This paradox grows out of the tension between Matthew's church and the synagogue over who has the best interpretation and application of the Jewish tradition in the post-temple, post-resurrection period. The break between the church (Matthew is the only Gospel that places the anachronistic term *ekklesia* on Jesus' lips; see 16:18; 18:17—chapter 18 is a church discipline of sorts) and the synagogue is especially evident in the fact that Matthew's narrator consistently describes Jesus as going to teach in *their* synagogues (4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; see also 11:1 where Matthew uses "their cities") as if Jesus as a Jew had no connection with the primary institution of Judaism in Matthew's day. More sharply, Matthew has Jesus accuse synagogues of being institutions that persecuted prophets and persecute the church (23:34; 10:17).

As we shall see in the commentary, Matthew does not present Jesus as a victim of unprovoked attacks by the Jewish religious authorities. Jesus makes the initial attacks on them. Both Matthew's vigilance in relation to the *torah* and his vehement attack of Jewish leaders should be understood as his attempt to legitimize the church and its faith in the midst of this struggle with the synagogue. Preachers will do well to highlight often this rivalry so as to help their congregation avoid using Matthew to support anti-Semitism. Indeed, it is Matthew's commitment to the idea that the Christianity of his day, including the inclusion of the gentiles in the church, is in continuity with the traditions and texts of Israel (over against the synagogue's claims that Christianity has broken with those traditions) that makes the rivalry so intense.

When this anti-synagogue/anti-religious leader theme shows up in lections, preachers will do well to help congregations recognize the role such rhetoric played in Matthew's struggle to defend and define the legitimacy of his church's life and faith. This can be done in such a way to affirm Christianity's continuity with Judaism today. Remember, both the church and Pharisaic Judaism were very young when Matthew was written in the late first century. Sibling rivalry can only occur if you are siblings. But usually as children mature, the siblings outgrow the rivalry while growing into new ways of valuing their relationship as siblings. In Western history, however, the church has sinfully and violently held on to the rivalry as the more powerful of the siblings in society. The costs to the church, to the Jewish people and to society have been enormous. Christians should not preach these texts in a post-holocaust age without humility and penitence in their hearts and on their lips. Moreover, with the dominant role the church occupies in Western society today, the preachers will often want to ask the congregation to identify and be convicted with the religious authorities/synagogue in the text instead of standing over against them.

Resisting the rival empire: One of the most common terms in the First Gospel is "the kingdom of heaven," (literally "of the heavens"). Matthew inherits the phrase and its significance from Mark—although Mark uses "kingdom of God"—but increases the emphasis on it in that he uses "kingdom" some sixty times compared to around twenty by Mark. Scholars have traditionally argued that the significance of Matthew's shift in phrasing is to make the term more appealing for a Jewish audience by using "the heavens" as a circumlocution which avoids uttering God's name. Since Matthew does use kingdom of God occasionally (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), this argument is not persuasive. Matthew's shift may reflect tradition or practice in his own community or a

stylistic choice of his own, but the import of the term does not seem to have shifted significantly with the change of modifier.

Before we discuss the import of the phrase for Matthew, we need to recognize that the traditional translation of the Greek word *basileia* as “kingdom” is problematic for two reasons. First, the word “kingdom” is a spatial or territorial term. *Basileia* can refer to a place that is ruled by someone, but it can also refer to the act/power of ruling itself. Second, the word kingdom is not inclusive by today’s standard of theological language. A kingdom is a place ruled by a male king, thus “kingdom of heaven” limits God by portraying God as male. Various terms—such as, reign, realm, rule, dominion—are in use as alternatives to kingdom, but none are without problems. In this commentary I will use “reign of heaven.” Although we rarely speak of rulers as “reigning” these days and “reign” loses some of the force of the spatial qualities of *basileia*, this translation conveys the power, authority and regality of *basileia*.

The translation “reign of heaven” also helps congregations overcome the way this term is often misunderstood in the church. Intuitively, we understand the significance of much of our vocabulary in terms of contrasts. Words make sense over against their opposites. “Up” makes sense over against “down.” “Yes” makes sense over against “no.” But many words that represent more complicated concepts can be contrasted to more than one thing, and only context makes clear which contrast is at play. When I use the word “woman,” I might be making a gender contrast over against “man” or an age contrast with “girl.” In today’s world when most people read or hear “kingdom of heaven,” their mind is led to contemporary understandings of the afterlife and “heaven” as opposed to “hell.” Or they hear it as a metaphor for the church over against the world—locating God in here with us but not out there.

In the ancient world, however, the heavens were the realm of God’s transcendent power and holy will over against the corrupt powers and self-serving desires in the “world.” This means that Matthew’s “reign of heaven” as a metaphor for God’s eschatological reign of justice and mercy should be understood as contrasted with the present reign of the world, especially although not solely, with the oppressive reign of Caesar. The reign of God represents God’s just and merciful desire for and calling of the world over against the church’s experience of life in the Roman Empire in which the vast majority had no political, social, or economic power. Matthew envisions a world transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. This transformation, for Matthew, is eschatological. It has begun in the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, but more is promised. The church is associated with the

reign of God but is not a synonym for it, since the church has fully arrived but the reign of God has not. (See the discussion of eschatology below.)

This contrast between the reign of heaven and the reign of the world means that Matthew's Gospel is thoroughly political. Ironically, the phrase "the reign of *heaven*" shows God's concern for the *world*. Recall the Lord's Prayer:

Your kingdom [reign] come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (6:10)

The evangelist is concerned that the church recognize that as they are not satisfied with the status quo, neither is God. Persecution of the church, economic disparity, exclusion of the unclean, oppression of those without power, lack of care for those who are ill and without means, peace forced on people by the sword, and so on and so forth cannot stand unchallenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The proclamation and work of the church should reflect God's desire that the world be healed—that the oppressed be saved and oppressors be judged. Preachers who deal with Matthew's messages only on individualistic terms and ignore its social and economic concerns are cheating key aspects of the First Gospel's presentation of the Christ event. While Luke's political agenda may be more obvious, Matthew's is no less significant for understanding the full import of the gospel for today's church. The very summary of the message of John the Baptist, Jesus and the church in Matthew is "Repent, for the reign of heaven has come near" (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Presumably for Matthew, this means the reign has come near *in Jesus*. For Matthew, then, salvation known and experienced through the Christ event is not limited to, but certainly includes, a sociopolitical dimension.

Given these three tensions that play a role in the development and expression of Matthew's narratives—rival interpretations of the Christ event within the church, rivalry between the church and synagogue, and the church resisting the empire—preachers will do well to ask of every Matthean passage from which they will preach: With whom is Matthew in dialogue here? Implicitly or explicitly, is Matthew speaking against something in his world as he affirms something in the narrative scene or saying of Jesus? Which rivalry in Matthew is at play in this passage? Or, vice versa, when Matthew speaks against something, is there a group affirming it that Matthew stands over against? Locating Matthew properly can better help the preacher locate the congregation effectively in relation to the sermonic claim that will be offered.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW

An important aspect of reading and preaching lessons from Matthew in Year A of the RCL in a cumulative fashion is a sound understanding of the Gospel's narrative structure and plot development. Not only the content, concepts, vocabulary and images in the Gospel, but the very flow of the story of Jesus' birth, ministry, teachings, passion and resurrection is theological. While the First Gospel's structure has been greatly debated, we should remember that outlining an ancient narrative is as much a heuristic device helping us get a handle on a literary work as a whole as it is discovering what the author actually planned. Thus in the long run, for a preacher, it is more important to recognize key narrative connections and transitions in the gospel that help put any individual pericope in an insightful narrative and theological context in the aid of proclamation than it is to determine precise and detailed narrative divisions which are argued for in different scholarly commentaries.

Variations on two basic proposals for understanding Matthew's structure dominate the scholarly debate. One is that Matthew has three primary sections (1:1—4:6; 4:17—16:20; 16:21—28:20), divided by the phrase "from that time Jesus began to" in 4:17 and 16:21. The three sections are complex, involving a range of types of narrative scenes and teaching materials as well as a variety of theological themes. Still some generalization is helpful for getting the big picture. The first section involves the establishment of Jesus' identity through his birth, baptism and temptation. The second is initiated by public proclamation of the reign of heaven. The third is initiated by private instruction about and that leads to the passion and resurrection. Ultimately, however, this outline is not convincing. The phrase argued to be transitional is simply not that prominent to be the kind of marker proposed. (Moreover, part of the phrase, "from that time," appears also in 26:16 in reference to Judas.)

The second and older proposal focuses on the five discourses mentioned earlier (Ethical, 5–7; Mission, 10; Parables, 13; Community, 18; Eschatological, 24–25). As noted in that discussion, in the classical development of this proposal (which is no longer accepted) scholars argued that the discourses represented a new *torah*, as Jesus represented the new Moses. Rejecting this interpretation of the discourses, however, does not mean dismissing them as key structural elements in the Matthew's narrative. The concluding phrases to the discourses (a form of "when Jesus had finished saying these things" in 8:1; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1) are more prominent than those observed in the previous proposal. The problems with this proposal are that (1) the gospel is presented as a pendulum between discourse and action that does not fully represent the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, resulting in the fact that (2) the

discourses are interpreted as disconnected from the narrative context in which they are found. Moreover, (3) emphasis on the sayings material often translates into a diminishing of the importance placed on the narrative sections as if they add little to what Mark has already provided, so much so that Matthew has in some older readings been incorrectly considered to be of the genre of ancient manuals for Christian living instead of a narrative at all. (This ignoring of the narrative aspects of Matthew is seen, as well, in the RCL's favoring of the sayings material over the narrative material in Year A.)

I want to suggest a third option for looking at the structure of the First Gospel: attending to the *geographical movement* of the gospel as a way of (1) valuing the flow of the narrative plot and the thematic development of the five discourses in these two proposals and (2) heuristically seeing Matthew as a theological and narrative whole while preaching through passages chosen by the RCL. In the outline below, the main headings name the primary geographical progression of the story (with the discourses listed in italics):

- Beginnings: From Bethlehem to Nazareth (1:1—4:11)
 - Birth (1:2—2:23)
 - Preparation for Ministry (3:1—4:11)
- Capernaum-Based Ministry (4:12—18:35)
 - Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (4:12-25)
 - *Ethical Discourse* (5:1—7:29)
 - Healings and Following Jesus (8:1—9:34)
 - *Mission Discourse* (9:35—10:42)
 - Conflicts Building (11:1—12:50)
 - *Parables Discourse* (13:1-53)
 - Jesus as the Son of God Who Feeds the World (13:53—17:27)
 - *Community Discourse* (18:1-35)
- Traveling to Jerusalem (19:1—20:34)
- Passion, Death, and Resurrection in and around Jerusalem (21:1—28:15)
 - Entrance (21:1-17)
 - Jesus against the Religious Leaders in the Temple (21:18—23:39)
 - *Eschatological Discourse* (24:1—25:46)
 - Preparation for Dying (26:1-46)
 - Suffering and Death (26:47—27:61)
 - Resurrection (27:62—28:15)
- Beginning Again in Galilee (28:16-20)

One of the most striking things to notice from this arrangement of Matthew's material is that four out of the five discourses fall within the narration of Jesus' Capernaum-based ministry. For all of the space Matthew gives to the discourses, they do not drive the narrative as a whole. Matthew's plot is influenced by the discourses but not determined by them. The overarching story is moved along by *growing conflict* between Jesus and the disciples on the one side and the demonic powers and religiopolitical authorities on the other.

In the Beginnings sections, Herod (along with religious authorities summoned and supported by him) seeks to kill Jesus, but through divine providence Jesus is rescued. This conflict which leads Jesus from Judea to Egypt then to Galilee serves as a pattern for the traveling conflict that defines the rest of the story.

In the Capernaum-based ministry (on Jesus setting up headquarters in Capernaum, see the commentary on 4:12-25), Jesus begins critiquing religious authorities in the Ethical Discourse (as had John the Baptist; 3:7) by calling his followers to a higher righteousness than the religious leaders practice. After the discourse, Jesus begins healing and casting out demons, and the religious authorities begin challenging his works, practices and teaching even to the point of accusing him of using the power of Satan in performing exorcisms (9:34; 12:24) and ultimately scheming to destroy him (12:14). Twice in this section, Jesus predicts the final conflict in terms of his arrest, suffering and death at the hands of the authorities (16:21; 17:12; see also 17:22).

This prediction is repeated and expanded in the section in which Jesus travels to Jerusalem (20:17-19; see also 20:22, 28), as is increased testing by the religious authorities along the way (for example, the section begins with Jesus being tested, 19:3-9). Jesus' public and symbolically loaded entry into Jerusalem and his attack on the temple intensifies the conflict in the opening of the final major section of the narrative. The religious authorities respond by challenging Jesus on numerous issues while he teaches in the temple. But Jesus gets the last word with the strident condemnation of the religious authorities as powerful and oppressive hypocrites (chapter 23). (By setting this attack in the temple just before Jesus departs the temple for the last time and predicts its destruction in chapter 24, Matthew associates the post-temple synagogue leaders in his day with the now defunct temple, thus lifting up the legitimacy of the church in the strongest terms yet.) But the religious authorities (in cooperation with the political powers) have the last act—they arrest, try, brutalize, and kill Jesus. Yet the death is not the end of the conflict. The religio-political powers carry the

conflict to the tomb by placing guards there. God, however, trumps all in the end by raising Jesus from the dead reducing their power to naught.

And in the final and shortest section of the narrative, in which Jesus and the disciples meet once again in Galilee, Jesus claims to have been given all authority in heaven and on earth (contrast Satan's claim to possess all the kingdoms of the world in 4:8-9) in a word that declares the conflict ended and won (28:18). It is not the discourses that drive the story, it is this conflict. And understanding where any individual passage is located in relation to this evolving conflict in Matthew will help the preacher name appropriately what is at stake in the scene. For instance, controversy scenes between Jesus and religious authorities are found in the Capernaum-based section, Travel Narrative, and Jerusalem section. But the tension is not equal in them, even if the clues within the passages themselves do not signal differences. The context should alert us that more is at stake for the plot in the conflicts in the temple than those at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Given the weight preachers should place on context in interpreting passages as exemplified in the rising conflict of the First Gospel, we must be careful not to read its discourses as if context does not matter. The discourses play the most obvious role in the presentation of Jesus' itinerant ministry in and around Capernaum. Throughout this section Jesus moves in and out of the public arena in different ways and the discourses add to this dimension. The Ethical Discourse, the first example of explicit teaching of Jesus in Matthew, begins with Jesus withdrawing from the crowd to speak with his disciples (5:1) but ends with the crowds astonished at his teaching (7:28-29). The Mission Discourse is directed to the Twelve (10:5) but its focus is on sending them out in public ministry to the people of Israel. Jesus addresses the Parables Discourse to the crowds (13:2-3) but interprets the parables in private for the disciples (13:10-23, 36-43). The Community Discourse is fully addressed to insiders in private—Matthew uses Jesus' last word in Galilee to speak directly to his late first century church before Jesus departs from there heading to Jerusalem (19:1).

The fifth and final discourse is also addressed only to the disciples and is part of the last major section. Its placement at the height of the story's conflict signals that it has a different narrative function than the others. Following Jesus' teaching in the midst of conflict in the temple, this discourse interprets the fall of the temple (which was in Jesus' future and Matthew's past) in eschatological terms. On the other hand, as a prelude to the death and resurrection—that is, the eschatological moment of all moments—Jesus delivers the last discourse on last things, and its purview is much more cosmic in nature than the teaching in the earlier discourses (although they all have eschatological elements as well).

This signals that the conflict that drives Matthew's story of the Christ event and especially the divine resolution of that conflict (along with the presumed parallel tensions in Matthew's situation which the evangelist is addressing) are eschatological in nature. (See the discussion of eschatology below.)

MATTHEW'S THEOLOGICAL THEMES

In the commentary that follows I will often signal the theological character of a lection as a way to signal what the theological character of the sermon should be. A great deal of preaching today de-emphasizes theology and emphasizes instead exhortation with theological language added for seasoning. If biblical preaching, however, uses a scripture passage as a lens for viewing God-with-us and the implications of that claim for our way of life, we must use the lens properly. At the core of biblical preaching is analogy between the world behind and in the scriptural text and our contemporary world. While much has changed in human society since the composition of the biblical texts, and while in a postmodern worldview we may resist making universal claims, biblical preaching assumes that the character and will of God and the core human condition (and thus state of the world) are basically the same today as they were then. Otherwise ancient scripture would have little to say to us today. Thus when we preach on a biblical text, we do well to make sure our sermon is in the same theological category as the text we are using as a lens for our interpretation of the gospel in today's world.

As we have said, at its core, the First Gospel is proclamation. It is theological proclamation that was developed in a specific time and place for a specific people. It is proclamation offered in the light of certain sociological, religious, and political tensions that were part of that time and place, so that the narrative world and the author's world bleed into one another. It is proclamation in the form of a complex story instead of direct theological discourse. But it is proclamation. And we preachers claim that this proclamation is relevant for *our* specific time, place, and people. Matthew proclaims God's decisive engagement in the world in Jesus Christ, and thus offers us in his narrative a lens through which we can view God's continued engagement with us. Thus it is important to attend to recurrent theological themes in the First Gospel before we move to exegetical commentary on individual passages. By foreshadowing some of the more important theological aspects of Matthew's thought in this introduction, we will have data to use in preaching cumulatively from any individual reading from the RCL where these themes

occur. Throughout the commentary, I will often note the theological arena of the passage to point preachers in a helpful direction.

Christology. First and foremost, Matthew is a christological work. In narrating the works of Jesus—the teaching, healings, death, and resurrection—Matthew proclaims something of the person of Jesus Christ.

Some of the most obvious clues to Matthew’s christology are the titles he uses for Jesus. More than conveying distinct aspects of Matthew’s theological understanding of Jesus’ identity, these titles cluster and overlap to offer a broad picture of Jesus’ theological significance. Matthew is filled with various christological titles, references and metaphors. We can only consider a few of the most important clusters here.

First is the name “Jesus” itself. As opposed to simply presenting “Jesus” as a proper name, Matthew etymologically connects the name with Jesus’ purpose: saving his people from their sins (1:21; cf. 26:28). Thus to say that Matthew is a christological work is to say it is a soteriological one. Matthew also uses “Messiah/Christ” (Greek: *Christos*) as a proper name at times (in the phrase “Jesus Christ”), but more often as the title indicating Jesus as God’s “anointed.” This is a religiopolitical term implying a kingly figure in the line of David (and thus connected with the title “Son of David”). Jesus is no insurrectionist but the “king of the Jews” who suffers to save his people (2:1-6; 21:1-9; 27:11, 37, 42).

Second is “Son of God.” This title is paired with Messiah in 16:16 and 26:63 so should not be seen as implying something radically different from that just discussed. It is, however, a more expansive term. Whereas in Mark, Jesus is claimed as God’s Son at his baptism (Mk 1:11), in Matthew the voice at baptism (Mt 3:17) simply confirms what has been established earlier in the narrative through the story of the divine conception and virgin birth (1:19-24). Jesus claims this identity for himself in the story of the temptation, and (differently than in Mark where this identity is not affirmed by any human until it is revealed at the point of his death, 15:39) others use the title for him as well (14:13; 16:16; 27:54). Jesus as Son of God is “Emmanuel” (1:23), God’s presence with God’s people (see also 28:20). Thus Jesus authoritatively reveals God’s will for the world as well as God’s love for and judgment of the world.

Connected with “the Son of God” (Greek: *ho huios tou theou*) in terms of parallel linguistic construction is the Greek title *ho huios tou anthropou*, traditionally translated as “the son of man.” This translation uses antiquated, male-exclusive language and simply does not convey the full sense of *anthropos*. Scholars have suggested terms like, “the Human One,” or “the son/child of humanity.” There is much to value in these, but they lose the linguistic parallel

with “the Son of God.” Therefore, although it is a wooden translation, awkward in English, and not necessarily recommended for the oral-aural arena of the pulpit, we are going to use the literal, “the son of the human” in this commentary.

“The Son of God” and “the son of the human” complement each other instead of naming different understandings of Jesus—we must be careful not to read later doctrinal formulations into “the Son of God” (fully divine) and “the son of the human” (fully human). Whereas “the Son of God” is established in the Beginnings section of the narrative, “the son of the human” does not appear until 8:20 during the Capernaum-based stage of Jesus’ public ministry, because in the narrative it is only used by Jesus to refer to himself, and he does so thirty times from this point on (approximately twice the number of times reference to Jesus as God’s Son are made). Hebrew and Aramaic predecessors to *ho huios tou anthropou* are simply poetic ways of referring to a generic person or likeness of a person. This is the case in the vision in Daniel 7, from which the Gospels’ use of the term clearly comes (see Mt 24:30). In the first part of the vision recounted by Daniel (7:1–8), there are four beasts representing four kingdoms. But then two heavenly figures in human likeness appear, the Ancient of Days (7:9) and “one *like a human being* coming with the clouds of heaven” (7:13, NRSV, italics added to designate the phrase more literally translated “son of a human”; cf. Mt 24:30) to whom the former gave authority and kingship to bring judgment upon the beasts/kingdoms (Dan 7:14). In other words, the phrase “son of human” designates a celestial being appearing in the vision in the likeness of a human. By the time the Gospel writers use the term, however, the figure in Dan 7:13 was understood in Second Temple Judaism as a specific apocalyptic redeemer/judge, and thus they used the phrase as a title. While Jesus almost nonchalantly refers to himself as “the son of the human” in the way celebrities refer to themselves in the third person, by using the title in this way Matthew presents Jesus as an eschatological figure who brings judgment into the world (for example, 10:23; 13:41–43; 16:27–28; 19:28; multiple uses in ch. 24; 25:31; 26:64). But the apocalyptic judge is also the servant one who suffers and dies to give his life as a ransom for many (24:27; see also 9:6; 16:13,21; 17:12, 22; 20:18; 26:24, 64).

Whereas the Gospels present Jesus using “the son of the human” to refer to himself, the final title we should examine is used in Matthew only by Jesus’ followers and those seeking aid from Jesus: “Lord” (8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27; 16:22; 17:15; 18:21; 20:30, 31, 33; 26:22; on calling Jesus “Lord” without submitting to him, see 7:21–22). The term is striking because it is commonly used for God as well as for Jesus. The Greek *kyrios* can simply be

a title of common courtesy/respect, like “sir” in English, but it can also imply a more significant level of dependence and even subservience on the part of the one using it to address another. When applied to Jesus in Matthew, it certainly implies nothing of a divine nature and in fact adds little to the christological content we have already named. What it shows, however, is something of the posture Matthew assumes members of the Christian community should have toward Jesus given the authority of his teaching and works. We approach the Messiah, the Son of God, the son of the human, our teacher, healer, redeemer judge, with humility and subservience.

We preachers often sprinkle our sermons with such christological titles without explaining their significance to our congregations. Most likely, we assume the congregation is familiar with them. This may or may not be the case, but it is highly unlikely that our congregation recognizes that Matthew uses these terms in distinctive ways. One way to preach on a lection that is christological in nature is to use the christological title(s) in the passage as an entry way into everything else going on in the scene.

Characterization of God. As named above, in the Beginnings section Matthew goes a long way toward establishing the core content of his christology, especially in identifying Jesus as “the Son of God” in the stories of the conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth. One of the reasons “the Son of God” is such an important christological title in Matthew is that it is the flip side of the characterization of God as “Father.” Whereas Mark uses the title four times and Luke seventeen, Matthew presents Jesus as calling God “Father” over forty times. Jesus refers to God in a personal way using the language of “my Father” (7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53), but he also includes his followers as children of God by speaking of God as *our* and *your* Father in the discourses (5:16, 45; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 15, 18; 7:11; 10:20, 29; 18:14; compare descriptions of the disciples as “sons of God/reign” in 5:9, 45; 13:38).

In contemporary preaching, this paternal metaphor for God is often sentimentalized or romanticized in a way that does not fit with Matthew’s use. While “Father” does convey parental love, we must remember that the first century was a time of extreme patriarchy. (This patriarchy has been continued in the church through the use of “Father” as the dominant metaphor for God—a matter that needs great liturgical, homiletical and theological consideration but is beyond the scope of this commentary.) Fathers had significant power over their children and households. Matthew’s use of “Father” for God, therefore, includes on the one hand, providential and salvific care for God’s children, and

on the other, it conveys God's authority and judgment over the world. It is very nearly equivalent to a kindly king. Therefore, we must be careful not to read too high a level of intimacy into this characterization of God. After all, while Matthew uses "Father" much more than does Mark, Matthew omits Mark's use "Abba" in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36, Mt 26:39).

Perhaps most revealing, Matthew usually has Jesus speak of God as the Father *in heaven* or as the *heavenly* Father (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9, 14, 26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32–33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 23:9). Marking Father as a formal title for God instead of a form of intimate address, these spatial modifiers signal the transcendence of God. God is in heaven—distant, holy, Other. And this transcendence is part of what explains the eschatological nature of Christian experience. God is with us through Christ as Emmanuel (1:23; 28:20), but as we must await temporally for consummation of the reign of heaven, we wait (spatially) the coming of God's will on earth as it is in heaven (6:10).

While in a commentary on Matthew, one cannot avoid reference to the "Father" in the text, preachers should be careful in using this metaphor homiletically and liturgically. Matthew's use has clearly shaped the way the masculine term for God has become the dominant metaphor for the deity in Christianity (and thus limiting God) and the many subsequent ways women have been marginalized and oppressed in the church and in society. Given the theological and ethical problems with the term, preachers must ask whether they can any longer faithfully proclaim the reign of God made known in Jesus Christ using this metaphor.

Eschatology. It is difficult to exaggerate the apocalyptic dimension of Matthew (or of the New Testament as a whole, for that matter). Nearly every action and teaching of Jesus in the gospel has eschatological import (albeit to varying degrees). This eschatology is best understood in the context of Matthew's broad picture of salvation history. Although Matthew's plot extends from the conception to the resurrection of Jesus, his story world extends from Abraham (1:1) to the end of time (28:20). Put differently, at all times in his narrative, Matthew has in view both Israel's past and the church's future, and the story of Jesus serves as the hinge between the two. Israel's past has leaned in toward Jesus as seen in the fact that as the Messiah he is the fulfillment of scripture. And Jesus leans toward the future of the church (and indeed of the cosmos) in that even the death and resurrection narrated within the storyline is not the end of his work—the *parousia* is.

Matthew most explicitly refers to the *parousia* in the Eschatological Discourse in chapters 24–25. He inherits this discourse from Mark 13, but edits

some of the language here and there, intensifies the expectation of the coming of the son of the human, and adds a significant amount of material (both “Q” material shared with Luke and material unique to Matthew) urging the disciples to be ready for the end. These elements are seen right from the beginning of the discourse. Mark’s discourse begins when Jesus leaves the temple, predicts its destruction and then is asked when this will happen and “what will be the sign that *all these things* are about to be accomplished” (Mk 13:4). In Matthew, however, after Jesus predicts the fall of the temple, the question is different: “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign *of your coming and of the end of the age?*” (Mt 24:3) Right from the outset, Matthew makes clear that the coming of Jesus and the end of times is absolutely connected.

When and how this *parousia* at the end of times will occur, however, are anything but clear. Matthew’s intensification of Mark’s eschatology might indicate that his hearers are less concerned about the *parousia* than he thinks appropriate. So Matthew names in strong terms the judgment that is part of the *parousia* with parables warning what happens to those not prepared (24:37–25:46).

Nevertheless, in attempting to raise his readers’ eschatological awareness, Matthew does not overstate his knowledge of the end (24:36). He makes clear that the coming of the son of the human is not to be associated with natural disasters or human violence, especially the destruction of the temple or persecution of the church (24:4–28). It will be accompanied, instead, by cosmic signs described in scripture—that is, the destruction of the lights in the sky (24:29). This cosmic description of eschatological expectations shows that while Matthew is clearly persuaded a literal salvific judgment is in the future and wants to persuade his readers of such, he is more concerned with his readers living eschatologically in the present. As long as the sky is the same way it was yesterday, you need to keep living toward God’s future.

This is the “already/not-yet” of eschatological existence. God’s salvation and judgment have already arrived in Christ (as seen in the existence of the church), but they are not fully consummated (and seen in continuing evil in the world). For Matthew, it is incorrect to view the first coming of Jesus as historical and the second as eschatological. To speak the name Jesus is, in Matthew’s view, to make an eschatological statement.

Notice that John’s disciples ask Jesus—who stands before them in the present—“Are you the one to come?” in the future tense (11:3). And notice that the Gadarene demoniacs in 8:29 confront Jesus, recognizing him as the Son of God and asking a different question than is found in Mark 5:7: “Have you come here to torment us *before the time?*” (Greek for “time” here is *kairos*; while not

all uses of *kairos* in Matthew have this weighty, eschatological sense, often it does: 11:25; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34, 41; 24:45; 26:18.) The demons seemed to think they had full reign until “the end of the age,” but this is not the case. Matthew’s story of Jesus is the story of the beginning of the eschatological age. The birth, teachings, healings/exorcisms, death and resurrection of Jesus as a whole mark the incursion of the end of the ages, in which we currently live and which we wait to see fulfilled. In Matthew’s view, you cannot be a Christian and not experience existence eschatologically.

The same in-betweenness is found in language of *the reign of heaven*. As we have said, the reign of heaven is to be understood over against the reign of this world (especially the reign of Caesar), and thus is a thoroughly political concept. But it is more expansive of a concept for Matthew than a political reference alone can make clear. Jesus never defines the reign of heaven, but only describes it in parables that evoke questions about one’s relation to the reign of heaven more than answer questions about the nature of God’s reign itself. But clearly for Matthew, the coming of the reign of heaven cannot be separated from the coming of the son of the human/son of God. While Matthew speaks of the reign of God existing before Jesus’ time, it has been suppressed by violence (11:12). The consistent proclamation of the approach (the Greek *eggizō* in the perfect tense can also mean “drawn near” or “has arrived”) of the reign of heaven by John, Jesus and the disciples (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) and the parables comparing the reign of heaven to growth (13:24–33) indicate God is doing something new in Jesus. A new order has begun. But (as with Matthew’s language of the *parousia*) this new order is not complete. Even though the reign of heaven has approached, the church is to pray for its coming (6:10).

Yet the First Gospel presents Jesus as predicting that the *parousia* will occur during the lifetime of some of those in the story (that is, in his generation—see 10:23; 16:28; 24:34). Matthew and Matthew’s church, of course, know this did not occur, so why did the evangelist not edit or omit these sayings? While historical answers to this question are hard to find, the presence of this theme does show that Matthew at least suggests a metaphorical interpretation of his eschatological themes alongside any literal interpretation one might propose. After all, one does not edit Mark’s Gospel to include teaching to inform the hermeneutics and practices of the church for the long run with the expectation that the son of the human is literally surfing in on the clouds any minute.

Thus in today’s theological climate and given the passing of two thousand years without the *parousia*, preachers will do best to interpret these themes in experiential terms instead of chronological ones. Eschatological existence can be compared to driving a car on a lonely country road (with no street lamps)

at night. With no oncoming traffic, you put your high beam lights on and ease toward the center of the road a little. But then as you begin to rise up a slope, you see headlight beams coming from the other side of the hill. You move back to the right some and turn off the high beams. This is a simplified version of already/not-yet. You have not yet met the vehicle coming your way, but you have already adjusted your driving in relation to its approach. To be a Christian shaped by the Christ event but living in a world shaped also by evil forces is to live everyday with the headlights but not the full reality of the vehicle.

Ecclesiology. The church for Matthew is the eschatological community formed by Jesus and living in the already/not-yet of the last days in light of his teaching, healing, death and resurrection. The church is not alone in this time. Even while awaiting the *parousia*, they have the promise that Jesus is with them (1:23; 18:20; 28:20). That Matthew is especially concerned for the church is seen in the fact that the fourth discourse focuses, to a great degree, on life in the church (the Community Discourse; chapter 18). In fact, as we have noted earlier, in this discourse Matthew anachronistically puts the word church (Greek *ekklēsia*) in Jesus' mouth (18:17; see also 16:18).

Jesus formed the church for Matthew in that he called the disciples, taught them, empowered/authorized them and sent them out as his emissaries. The disciples represent the church in Matthew's narrative, or conversely, the readers are led to identify with the disciples in the narrative. Understanding how Matthew does this will help preachers invite their congregation to identify with the disciples appropriately in different lections from Matthew.

This identification between the church and the disciples is found in Mark as well, but in Mark the disciples start off in a positive manner—obediently responding to Jesus' call (1:16–20)—only to misunderstand who Jesus is (for example, 4:41), and to eventually abandon him at his arrest (14:26–31, 50, 66–72). A key Markan passage in showing the disciples as flawed is Peter's confession in 8:27–33. When asked who the disciples think Jesus is, Peter uses the correct words: “You are the Messiah.” But something is signaled as wrong when Jesus immediately (and sternly) orders the disciples to keep this silent; then foretells his suffering, death and resurrection using not Peter's title of Messiah but “the son of the human;” and then rebukes Peter to the point of identifying him with Satan when Peter tries to rebuke Jesus. This flawed understanding of the Markan disciples is likely a literary technique to help the Markan readers see their own flawed christology.

Matthew, however, redeems the disciples to a great extent. They certainly misunderstand Jesus at times, and they certainly abandon Jesus at his arrest

(26:31–35, 56, 69–75). But they are much more aware of who Jesus is than in Mark’s version. As a group, they profess him as the Son of God (14:33). And Peter does so in the confession at Caesarea Philippi, expanding Mark’s “Messiah” to “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Instead of immediately silencing Peter, Jesus blesses him, explicitly founding the church. Matthew then continues with the Markan material in which Jesus orders the disciples to tell no one, predicts his death and rebukes Peter by calling him Satan (16:13–23). But the dye has already been cast a different color and the scene has a much more positive tone. Matthew’s disciples are a positive model for the church to emulate.

Indeed, the authority given to Peter when Jesus praises him for his confession is the same authority Jesus gives to the church just a couple of chapters later in the Community Discourse. Jesus says to Peter, “And I tell you, you are Peter [Rock], and on this rock I will build my church... And 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). Likewise, when Jesus describes the role of the church in conflict between Christians, he says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (18:18).

Matthew’s use of the disciples as representatives of the church in his gospel means that not only is the discourse of chapter 18 directed especially to the church, so are the other discourses. Only the Parables Discourse (chapter 13) is addressed to the crowds instead of the disciples, but even it contains private interpretation offered only to the disciples. Matthew’s expansion of Mark with teaching materials grouped into these discourses for the disciples/church shows that the evangelist is concerned with creating a document that will undergird the ongoing life of the community of faith in a way he assumes Mark’s narrative does not. He provides the church with instructions for their ethical life, their missionary outreach, their understanding of the reign of God, and their eschatological existence. With the RCL’s emphasis on these discourses during Ordinary Time of Year A, preachers will do well to imagine with their congregations ways these teachings name who the church is and who it is to become in accordance with God’s will and Jesus’ ministry as opposed to reading them in ways that laity hear the lections as addressing individuals alone.

Part of Matthew’s goal in narrating and providing teaching for the church in these ways is to locate the church within the scope of his vision of salvation history. As we described earlier, Matthew views Jesus as the hinge between Israel’s past and the church’s future. A theological problem in connecting

those two for the New Testament writer is the fact that the church contains gentiles. How can a gentile-filled church be part of Jesus as fulfilling instead of abandoning the *torah*? In addition to having Jesus exhort the disciples/church to hold on to a higher righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees in observing the law in the Ethical Discourse (5:20), Matthew answers this question with a two-stage mission. When Jesus sends the disciples out to exorcise demons, heal sickness and proclaim the approach of the reign of heaven in the Mission Discourse, he begins with the explicit instruction, “Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:5-6). This is striking given Matthew’s distancing of Jesus from the synagogue discussed above. In other words, the mission of the disciples (historical representatives of the church) is narrated as initially being directed only to the Jews. Mark does not contain this element in his form of the sending of the twelve (Mk 6:7-13), so Matthew has made an intentional theological move in adding it. Mark concludes the mission with the disciples reporting what they had done and taught (Mk 6:30), but Matthew never reports the apostles’ return. Omitting this detail is likely also intentional, signaling to the reader that the mission to the Jews has not ended. Thus when expounds upon the parable of the vineyard, claiming, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (21:43), the “you” refers to religious leaders and not Israel as a whole. After the resurrection, however, Jesus returns to Galilee of the gentiles (4:15) and instructs the disciples now to go and make disciples *of all nations* (28:19). The gentile mission does not replace the mission to Israel but supplements it. In spite of his church’s conflict with the synagogue, Matthew views Jesus’s concern as being universal—not either/or but both/and. And he assumes the church’s concern should be the same. The church today that reads Matthew, therefore, should have an evangelistic fervor to proclaim the good news of the reign of God known in and through Jesus Christ but without anti-Semitic or supersessionist tones to the proclamation.