**THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (25 Studies)**

**Assembled by Jeremy Stephens**

**How to use this guide.**

Undoubtedly, these are huge sections of scripture set up in blocks to illuminate themes in Matthew about Jesus. Each block, despite how large, has important thematic elements that tie it all together. Some of the sections may be too large to study in one sitting, yet smaller passages can be extracted to gain the theme of each block. For example during the Sermon on the Mount block you might choose to reduce the block from 48 verses to only a few while still encouraging the community to consider the text within its larger context. I gave some suggested alternative passages, though they are even quite large so further modification may be needed. Each group using this guide will have the freedom to choose how to specifically break up each block according to the needs of their community, yet can be confident that as they move through Matthew no major themes will be missed.

I included plenty of commentary (*IVP Background Commentary* and *Matthew for Everyone Series*) but it is not exhaustive. Some will be extremely important to pass on to the community while other parts will only help you as a leader grow in your depth of understanding. As you shorten the text for your community’s needs, the correlating commentary will be embedded and you will need to search for the relevant information.

Finally, I included a fun little part call, “Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments” as a way to share a few thoughts and insights in a condensed format. Some of the comments only make sense when looking at the passage directly and some might not even make sense at all. Take it or leave it.

[**INTRO**](#id.assaknfy88kr)

[**Matthew 1:1-2:23 (alternate passage Matthew 1:...**](#id.k7pczd2wjgop)

# **[Matthew 3:1-17](#id.kb9zcmffdkib)**

[**Matthew 4:1-25 (alternate passage Matthew 4:12-25 or…**](#id.tbcc59qs4url)

[**Matthew 5:1-48 (alternate passage Matthew 5:1-16 or…**](#id.bm6klcxjnn)

[**Matthew 6:1-34 (alternate passage Matthew 6:1-24 or…**](#id.gt86z2i27ivj)

[**Matthew 7:1-29 (alternate passage Matthew 7:7-29 or…**](#id.ezc3zxftr4od)

[**Matthew 8:1-9:8**](#id.lapakakofyqx)

[**Matthew 9:9-10:42 (alternate passage Matthew 9:...**](#id.e2a9pe7r1lac)

[**Matthew 11:1-30**](#id.b1251eofd3g0)

[**Matthew 12:1-50**](#id.v6rxecyswhv4)

[**Matthew 13:1-53**](#id.lva42c9bd6ob)

[**Matthew 15:1-39**](#id.ysez38m7rt9g)

[**Matthew 16:1-28**](#id.2gpagivnc6ya)

[**Matthew 17:1-27**](#id.h81q0avox421)

[**Matthew 18:1-35**](#id.tq659bxho9gu)

[**Matthew 19:1-20:16**](#id.nhyrbuavtyyk)

[**Matthew 20:17-21:32**](#id.lj9ze5dljzi)

[**Matthew 21:33-22:46**](#id.xxc5uirvj55e)

[**Matthew 23:1-39**](#id.wmhfvkfs8jdk)

[**Matthew 24:1-44**](#id.5dawc72k8hru)

[**Matthew 24:45-25:46**](#id.bmsnlhqfbzqv)

[**Matthew 26:1-56**](#id.2zyrdx6jtkry)

[**Matthew 26:57- 27:44**](#id.wagr6qedb0nv)

[**Matthew 27:45-28:20**](#id.v2p3uhjly3km)

# **Intro**

**Date**. The date of Matthew is debated. Some conservative scholars, like Robert Gundry, date Matthew before A.D. 70 and attribute its authorship to Matthew; other equally conservative scholars date Matthew around 80 and are less certain about authorship. Because Matthew addresses the emerging power of the \*Pharisaic \*rabbis considerably more than Mark (but still recognizes the power of the \*Sadducees and the priesthood), and these rabbis began to achieve some political power in Syria-Palestine mainly after 70, it is reasonable to surmise that Matthew was written in the seventies, although this date is not certain. Where Matthew Was Written. The most likely locale is in the area of Syria-Palestine, because that is where the rabbis exercised their greatest influence in the seventies and eighties of the first century. But again certainty is not possible.

**Setting, Purpose.** Matthew addresses the needs of his Jewish-Christian readers, who are apparently in conflict with a Pharisaic religious establishment (cf. 3:7 with Lk 3:7; Mt 5:20; 23:2-39). Members of the early rabbinic movement, mainly successors of the earlier Pharisees, never achieved the power they claimed, but they began to consolidate as much juridical and theological influence as possible, especially in Syria-Palestine, in the years following A.D. 70.

**Genre and Sources**. Most scholars think that when Matthew wrote his Gospel, Mark was already in circulation. (Not all scholars accept this position, but it is widely viewed as the consensus.) In line with the standard literary practice of the day, Matthew followed one main source, which he regarded as highly reliable-Mark-and then wove in material from other dependable sources around it. Biographies were written differently in Matthew's day than they are today. Biographers could write either in chronological order (e.g., Luke follows the order of his sources as carefully as possible) or, more frequently, in topical order. Matthew arranges the sayings of Jesus according to topic, not chronology: the ethics of the \*kingdom in chapters 5-7, the mission of the kingdom in chapter 10, the presence of the kingdom in chapter 13, church discipline and forgiveness in chapter 18 and the future of the kingdom in chapters 23-25. Some commentators have argued that Matthew grouped Jesus' sayings into five sections to parallel the five books of Moses (other works were divided into five to correspond with the books of Moses, e.g., Psalms, Proverbs, the \*rabbinic tractate Pirke Abot, 2 Maccabees and perhaps \*1 Enoch). Matthew's Message. This Gospel or one of its sources may have been used as a training manual for new Christians (Mt 28:19); rabbis taught oral traditions, but Jewish Christians needed a body of Jesus' teachings in writing for Gentile converts. Matthew repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, and argues from those Scriptures the way a trained scribe would. He portrays Jesus as the epitome of Israel's hopes for his Jewish audience, but also emphasizes missions to the Gentiles: outreach to the Gentiles is rooted both in the `Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching. Matthew is quick to counterattack the religious leaders of his day who have attacked the followers of Jesus; but he also warns of the growing dangers of apostate religious leadership within the Christian community.

 **Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 465-476). Kindle Edition.**

### Matthew 1:1-2:23 (alternate passage Matthew 1:18-2:23)

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 1:19 a righteous man may find himself looking unrighteous because of God. What is more of a concern...the way we look righteous or doing what Jesus tells us. Joseph had a relationship with God and obeyed.
* 2:1-2 Those outside the kingdom are seeking the king.
* 2:5 priests knew where messiah was to be born but were not looking. Are we looking to worship the king or do we assume we have a relationship?
* 2:13 The innocent are always targeted by evil when fighting the kingdom. the innocent are always targeted by evil when outwitted by the kingdom.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

The Birth of Jesus Ancient biographers sometimes praised the miraculous births of their subjects (especially prominent in the Old Testament), but there are no close parallels to the virgin birth. Greeks told stories of gods impregnating women, but the text indicates that Mary's conception was not sexual; nor does the Old Testament (or Jewish tradition) ascribe sexual characteristics to God. Many miraculous birth stories in the ancient world (including Jewish accounts, e.g., \*1 Enoch 106) are heavily embroidered with mythical imagery (e.g., babies filling houses with light), in contrast with the straightforward narrative style of this passage (cf. similarly Ex 2:1-10).

Mary would have probably been between the ages of twelve and fourteen (sixteen at the oldest), Joseph perhaps between eighteen and twenty; their parents likely arranged their marriage, with Mary and Joseph's consent. Premarital privacy between betrothed persons was permitted in Judea but apparently frowned upon in Galilee, so Mary and Joseph may well not have had any time alone together at this point.

1:19. The penalty for adultery under Old Testament law was death by stoning, and this penalty applied to infidelity during betrothal as well (Deut 22:23-24). In New Testament times, Joseph would have merely been required to divorce Mary and expose her to shame; the death penalty was rarely if ever executed for this offense. (Betrothals were so binding that if a woman's fiance died, she was considered a widow; betrothals could otherwise be terminated only by divorce.) But a woman with a child, divorced for such infidelity, would be hard pressed ever to find another husband, leaving her without means of support if her parents died.

Matthew informs his readers that even at Jesus' birth, the religious teachers who knew the most (2:5) failed to act on the truth, while pagans whom one would never expect to come to the Jewish \*Messiah did just that. 2:1. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.; Jesus was thus born before 4 B.C., rather than in A.D. 1; our calendars are off by several years. "Magi" (not "wise men"-KJV) were pagan astrologers whose divinatory skills were widely respected in the Greco-Roman world; astrology had become popular through the "science" of the East, and everyone agreed that the best astrologers lived in the East. The Old Testament explicitly forbade such prognostication from signs (Deut 18:11; cf. Is 2:6; 47:11-15), prescribing true \*prophecy instead (Deut 18:15).

2:9-10. The text might imply only that the star appeared to move due to the Magi's own movement. Even had the object been close enough to earth to calculate its relation to Bethlehem, Bethlehem was so close to Jerusalem that any distance would have been negligible unless the object was only a mile high. But the description of God's leading of the Magi by a moving, supernatural sign may recall how God had led his own people by the fire and cloud in the wilderness (Ex 13:21-22).

One of his fortresses, the Herodium, was within sight of Bethlehem, and he may have dispatched guards from there. Jewish people saw infanticide (killing babies) as a hideous, pagan act; normally applied by the Romans to deformed babies, it had also been used to control oppressed populations (Ex 1:16; 1 Macc 1:60-61; 2 Macc 8:4). Like Moses, Jesus escaped the fate of other male babies (Ex 1:22-2:10), and some Jews were expecting the coming of a prophet "like Moses" (Deut 18:15, 18).

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 587-590). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

For many cultures ancient and modern, and certainly in the Jewish world of Matthew’s day, this genealogy was the equivalent of a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets, and a town crier calling for attention. Any first-century Jew would find this family tree both impressive and compelling. Like a great procession coming down a city street, we watch the figures at the front, and the ones in the middle, but all eyes are waiting for the one who comes in the position of greatest honour, right at the end. Matthew has arranged the names so as to make this point even clearer. Most Jews, telling the story of Israel’s ancestry, would begin with Abraham; but only a select few, by the first century AD, would trace their own line through King David. Even fewer would be able to continue by going on through Solomon and the other kings of Judah all the way to the exile. For most of the time after the Babylonian exile, Israel had not had a functioning monarchy. The kings and queens they had had in the last 200 years before the birth of Jesus were not from David’s family. Herod the Great, the old king we shall presently meet, had no royal blood, and was not even fully Jewish, but was simply an opportunist military commander whom the Romans made into a king to further their own Middle Eastern agendas. But there were some who knew that they were descended from the line of true and ancient kings. Even to tell that story, to list those names, was therefore making a political statement. You wouldn’t want Herod’s spies to overhear you boasting that you were part of the true royal family. But that’s what Matthew does, on Jesus’ behalf. And, as though to emphasize that Jesus isn’t just one member in an ongoing family, but actually the goal of the whole list, he arranges the genealogy into three groups of 14 names – or, perhaps we should say, into six groups of seven names. The number seven was and is one of the most powerful symbolic numbers, and to be born at the beginning of the seventh seven in the sequence is clearly to be the climax of the whole list. This birth, Matthew is saying, is what Israel has been waiting for for two thousand years.

In the ancient pagan world there were plenty of stories of heroes conceived by the intervention of a god, without a human father. Surely Matthew, with his very Jewish perspective on everything, would hardly invent such a thing, or copy it from someone else unless he really believed it? Wouldn’t it be opening Christianity to the sneers of its opponents, who would quickly suggest the obvious alternative, namely that Mary had become pregnant through some more obvious but less reputable means? Well, yes, it would; but that would only be relevant if nobody already knew that there had been something strange about Jesus’ conception. In John’s gospel we hear the echo of a taunt made during Jesus’ lifetime: maybe, the crowds suggest, Jesus’ mother had been misbehaving before her marriage (8.41). It looks as though Matthew and Luke are telling this story because they know rumours have circulated and they want to set the record straight. Alternatively, people have suggested that Matthew made his story up so that it would present a ‘fulfilment’ of the passage he quotes in verse 23, from Isaiah 7.14. But, interestingly, there is no evidence that anyone before Matthew saw that verse as something that would have to be fulfilled by the coming Messiah. It looks rather as though he found the verse because he already knew the story, not the other way round.

The name ‘Jesus’ was a popular boys’ name at the time, being in Hebrew the same as ‘Joshua’, who brought the Israelites into the promised land after the death of Moses. Matthew sees Jesus as the one who will now complete what the law of Moses pointed to but could not of itself produce. He will rescue his people, not from slavery in Egypt, but from the slavery of sin, the ‘exile’ they have suffered not just in Babylon but in their own hearts and lives. By contrast, the name ‘Emmanuel’, mentioned in Isaiah 7.14 and 8.8, was not given to anyone else, perhaps because it would say more about a child than anyone would normally dare. It means ‘God with us’. Matthew’s whole gospel is framed by this theme: at the very end, Jesus promises that he will be ‘with’ his people to the close of the age (28.20). The two names together express the meaning of the story. God is present, with his people; he doesn’t ‘intervene’ from a distance, but is always active, sometimes in most unexpected ways. And God’s actions are aimed at rescuing people from a helpless plight, demanding that he take the initiative and do things people had regarded as (so to speak) inconceivable.

More likely is the fact that the planets Jupiter and Saturn were in conjunction with each other three times in 7 BC. Since Jupiter was the ‘royal’ or kingly planet, and Saturn was sometimes thought to represent the Jews, the conclusion was obvious: a new king of the Jews was about to be born. We cannot be certain if this was why the ‘wise and learned men’ came from the East. But, even if it wasn’t, nothing is more likely than that thoughtful astronomers or astrologers (the two went together in the ancient world), noticing strange events in the heavens, would search out their earthly counterparts.

In fact, the shadow of the cross falls over the story from this moment on. Jesus is born with a price on his head. Plots are hatched; angels have to warn Joseph; they only just escape from Bethlehem in time. Herod the Great, who thought nothing of killing members of his own family, including his own beloved wife, when he suspected them of scheming against him, and who gave orders when dying that the leading citizens of Jericho should be slaughtered so that people would be weeping at his funeral – this Herod would not bat an eyelid at the thought of killing lots of little babies in case one of them should be regarded as a royal pretender. As his power had increased, so had his paranoia – a not unfamiliar progression, as dictators around the world have shown from that day to this. The gospel of Jesus the Messiah was born, then, in a land and at a time of trouble, tension, violence and fear. Banish all thoughts of peaceful Christmas scenes. Before the Prince of Peace had learned to walk and talk, he was a homeless refugee with a price on his head. At the same time, in this passage and several others Matthew insists that we see in Jesus, even when things are at their darkest, the fulfilment of scripture. This is how Israel’s redeemer was to appear; this is how God would set about liberating his people, and bringing justice to the whole world. No point in arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery; no point having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God-with-us, he must be with us where the pain is. That’s what this chapter is about.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 416-428). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

#### **Matthew 3:1-17**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* A radical message needs a radical trumpet (form) where the medium and the message match.
* John is the worst attractional evangelist...in the desert and gives a pure message, yet people respond because God stirred a nation.
* 3:15 unnecessary righteousness is modeled by Jesus and validated by the Trinity.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

3:4. John's diet is that of the very poor; although domestic beekeepers were common, John eats only wild honey. (Honey was normally procured by smoking the bees out and then breaking open the honeycomb; honey was the only sweetener for food and was considered the sweetest of tastes.) But \*Essenes and other pious Israelites (2 Macc 5:27) ate such diets to avoid unclean food. John dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and other people who lived outside society (some, like \*Cynics and \*Josephus's Essene tutor Bannus, were more \*ascetic); the allusion to Elijah here suggests that the end is near (Mal 4:5-6). 3:5-6. Pagans wanting to convert to Judaism would \*repent and be baptized, but John here treats Jewish people on the same terms as pagans (see further comment on Mk 1:4-5.) 3:7. Ancients thought that some kinds of vipers ate their way out of their mothers (see, e.g., Herodotus, \*Plutarch). It was bad enough to be called a viper, but to be called a viper's child was even worse-killing one's mother or father was the most hideous crime conceivable in antiquity.

3:11. Slaves of high-status individuals often had higher status than free persons. A slave (unlike a \*disciple, who also served a master) carried the master's sandals; John here claims that he is not worthy even to be Christ's slave. The prophets had predicted the outpouring of God's \*Spirit on the righteous at the time when God established his \*kingdom for Israel (Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28). They also decreed fire upon the wicked (Is 26:11; 65:15; 66:24; Jer 4:4; 15:14; etc.). In Matthew 3:11, the wicked are baptized, or immersed, in fire (3:10, 12), the righteous in the \*Holy Spirit. 3:12. Because the same Greek word can mean both "spirit" and "wind," the picture of wind and fire carries over from 3:11.

3:16. Many believed that the \*Spirit was no longer available in their time; others believed that the Spirit simply did not work as forcefully as in the days of the prophets, until the time of the end. That the Spirit comes on Jesus indicates the inauguration of the messianic era and marks Jesus out as the Spirit-bearer and hence Messiah (3:11). 3:17. Many believed that voices from heaven were the closest anyone came to \*prophecy in their time; Jesus has both kinds of witness: the heavenly voice and John's prophecy. Matthew intends his more erudite readers to see allusions not only to a royal \*Messiah in Psalm 2:7, but also to the suffering servant of Isaiah 42:1-4 (see comment on Mt 12:18-21).

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 635-639). Kindle Edition**

##### **Matthew 4:1-25 (alternate passage Matthew 4:12-25 or 4:12-22)**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Jesus heals indiscriminately and crowds follow to receive from him: good Jews, bad Jews, Hellenized Jews...all attracted to him.
* Jesus did 4 things: Went, Taught, Preached, Healed...he did not stay still and did the other three activities while being surrounded by people who only came for the healing show.

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The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) cited here (4:4, 7, 10) were commands God gave to Israel when he tested Israel for forty years in the wilderness. Unlike Israel of old, Jesus as Israel's representative (1:1; 2:15) passes the tests.

4:17. Jesus' message, like John the Baptist's (3:2), is summarized as 'repentance to be ready for the `kingdom. First-century Jewish hearers would have heard in this proclamation a warning of the imminent day of judgment.

Examples of Repentance Ancient writers often illustrated their teachings (here, 4:17) with \*narrative examples. See comment on Mark 1:14- 20 for further details. 4:18. Most people in Jewish Palestine depended on salted fish, wheat and barley for sustenance; fish products like fish gravies were thus also common. The fish of the Sea of Galilee included large carp; the fish would be dried, salted or pickled to preserve them. Fishermen were central to the Galilean economy and made a good living by the standards of their culture, far better than the large numbers of peasants who worked the land through much of the Roman Empire. It is thought that the casting net had a narrow end pulled by the boat and a wide end sunk by leads (contrast the larger dragnet of 13:47); nets were probably made of rope or cords woven from flax, papyrus or hemp. 4:19-20. `Disciples normally chose to become students of a particular \*rabbi, rather than a teacher calling his own disciples. 4:21-22. Fishermen had more income than average people in Galilee, so James and John left behind a good job. More than that, however, they suddenly left behind their father and the family business;

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 669-676). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

The biblical texts Jesus used as his key weapons help us to see how this remarkable story fits into Matthew’s gospel at this point. They are all taken from the story of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus had come through the waters of baptism, like Israel crossing the Red Sea. He now had to face, in forty days and nights, the equivalent of Israel’s forty years in the desert. But, where Israel failed again and again, Jesus succeeded. Here at last is a true Israelite, Matthew is saying. He has come to do what God always wanted Israel to do – to bring light to the world (see verse 16). Behind that again is the even deeper story of Adam and Eve in the garden. A single command; a single temptation; a single, devastating, result. Jesus kept his eyes on his father, and so launched the mission to undo the age-old effects of human rebellion.

The temptations we all face, day by day and at critical moments of decision and vocation in our lives, may be very different from those of Jesus, but they have exactly the same point. They are not simply trying to entice us into committing this or that sin. They are trying to distract us, to turn us aside, from the path of servanthood to which our baptism has commissioned us. God has a costly but wonderfully glorious vocation for each one of us. The enemy will do everything possible to distract us and thwart God’s purpose. If we have heard God’s voice welcoming us as his children, we will also hear the whispered suggestions of the enemy. But, as God’s children, we are entitled to use the same defence as the son of God himself. Store scripture in your heart, and know how to use it. Keep your eyes on God, and trust him for everything. Remember your calling, to bring God’s light into the world. And say a firm ‘no’ to the voices that lure you back into the darkness.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 644-651). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

###### **Matthew 5:1-48 (alternate passage Matthew 5:1-16 or 5:17-37)**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Jesus engaged a “crowd” moment to teach, Disciples were the ones who came to listen. Just because you’re in the crowd doesn’t mean you’re a disciple.
* there is a general benefit to being around Jesus stuff but to be a disciple (student) take a few more steps up the mountain.
* Jesus sets himself apart from other teachers by connecting blessing from God to persecution for him.
* Disciples don’t have to try! They ARE salt, light, city on a hill. Be yourself; you were made for witness and you will have an impact on the environment around you.
* 5:25 run to say you’re sorry. Your worship is less important than reconciliation. White people should empty their churches and run to settle the strife.
* How much do you act like a pagan vs a real disciple?

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

Matthew 5-7 is the first block of teaching material in Matthew, dealing with the ethics of the \*kingdom. In 4:17 Jesus summarizes his message: "\*Repent, for the kingdom is at hand"; Matthew 5-7 shows in greater detail the repentant lifestyle that characterizes the people of the kingdom. This block is introduced by a common \*Old Testament literary form called beatitudes: "Happy are those who..., for they shall..." (e.g., Ps 1:1). Here the blessings are the promises of the kingdom for those who live the repentant life. Jesus' hearers would have understood them especially as promises for the future time of God's reign; we must read them in the light of the present aspect of the kingdom as well

Many scholars have compared the "mountain" (cf. Lk 6:17) here to Mount Sinai, where God through Moses first taught his ethics by the \*law (Ex 19-20; cf. Is 2:2-3).

5:3. Ancient writers and speakers would sometimes bracket a section of material by beginning and ending with the same phrase. These blessings thus deal with the gift of the kingdom (5:3, 10). Many Jewish people believed that the kingdom would be ushered in only by a great war and force of arms; Jesus promises it for the "poor in spirit," the "humble" or "meek" (5:5), the peacemakers (5:9). Poverty and piety were often associated in Judaism; the term poor could encompass either physical poverty (Lk 6:20), or the faithful dependence on God that it often produced ("in spirit," as here). 5:4. Mourning was usually associated with either \*repentance or bereavement; the conjunction with "comfort" means that the second aspect is in view here. It could mean grief over Israel's sins, but in this context probably refers to the pain of the oppressed.

5:10-12 To suffer for God was meritorious (Ps 44:22; 69:7), and Judaism highly honored martyrs for God's \*law; yet no other \*rabbi called disciples to die for his own teachings or name.

5:13. Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: "if salt has become tasteless" (the Greek word can also mean "become foolish," so it may include a play on words). Although the salt recovered from impure salt substances taken from the Dead Sea could dissolve, leaving only the impurities behind, the point here is closer to that expressed by a \*rabbi at the end of the first century. When asked how one could make saltless salt salty again, he replied that one should salt it with the afterbirth of a mule. Being sterile, mules have no afterbirth, and he was saying that those who ask a stupid question receive a stupid answer. Real salt does not lose its saltiness; but if it did, what would you do to restore its salty flavor-salt it? Unsalty salt was worthless.

 5:21-26 Anger as Murder Six times in verses 21-43 Jesus cites Scripture and then, like a good \*rabbi, explains it (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). The sort of wording he uses ("You have heard, ... but I say") was used by other Jewish teachers to establish the fuller meaning of a text, although Jesus speaks with greater authority than Jewish teachers normally claimed. 5:21-22. "Raca" is \*Aramaic for "empty-headed one"; the insult is about the same as the one that follows it, "Fool!" The punishments are also roughly equal: the (day of God's) judgment, the heavenly \*Sanhedrin or supreme court, and hell. (Jewish literature described God's heavenly tribunal as a supreme court, or sanhedrin, parallel to the earthly one.) "The hell of fire" is literally "the \*Gehenna of fire," which refers to the standard Jewish concept of Gehinnom, the opposite of paradise; in Gehinnom the wicked would be burned up (according to some Jewish teachers) or eternally tortured (according to other Jewish teachers). Not only the outward act of murder but also the inward choice of anger that generates such acts violates the spirit of God's law against murder.

 5:39. The blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult possible in the ancient world (apart from inflicting serious physical harm), and in many cultures was listed alongside the "eye for an eye" laws; both Jewish and Roman law permitted prosecution for this offense. A prophet might endure such ill treatment (1 Kings 22:24; Is 50:6). 5:40. The poorest people of the Empire (e.g., most peasants in Egypt) had only an inner and outer garment, and the theft of a cloak would lead to legal recourse. Although conditions in firstcentury Palestine were not quite that bad, this verse could indicate divestiture of all one's possessions, even ('hyperbolically) one's clothes, to avoid a legal dispute affecting only oneself. Jesus gives this advice in spite of the fact that, under Jewish law, a legal case to regain one's cloak would have been foolproof: a creditor could not take a poor person's outer cloak, which might serve as one's only blanket at night as well as a coat (Ex 22:26-27). 5:41. Roman soldiers had the legal right to impress the labor, work animal or substance of local residents (cf. Mk 15:21). Although impressment may not have happened often in Galilee, it happened elsewhere, and the fact that it could happen would be enough to raise the eyebrows of Jesus' hearers at this example of nonresistance and even loving service to the oppressor.

 5:46-47. Some Jewish teachers emphasized kindness to pagans (\*Gentiles) to draw them to the truth, but most people greeted and (apart from charity) looked after only those they knew. \*Tax gatherers were considered among the most apostate Jews; Gentiles were considered (usually rightly) immoral, idolatrous, often anti-Jewish pagans. Jews agreed that one should not be like the pagans (so also the Old Testament: Lev 18:3; Deut 18:9; Jer 10:2). 5:48. This verse summarizes 5:21-47. The \*Aramaic word for "perfect" can mean "complete" or "whole," including the nuance of "merciful" (Lk 6:36); in this context, it means fulfilling the requirements of Matthew 5:21-47. The Bible already commanded being holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26), and Judaism (as well as some Greek philosophers) sometimes argued ethics on the basis of imitating God's character.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 796-801). Kindle Edition.**

 **N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

First things first. Matthew normally has Jesus speak of the ‘kingdom of heaven’; the other gospels normally use the phrase ‘kingdom of God’. Saying ‘heaven’ instead of ‘God’ was a regular Jewish way of avoiding the word ‘God’ out of reverence and respect. We must clear out of our minds any thought that ‘kingdom of heaven’ means a place, namely ‘heaven’, seen as the place where God’s people go after their death. That, after all, would make no sense here. How could this sort of kingdom be said to be ‘approaching’ or ‘arriving’? No. If ‘kingdom of heaven’ means the same as ‘kingdom of God’, then we have a much clearer idea of what Jesus had in mind. Anyone who was warning people about something that was about to happen must have known that the people he was talking to would understand. And any first-century Jew, hearing someone talking about God’s kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven, would know. This meant revolution.

And now Jesus was declaring that God’s kingdom, the sovereign rule of heaven, was approaching like an express train. Those who were standing idly by had better take note and get out of the way. God’s kingdom meant danger as well as hope. If justice and peace are on the way, those who have twisted justice or disturbed peace may be in trouble. They had better get their act together while there’s time. And the good old word for that is: ‘Repent!’ The trouble with that word, too, is that people have often not understood it. They have thought it means ‘feeling bad about yourself’. It doesn’t. It means ‘change direction’; ‘turn round and go the other way;’ or ‘stop what you’re doing and do the opposite instead’. How you feel about it isn’t the really important thing. It’s what you do that matters.

But the trouble was that many of his contemporaries were eager to get on with the fight. His message of repentance was not, therefore, that they should feel sorry for personal and private sins (though he would of course want that as well), but that as a nation they should stop rushing towards the cliff edge of violent revolution, and instead go the other way, towards God’s kingdom of light and peace and healing and forgiveness, for themselves and for the world. What would happen if they didn’t? Gradually, as Matthew’s story develops, we begin to realize. If the light-bearers insist on darkness, darkness they shall have. If the peace-people insist on war, war they shall have. If the people called to bring God’s love and forgiveness into the world insist on hating everyone else, hatred and all that it brings will come crashing around their ears. This won’t be an arbitrary judgment or punishment; it will be what they themselves have been calling for. This is why they must repent while there’s still time. The kingdom is coming, and they are standing in the way.

He really did have remarkable powers of healing. But Jesus was never simply a healer pure and simple, vital though that was as part of his work. For him, the healings were signs of the new thing that God was doing through him. God’s kingdom–God’s sovereign, saving rule – was at last being unleashed upon Israel and the world, through him.

Jesus is not suggesting that these are simply timeless truths about the way the world is, about human behaviour. If he was saying that, he was wrong. Mourners often go uncomforted, the meek don’t inherit the earth, those who long for justice frequently take that longing to the grave. This is an upside-down world, or perhaps a right-way-up world; and Jesus is saying that with his work it’s starting to come true. This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It’s about something that’s starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice.

The word for ‘wonderful news’ is often translated ‘blessed’, and part of the point is that this is God’s wonderful news. God is acting in and through Jesus to turn the world upside down, to turn Israel upside down, to pour out lavish ‘blessings’ on all who now turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing. (This list is sometimes called ‘the Beatitudes’, because the Latin word ‘beatus’ means ‘blessed’.) But the point is not to offer a list of what sort of people God normally blesses. The point is to announce God’s new covenant.

So when do these promises come true? There is a great temptation for Christians to answer: in heaven, after death. At first sight, verses 3, 10 and 11 seem to say this: ‘the kingdom of heaven’ belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted, and there’s a great reward ‘in heaven’ for those who suffer persecution for Jesus’ sake. This, though, is a misunderstanding of the meaning of ‘heaven’. Heaven is God’s space, where full reality exists, close by our ordinary (‘earthly’) reality and interlocking with it. One day heaven and earth will be joined together for ever, and the true state of affairs, at present out of sight, will be unveiled. After all, verse 5 says that the meek will inherit the earth, and that can hardly happen in a disembodied heaven after death. No: the clue comes in the next chapter, in the prayer Jesus taught his followers. We are to pray that God’s kingdom will come, and God’s will be done, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’. The life of heaven – the life of the realm where God is already king – is to become the life of the world, transforming the present ‘earth’ into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now. That’s the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these ‘beatitudes’ in particular. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see.

This was truly revolutionary, and at the same time deeply in tune with the ancient stories and promises of the Bible. And the remarkable thing is that Jesus brought it all into reality in his own person. He was the salt of the earth. He was the light of the world: set up on a hill-top, crucified for all the world to see, becoming a beacon of hope and new life for everybody, drawing people to worship his father, embodying the way of self-giving love which is the deepest fulfilment of the law and the prophets. That’s why these sayings, originally applied to Israel, now apply to all those who follow Jesus and draw on his life as the source of their own.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the commands of the law and shows how they provide a blueprint for a way of being fully, genuinely, gloriously human. This new way, which Jesus had come to pioneer and make possible, goes deep down into the roots of personality and produces a different pattern of behaviour altogether.

This passage is not, of course, the only place in the New Testament where the matter comes up. It is important to study Mark 10.2–12, Luke 16.18, and 1 Corinthians 7.10–16, as well as the present passage and Matthew 19.3–9. Together they show both that Jesus set his face firmly against divorce (in line with Old Testament teaching, e.g. Malachi 2.14–16) and that the early church wrestled with how to apply this in practice. It is also important to notice that in the present passage the mention of divorce comes between two other issues, both of which are in some ways more basic. It may be stating the obvious to point out that if people knew how to control their bodily lusts on the one hand (verses 27–30), and were committed to complete integrity and truth-telling on the other (verses 33–37), there would be fewer, if any, divorces. Divorce normally happens when lust and lies have been allowed to grow up like weeds and choke the fragile and beautiful plant of marriage.

Perhaps the most important thing to say here, though, is that Jesus certainly didn’t want his hearers, or the later church, to get embroiled in endless debates about what precisely was allowed. Far, far more important to think about how to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth! And in the area of sexual behaviour, the answer is clear, bracing and just as challenging today as it was to the wider pagan world of the first century. Sexual desire, though itself good and God-given, is like the fire of Gehenna, which needs firmly keeping in place. Saying ‘no’ to desire when it strikes inappropriately – in other words, outside the context of marriage – is part of the most basic Christian discipline.

So Jesus gives three hints of the sort of thing he has in mind. To be struck on the right cheek, in that world, almost certainly meant being hit with the back of the right hand. That’s not just violence, but an insult: it implies that you’re an inferior, perhaps a slave, a child, or (in that world, and sometimes even today) a woman. What’s the answer? Hitting back only keeps the evil in circulation. Offering the other cheek implies: hit me again if you like, but now as an equal, not an inferior. Or suppose you’re in a lawcourt where a powerful enemy is suing you (perhaps for non-payment of some huge debt) and wants the shirt off your back. You can’t win; but you can show him what he’s really doing. Give him your cloak as well; and, in a world where most people only wore those two garments, shame him with your impoverished nakedness. This is what the rich, powerful and careless are doing. They are reducing the poor to a state of shame. The third example clearly reflects the Roman military occupation. Roman soldiers had the right to force civilians to carry their equipment for one mile. But the law was quite strict; it forbade them to make someone go more than that. Turn the tables on them, advises Jesus. Don’t fret and fume and plot revenge. Copy your generous God! Go a second mile, and astonish the soldier (and perhaps alarm him – what if his commanding officer found out?) with the news that there is a different way to be human, a way which doesn’t plot revenge, which doesn’t join the armed resistance movement (that’s what verse 39 means), but which wins God’s kind of victory over violence and injustice.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 1082-1094). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 6:1-34 (alternate passage Matthew 6:1-24 or 6:5-34)**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 6:1 do you want to be seen or rewarded? Disciples have a secret life with Jesus...praying, giving. Public reward comes but secret rewards last forever. Hypocrites do receive a reward; but thats all they get. A secret life is rewarded by Father.
* Litmus test...diagnostic time; where is your money
* You should worry...about the kingdom, seeking it is our aim.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

Some commentators have taken the trumpet sounding literally, but it is \*hyperbolic (people did not blow trumpets when giving alms) and may reflect a play on words (charity boxes were often shaped like trumpets). Not letting one's left hand know about the right hand's gift is clearly hyperbole. The language of "having" a reward "in full" is the language of repayment in ancient business receipts.

Jesus predicates effective prayer on a relationship of intimacy, not a business partnership model, which was closer to the one followed by ancient paganism.

6:22-23. Jesus speaks literally of a "single" eye versus a "bad" or "evil" one. This saying may involve several plays on words. A "single" eye normally meant a generous one but also sets the reader up for 6:24. A "bad" eye in that culture could mean either a diseased one or a stingy one. Many people believed that light was emitted from the eye, enabling one to see, rather than that light was admitted through the eye. Although here Jesus compares the eye to a lamp, he speaks of "diseased" eyes which fail to admit light. Such eyes become a symbol for the worthlessness of a stingy person.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 844-848). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Jesus contrasts the sort of praying he has in mind with the sort that went on in much of the non-Jewish world. We know from many writings and inscriptions that many non-Jews did indeed use multiple formulae in their prayers: long, complicated magic words which they would repeat over and over in their anxiety to persuade some god or goddess to be favourable to them. Such prayers are often marked by a note of uncertainty. There were many divinities in the ancient pagan world, and nobody quite knew which one might need pacifying next, or with what formula. This is hardly surprising. Prayer is one of life’s great mysteries. Most people pray at least sometimes; some people, in many very different religious traditions, pray a great deal. At its lowest, prayer is shouting into a void on the off-chance there may be someone out there listening. At its highest, prayer merges into love, as the presence of God becomes so real that we pass beyond words and into a sense of his reality, generosity, delight and grace. For most Christians, most of the time, it takes place somewhere in between those two extremes. To be frank, for many people it is not just a mystery but a puzzle. They know they ought to do it but they aren’t quite sure how. What the Lord’s Prayer provides, here at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, is a framework.

The three little sayings which follow all make the same point. First, Jesus points out the difference between two sorts of treasure. As with other references to heaven and earth, we shouldn’t imagine he means ‘don’t worry about this life – get ready for the next one’. ‘Heaven’ here is where God is right now, and where, if you learn to love and serve God right now, you will have treasure in the present, not just in the future. Of course Jesus (like almost all Jews of his day) believed that after death God would have a wonderful future in store for his faithful people; but they didn’t normally refer to that future as ‘heaven’. He wanted his followers to establish heavenly treasure right now, treasure which they could enjoy in the present as well as the future, treasure that wasn’t subject to the problems that face all earthly hoards. How can one do this? Well, the whole chapter so far gives us the clue. Learn to live in the presence of the loving father. Learn to do everything for him and him alone. Get your priorities right.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 1276-1283). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 7:1-29 (alternate passage Matthew 7:7-29 or 7:24-29)**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Judging others is like Karma...it comes back to you.
* if something large is in your eye, then you can’t see clearly to help someone with what’s in theirs. Like when oxygen masks fall on airplane, you must put yours on first before you help others.
* 7:7 God is hospitable to us. If you come to him he welcomes. Our role is not to worry or strive but to seek, search. God’s role is to give good gifts and save us.
* 7:13 the opportunities to leave the road and wreck your car are many; but there is one path to stay alive, and many will not choose it.
* 7:16 Fruit exposes sheep from wolves, though they may produce something it does not mean it is good.
* Wisdom = hearing and obeying...not just knowing the right answers.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

7:13-14. Jesus' hearers would have been familiar with the image of "two ways"-one leading to life and the other to death; it was common in Judaism. Jesus' emphasis that few are on the right way occurs in 4 Ezra but is not as common as the general image of the two ways. Most Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved and that the few who were lost would be exceptions to the general rule.

7:21-23. The miracles Jesus mentions are not necessarily false; it is possible to prophesy by the \*Spirit's inspiration and yet be disobedient to God and unsaved (1 Sam 19:20-24). The admonition to depart is from a psalm about the vindication of the righteous (Ps 6:8; cf. 119:115; 139:19). 7:24-27. The \*rabbis debated whether hearing or doing the law was more important; most concluded that hearing it was more important, because one could not do it without hearing it. The idea of ultimately being judged for hearing but not obeying was familiar (Ezek 33:32-33). But no Jewish teacher apart from Jesus claimed so much authority for his own words; such authority was reserved for the law itself. The teachers of the law never claimed as much authority as Jesus had (7:24- 27); they derived their authority especially from building on previous tradition.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 891-893). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

if God is supremely wise, powerful and loving, he shouldn’t simply do for everybody everything that they could possibly want. But, as Archbishop William Temple famously said, ‘When I pray, coincidences happen; when I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening.’ Some of the wisest thinkers of today’s church have cautiously concluded that, as God’s kingdom comes, it isn’t God’s will to bring it all at once. We couldn’t bear it if he did. God is working like an artist with difficult material; and prayer is the way some of that material co-operates with the artist instead of resisting him. How that is so we shall never fully understand until we see God face to face. That it is so is one of the most basic Christian insights.

Build your house on the rock, says Jesus; and the rock is his own words, or rather, doing those words instead of merely hearing them. But we often miss what his first hearers would probably have heard behind the dramatic picture-language. Not far away from where he sat on that hillside, just a hundred miles or so away in Jerusalem, Herod’s men were continuing to rebuild the Temple. They spoke of it as God’s House, and declared that it was built upon the rock, proof against wind and weather. In the last great sermon in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus warns that the Temple itself will come crashing down, because Israel as a whole had failed to respond to his message. Halfway through the gospel, in another dramatic moment, he promises that Peter’s confession of faith will form the rock on which something very different will be built – the community that believes in him, Jesus, as Messiah.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 1587-1593). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 8:1-9:8**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Does it take being a leper to humble your entitlement? What posture do we ask Jesus to intervene?
* Jesus was being followed by a crowd but made time for the leper
* 8:5 Here is an enemy who knows his place, and has greater faith than friends. faith can be found in unexpected places so there is room for hope.
* 8:14 Peter’s mom was healed, then immediately served, it was not about the healing...it was about the healer.
* Some people can’t pursue Jesus...they must be brought to him.
* Jesus drives out spirits with a word...we just need a word from HIM; just the right word.
* The prophet Isaiah said he will “carry our diseases” so there is healing but also the lifting of the burden within disease.
* Jesus didn’t go to the crowd, he went away. How does the pursuit of the crowds cloud our real mission?
* When Jesus shows up he casts out demons and gets rid of the pigs in your life. The primary miracle has a secondary effect.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

8:1-4 Touching the Unclean: Leprosy Matthew groups together nine stories containing ten specific miracles (some commentators have suggested that Matthew wants his readers to remember Moses' ten miracles) in chapters 8-9: three miracles in 8:1-17, then teaching on true discipleship (8:18-22); three more miracles (8:23-9:8), then teaching on true discipleship (9:9-17); and finally three more miracle stories, one of which includes two miracles (9:18-33). Ancient writers used examples to illustrate points: Jesus' authority over sickness, demons and nature summons people to recognize his authority over their lives.

8:3. Touching a leper was forbidden, and most people would have been revolted by the thought of it. Indeed, the law enjoined the leper's isolation from society (Lev 13:45-46). See further comment on Mark 1:40-45. The miracle itself would have been viewed as the work of a mighty prophet, however (cf. 2 Kings 5:14).

8:8. The centurion, who knows that Jewish people rarely entered Gentile homes, concedes Jesus' special mission to Israel (cf. 15:27). At the same time he expresses great faith, for among all the stories (both true and spurious) of healing miracles in antiquity, long-distance healings were rare and considered especially extraordinary.

8:16. Exorcists often used magical incantations and sought to manipulate higher spirits into helping them drive out lower ones; in contrast, Jesus simply drives out spirits "with a word."

8:19-20. Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Some radical Greek philosophers who eschewed possessions sought to repulse prospective disciples with enormous demands, for the purpose of testing them and acquiring the most worthy.

8:21-22. One of an eldest son's most basic responsibilities (in both Greek and Jewish cultures) was his father's burial. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, however, and family members would not be outside talking with \*rabbis during the reclusive mourning period immediately following the death. It has recently been shown that what is in view here instead is the secondary burial: a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb's wall. Nevertheless, Jesus' demand that the son place him above the greatest responsibility a son had toward his father would have sounded like heresy: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments, and to follow Jesus at the expense of not burying one's father would have been viewed as dishonoring one's father (cf. Tobit 4:3-4).

8:23-27 Lord of Nature Greek stories about those who could subdue nature were normally about gods or about demigods who had acted in the distant past. Jewish tradition reported some earlier teachers who could pray for rain or its cessation like Elijah. But absolute authority over waves and sea in Jewish tradition belonged to God alone. It is not difficult to understand why the \*disciples did not know what to make of Jesus!

8:28-34 Lord over Evil Spirits Proposals vary on why Matthew has two, and Mark but one, demoniac here (see comment on Mk 5:1-20); one suggestion is that Matthew includes an extra one here because he left one out by omitting the story recorded in Mark 1:21-28. The doubling of characters here would not have violated standard Jewish writing conventions of that time.

8:32. In Jewish tradition, demons could die or be bound; because Matthew says nothing to the contrary, his readers would probably assume that these demons have been destroyed or imprisoned.

8:33-34. The \*Old Testament \*narratives of Elijah and Elisha allowed Jewish people to place some miracle workers in the category of "prophet," but Greeks usually categorized miracle workers as magicians or sorcerers. Because magicians and sorcerers were usually malevolent and Jesus' coming had already cost these \*Gentiles from the Decapolis economically (he sank a lot of pork), they were naturally terrified of him.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 957-959). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

With the leper, Jesus is restoring and renewing a member of Israel. With the centurion, faith in Jesus’ authority is already spreading to people outside Israel, as a sign of the wonderful gathering-in of the nations that God intends to bring about. Together these two stories make a small but complete window on the whole gospel.

Jesus had come, he said, not to destroy the law but to fulfil it (5.17). The leper needed not only physical healing but reintegration into society, back into family and village life. It wouldn’t be much good going home and claiming to be cured unless he had the official authorization. So Jesus tells him to go through the regular process: show yourself to the priest, and make the required offering. He needed to be restored as a full member of Israel. Restoring God’s people was part of what the gospel was all about.

‘Faith’ is defined here, it seems, not as a general religious attitude to life, but as something much more specific: recognizing that Jesus possesses authority.

So when Jesus found one of his followers saying that he had to go and organize his father’s funeral, you’d have expected him to say, ‘Oh well, of course, you must go and do that – and then come and follow me later.’ What Jesus actually said is one of the most shocking things in the whole gospel story. ‘Let the dead bury the dead,’ he said: ‘you must follow me right now.’

Somehow, in Matthew’s picture of Jesus, we find all this rolled together: authority through healing, healing through suffering. Authority and suffering are strangely concentrated in this one man, who nobody at this stage quite understood, but who everybody found compelling. Perhaps that’s the greatest challenge facing the church today: how to live the life of Jesus, how to be his followers, in such a way that people will want to follow him too.

The stories about the sea in the Old Testament (there aren’t many of them) make the same point: YHWH tames it at the Exodus, and uses it to stop the disobedient prophet Jonah in his tracks and send him back about his proper business.

these remarkable stories about Jesus are designed to show that what God was doing through him and in him was indeed nothing short of new creation. That’s why, once again, the proper reaction to Jesus is ‘faith’. Again, this isn’t a general religious response to the world around; a ‘religious response’ to a great storm at sea might be awe and terror, or frightened prayer to the sea-god. No: this ‘faith’ is quite simply a trust that Jesus is the sovereign one who has authority over the elements.

This story is, as it were, a yet more vivid version of the previous one (the stilling of the storm). Think of the wild sea, with wind and waves doing their worst. Now turn that into a human being, with the wind and waves inside them; not a bad image for how it is with some poor people who find that, for whatever reason, their imagination and emotions, their thinking and acting, seem to have been taken over by forces beyond their control.

He isn’t just somebody with good ideas. He isn’t just somebody who will tell us how to establish a better relationship with God. He is somebody with authority over everything that the physical world on the one hand, and the non-physical world on the other, can throw at us. This is a Jesus we can trust with every aspect of our lives.

After Jesus has quietened the storm, the disciples ask one another what sort of a man he can be. Now we get an answer, and from a most surprising source: Jesus, the two demon-possessed men yell out, is ‘the son of God’! This phrase ‘son of God’ will later be used by the disciples (14.33), by Peter (16.16), by the chief priest (26.63), and by the centurion at the foot of the cross (27.54). It is of course ironic that the first people to address Jesus in this way do so under evil influence, but Matthew would have no doubt that, though the demons are evil and destructive, they have (as it were) access to inside information about spiritual reality. The best explanation of the phrase ‘son of God’ here is that it refers to Jesus as Messiah.

What we do know is that wherever Jesus went, people were in awe of him. There was no sense, as in much of the world today, that he was just one teacher among others, one religious leader to be coolly appraised. He was a force to be reckoned with. You might follow him, or you might be scared stiff of him, but you couldn’t ignore him. That is the Jesus we must follow today, the Jesus we must make known in the world.

What ‘authority’ really means in all these cases, of course, is ‘people who have the power to do what they want’. This usually means ‘people who have an army to back them up’. Authority means power, which means force, which means violence. No wonder we’re suspicious of the very word ‘authority’ itself. Yet here it is again in the gospel story: Jesus has authority. You can’t miss it. Authority in his teaching. Authority over diseases at a distance. Authority over the storm, over the demons. Now, authority to do what normally only God does: to put away sins, to change a person’s life from the inside out, to free them from whatever was gripping them so tightly that they couldn’t move. What is this authority?

Once again, ‘faith’ here means ‘faith in Jesus’ authority’; ‘faith that Jesus will be able to do something about it’. That’s what Jesus is responding to. He addresses the key problem, knowing that all the symptoms will quickly disappear if the main disease is dealt with. Jesus has no straightforwardly physical means of healing the man. He uses the authority which God has invested in him, authority to forgive sins and so to bring new life. He is already acting as ‘the son of man’, the one who is to be enthroned over all the forces of evil (Daniel 7.13–14). He has the right, even in the present, to declare that sin is a beaten foe, and to send it away.

 **Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 95). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 9:9-10:42 (alternate passage Matthew 9:9-34 or 9:35-42)**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* When you first follow Jesus you gather your friends to him...later you must be sent.
* Have religious people questioned “why you are eating with sinners and tax collectors?”
* We imitate Jesus and call sinners...call OUT to sinners.
* Jesus repackages you into new wineskins...calling you daughter, making you important and restoring you fully. The healing without the relabel/new package of daughter is new remaining in the old...both will be lost.
* Just because you are healed doesn’t mean you follow. Jesus can touch and heal your life and yet you will not obey him. mercy but not lordship.
* to whom are you sent...is not everyone...deliver peace to those who receive you. IF is conditional and not guaranteed, we go but don’t have to stay.
* the village is not your friends, be on guard for those opposing and plotting.
* The expansion to the “Gentiles” or other missions will be through persecution/suffering.
* Imperial evangelism: expansion through ambition or convenience. Jesus sends us to a town to incarnate and freely give. The path of expansion is through suffering through officials, families to the point we must flee, thus expanding the gospel. But don’t let fear drive us into expansion because we are worth much. Do it for Jesus. Lose your life for Jesus, not for fear or imperial plans.
* 10:26 Fear is natural. so place it where it belongs...at the feet of your creator (and potentially unmaker) who cares for you and says back to you, “don’t be afraid”
* fear comes in tandem with proclamation but the antidote is to know what the one who is to be feared says about you. “fear not”
* What we say (and don’t say) about Jesus in front of others is a true indicator of our relationship with him.
* Identifying with Jesus doesn’t solve all problems...it might even create a few!

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

9:17. Wine could be kept in either jars or wineskins. Old wineskins had already been stretched to capacity by fermenting wine within them; if they were then filled with unfermented wine, it would likewise expand, and the old wineskins, already stretched to the limit, would burst.

9:10. Most people regarded a man of wealth inviting a religious teacher over for dinner as honorable behavior. \*Tax gatherers, however, were regarded as collaborators with the Romans and were despised by religious people. Some commentators have argued that "sinners" may refer to all who did not eat food in ritual purity, but the term probably refers to anyone who lived sinfully rather than religiously, as if they did not care what the religious community thought of them.

One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king) or prostrate oneself before God; thus for this prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus was to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way. 9:20-21. This woman's sickness was reckoned as if she had a menstrual period all month long; it made her continually unclean under the \*law (Lev 15:19-33)-a social and religious problem in addition to the physical one. If she touched anyone or anyone's clothes, she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day (cf. Lev 15:26-27). Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched, she should not have even been in this heavy crowd.

9:23-24. Flute players were there to lead the crowd in mourning. Several professional women mourners were required even at the funeral of the poorest person; the funeral of a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. The cathartic release of mourning included shrieking and beating of breasts. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners were to be assembled, if possible, immediately upon someone's death; in this case they had gathered before word even reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

9:25-26. The most defiling kind of ritual uncleanness one could contract in Jewish law came from touching a corpse (Num 19:11-22).

9:35-36. Without Moses (Num 27:17) or a king (1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16) Israel had been said to be "without a shepherd," or ruler. When Israel was without other faithful shepherds (religious leaders), God himself would become its shepherd (Ezek 34:11-16); the shepherd's ministry included feeding (34:2-3), healing (34:4) and bringing back the lost sheep (34:4-6).

The lists in Luke and Acts replace Mark and Matthew's "Thaddeus" with "Judas son of James" (cf. also Jn 14:22). Ancient documents show that it was common for people to go by more than one name, so the different lists of \*apostles probably do refer to the same people. Nicknames were common, appearing even on tomb inscriptions. "Cananaean" is \*Aramaic for "\*zealot" (Lk 6:15); thus some translations simply read "Simon the Zealot" here. In Jesus' day, this word could just mean "zealous one," but it may mean that he had been involved in revolutionary activity before becoming Jesus' follower, as it would probably mean when the Gospels were written. "Apostles" means "sent ones," or commissioned representatives. The analogous Hebrew term was used for business agents, although the general concept is broader than that; a "sent one" acted on the full authority of the sender to the extent that he accurately represented the sender's mission.

10:5. "Way of the \*Gentiles" probably means a road leading only to one of the pagan, Greek cities in Palestine; Jewish people normally avoided roads that led into such cities anyway.

They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak; (2) some traveling philosophers, called \*Cynics (probably represented as nearby as Tyre and the Decapolis, \*Gentile cities surrounding Galilee); (3) some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. The "bag" could have been used for begging (so the Cynics used it),

10:14-15. Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want even the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals; Jesus' representatives here treat unresponsive regions as unholy or pagan.

Jewish flogging consisted of thirteen harsh strokes on the breast and twenty-six on the back. These words would have struck Jewish Christians as particularly painful, because they signified rejection of their preaching among their own people. 10:18. In Jewish thinking, a Jew betraying any Jew to \*Gentile persecutors was a horrendous act. "Governors" are Roman overseers in the provinces; the three levels were propraetors, proconsuls and procurators. "Kings" may refer only to Rome's vassal princes but probably includes Parthian and other rulers from the East, indicating virtually universal persecution.

Verse 25 contains a play on words: by reading "Beelzebul" as if it meant "master" (\*Aramaic be'el) of the house (Hebrew zebul), Jesus spoke of the "master of the house."

10:37. Jesus here expounds on the text just cited (Mic 7:6) to make a point virtually inconceivable to most of his hearers. Loving family members, especially parents, was one of the highest duties in Judaism; the only one who could rightfully demand greater love was God himself (Deut 6:4-5; cf. Deut 13:6-11; 2 Macc 7:22-23).

A cup of water was the only gift the poorest person might have, but it would symbolize enough. Cold water was highly preferred for drinking (see comment on Rev 3:15-16).

 **Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1080-1081). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

The three pictures Jesus himself gives all show how impossible it is to combine the new thing he’s doing with the old way things used to be. You can’t combine funerals and weddings: you can’t be gloomy while you’re celebrating a marriage feast.

This doesn’t mean, of course, that the old was bad. Jesus came, Matthew insists, not to destroy, but to fulfil. It simply means that morning has broken on a new day, God’s new day, and the practices that were appropriate for the night-time are now no longer needed.

In societies before modern medicine, where you couldn’t cure infections nearly as easily as we can now, it was vital to have strict codes about what you could and couldn’t touch, and what to do if you did contract ‘impurity’. These weren’t silly regulations; they didn’t mean you were being ‘legalistic’. They were and are practical wisdom to keep society in good shape. The Jewish people, who had plenty of regulations like that in the Bible already, had codified them further to make it clearer to people exactly how to keep from getting sick. And two of the things that were near the top of the list, things to avoid if you wanted to stay ‘pure’ in that sense, were dead bodies on the one hand, and women with internal bleeding (including menstrual periods) on the other. And in this double story Jesus is touched by a haemorrhaging woman, and then he himself touches a corpse. No Jew would have missed the point – and Matthew was most likely writing for a largely Jewish audience. In the ordinary course of events, Jesus would have become doubly ‘unclean’, and would have had to bathe himself and his clothes and wait until the next day before resuming normal social contact.

Her ‘uncleanness’ doesn’t infect him. Something in him infects her. Jesus turns round, sees her, and tells her, as he told the centurion, that what has made the difference is her own faith (8.13; see 9.2, 29). Here is the mystery: Jesus has the power to heal, but those who receive it are those with faith. And the word Matthew uses for ‘healing’ in verses 21 and 22 is ‘save’, ‘rescue’.

Outside the Lord’s Prayer itself, Jesus doesn’t often tell his followers what to pray for, but this time he does. Go to the farmer, he says, and beg him to send workers to bring in the harvest. And, as his followers pray that prayer, the answer comes back worryingly quickly: you are, yourselves, to be the answer to your own prayer.

Matthew takes this opportunity to give us a list of the Twelve themselves, calling them for the first time ‘apostles’, that is, people who are ‘sent out’, as Jesus was now sending them, and would later send all those who witnessed his resurrection. The number 12 is itself of course full of meaning, as anyone in Jesus’ world would recognize; at the heart of what Jesus was up to was his belief that through his work God was at last renewing and restoring Israel, which traditionally had been based upon the twelve tribes. But now the Twelve were not just to be a sign that God was restoring Israel; they were to be part of the means by which he was doing so. This is the meaning of the otherwise puzzling verses 5–6. Surely, we ask, Jesus had come for everybody? Didn’t he himself say that Gentiles would come flooding into the kingdom (8.11)? Hasn’t Matthew already told us that even at the time of his birth foreign stargazers came to pay him homage (2.1–12)? Yes, and all of that matters. Jesus will, after his resurrection, reverse these instructions and send the disciples out to all the nations (28.19). But there is an immediate and urgent task, before the wider mission can be built in to the programme. Israel itself must hear the message, must be given a chance to repent before it’s too late. So

They aren’t to swagger around giving it out that they are the chosen servants of the coming king. They are to be healers, restorers, people who will bring life and hope to others, not grand status to themselves. They are to be scrupulous about avoiding any suggestion that they are on the make, out for money. They mustn’t even take cash or provisions with them, or carry the sort of bag that beggars would normally have. They must expect that those who hear and receive their message will feed them; but the gospel itself, the all-important message, is free.

Which command is repeated most often in the Bible? You might imagine it’s something stern: Behave yourself! Smarten up! Say your prayers! Worship God more wholeheartedly! Give more money away! You’d be wrong. It’s the command we find in verses 26, 28 and 31: Don’t be afraid.

Jesus came to begin and establish the new way of being God’s people, and not surprisingly those who were quite happy with the old one, thank you very much, didn’t like having it disturbed. He didn’t want to bring division within households for the sake of it. But he knew that, if people followed his way, division was bound to follow. Actually, the passage about sons and fathers, daughters and mothers, and so on, is a quotation from one of the Old Testament prophets (Micah 7.6). In this passage, the prophet predicts the terrible divisions that would always occur when God was doing a new thing. When God acts to rescue his people, there are always some who declare that they don’t need rescuing, that they are comfortable as they are.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 123). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 11:1-30**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Many who doubt Jesus aren’t looking for the Messiah, but John is looking so when he asks he still asks from a position of faith.
* Jesus sends the 12 by 2 but he goes on alone. If you do ministry alone you either are the Messiah or you’re trying to be.
* 11:6 Jesus’ work with the poor is offensive and repelling to some...blessed are those who endure.
* 11:20 Miracles don’t equate to faith. Do you seek? Education and intellect don’t equate to faith. Are you like a child?
* 11:27 Come to Jesus...he will not force you. Come to him, make the effort and rest will be your reward.
* Must be active to find rest: Come, Take, Learn are all active postures for a disciple to find rest.
* Our souls are burdened and tired...we are looking for relief, escape and a change...and Jesus evokes King language. He has the right to tax us and make demands...but he is different.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

11:7. Reeds were fragile (Is 42:3; \*3 Maccabees 2:22), so a "reed shaken by the wind" was notoriously weak (1 Kings 14:15) and undependable (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6).

Spoiled children who pretend to have weddings and funerals (one later game was called "bury the grasshopper") stand for Jesus' and John's dissatisfied opponents; dissatisfied with other children who will not play either game, they are sad no matter what. The term for "mourn" here is "beat the breast," a standard mourning custom in Jewish Palestine. Custom mandated that bystanders join in any bridal or funeral processions.

11:20-21. Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), but some of their inhabitants who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). "Sackcloth and ashes" was dressing characteristic of mourning, including the mourning of repentance. Chorazin was a short walk, less than two miles, from Capernaum.

11:29-30. When a man carried a yoke he would carry it on his shoulders (cf., e.g., Jer 27:2); Judaism applied this image of subjection to obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God's law and the yoke of his kingdom, which one accepted by acknowledging that God was one and by keeping his commandments. Matthew intends Jesus' words about rest as a contrast with \*Pharisaic sabbath rules in the following passage (12:1-14): the promise of "rest for your souls" comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where God promises to stay his wrath if the people turn to him instead of to the words of the false religious leaders (6:13-14, 20). Greek literature praised meekness in the sense of gentleness and leniency but not in the sense of self-abasement; aristocrats disdained humility as a virtue, except for the lowly. Jesus, however, identifies with those of low social status, a value more prominent in Jewish piety.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1126-1131). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Jesus believed – and Matthew wants us to get this clear – that he really was ‘the one who was to come’. He really was the Messiah. But he had rewritten the key bit of the play, to the surprise and consternation of the other actors and the audience as well. He was going back to a different script, a different kind of story. He wasn’t thinking of himself in terms of Elijah calling down fire from heaven. He was thinking of passages like Isaiah 35, the great prophecies of what would happen when Israel was not so much judged and condemned, but restored after judgment. Exile would be over, the blind and the lame would be healed, God’s people would be set free at last.

In one of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran there’s a passage which predicts that when the Messiah comes he will heal the sick, raise the dead, bring good news to the poor, and so on. The difference is that Jesus was actually doing these things. Just as wicked people don’t like the message of judgment, because they think (rightly) that it’s aimed at them, so sometimes good people don’t like the message of mercy, because they think (wrongly) that people are going to get away with wickedness. But mercy was at the heart of Jesus’ messianic mission, just as it remains at the heart of the church’s work today.

he teases the crowds into thinking harder about who John was – and who, therefore, Jesus himself must be. John wasn’t like the royalty they knew. He was nothing like Herod (whose emblem, on his coins, was a Galilean reed waving in the wind). He wasn’t dressed in the sort of fine clothes that rich and famous people, especially royalty, would wear. John was different: he was a prophet. Not just any old prophet, either, but the prophet that previous prophets had spoken about: he was the one destined to get the path ready for God’s Messiah to walk along when he arrived. The point is this: Jesus isn’t just telling the crowds about John. He’s telling them about himself – but doing so obliquely. To come out and declare his own messiahship would be both dangerous and, in a strange way, all wrong. Precisely because of the sort of Messiah Jesus is trying to be, he doesn’t want to force himself on people. They have to work it out for themselves.

When he declares here, in the old translation, that he is ‘meek and lowly of heart’, he isn’t boasting that he’s attained some special level of spiritual achievement. He is encouraging us to believe that he isn’t going to stand over us like a policeman, isn’t going to be cross with us like an angry schoolteacher.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 137). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 12:1-50**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 12:2 there are people who correct you but they are not Jesus.
* 12:7 Mercy not sacrifice keeps us from slaughtering the innocent.
* 12:14 We get so caught in our concerns that we seek to kill Jesus. Can’t see the truth. Care abou the wrong things leads to 1st degree murder.
* 12:15 Rather than prove he is right Jesus does what he is called to do. Jesus has the crowds and power...he could fight the structures (Pharisees), confront the power of the age, but he withdraws “he will not quarrel or cry out”...and then leads justice to victory.
* The resurrection. the one sign given
* 12:49 Jesus redefines family lines...they obey the FAther
* 12:45 A good way to invite demons over is to clean your life up but not fill it up.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

12:1. Jewish law based on Deuteronomy 23:25 (cf. Ruth 2:2-3) provided for the poor to eat food as they passed through a field. The issue here is thus not that the disciples took someone's grain but that they picked it on the Sabbath; later \*rabbinic law specifically designated this as one of thirty-nine kinds of work forbidden on the Sabbath. 12:2. The modern picture of \*Pharisees as legalists unfairly trivializes the Pharisees' piety (probably intentionally, so modern legalists will not have to address Jesus' real bases for criticism). Not only the Pharisees but other Jewish people throughout the ancient world honored the sabbath and celebrated it with joy. The Bible itself had forbidden infractions of the sabbath under pain of death, so the Pharisees were naturally disturbed when it appeared that Jesus dishonored the day.

12:9-10. As one may gather here, informal dialogues could occur in smaller \*synagogue gatherings in this period that are quite different from the stricter ritual observed in most churches and synagogues today. The predominant school of \*Pharisees in this period, the Shammaites, did not allow praying for the sick on the sabbath; the minority school, however, the Hillelites (who later became predominant), allowed it. 12:11. The \*Essenes would have forbidden even rescuing an animal on the sabbath, but many Pharisees and most other Jewish interpreters would have agreed with Jesus. Pits were sometimes dug to capture predators such as wolves, but livestock could fall into them as well. Counterquestions (as here, answering 12:10) were common in the debates of Jewish teachers.

12:13-14. \*Pharisees, who had little political power in this period, could do no better than plot. Jewish courts could not enforce the death penalty in this period, although the law of Moses allowed it for sabbath violation (Ex 31:14; 35:2). The Pharisees had no power to destroy him, and their own rules did not permit them to seek his execution if he had defeated them in a scriptural argument, but this need not stop them from trying. Even had Matthew's Jewish readers been Pharisees (which is unlikely), they would be forced to see Jesus' opponents as unjust and obstinate here.

12:17-18. The servant passage in Isaiah 42:1-4 in context refers inescapably to Israel, not to the \*Messiah, despite a later Jewish tradition applying it to the Messiah (44:1, 21; 49:3). But because God's servant Israel failed in its mission (42:18-19), God chose one within Israel to restore the rest of the people (49:5-7), who would take the remainder of the punishment due Israel (cf. 40:2) in its place (52:13-53:12). Thus Matthew declares that the Messiah takes up the servant mission of Isaiah 42:1-4, and he is marked by the presence of the \*Spirit. Matthew translates Isaiah to conform to the language of Matthew 3:17 ("my beloved. .. in whom I am well pleased"), which was otherwise closer to Genesis 22:2. 12:19-21. This passage stresses Jesus' meekness, in contrast to the warlike \*Messiah many people hoped for; this was the reason for the messianic secret

12:24. Pagan exorcists sought to remove demons by magical incantations. In the second century \*rabbis still accused Jesus and Jewish Christians of using sorcery to achieve the miracles that everyone acknowledged they were performing. Sorcery merited the death penalty under Old Testament law (Ex 22:18). The title Beelzebul, "Lord of the House," probably alludes to "Beelzebub" ("lord of flies," a possible corruption of Baal-zebul), the local deity of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2-3). The title was appropriately applied in early Judaism to \*Satan (\*Testament of Solomon).

12:27. "Your sons" means "members of your own group" (just as, e.g., "sons of the prophets" in the \*Old Testament meant "prophets"). Because some of the Pharisees' associates also cast out demons (by methods that would look more magical than Jesus'), they should consider their charge carefully.

12:29. Many early Jewish sources report that \*Satan or demons were "bound," or imprisoned, after God subdued them; magical texts often speak of "binding" demons by magical procedures. Here, however, the \*parable about tying up a protective householder means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions-free the demon-possessed.

Blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev 24:10-23). Jesus thus regards blasphemy against the \*Spirit-permanently rejecting his identity (Mt 12:18) as attested by the Spirit's works (12:28)-as the worst of sins.

"Three days and nights" (Jon 2:1) need not imply complete days; parts of a twenty-four-hour day counted as representing the whole day. In early Jewish law, only after three days was the witness to a person's death accepted. 12:42. Some traditions identified the "Queen of the South," the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1), with the queen of Ethiopia (cf. Acts 8:27). 12:43-45. Jesus' point: Although he is casting out demons, this wicked generation is inviting all the more back in. The desert was a natural haunt of demons in much of Jewish tradition, and "sevenfold" was a traditional way to express severe punishment (Gen 4:15, 24; Lev 26:18), so the hearers would have readily caught Jesus' point.

Many Jewish interpreters regarded the command to honor father and mother as the most important in the \*law. Family relationships in the ancient world were often defined by hierarchy even more than by kinship ties, so that wives and especially children (and, in wealthy homes, slaves) were expected to obey the father of the household. Jesus can thus define his "mother, brothers and sisters" as those who obey his Father. To disavow literal family members was so repulsive that even using the image would have been culturally offensive. Further, spiritual or figurative kinship language in Judaism (especially "brothers") was viewed ethnically (fellow Israelites).

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1206-1210). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

When Jesus quoted this story to explain what he and his disciples were doing, he was saying two things, both of which explain the anger he aroused. First, he is the true king; like David, he has been anointed, but not yet enthroned. (A good part of the gospel story is a matter of explaining how he moves from the ‘anointing’ at his baptism to the ‘enthronement’ on the cross.) Second, he and his followers are more important than the Temple itself; not just because people matter more than things, but because Jesus matters more than Solomon’s Temple and all that goes on in it.

What systems are currently in danger of being exalted over the needs of real human beings, in your country, your church, your family? What would it mean for the son of man to be master of them?

The story of the Servant begins in the passage Matthew quotes here; it’s taken from Isaiah 42. The ‘Servant of YHWH’ is a strange figure in Isaiah: one who will bring YHWH’s blessing and justice to the world – the task which, earlier in Isaiah, was assigned to the Messiah, the coming king.

So, too, those who want to get ahead in this world tend to push others out of the way. If they see a weak link – a rod that’s bent and could break, a candle that’s almost gone out – they will trample on it without a thought. That’s not the Servant’s way. The nations are used to arrogance.

It was the prince of demons himself, they said. ‘Beelzebul’ is a kind of jokey name for the arch-demon or devil, ‘the satan’, the accuser. It literally means ‘Lord of flies’ or ‘Lord of filth’, though in Jesus’ day it was most likely just a kind of slang term, a way of avoiding speaking directly of the devil. But why did they think Jesus might be in league with the arch-demon? Because the alternative was that he really was acting in the power and spirit of Israel’s God himself. That would mean that everything else he was doing – welcoming outcasts, announcing the kingdom in a way which stood everything upside down, refusing to endorse a programme of national liberation – all this would be God’s work, even though it seemed, to the Pharisees at least, as though it was going in exactly the opposite direction to what they thought God wanted.

They would only say, ‘How does he do it?’ of Jesus if he really was performing extraordinary deeds. And we can be sure that the early church, Jesus’ devoted followers after his resurrection, would never have made up the idea that people said Jesus himself was in league with the devil.

Jesus’ final warning has often worried devout readers. How can we know whether or not we have committed this unforgiveable sin? But this saying relates very specifically to what has gone before. Jesus is warning against looking at the work of the spirit and declaring that it must be the devil’s doing. If you do that, it’s not just that you won’t be forgiven; you can’t be, because you have just cut off the very channel along which forgiveness would come. Once you declare that the only remaining bottle of water is poisoned, you condemn yourself to dying of thirst. Although the warning is therefore not so worrying at one level as some have imagined – if you’re worried about committing this sin, it’s a good sign that you haven’t done so – it remains serious in terms of the decision people reach about Jesus.

Many believed that YHWH, Israel’s God, had abandoned the Temple long ago; maybe he would now return. Not so, says Jesus. This generation is like a person who has been exorcized, but the demon may return and ‘repossess’ – with several others. All right, you’ve had your great revolution, and it worked in its way. You have swept and cleaned as best you can, with new programmes of Torah-teaching and personal piety. The Temple itself is standing there, in working order. But it’s still empty.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 154). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 13:1-53**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 13:29 Mercy of God for both the good and evil holds back the righteous hand of judgement while both good and evil mature. Evil is maturing...but so is the church.
* 13:33 ROI is huge. small kingdom seeds lead to large changes.
* 13:41 Though the crop was mixed it was always the Son of Man’s Kingdom...those who cause sin and do evil will be destroyed.
* 13:44 Looking for joy...lose everything for the kingdom

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

13:3-4. Seed was often (though not always) sown before the ground was plowed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here. A farmer could either cast the seed by hand, as probably here, or let it trickle from holes in a sack carried by an animal. The "path" or "road" is one of the many footpaths through the field. 13:5-6. Much of the land in Palestine has only a thin layer of soil over rock; if the sower had not plowed first, he would not be aware that he wasted seed on this soil until after the fact.

13:14-15. The people in Jesus' day were like the people in Isaiah's day who heard the word but could not really hear and repent (Is 6:9-10).

13:24. "The kingdom is like a man who..."does not mean that the king- dom is compared only to the man. \*Rabbinic \*parables often began with, "To what may such and such be compared?" or, "Such and such is like... In these parables the phrase meant that the subject was being explained by the whole analogy that followed, not just by the next word.

the point is that it was recognized as very small and yet yielded a large shrub. Around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of ten feet and has sometimes reached fifteen feet. Its usual height, however, is about four feet; because it would grow anew each year, birds could not nest in it when they built nests in early spring. The 'hyperbole Jesus applies to the best image of growth from tiny to large he had available does not change the point, however; the \*kingdom might begin in obscurity, but it would culminate in glory. Even if birds could not nest in the mustard plant, they could perch in it (Matthew's term here was sometimes used that way); Matthew's language here alludes to Daniel 4:12, the splendor of another ruler's kingdom.

The harvest is used elsewhere (e.g., 4 Ezra 4:30-32; \*2 Baruch 70:2; cf. Is 32:13-15; Jer 31:27-28; Hos 2:21-23; 6:11) as a symbol for the end, and Jewish texts sometimes compare hell with a furnace (\*1 Enoch 54:6; some manuscripts in 98:3; 4 Ezra 7:36). Other Jewish texts also spoke of the righteous shining with glory in the future kingdom.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1257-1259). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Chapter 13 is the third of the five ‘discourses’ which make up the book (Matthew 5—7, 10, 13, 18 and 23—25). These stories draw together all that has been going on so far in the gospel story, and point ahead to what is still to come.

But nobody would have missed the underlying meaning. Yes, Jesus was saying; what you have been longing for and praying for really is coming true. I’m here to make it happen. It’s going to be hard for you to understand, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t true. Stick with me. Listen to me. Figure it out. Come back for more. Like the crowds on the lakeshore that day, our task, again and again as we read scripture and think about God’s work in our own day, is to think it through and figure it out. Matthew’s gospel is designed to help us do that. It won’t always be easy. Christianity isn’t about cosy little lessons to make us feel better. It’s about what God’s doing in the world – what he’s already done in Jesus and what he wants to do through us today. What sort of stories ought we to be telling to get people to listen?

The really troubling thing about this passage is not simply that people have had to wait so long to see the kingdom finally appear. The biggest problem is that, now that it is appearing at last, it is bringing both judgment and mercy. And part of the judgment is that people will look and look and not see what God is doing. People will listen and listen to what Jesus is saying and they simply won’t be able to understand. Like tone-deaf people listening to a symphony, they will have no idea what it’s all about.

They expected, like many Jews of the time, that when God finally acted to bring the kingdom to birth this would happen in a blaze of glory, in a movement that would sweep through Israel, bringing freedom, justice and peace wherever it went, continuing until the whole world had come under God’s righteous rule. The suggestion that, instead, it might come as it were by stealth, not only through the puzzling words of a riddling preacher but through the mixed response of his hearers – this must have seemed very strange.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 165). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 13:54-14:36**

**Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 13:57 Sometimes you have to leave the rest to be heard. You have to leave your comfort zone to truly walk into your own leadership.
* 14:13 Jesus retreated to grieve but still had compassion. he doesn’t even get off the boat before demands are put on him. The crowds do not care for him, they only care for their healing...and Jesus “gives” into their needs, not from a motivation of being needed but to suffer with them (compassion).
* 14:19 Human agents in divine work looks like receiving what Jesus has given us and giving it to the crowds he’s gathered.
* 14:22 Jesus leaves crowds, makes space for them to pursue him again.
* 14:27 The words “don’t be afraid” only have weight when followed by “it is I”. Fear only leaves when assurance comes from the right place/person.
* 14:32 There is something innocent and sweet about worship birthed from the place where words and explanations fail. The disciples had no theology to really understand what happened, yet they knew the right response.
* 14:35 Learn from the crowds: they recognized Jesus, told others, brought the sick and begged him for a touch, reached out and touched him.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

Nazareth itself was a small village in this period, with perhaps 1,600-2,000 inhabitants; Jesus would thus have been known to most of his townspeople.

Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's son by a \*Samaritan mother, and full brother of Archelaus (2:22). He had ruled in Galilee and Perea (the latter was a narrow strip of land on the east of the Jordan) since about 4 B.C., and continued in power till A.D. 39. 14:1. Matthew uses Herod Antipas's actual title, "tetrarch," rather than the sarcastic or loose one Mark gives him ("king"). "Tetrarch" originally meant ruler of one-quarter of some territory, but Romans applied it to rulers of any portion; Herod the Great's kingdom had been divided in 4 B.C. among Archelaus (later supplanted by Roman procurators), Antipas and Philip. 14:2-4. The first-century historian \*Josephus also reports Herod Antipas's affair with his sister-in-law Herodias. The tetrarch and his paramour divorced their spouses to marry one another, and Herod thereby offended his former father-in-law, the Nabatean king, ultimately leading to a war in which Herod's honor suffered greatly.

14:5-6. Jewish people did not normally celebrate birthdays in this period (Josephus declares celebrating birthdays forbidden). But though most Jews considered birthday celebrations a \*Gentile custom, the aristocracy evinced considerable Greek influence.

14:13-15. Bread and fish were basic staples of the Palestinian diet; meat was more expensive and rarely eaten except at feasts. Teachers were not normally responsible for feeding their \*disciples from their own means. 14:16. Ancient students often paid their teachers (though other teachers were self-supporting); it was honorable to invite teachers to dinner and to show them the utmost hospitality. But here Jesus, the teacher, assumes the role of host or provider. (Although \*disciples often viewed teachers as father figures, teachers rarely had the resources to provide for disciples out of their own means.) The ancient emphasis on hospitality included providing food as well as shelter for guests. 14:17-18. Compare especially 2 Kings 4:42-43 for the incredulity of prophetdisciples when Elisha tells them to distribute the food to the people. 14:19. It was customary for the head of the household to "bless," or give thanks for, food before a meal.

the only one the \*Old Testament said "trod" upon the waters was God himself.

14:24. Harsh storms often arise suddenly on the Sea of Galilee. 14:25. The fourth, or final, shift of the night watch was between 3 and 6 a.m.; the watches started at 6 p.m. Jewish people often divided the night into three watches, but the Romans had four. 14:26. Belief in ghosts or disembodied spirits was common on a popular level in antiquity, even though the idea of ghosts contradicted popular Jewish tdead. teachings about the \*resurrection from

14:27. Jesus' answer is literally "I am"; although this can easily mean "It is I," it may also allude back to God's self-revelation in Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10, 13: "I AM."

14:33. The term worship was applied to homage offered to pagan kings as well as that offered to deities. Although it could indicate prostration as a sign of respect (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8; 25:23), it is an unusual term to express Jewish \*disciples' amazement at a human teacher, even in miracle stories.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1314-1315). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

At the same time, there is comfort and encouragement hidden in this story too, if we know where to dig for it. The very people the villagers refer to – Jesus’ mother, Mary, and his brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judah – seem at this point to have joined in the general disapproval. But all that changed. After Jesus’ resurrection, many of his relatives became great leaders in the early church, and none greater than his brother James. Those who at present seem to be hardened against the message can still be reached by a further act of God’s love and power.

In fact, rejection can sometimes be a strange encouragement. Provided we understand such a moment with humility, it can become a further indication, albeit a dark and negative one, that God is truly at work. If new creation and new life are going forward, those who have invested heavily in the old creation, the old ways of life, are bound to be offended.

Within Matthew’s story, of course, there is much more going on than simply a remarkable example of Christian vocation. The twelve baskets left over may point to Jesus’ intention to restore God’s people, the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus feeding people in the wilderness fits so well with Matthew’s theme of Jesus as the new Moses (God gave the Israelites manna, special bread from heaven, when they were in the desert in the time of Moses) that we can be sure that Matthew intended us to see this too.

Professional fishermen, they were struggling with the oars, unable to make headway against the wind. We too in our world have discovered so much, learned so much, invented so much, and yet are still without power to do many of the things that really matter. We have invented wonderful machines for making war, but nobody yet has found one that will make peace. We can put a man on the moon, but we can’t put food into hungry stomachs. We can listen to the songs the whales sing on the ocean floor, but we can’t hear the crying of human souls in the next street. And there, shimmering on the water, is a strange figure, walking towards us. Much of our world knows at least a little about Jesus; but he seems a ghostly image, a mirage or fantasy, unrelated to us and our problems.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 190). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 15:1-39**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 15:8 The definitive traits of a hypocrite is they are religious, pious and even at times sacrificial...just not for God. Not motivated by God or obeying him, their actions are masked by what sounds like obedience, but they pick and choose what serves them best.
* 15:12 Our actions and words are symptoms of heart trouble. The heart generates unclean activity...must deal with the heart, but it’s identified by actions/words.
* 15:33 Do we think the activity of Jesus in our lives was meant to be a one-off event?
* 15:39 Jesus is not trying to build a mega church...he sends crowds away...after he feeds them.

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15:21. Tyre and Sidon were traditionally pagan territory; Sidon had been the home of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). But in the same generation a woman from that region had miraculously received food and healing for her child from the prophet Elijah and so became a full believer in Israel's God

15:22. Canaanites, many of whose survivors had been driven northward into Phoenicia during the Israelite conquest, were the most morally despised of Israel's enemies in the \*Old Testament; Matthew's characterizing this woman with this term would set Jewish readers on edge if they still had any racist tendencies. But by acknowledging Jesus as "Son of David"-\*Messiah-she also acknowledges the right of the kingdom of David (who had also embraced many non-Jews as allies) over the land. How could a Jewish person remain prejudiced against a Canaanite woman such as this one? 15:23-24. Jesus' statement in verse 24 does not preclude a later mission to \*Gentiles. The servant of Isaiah 53:6-8 suffers on behalf of the lost sheep of Israel (cf. 40:11; 56:11), but the servant's mission was ultimately to reconcile all nations to God (42:6; 49:6-7). 15:25-28. Certain people in the Old Testament, most notably the Sidonian woman to whom Elijah came (1 Kings 17:18-19) and the Shunammite woman with Elisha (2 Kings 4:28), laid their need before a prophet and would not take no for an answer; God answered their prayers with a yes.

Jesus' first feeding miracle (see comment on Mt 14:13-21) was not an exception; he was able to repeat it at any time. Magadan (v. 39) was Mary Magdalene's hometown; it has been identified with Tarichea, where many fishermen seem to have worked.

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The Canaanite woman does indeed have great faith. Not only does she clearly believe that Jesus can heal her stricken daughter. She addresses Jesus as ‘son of David,’ the Jewish messianic title which the disciples themselves were only gradually coming to associate with him. And, most remarkably, she understands, and uses to her advantage in the banter with Jesus, the way in which God’s choice of Israel to be the promise-bearing people for the sake of the world was to work out in practice. Yes, she says, the dogs can’t simply share the children’s food. This is remarkable enough, that she accepts the designation ‘dog’, which was a regular way of dismissing the Gentiles as inferior. But she insists on her point. If Israel is indeed the promise-bearing people, then Israel’s Messiah will ultimately bring blessing to the whole world. The dogs will share the scraps that fall from the children’s table.

The mask, says Jesus, is the words the Pharisees use. Behind their words of piety, their hearts have no intention of really discovering what God desired. They have elevated merely human customs to the status of divine commands. In the process, they have overthrown the actual divine commands themselves.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 1: Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 194). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 16:1-28**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 16:4 jesus is not a caged animal, a wonder to be put through tricks and proofs. He gives people what they need and is not driven by proving himself.
* Jesus is moved by compassion for people who seek him but not by skeptical investigation. There is a way to know Jesus that is beyond skepticism’s scope.
* 16:11 Truth comes by seeking. Just a little hypocrisy, skepticism, places a disciple in danger. It’s not so much their doctrine (both Pharisees and Sadducees were conservative and liberal respectively) but the ethos of their teaching. Teaching without really looking for truth and not knowing truth comes beyond just logic, proof and argumentation.
* 16:14 Logical “faith” says Jesus is special, even a prophet. It is half way right but not even close.
* 16:17 God must reveal truth in all its unexpected forms. For us to see beyond our logical faith. The truth does not contradict the faithful logic but goes beyond, overwhelms and envelops it within itself. truth about Jesus is more than we can discern or imagine. We must seek it.
* 16:22 Peter employs logical faith. he believes Jesus to be the Messiah, revealed by Father, but that leads him to the logical action rather than allowing both truth and deeds to be revealed by God.
* 16:21 Jesus does not want disciples to identify him as Messiah publically because both the truth of his identity and his mission (deeds) are bundled. They only know half of what Messiah is (his identity) but do not yet understand his mission (his deeds).

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16:12. The \*Sadducees denied the \*resurrection (Mt 22:23) and the \*Pharisees held to human traditions (15:2-3); throughout Matthew, both oppose Jesus.

16:13. Caesarea Philippi (a city distinct from the usual \*New Testament Caesarea, which was on the coast) was pagan territory, near a grotto devoted to the worship of the Greek deity Pan; Herod had also dedicated a temple for the worship of Caesar there. Thus it was hardly the most expected site for a divine revelation. The city was some twenty-five miles from the Lake of Galilee and about seventeen hundred feet higher, hence the need to stop along the way (15:21); it lay near the source of the Jordan, at the Old Testament Dan, the northern boundary of ancient Israel.

though most Jewish teachers held that prophets had ceased, popular expectation of end-time prophets remained strong. Elijah was expected to return (Mal 4:5), and many of Jesus' miracles resembled Elijah's. His judgment oracles (Mt 11:20-24) or downplaying the temple (cf. 12:6; 24:1-2) may have evoked the comparison with Jeremiah.

16:15-16. Peter has the right title, though the wrong concept of what \*Messiah means (16:22). David's royal line was adopted by God (2 Sam 7:14), so it was natural for the ultimate successor to his throne to be called God's Son (Ps 2:7; 89:27),

16:18. In \*Aramaic, "Peter" and "rock" are the same word; in Greek (here), they are cognate terms that were used interchangeably by this period. For the idea of a person as the foundation on which something is built, cf. Isaiah 51:1-2; Ephesians 2:20. (This promise is made to Peter because Peter was the one who confessed Jesus-v. 16; the point is that Peter is the rock in his role as confessor, and others build on the foundation by their proclamation of the same confession.)

16:19. The keeper of the keys was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold (cf. Mk 13:32-34); a high official held the keys in a royal kingdom (Is 22:20-22) and in God's house, the temple. Keys here refer to the authority to admit into the \*kingdom (Mt 23:13), based on the knowledge of the truth about Jesus (16:16).

16:22. Jewish tradition in this period emphasized a triumphant \*Messiah; apparently only a century after Jesus' teaching did Jewish teachers begin to accept the tradition of a suffering Messiah in addition to a triumphant one. One of the first rules of ancient discipleship (with noticeably rare exceptions) was: Never criticize the teacher, especially publicly. Here Peter breaks that rule, even on standard cultural grounds. 16:23. The term stumbling block, referring to something over which people tripped, had come to be used figuratively for things that led people to sin or stumble in their faith. Jesus identifies Peter with \*Satan because he speaks the same temptation: the kingdom without the cross (4:9-10). \*Rabbis sometimes punned on the names of \*disciples; here the "rock" (16:18) becomes a "stumbling stone."

16:24. For 16:24-28, see comment on Mark 8:34-9:1. Carrying the horizontal crossbeam en route to crucifixion (where the upright stake already stood awaiting the condemned person) meant enduring mockery and scorn on a path leading to death as a condemned criminal. Crucifixion was the worst form of criminal death, the supreme Roman penalty, inflicted only on the lower classes and slaves; even talk of it could evoke horror.

16:27-28. Jesus alludes to Daniel 7:13-14 and thus applies \*Old Testament language for God as judge to himself

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The point is this. At Passover, one of the greatest Jewish festivals, all leaven had to be cleared out of the house, commemorating the time when the children of Israel left Egypt in such a hurry that they didn’t have time to bake leavened bread, and so ate it unleavened. Gradually, ‘leaven’ became a symbol not for something that makes bread more palatable, but for something that makes it less pure. Warning against the ‘leaven’ of someone’s teaching meant warning against ways in which the true message of God’s kingdom could be corrupted, diluted, or (as we say, referring to drink rather than bread), ‘watered down’. Bring the whole scene forward two thousand years, and we face the question for ourselves. What are the ‘signs of the times’ in our own day? Where are leaders and teachers, official and unofficial, leading people astray? What are the true signs of God’s work in our midst?

‘You are the Messiah,’ he says, ‘the son of the living God.’ It’s important to be clear that at this stage the phrase ‘son of God’ did not mean ‘the second person of the Trinity’. There was no thought yet that the coming king would himself be divine – though some of the things Jesus was doing and saying must already have made the disciples very puzzled, with a perplexity that would only be resolved when, after his resurrection, they came to believe that he had all along been even more intimately associated with Israel’s one God than they had ever imagined. No: the phrase ‘son of God’ was a biblical phrase, indicating that the king stood in a particular relation to God, adopted to be his special representative (see, for instance, 2 Samuel 7.14; Psalm 2.7). Very soon after Jesus’ resurrection, his followers came to believe that the same phrase had a whole other layer of meaning that nobody had hitherto imagined. But it’s important, if we are to understand the present passage, that we don’t read into it more than is there. What Peter and the others were saying was: you are the true king. You’re the one Israel has been waiting for. You are God’s adopted son,

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 283-292). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 17:1-27**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 17:5 We cannot trap Jesus in a prophet mold. The voice of God reminds us the exclusively unique claims of Jesus. He is the one foretold to lead his people and we must LISTEN.
* 17:11 Restoring all things does not exclude suffering, sacrifice and the appearance of failure.
* 17:23 Grief fills us when we only listen to 50% of what Jesus is saying. The disciples only hear Jesus say “death” and miss him talking about “life”.

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17:1. The six days alludes to Exodus 24:16, when God began to speak to Moses from his cloud on the mountain. 17:2. Some Jewish texts described glorious angels or the resurrected righteous in terms like those describing Jesus here, but the strongest allusion to a human appearance being transformed by glory is in Exodus 34:29, where Moses' face radiated glory because of God's revelation of himself to Moses. 17:3. Jewish people expected the return of both Elijah and Moses at the end of the age. Both of them (Ex 24:15- 16; 1 Kings 19:8) heard from God at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb).

17:4. Israel had dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness while the presence and glory of God was among them. 17:5. The cloud of glory overshadowed the mountain in Exodus 24:15 and the tabernacle in 40:34 (the same Greek word is used in the \*LXX of Ex 40:35 that Matthew uses here). To the biblical allusions in Matthew 3:17, the voice in this passage adds Deuteronomy 18:15: When the prophet like Moses comes, "give heed to him."

17:14-21. See comments on Mark 9:14-29 for more detail. Like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35). "Removing mountains" was a Jewish figure of speech for that which was incomparably difficult (mountains were thought to be the most stable of all things; cf. Ps 46:2; Is 54:10); mustard seeds were used to define a proverbially small quantity. Jesus is thus telling the \*disciples that nothing God asks them to do will be impossible if they trust him. (Cf. Zech 4:7.)

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Jesus himself had said, earlier in Matthew’s gospel, that all God’s people would shine like stars in God’s kingdom (13.43, quoting Daniel 12.3). For the New Testament writers in general, in fact, humanity itself is a glorious thing, and Jesus’ perfect humanity provides the model for the glory which all his people will one day share. If you want to see Jesus’ divinity, the early Christians would tell us, you must look, however surprisingly, at Jesus’ suffering and shameful death. If that seems puzzling, it’s a puzzle the first Christians insisted we should live with.

Matthew, here as elsewhere, highlights the parallel between Jesus and Moses. Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and then, before completing his task, went up Mount Sinai to receive the law. He then went up again, after the Israelites had drastically broken the law, to pray for them and to beg for God’s mercy. (Elijah, too, met God in a special way on Mount Sinai; but Matthew’s interest, throughout the gospel, is in the way in which Jesus is like Moses, only more so.) Towards the end of Moses’ life, God promised to send the people a prophet just like him (Deuteronomy 18), and gave the command: you must listen to him. Now, as Moses once again meets God on the mountain, the voice from the cloud draws attention to Jesus, confirming what Peter had said in the previous chapter. Jesus isn’t just a prophet; he is God’s own son, the Messiah, and God is delighted with what he is doing. The word to the disciples then is just as much a word to us today. If you want to find the way – the way to God, the way to the promised land – you must listen to him.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 408-412). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 18:1-35**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* We chase power and security while kids pursue their father’s heart. Be a child of God.
* 18:3 While pursuing to be great, you can’t be in the kingdom.
* 18:16 Kids are a microcosm of God’s heart for the poor.
* 18:7 Woe to those who use creativity to sin, to give birth to sin.
* 18:12 Utilizing a cost/benefit analysis God looks unreasonable. He values those who do not have value. He pursues the least. His obsession may even look foolish, yet he commands us to take on his attitude.
* 18:15 Show him his fault (because he might not know) bring another (because it might be you) bring the church (because it affects the community) treat as a sinner (so they hear the gospel)
* 18:21 Our generosity is a cracked facade next to God’s mercy. When we limit forgiveness we have removed our gaze from the beauty of God’s love for us.
* 18:35 There is nothing more dangerous than a heart riddle with the cancer of unforgiveness. Our hearts must release people the way God has done for us.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

18:2-4. The most powerless members of ancient society were little children; in most of ancient society, age increased one's social status and authority. In Jewish culture, children were loved, not despised; but the point is that they had no status apart from that love, and no power or privileges apart from what they received as total dependents on their parents. "Converted" may allude to the Jewish idea of turning, returning or \*repenting.

18:10. Jewish readers would generally recognize here the concept of the guardian angel; it was typically believed that every Jewish person had one.

18:12-14. One hundred was an average-sized flock in Palestine. Greek and Jewish literature affords other examples of pasturers who had to leave the flock or herd to look for a lost animal (cf. 1 Sam 9:3); a shepherd could leave his own flock with the other shepherds with whom he worked, who would be watching over their own flocks. Religious leaders who failed to care for the broken and powerless are rejected by God (Ezek 34:2-10), and God himself would then seek after the sheep (34:11-16).

We should keep in mind that the whole context of this passage on \*church discipline is mercy and forgiveness; forgiveness qualifies (but does not annul) the force of this passage on disciplining unrepentant offenders in the Christian community.

18:15. This procedure was standard Jewish custom; the \*Dead Sea Scrolls, the \*rabbis and others demand that one begin with private reproof. Publicly shaming someone unnecessarily was considered sinful, and Jewish teachers stressed the importance of receiving reproof. 18:16. Deuteronomy 19:15 (cf. 17:6- 7) was the standard text Jewish authorities cited for requiring two witnesses. (The \*rabbis took this principle so far that one eyewitness was not sufficient even if the eyewitness caught the murderer with the bloody knife in hand.) Strict judicial procedures are being followed at this point because a judicial action is about to take place; Jesus here agrees with the Jewish practice of private rebuke, witnesses and finally, if repentance is not forthcoming, the judicial assembly (18:17). 18:17. A \*church by definition would function as an ancient \*synagogue would, and ancient synagogues were not only assembly halls for prayer and study but community centers where discipline would be inflicted on an erring member of the community. This discipline could take a variety of forms, including public beating, but the most severe were several levels of dismissal from the community. After the most severe level of discipline the offending member would be treated as a pagan instead of as a Jew. Pagans and \*tax gatherers alike-tax gatherers were seen as agents of a pagan government-were excluded from the religious life of the Jewish community. Giving a person a final warning before a court would take action (e.g., Deut 25:8) was an act of mercy.

"Binding" and "loosing," terms normally used for tying up or imprisoning versus freeing or releasing, provide a natural metaphor for condemning or acquitting in a court. As terms regularly used for \*rabbis' legislative authority in interpreting Scripture, they could naturally apply to judicial situations as well. 18:19-20. The "two or three" must refer to the "two or three witnesses" of 18:16. These verses may refer to the prayer of execration given at a Jewish excommunication; or they could represent prayers for the \*repentance and consequent forgiveness of the excommunicated person (see 1 Jn 5:16). In either case, it is of interest to note that the witnesses in the \*Old Testament were to be the first to execute the judgment of the court (Deut 17:7); here they are the first to pray. Ten Jewish males was the minimum quorum to constitute a \*synagogue assembly, but it was frequently said that God's presence was with even two or three who met together to study his law. Jesus' presence is thus presented here as identical with God's (cf. also Mt 1:23; 28:20). (One of the most common names for God among the later \*rabbis was "the Place," i.e., the Omnipresent One.)

18:21-22. Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven) does not really mean exactly 490 here; it is a typically graphic Jewish way of saying "Never hold grudges." Because true \*repentance should involve turning from sin, some later \*rabbis limited opportunities for forgiveness for a given sin to three times; Peter might have thought his offer of seven times was generous.

18:29-30. Someone in prison could not pay back what he owed (v. 34), unless friends came to his aid with the requisite funds. 18:31-33. The king is naturally angry; the forgiven servant has put another of his servants out of active commission, hence costing the king more lost revenues. The king had gained more advantage by convincing his people of his benevolence than he would have gained profit from the sale of the first servant; but once it was rumored that this first servant, his agent, was acting mercilessly, it reflected badly upon his own benevolence. 18:34. Jewish law did not permit torture, but Jewish people knew that \*Gentile kings (as well as Herod) practiced it. Because this servant had fallen from political favor, he would have no allies who would dare come to his aid; and even if he had, given the sum he owed, his situation would have remained hopeless. He would never be released. 18:35. The great contrasts of the \*parable are humorous and effective in relaxing the ancient listener's guard, but the horrifying details of debt slavery, torture and so forth bring home the point forcefully.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1497-1504). Kindle Edition.**

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Children were frequently seen as only half-human until they had reached puberty, perhaps for the worrying reason that until they were available as sexual partners adults wouldn’t want to know about them. Girls in particular suffered. Often newborn girls were simply thrown away – left to starve or be eaten by predators, or sold for prostitution at an early age – because the family didn’t want another expensive daughter to bring up. It is significant that in some languages, including the Greek in which the New Testament is written, the words for ‘child’ are mostly neither masculine nor feminine, but neuter: the child wasn’t a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, but simply an ‘it’. The child in this story is an ‘it’ in Greek (verse 2). But I have guessed, in the translation, that ‘it’ was a girl, not least because a girl would make with special clarity the point Jesus was wanting to get into the disciples’ minds: that the weakest, most vulnerable, least significant human being you can think of is the clearest possible signpost to what the kingdom of God will be like.

So who are these ‘little ones’? They include weak, vulnerable children, of course, as we were thinking in the previous passage. But they also include those who are weak and vulnerable at other times of life, too: the cripples, the chronically sick, the elderly and infirm, refugees, women (in many cultures), any who find themselves on the human scrap-heap that our world throws people on to when it can’t think what else to do with them. They include the dirty begger you avoided in the street yesterday. They include the shop-girl who you were tempted to be rude to (or to be rude about behind her back). They include the old woman pushing a supermarket trolley down the street with (so it seemed) all her life’s belongings piled high on it. They include the teenage boy who drifted into drugs because there weren’t any jobs, and who is now dying of heroin. It’s interesting that our modern culture tends, as we say, to ‘screen out’ people like that. We hide our faces from them, in a strange parody of the fact that their guardian angels are among the few who don’t have to hide their faces from God. We are ashamed of them; God isn’t. We don’t want to know about them; God wants to let them into his closest, most intimate presence. We regard them as undesirable; God desires not only their welfare but their company. They are a standing reminder of God’s kingdom, and we turn away from them as a society because as a society we have turned away from God.

Forgiveness is more like the air in your lungs. There’s only room for you to inhale the next lungful when you’ve just breathed out the previous one. If you insist on withholding it, refusing to give someone else the kiss of life they may desperately need, you won’t be able to take any more in yourself, and you will suffocate very quickly. Whatever the spiritual, moral and emotional equivalent of the lungs may be (we sometimes say ‘the heart’, but that of course is a metaphor as well), it’s either open or closed. If it’s open, able and willing to forgive others, it will also be open to receive God’s love and forgiveness. But if it’s locked up to the one, it will be locked up to the other.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 862-866). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 19:1-20:16**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 19:3 Some will walk past your fruit so to test your integrity.
* 19:6 Marriage (or divorce) is not about the man or woman or the reason (any or every)...it is about God and who he brought together.
* 19:29 Compensation for sacrifice will come but not in the way we plan or in our timing...yet there is a compensation.
* 20:13 Kingdom compensation does not submit to imperial capitalism but rather brings equality and pushed the equality beyond so the superior becomes the inferior...wealthy become unwealthy and the least are exalted.
* Equality looks unfair. Biblical justice does not respond equally to everyone. Some are protected while others corrected. Generosity is not fair.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

19:1-3. The \*Pharisees themselves debated the grounds for divorce implied in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: the school of \*Shammai, predominant in Jesus' day, argued that the passage allowed divorce only if one's spouse was unfaithful; the school of \*Hillel, which eventually won out, said that a man could divorce his wife if she burned the toast (a later \*rabbi of this school added, "Or if you find someone more attractive"!). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1).

19:8. Jewish teachers of the \*law recognized a legal category called "concession": something that was permitted only because it was better to regulate sin than to relinquish control over it altogether. Given God's purpose in creation (Gen 2:24), divorce naturally fell into such a category (cf. Mal 2:14- 16).

Jesus is more consistent: if one divorces one's spouse without valid grounds (unfaithfulness or analogous sins; cf. 1 Cor 7:10-13), the marriage is not truly dissolved and subsequent marriage is adulterous. This statement (that all subsequent unions are invalid unless the first marriage was dissolved by infidelity) may be \*hyperbolic rather than literal, but hyperbole is stated the way it is to make its point forcefully, not to be ignored. Divorce must never be taken lightly. Because men could divorce women unilaterally but women could demand a divorce only under certain very narrow conditions (and then needed the court's help), Jesus' opposition to this sort of divorce is also a defense of married women.

19:11-12. \*Rabbis recognized different categories of eunuchs-those born without sexual organs (i.e., made eunuchs by God) and those made eunuchs by people, such as served in Eastern courts. But nothing was as offensive to Jewish sensitivities as making someone a eunuch, a practice that would exclude him from the people of God (Deut 23:1). Perhaps playing on Isaiah 56:4-5, Jesus uses this graphic language to describe a call to singleness for the \*kingdom, although singleness, too, was generally outside the mainstream of Jewish social life (see comment on 1 Cor 7).

19:20. With the possible exception of the less specific "Love your neighbor as yourself," most Jewish people could claim to have kept the specific commandments just mentioned. "Young man" places him between twenty-four and forty years of age. 19:21. Only a few radical Greek teachers demanded such things of would-be \*disciples. Jesus' demands are more radical than Jewish charity laws permitted (lest the benefactor reduce himself to poverty); later regulations limited charity to twenty percent (which was nonetheless considerable on top of tithes and taxes). This was a severe test, not only of whether the disciple would value the teacher above earthly possessions, but even of his claim to love his neighbor as himself. 19:22. The young man responds as most aristocrats would have responded and did respond when confronted with such demands. The \*kingdom is not meant to be an extra blessing tagged onto a comfortable life; it must be allconsuming, or it is no longer the kingdom. For that reason, it appeals more readily to those with less to lose.

19:23-26. Here Jesus clearly uses \*hyperbole. His words reflect an ancient figure of speech for the impossible: a very large animal passing through a needle's eye. (A needle's eye in Jesus' day meant what it means today; the idea that it was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching in the first century.) Mainstream Judaism never denied the rich a place in the \*kingdom of God; many of its benefactors and leaders were rich. Jesus allows that the rich may, by God's mercy, enter in, but only by giving their wealth to the poor.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1538-1541). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Those at the back, said Jesus, will find themselves at the front, and those at the front will find themselves at the back. There will be astonishment, embarrassment, delight and dismay. God is going to stand everything on its head. In the long human hunt for truth, wisdom, justice and salvation, the divine fox has doubled back, and is reappearing where we least expected him. This time, the nobodies are in the lead, and the great and good are in the rear.

As we have seen in this chapter and the previous ones, Jesus often exaggerates hugely to make his point. It’s like saying, ‘You couldn’t get a Rolls-Royce into a matchbox.’ The point is not that you might achieve it if you tried very hard, or that there was a particular type of small garage called a ‘matchbox’; the point is precisely that it’s unthinkable. That’s the moment when all human calculations and possibilities stop, and God’s new possibilities start. What is impossible in human terms, Jesus’ followers are to discover to their amazement, is possible to God (verse 26). Jesus is then offering a vision of God’s whole new world in which everything will be upside down and inside out.

God’s grace, in short, is not the sort of thing you can bargain with or try to store up. It isn’t the sort of thing that one person can have a lot of and someone else only a little. The point of the story is that what people get from having served God and his kingdom is not, actually, a ‘wage’ at all. It’s not, strictly, a reward for work done. God doesn’t make contracts with us, as if we could bargain or negotiate for a better deal. He makes covenants, in which he promises us everything and asks of us everything in return.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (Kindle Locations 1178-1181). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 20:17-21:32**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* Obedience doesn’t always make sense; like a single thread in a cord has no strength, yet when strung together with all the prophecies we find our faithfulness aligned with the will of God.
* 20:22 The path to leadership is cup of suffering and being a slave. The leadership pipeline doesn’t discourage desire for leadership but rather shapes what type of leader will look like Jesus.
* 21:11 Crowds respond to Jesus, go to see him, praise him and then keep him at arms length by calling him prophet.
* 21:22 the level of trust does not need to be of high quality because the object is infinitely full. A little bit of infinite is still infinity.
* 21:25 Religious leaders worry more about politics than truth. They weigh the scales without regard to what God is doing.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

21:28-30. That a father should have asked his son to go work in the vineyard was natural. That the son should have refused to go would have offended Jewish moral sensibilities: this was an openly disobedient son, and disobedience was a punishable offense. But failing to go after promising to go was worse than not having promised; this son violated his word to his own father. The son who refused to go but \*repented clearly acted preferably (cf. Ezek 18:21-24). 21:31-32. The pious regarded \*tax gatherers and prostitutes as outside practicing Judaism. Jesus could not have chosen a much more offensive comparison.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1538-1541). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Jesus’ curious answer to them opens a very different window: on the biblical roots of the calling which he was following. The Old Testament prophets speak darkly about the ‘cup of YHWH’s wrath’ (Isaiah 51.17, 22; Jeremiah 25.15–29; and several other passages). These passages talk of what happens when the one God, grieving over the awful wickedness of the world, steps in at last to give the violent and bloodthirsty, the arrogant and oppressors, the reward for their ways and deeds. It’s as though God’s holy anger against such people is turned into wine: dark, sour wine which will make them drunk and helpless. They will be forced to ‘drink the cup’, to drain to the dregs the wrath of the God who loves and vindicates the weak and helpless. The shock of this passage – and it becomes more shocking as we go forward from here – is that Jesus speaks of drinking this cup himself. No wonder the disciples couldn’t grasp the idea!

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (pp. 60-61). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 21:33-22:46**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 21:46 Do your stories upset unjust rulers, authorities and powers?
* 22:9 The servants have 2 groups to target with invitations: those they are sent to and anyone they find.
* 22:14 Being relentlessly inclusive doesn’t mean we stop being exclusivists. Those invited must come to celebrate the wedding of the Son.
* 22:15 Politicking with words is the tool of enemies. Make sure it is the only weapon they have because of they way you live.
* 22:29 Jesus previously avoids a trap of words but here he corrects poor theology. He doesn’t respond to the question but rather the mistake in their understanding of God.
* 22:40 When we try to simplify God we stumble into heresy. When we complicate the law of love we are shackled by legalism. In Jesus we find the complexity of God living the simplicity of love.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

21:33. Jesus' description follows the normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard.

21:38-39. The tenants presume too much about the inheritance. Although they could have seized it under certain legal conditions, the owner could also stipulate-and after their misdeeds certainly would-that someone else inherit the vineyard; or representatives of the emperor could have seized it. The story paints the tenants as incomparably wicked and stupid; yet the tenants are a transparent metaphor for the religious leaders who serve themselves rather than God-as Jesus' hearers know (21:45).

21:42. This text is from Psalm 118:22- 23, part of the Hallel, like 118:25-26 cited in Matthew 21:9. The building referred to is the temple (see Ps 118:18- 21, 25-27); as the cornerstone of a new temple, Jesus poses a threat to the builders of the old one (the Jewish aristocracy). (Interpreters disagree as to whether the "cornerstone" refers to the stone located in the corner of the foundation or to the capstone of an arch, but this point is not crucial to the interpretation of the passage.) 21:43. Israel was a "holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6), but the threat of transferring their status to others had been made before (Ex 32:10; Num 14:12). God rejected the builders' rejection (Mt 21:42), and he could replace them (cf. 3:10). "Producing" fruit (cf. 3:8) meant turning over the fruit to the landowner (God), in contrast to the tenants in the \*parable (21:33-42).

21:44. "Falling on" the cornerstone reflects Isaiah 8:14-15 (cf. Is 28:16); the stone falling on the offender alludes to Daniel 2:34, 44, where God's \*kingdom, portrayed as a rock, crushes its earthly challengers. Jesus here uses a standard Jewish practice of expounding one text (Mt 21:42) by citing others sharing the same key word or concept, in this case, the divine stone. A later \*rabbi warned, "If a pot falls on a rock, woe to the pot; if a rock falls on the pot, woe to the pot-either way, woe to the pot!"

22:5. Ignoring the king would be scandalously rude, would probably suggest treasonous feelings and would certainly invite a king's wrath; this .parable's original hearers would thus feel incensed at these subjects' unbelievable stupidity. 22:6. This behavior would obviously have been illegal even had the servants not belonged to the king; but servants of a king had higher status than most free persons, and as a king's messengers they represented his person. Ancient peoples universally despised the mistreatment of heralds, or emissaries. In addition, the mistreatment of royal representatives was outright treason, constituting a declaration of revolt. Yet this was the treatment God's servant-messengers, the prophets, were known to have received.

22:11-13. Even commoners knew better than to attend a royal feast without appropriate (at least clean) attire; this would be a sign of insolent disrespect to the host (who at this point in the story is in no mood for further disrespect!). Thus even some of those who showed up for the feast (presumably representing Jesus' purported followers, like Judas) dishonored him. Scholars have suggested a parallel with a later Jewish story in which a king invited guests to a feast without advance notice of the date. In this story, only the diligent subjects were dressed and ready at the door when the date came; the others had to wait outside in shame. 22:14. The last part of the story illustrates the point that many are invited ("called") to a feast, but few are in the end among the chosen.

22:15-16. \*Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have witnesses for a charge but would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the \*law. That they would test his teaching here is not surprising. The Herodians, who hoped for a restoration of Herodian rule in Judea (which Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by \*messianic figures who might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

22:18-22. Jewish Palestine circulated its own copper coins, omitting the image of the deified emperor, which was offensive to Jewish tastes (though after A.D. 6 they were nonetheless Roman coins). But foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were permitted to be struck. The silver denarius, probably minted in Lyon, was required to pay taxes in Palestine as elsewhere in the empire, and Jewish people had to use it whether they liked it or not. Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the use of such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation. If Jesus' questioners here are concerned about paying Roman taxes, they obviously ought not to be carrying this coin. Repartee that put one's interrogators in a bad light was characteristic of popular teachers in both Jewish and Greek traditions, and Jesus proves himself among the most effective of ancient teachers.

22:23. In ancient Judaism the \*Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in \*resurrection; \*rabbis who considered themselves successors of the \*Pharisees often classified Sadducees as heretics for this view (although the Sadducees, who vanished in the years after A.D. 70, were no longer around to respond). 22:24. The Sadducees' question concerns the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). It provides economic and social protection to widows in certain kinds of family-oriented societies where women cannot earn wages.

Following Jewish interpretive technique, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) by a common key word: "Love." Jewish ethics repeatedly stressed love of God and of others. 22:34-38. This commandment was so important to Judaism that it was regularly recited. In the Greek language, adjectives like "great" had come to be used sometimes for superlatives like "greatest." Deuteronomy 6:5 demanded loving God with all one's "heart, soul and might"; "might" here becomes "mind" (which was implicit in the Hebrew understanding of "heart"), but the image is still "with one's whole person." (\*New Testament writers apparently revocalized the Hebrew term for "might" as "mind," a Hebrew term which sounded similar; such revocalization was a common Jewish interpretive practice.) 22:39. Jewish tradition sometimes joined the second commandment with the first.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1711-1716). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

They also waved the branches they’d cut from the trees to make a celebratory procession for him. This too carried ‘royal’ implications. In the long folk-memory of Jerusalem and its surrounding villages, stories were still told, and some of them by this stage were written down, about the famous Judas Maccabaeus who, 200 years before, had arrived in Jerusalem after conquering the pagan armies that had oppressed Israel. He, too, was welcomed into the city by a crowd waving palm branches (2 Maccabees 10.7). And he was the start of a royal dynasty that lasted for over a hundred years.

However, at the same time he must answer in his own way. The people wanted a prophet, but this prophet would tell them that their city was under God’s imminent judgment (chapter 24). They wanted a Messiah, but this one was going to be enthroned on a pagan cross. They wanted to be rescued from evil and oppression, but Jesus was going to rescue them from evil in its full depths, not just the surface evil of Roman occupation and the exploitation by the rich. Precisely because Jesus says ‘yes’ to their desires at the deepest level, he will have to say ‘no’ or ‘wait’ to the desires they are conscious of, and expressed.

It isn’t the buying, selling and money-changing he’s objecting to in itself. When he says, ‘You’ve made it a brigands’ lair’, the word brigand doesn’t mean a thief. ‘Brigands’ were revolutionaries, people who believed so strongly in God’s coming kingdom of justice and triumph for Israel they were prepared to take the law into their own hands. They were the violent ones Jesus had commented on earlier in the gospel (11.12). The Temple itself, instead of being regarded as the place where Israel could come to God in prayer, had come to stand for the violent longings of the ‘brigands’ for a great revolution in which the kingdom of God would come by force. It was everything Jesus had opposed throughout his lifetime, not least in the Sermon on the Mount. Now his warnings against ‘the house’ were to come true.

This, too, is the reason for Jesus’ otherwise apparently petulant action with the fig-tree. He came looking for fruit, but when he found none he solemnly declared that the tree would be barren for ever. That’s exactly what he was doing with the Temple. And the promise to the disciples, which follows from it, is not a general comment about the power of prayer to do extraordinary things (though of course it is true that all sorts of things can be accomplished through prayer). The promise is far more focused than that. Saying to ‘this mountain’ that it should be ‘lifted up and thrown into the sea’, when you are standing right beside the Temple mountain, was bound to be taken as another coded warning about what would happen to the Temple as God’s judgment fell upon his rebellious people.

What has all this to do with the parable of the wicked farmers killing the owner’s son? Just this: Jesus, interpreting his own story, quotes from two biblical passages, Psalm 118 and Daniel 2. The stone which the builders rejected has become the top cornerstone; it wouldn’t fit anywhere else in the building, but it will go in the place of greatest honour. And the stone will crush anything that collides with it. He is the Stone, the Messiah, God’s anointed; he has come to bring into being the kingdom of God through which the kingdoms of the world will shiver, shake and fall to the ground. And why is that an interpretation of the parable? Because the Stone and the Son are the same. The Son the farmers rejected is vindicated when the owner comes and destroys them, and gives the vineyard to someone else. The Stone the builders rejected is vindicated when it goes in place at the top of the corner. And – just as in English the letters of the word ‘Son’ are the same as the letters of the word ‘Stone’, with two more added, so in Hebrew, by coincidence, the letters of the word ben (son) are the same as those of the word eben (stone), with one more added. The whole story is therefore Jesus’ way of explaining what was going on then and there. It is Jesus’ perspective on the very events he was involved in – rejected by those he had come to, but destined to be vindicated by God. The vineyard owner is of course God; the vineyard is Israel; the farmers are Israel’s officials, and the slaves are the earlier prophets, ending with John the Baptist. The Son can only be Jesus himself.

When the prostitutes and extortioners came to Jesus (or, for that matter, to John the Baptist), he didn’t say, ‘You’re all right as you are’. His love reached them where they were, but his love refused to let them stay as they were. Love wants the best for the beloved. Their lives were transformed, healed, changed. Actually, nobody really believes that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are. God loves serial killers and child-molesters; God loves ruthless and arrogant businessmen; God loves manipulative mothers who damage their children’s emotions for life. But the point of God’s love is that he wants them to change. He hates what they’re doing and the effect it has on everyone else – and on themselves, too. Ultimately, if he’s a good God, he cannot allow that sort of behaviour, and that sort of person, if they don’t change, to remain for ever in the party he’s throwing for his son.

God’s kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered. They are the clothes you need to wear for the wedding. And if you refuse to put them on, you are saying you don’t want to stay at the party. That is the reality. If we don’t have the courage to say so, we are deceiving ourselves, and everyone who listens to us.

One of the most famous Jewish leaders when Jesus was a boy, a man called Judas (a good revolutionary name in the Jewish world), had led a revolt precisely on this issue. The Romans had crushed it mercilessly, leaving crosses around the countryside, with dead and dying revolutionaries on them, as a warning that paying the tax was compulsory, not optional.

But if this God himself were to become human, as Matthew has insisted is the case (1.23), then we would be faced with a very different situation. If David’s son is also David’s master, then the warlike Davidic Messiah of popular Jewish imagination will be, after all, one who will bring the saving, healing rule of this creator God to the whole world. And the ‘enemies’ that he will put ‘under his feet’, as Psalm 110 insists, will not be the nationalist enemies of an ethnic ‘people of God’, but the ultimate enemies of the whole human race, and indeed of the whole world; in other words, sin itself, and death, which it brings.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (p. 80). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 23:1-39**

 **Jeremy’s Tweetable Comments:**

* 23:3 obey bad leaders who hold honored positions but do not imitate them.
* 23:4 Titles have theological significance. Be careful to exalt yourself with titles...you might find you’re in competition with God.
* 23:5 Bad Leaders: selfish ambition and vanity is masked in good deeds.
* 23:13 Bad Leaders: control decisions that people make for God and discourage choices divergent from their own.
* 23:15 Bad Leaders: Missional efforts die with the fruit.
* 23:16 Bad Leaders: Loopholes fill their promises.
* 23:26 Bad Leaders: use band-aids instead of chemotherapy
* 23:23 Convenient generosity neglects mercy, sacrifice and justice.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

23:3. Pharisaic teachers normally taught that knowing Scripture took precedence over obeying it, because knowing it was the prerequisite for obeying it; but they themselves would have agreed that one must obey it and not just learn it. 23:4-5. "Phylacteries" are tefillin, small boxes affixed by a leather strap to one's head and left hand during morning and evening prayers; Scripture passages were inserted in these boxes (the practice is based on Deut 6:8). These passages were then recited as part of the prayers; rules concerning this later became stricter under the \*rabbis.

23:6. Seating was critical at banquets; those seated in lower-status places frequently complained, as ancient literature amply attests.

23:7-8. Greetings ("Peace be with you") were so important socially that specific rules developed how to greet whom when; greetings were an essential courtesy in Greek and Jewish cultures. Not to hail a person superior in understanding the \*law was a grievous insult. Marketplaces were the most crowded places in town. "\*Rabbi" means "my master" and came to be commonly applied to teachers as a title of respect (something like "Reverend" or "Father" today); they were especially "masters" of their pupils. They were venerated in a variety of ways. 23:9-11. Rabbis were also affectionately and respectfully called "Abba," or "Papa"; they addressed their \*disciples as their children, and the rabbis' authority and honor placed them on a higher level than the disciples. Jesus says that only God is to receive such superior respect; all other Christians are peers.

Hypocrites originally meant playactors but by this time the term was also used pejoratively for two-faced people, whose behavior either differed from their belief or varied when they were with different people.

23:15. \*Pharisees did not have missionaries as such, but Jewish people outside Palestine were always eager to make converts among the \*Gentiles, and the wing of Pharisaism most influenced by \*Hillel was said to be especially open to converting non-Jews to Judaism.

"Child of hell" means someone destined to go there. The problem here is not making converts (28:19) but teaching them wrongly.

23:16-22. Jews were no longer allowed to pronounce the sacred name of God in this period. By swearing lesser oaths, some people hoped to avoid the consequences of swearing by God's name if they could not keep their vow or if their oath turned out to be mistaken. As people swore or vowed by things related to God instead of by God himself, more and more things became substitutes for the divine name and thus became roundabout ways of seeming to swear by God while hoping to buffer the consequences.

23:24. The \*hyperbole here is humorous and would certainly catch ancient hearers' attention. Wanting to avoid the impurity caused by a dead insect in their drink, Pharisees would strain out an insect as small as a fly (and anything larger than a lentil) before it could die in order to preserve the fluid (cf. Lev 11:32, 34). Pharisees considered gnats, which were smaller than lentils, exempt from this impurity, but the scrupulous Pharisee of Jesus' hyperbole would not have taken any chances. Yet Jesus charges hyperbolically that they would leave a camel (the largest land animal in Palestine and ritually unclean) in the cup and gulp it down. Their attention to the law's details was fine, but they had missed the main point (Mt 23:23).

"Whitewash" probably alludes to Ezekiel 13:10-12 and 22:28; it may have covered over a wall's weakness but would not stop its collapse.

23:33. Being called vipers, or a kind of venomous snake, was bad enough (Ps 58:4; 140:3; cf. Gen 3). But the offspring of a viper was reputed to eat its way out of its pregnant mother's belly, so calling someone the offspring of vipers could imply that one was guilty of the universally horrifying crime of matricide. In other words, this was worse than just calling someone a viper!

The Zechariah murdered in the temple was son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron 24:22), not Zechariah son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), who lived much later in Israel's history. But Matthew uses the Jewish interpretive technique of combining key words to coalesce two Zechariahs, referring to one and alluding to the other, as he did with Amon/Amos and Asa/Asaph in his genealogy in chapter 1.

23:37. Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God's wings, and when a Jewish person converted a \*Gentile, he or she brought that Gentile "under the wings of God's presence." The \*Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4), protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4) and terrifying Israel's foes in the same way (Jer 49:22). This is one Old Testament image of God's love for his people; here Jesus fills this divine role.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1798-1801). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

In all of this, Matthew is saying, we are to regard Jesus as being like Moses, only more so. Moses (they believed) gave the people the five books of the law; Jesus gives them the five books of the new covenant, the new relationship between God and the world. Moses brought the people through the desert and led them to the point where they were ready to cross over the Jordan and go into the promised land. Jesus is leading his people through the desert to the point where he will lead them through death itself and on into the new world which God is going to make. Only, unlike Moses, he won’t stay on this side of the river, leaving someone else to take the people across. He will go on ahead, like his namesake Joshua, and lead them himself into the new world.

All of this results in the teachers in question being twice condemned as ‘blind’ (verses 16, 19). They can’t see what’s really important, or rather who is really important.

Now imagine Jesus as the hen, and his fellow-Jews, not least the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as the chickens. What is Jesus saying he wanted to do? To answer that, you have to understand the dark and threatening paragraph that comes before the final one (23.24–36). Jesus sees a build-up of guilt: the guilt of Israel, rejecting prophet after prophet, and stoning the people God has sent to warn them of danger. This is, of course, similar to what happens in the parables of the wicked tenant farmers and the wedding banquet (21.33–46; 22.1–14). Behind this, though, there is also the guilt of the whole human race. Jesus traces the line of blood-guilt back to the killing of Abel, the first victim of murder, killed by his brother Cain in Genesis 4. What can he mean? How can all this come upon one generation? And what does he propose to do about it? The answer takes us, not into more denunciations, but deep into the heart of Jesus’ own vocation and Matthew’s biblical understanding of how it works. The key to it all is the way in which, within biblical theology, Israel was called to represent the rest of the world before God. Israel, said God to Moses at Sinai, was to be a nation of priests (Exodus 19.5–6), God’s special people out of all the nations. But this was not for its own sake. Israel was to be God’s special people in order to be the light of the nations (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6). But if the world remained rebellious and wicked – as it showed every sign of doing – what would this vocation then mean? Isaiah, once more, came to the stunning prophetic vision that Israel, in the person of the Servant of the Lord, would bear in his own person the guilt and sin of everyone else. The darkness of the whole world would descend upon Israel itself, so that it might be dealt with and the world might after all have light (52.13—53.12). Jesus himself, and the gospel writers as they reflected on his achievement, saw this picture coming to fulfilment in himself. His vocation was to draw on to himself the destiny of Israel,

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (pp. 109-110). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 24:1-44**

* 24:1 Young disciples see and call attentions to the temporal artifacts, while Jesus sees the truth.
* 24:1 We spend our wonder flagrantly on fading novelties.
* 24:10 The warning of Jesus is real. We might not be able to be deceived or be overcome but it sure seems like we can run from suffering.
* 24:12 When our love is conditional, wickedness and betrayal make it grow cold.
* 24:39 The Son of Man does not have to announce himself...he just comes.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

Chapter 23 began Jesus' warning of God's judgment against certain elements of the religious establishment; this chapter extends that judgment to the temple itself. After it was destroyed in A.D. 70, many of the Jewish people saw God's hand of judgment in the destruction. 24:1. The Jerusalem temple was one of the most splendid structures of all antiquity and seemed strong and invincible (cf., e.g., Letter of Aristeas 100- 101). It was the central symbol of Judaism and was renowned for its beauty. See further comment on Mark 13:1.

24:15. The "abomination that brings about desolation" in Daniel 9:27 occurs after the cutting off of the \*Messiah (a passage subjected to various interpretations); Daniel 11:31 sounds as if it should have occurred in the second century B.C., and 12:11 at the time of the end, so some interpreters have felt that the \*prophecy was accomplished in stages. Some interpreters believe that parts of Daniel's prophecy remain to be fulfilled; others believe that all of it was fulfilled in the first century. The first-century Jewish historian \*Josephus felt that Daniel was fulfilled when \*Zealots slaughtered the priests in the temple in A.D. 66, committing a sacrilege for which God brought about the desolation of the temple (human bloodshed in the temple desecrated it; cf. comment on Mt 23:35). This sacrilege would have been the signal for Christians to flee Jerusalem (24:16); early Christian historians tell us that Christian prophets warned the Jewish Christians to flee Jerusalem at this time.

The temple was left "desolate" in 70, when the Romans destroyed it with fire and then erected their own standards on the site. As Jewish people knew (it is lamented in the \*Dead Sea Scrolls), these standards bore the insignia of the Roman emperor, who was worshiped as divine in the Eastern Mediterranean; they would thus have sealed the site's desecration. Jerusalem's citizens had felt that even bringing these standards into Jerusalem temporarily (as Pilate had done roughly three and one-half years before Jesus uttered this warning) defiled the holy city.

24:19. Being pregnant or nursing a child made travel much more difficult. Famine would also make pregnancy and nursing much more problematic. Indeed, \*Josephus reports that the siege of Jerusalem became so difficult that some women ate their children (as in Lev 26:29; Deut 28:57; 2 Kings 6:29). 24:20. Winter restricted conditions for travel, immobilizing even most armies. In the winter, the otherwise dry creek beds (wadis) were flooded with water and became difficult to cross. Some fugitives from Jerusalem did try to escape the Roman siege in winter and, delayed by these flooded creek beds, were slaughtered.

24:35. Even Jewish prophets would not speak thus of their own words (Zech 1:5-6); such a claim was made only for God's words, spoken through Moses and the prophets (cf. Jer 31:35- 37). Those who claimed that their words were unchangeable believed that they spoke infallibly for God

24:42-44. Thieves could "break in" by digging through the clay wall of the average Palestinian Jewish home. (A more well-to-do householder with stronger walls would often have servants to watch the doors for him.) A thief who broke in at night, unlike one who broke in during the day, could be killed with impunity because he was regarded as potentially dangerous (Ex 22:2-3).

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1890-1893). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

As far as Jesus is concerned, there are two central features of God’s future. On the one hand, there is his own calling and destiny; he has spoken about it often enough in the last few chapters. He has come to Jerusalem knowing that by continuing his dramatic mission of summoning Israel to repentance he will precipitate hostility, violence and his own death. And he believes that God will vindicate him after his death, by raising him from the dead. On the other hand, there was the fate of the Jerusalem Temple. Throughout his public career Jesus had done and said things which implied that he, not the Temple, was the real centre of God’s healing and restoring work. Now he had done and said things in the Temple itself which implied that the whole place was under judgment and that he had the right to pronounce that judgment. And when the disciples pointed out to him the magnificent buildings (the Temple was generally recognized as one of the most beautiful sights in the whole world) he warned them explicitly: it was all going to come crashing down.

If you were a Roman citizen, believing that Caesar was the rightful king of the world, but living at some distance from Rome itself, you would long for the day when he would pay you a state visit. Not only would you see him for yourself, but, equally importantly, all your neighbours would realize that he really was the world’s lord and master. Much of the Roman empire was Greek-speaking; and the Greek word that they would use for such a state visit, such an ‘appearing’ or ‘presence’, was parousia. The same word was often used to describe what happens when a god or goddess did something dramatic – a healing miracle, say – which was thought to reveal their power and presence. And it’s this word parousia which the disciples use in verse 3, when they ask Jesus about what’s going to happen.

Daniel was an extremely popular book in the first century. Jesus drew on it freely, as did many of his contemporaries. It describes, in a series of stories and dreams, how God’s kingdom will triumph over the kingdoms of the world. Daniel 2 is about the stone which smashes the great statue; we looked at that when reading 21.33–46. Chapters 3 and 6 are about how God delivers his faithful ones from suffering. Chapter 7, at the centre of the book, is about the monsters that wage war on the humans, and about how God vindicates the human figure (‘one like a son of man’) and destroys the monsters – which any first-century Jew would recognize as code for Israel being vindicated over the pagan nations. Those are perhaps the best-known parts. But there is more. Daniel 12 predicts the eventual resurrection of all God’s people. And chapter 9 speaks of something blasphemous, sacrilegious, some abominable object, which will be placed in the Temple itself. This, it seems, will be part of the sequence of events through which God will redeem his true people, send his true Messiah, and bring his age-old plan to completion.

The event will not be disguised. You won’t have to guess to see the Messiah being vindicated. He won’t be standing there in person, maybe looking like somebody else. His vindication will be read in the signs of the times. Where the carcass is, there the vultures will gather: the ancient world didn’t always distinguish between vultures and eagles, and when the eagles on the Roman standards gathered around Jerusalem they would seem like birds of prey circling over a corpse in the desert, coming in for the final kill.

For Isaiah, and for those who read him in the first century, the one thing it didn’t mean was something to do with the actual sun, moon and stars in the sky. That would make a quite different tune. This language was well known, regular code for talking about what we would call huge social and political convulsions. When we say that empires ‘fall’, or that kingdoms ‘rise’, we don’t normally envisage any actual downward or upward physical movement.

They will see, he says, ‘the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven’. Now in Daniel this certainly refers, not to a downward movement of this strange human figure, but to an upward movement. The son of man ‘comes’ from the point of view of the heavenly world, that is, he comes from earth to heaven. His ‘coming’ in this sense, in other words, is not his ‘return’ to earth after a sojourn in heaven. It is his ascension, his vindication, the thing which demonstrates that his suffering has not been in vain.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (p. 122). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 24:45-25:46**

* 24:49 Servants are responsible to obey the master even when he is not there. Obedience while the master is present is no obedience at all. Obey while he is away is a test of true devotion.
* 25:13 Proof of your desire is how you prepare for his return.
* 25:44 Our willingness to obey without action paves the way to hell. It opens the door for the sins of omission to become normal while grasping at the veil of righteousness from not committing sins.
* 25:45 All our attention is on the master. In devotion, desire, resources and relationship with others...we are always looking for him and to him.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

Being a bridesmaid was a great honor; to be insultingly unprepared and shut out of the feast was the stuff of which young women's nightmares were made.

It is unlikely that "lamps" refers to the small Herodian oil lamps, which could be carried in the hand; all the evidence points instead to torches, which were also used in Greek and Roman wedding ceremonies. These torches may have been sticks wrapped with oil-soaked rags. In many traditional Palestinian villages in more recent times, the wedding feast occurs at night after a day of dancing; the bridesmaids leave the bride, with whom they have been staying, and go out to meet the bridegroom with torches. They then escort him back to his bride, whom they all in turn escort to the groom's home. 25:2-7. Torches like these could not burn indefinitely; some evidence suggests that they may have burned for only fifteen minutes before the burnt rags would have to be removed and new oil-soaked rags would need to be wrapped on the sticks of which they were made.

The young women were supposed to meet the bridegroom, who would then fetch his bride from her home and lead the whole procession back to his father's house for the feast.

25:15-17. Although the exact value of a talent varied from period to period and place to place, we may estimate the values of these investments at roughly fifty thousand, twenty thousand and ten thousand denarii. Since one denarius was a day's wage, this would be a "small sum" (25:21, 23) only to a very rich master, who would probably entrust his wealth only to his most dependable and prudent servants.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 1921-1924). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

But along with the welcome for sinners which Jesus announces, and the ready forgiveness that is always on offer when we fail and then come to our senses, there is the hard and high call to watchfulness and loyalty. You can’t use God’s grace as an excuse for going slack (‘God will forgive me,’ said one philosopher, ‘that’s his job’). Even when we don’t think we’re being watched, we can never forget that much is expected of those to whom much is given.

It’s probably wrong to try to guess what the oil in the story ‘stands for’ (some have suggested that it means good works; others faith, or love, or almost any of the Christian virtues). It isn’t that kind of story. Within the world of the story itself, it simply means being ready for the key moment. You can’t squash all these parables together and make the details fit with each other; all the girls in this parable, including the ‘wise’ ones, go to sleep in verse 5, whereas in verse 13 Jesus tells his followers to stay awake. Again, that kind of detailed question misses the point. What matters is being ready; being prepared; being wise; thinking ahead, realizing that a crisis is coming sooner or later and that if you don’t make preparations now, and keep them in good shape in the meantime, you’ll wish you had.

Yes, God does indeed long for people to use wisely the gifts they have been given. Yes, God did indeed come, in the person of the Emmanuel, Jesus the Messiah, to find out who within his chosen people had used profitably the blessings he had showered upon them. And, yes, once we have said this we can perfectly reasonably say, in line with the whole New Testament, that God will, still through the person of Jesus, sift and weigh everything that Christians do in the present life (see particularly 1 Corinthians 3.10–15; 2 Corinthians 5.10). All this is important and cannot be ignored. But we must also, and always, insist that this parable and others like it do not give a complete picture of the creator God, the maker and lover of the world, the God who sent Jesus as the personal expression of his love.

Justice is one of the most profound longings of the human race. If there is no justice, then deep within ourselves we know that something is out of joint. Justice is hard to define and harder still to put into practice; but that has never stopped human beings and societies seeking it, praying for it, and working to find ways of doing it better. And ‘justice’ doesn’t simply mean ‘punishing wickedness’, though that is regularly involved.

According to the rest of the New Testament, not least St Paul, Jesus is already ruling the world as its rightful lord (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15.25–28). Should we not say, then, that this scene of judgment, though in this picture it is spoken of as a one-off, future and final event, may actually refer to what is happening throughout human history, from the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the present? Could it be that the final judgment, in some sense, comes forward to meet us? This is not to say, of course, that there will not also be a final moment when all judgment is complete,

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (p. 143). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 26:1-56**

* 26:1 After demonstrating power and authority Jesus reminds his disciples what that means...suffering.
* 26:5 Bad leaders don’t care about Justice and are not bothered with morality, but they do cower before politics and rating approvals.
* 26:13 The woman’s name is not remembered yet her deed is. It would not be remembered if she gave it away. Our sacrificial adoration of Jesus shines brightest for the world to see. It sets us apart.
* 26:15 Betrayal looks for an opportunity and is bought cheaply.
* 26:26 Jesus breaks his body with even his betrayers.
* 26:33 Bold and empty declarations of loyalty are the masks of liars.
* 26:13 Community within sorrow still requires leaders to include their followers and invite them in.
* 26:41 Inviting others to pray in our sorrow is not only for our benefit but also for the protection of others from temptation.
* 26:53 Pacifists do not sheath swords because of fear or courage but rather trust in the one with true power. Being passive does not mean being against violence but rather violence from the right place.
* 26:56 Immature disciples flee when it seems Jesus has given up the cause. The threshold of their trust has been broken so they reclaim it and flee.
* 26:56 For activists can we learn the lesson of the arrest: Jesus submits to the powers of this world for his purposes and not run from him?

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

25:32. God judging the nations (e.g., Is 2:4; Mic 4:3) was a standard part of Jewish expectation for the future. God would distinguish among the sheep (Ezek 34:17). Although sheep and goats grazed together, it is said that Palestinian shepherds normally separated sheep and goats at night because goats need to be warm at night while sheep prefer open air. Sheep were more valuable than goats, and characteristics like this may have may have influenced how these terms would be heard figuratively; for instance, in a pagan dream handbook sheep were associated with good while goats were associated with trouble.

25:46. \*Eternal life was promised to the righteous after their \*resurrection at the end of the age (Dan 12:2). Some Jewish teachers believed that hell was temporary and that at the end some people would be burned up and others released; other Jewish teachers spoke as if hell were eternal. Jesus here sides with the latter group.

26:10-11. Jesus' reply probably contains an allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11, which urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land. He does not play down giving to the poor but plays up what follows: devotion to Jesus himself must precede and inform all other important and godly agendas. 26:12-13. In Jewish tradition, kings (including, by definition, the \*Messiah, or "anointed one"), priests and others had to be anointed for service. But Jesus here stresses a different kind of anointing undoubtedly unintended by the woman: anointing a body for burial (see Mk 16:1).

26:21-23. Bitter herbs were dipped into a mixture of nuts, fruit and vinegar to lessen their bitterness. That someone who was betraying a person would "dip in the bowl" with that person would have horrified ancient readers, who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond.

26:41-46. "Temptation" here is "testing"; given the common Jewish religious uses of the word, Jesus is saying: "lest you fall prey to the testing you are about to face."

26:47. Because they are sent by prominent men of Jerusalem, the band that comes to arrest Jesus is probably the temple guard. They come prepared for armed resistance from one they suppose is a \*messianic revolutionary. 26:48-50. A kiss was a sign of special affection among family members and close friends, or of a \*disciple's honor and affection for his teacher. Judas's kiss is thus a special act of hypocrisy (cf. Prov 27:6). Given ancient values concerning hospitality, friendship and covenant loyalty, any of Matthew's readers encountering this story for the first time would have been horrified by the narration of the betrayal.

26:53-54. Legions normally had six thousand soldiers, so Jesus is saying that he could summon around seventy-two thousand angels (a legion per disciple).

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 2027-2028). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

He offered a new direction of thought which, for those who followed him and came to believe in him, took Passover in quite a new direction, which has likewise continued to this day. We can perhaps imagine the shock of the disciples as they realized he was departing from the normal script and talking about…himself.

The Jews had believed for some while that the original Exodus pointed on to a new one, in which God would do at last what he had long promised: he would forgive the sins of Israel and the world, once and for all. Sin, a far greater slave-master than Egypt had ever been, would be defeated in the way God defeated not only Egypt but also the Red Sea. And now Jesus, sitting there at a secret meal in Jerusalem, was saying, by what he was doing as much as by the words he was speaking: this is the moment.

Here, for the second time in the gospel narrative (the first time being the temptation story in 4.1–11), we see Jesus fighting in private the spiritual battle he needed to win if he was then to stand in public and speak, and live, and die for God’s kingdom.

But when someone swung a sword around in among the olive trees in dark Gethsemane, thinking it was his God-given duty to defend Jesus, Jesus told him not to bother. In fact, he told him he was heading for disaster.

(Gethsemane is just outside the city walls, down a steep hill to the east of the Temple mount, at the foot of the Mount of Olives which goes steeply up the other side of the Kidron valley.) What Jesus had been saying and doing was not perceived as what we mean by ‘religious’. If you talked about God’s kingdom at Passover-time, it could never be merely a matter of private spirituality. It meant revolution. If someone else had a rival plan, it meant violence. If they caught you, it probably meant death.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (p. 164). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 26:57- 27:44**

* 26:58 Peter shows how you can follow Jesus at a distance and merely spectate...and when your posture is sitting, watching you become like your surroundings and deny him.
* 26:67 When you become preoccupied condemning heresy and false Messiahs your heart can cease longing for the real one so when he shows up you see a criminal and not your king.
* 26:74 Peter (denies) runs first by his words then with his feet, but takes his first step back to Jesus with his tears.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

26:57. The full \*Sanhedrin normally met in their special meeting hall in the temple, the Chamber of Hewn Stone. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the high priest's home, though they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense. At least according to later \*Pharisaic legal ideals, such a meeting was illegal on all these counts: capital trials had to meet during the day, and only after a day had intervened might the court render a verdict. Pharisaic laws forbade executions at feasts except for the most heinous crimes. But the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic scruples, and they had to hurry before Jesus' popularity with the crowds forced his release or made him more of a hero.

26:58. Trespassing on the high priest's private property required much courage from a Galilean fisherman.

under Jewish law, in a capital case, false witnesses were supposed to be put to death (see Deut 19:16-21; also the \*Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the \*Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them; that the case just goes on demonstrates severe bias among the council members gathered there.

26:64. Jesus' statement here is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13-14, the embodiment of Israel's call, the one who would come in glory and reign forever; the phrase "from now on" is especially offensive, because he thereby claims this role in the present, which would imply that he is their judge rather than they being his judges. "Power" was one Jewish title for God. 26:65. One would tear one's clothes as a sign of mourning or \*repentance; more to the point here, one who heard the sacred name blasphemed was required to do this. But the high priest must be desperate for a conviction; unless Jesus mentions the sacred Hebrew name of God, or summons them to idolatry (e.g., by calling himself God, which he does not do at this point) or in some other way insults God's dignity, he is not technically guilty of blasphemy. Jesus' association of himself with God could be considered offensive, but the high priest would first have to prove it untrue.

26:74. The "curses" Peter utters are not vulgar words; rather, he swears by various things that he does not know Jesus (cf. 5:33-37), invoking curses on himself if he is lying. No one considered the uttering of such curses good religious behavior.

Flinging the money in the temple alludes to Zechariah 11:13 (see comment on Mt 27:9). 27:6. Ancient writers often used irony, and Matthew is no exception: the chief priests are more concerned about the legal technicality of blood money for the treasury than that they issued the money for a judicial murder or that Judas is about to kill himself (cf. 23:23- 24). Although the \*Old Testament did not explicitly prohibit the use of such money, they are careful to use it for something doubly unclean (burying strangers).

27:9-10. Jewish scholars could cite some texts while simultaneously alluding to others. Matthew here quotes Zechariah 11:12-13, but by attributing it to Jeremiah he also alludes to a similar text that he wishes his more skillful readers to catch (Jer 32:6-10; cf. 19:1-4, 10-11). (The quotation is almost verbatim, and it is unlikely that Matthew would have known the text so well yet attributed it accidentally to the wrong author, unless he is using a list of standard \*messianic proof texts instead of citing directly from Zechariah, or he is purposely "blending" texts, as I suggest here.) Zechariah 11:12-13 refers to the low valuation God's people had placed on him; they valued him at the price of a slave (Ex 21:32).

27:26. Crucifixion was prefaced by scourging, either on the way to the cross or before the victim began the trip to the cross. Tied to a post, the condemned person would be beaten with the flagellum: a leather whip with metal knotted into its thongs. This whipping bloodied the victim's back, leaving strips of flesh hanging from the wounds. By weakening the victim's constitution, it would mercifully shorten the time it would take the condemned person to die on the cross.

Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful form of execution known in antiquity. Stripped naked-especially shameful for Palestinian Jews-the condemned would be hanged in the sight of the crowds, regarded as a criminal, unable to restrain the excretion of wastes in public and subjected to excruciating torture. Sometimes the victim would be tied to the cross with ropes; in other cases, as with Jesus, he would be nailed to the cross. His hands would not be free to swat away insects attracted to his bloodied back or other wounds. The victim's own weight would pull his body into a position that eventually prohibited breathing. A footstand on the cross allowed him some support, but sooner or later his strength would give out, and (usually after several days) he would die from suffocation.

27:30. Spitting on a person was one of the most grievous insults short of violence; Jewish people considered the spittle of non-Jews particularly unclean.

The myrrh-mixed wine of Mark 15:23, a delicacy and external pain reliever, becomes wine mixed with gall in Matthew; compare Ps 69:21 and the similarity between the \*Aramaic word for "myrrh" and the Hebrew word for „gall."

27:38. The word for "robbers" here is the standard term in \*Josephus for revolutionaries; presumably they had been colleagues of Barabbas.

**Craig S. Keener. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Kindle Locations 2137-2138). Kindle Edition.**

**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Peter’s tears at the end of this story are the main thing that distinguish him from Judas in the next chapter. There is all the difference in the world between genuine repentance and mere remorse, as Paul wryly notes in one of his letters to Corinth (2 Corinthians 7.10). The one leads to life, the other to death. Peter’s tears, shaming, humiliating and devastating though they were, were a sign of life. Judas’s anger and bitterness led straight to death.

This isn’t just about Judas wishing he’d never been born and the priests remaining aloof. This is the beginning of the end for the Temple. The house has after all been built on the sand, and will fall with a crash. Jesus has said to the Temple mountain, ‘Be cast into the sea’, and it’s getting ready to go. The Messiah has turned over the tables – he has stopped the sacrifices for a few brief but significant moments – and now the Temple authorities themselves can’t help a man who complains of guilt and impurity. The chief priest has refused to listen to the Messiah’s warnings and challenges, and the whole system he represents is starting to crumble.

From sources outside the New Testament (mostly the historian Josephus), we know, comparatively speaking, quite a lot about Pontius Pilate. He was a minor Roman official a long way from home, who was frequently accused by his subjects of heavy-handed or ill-considered judgments. He got into trouble for one or two major mistakes. He allowed troops to kill innocent and unarmed civilians. He used money from the Temple treasury for secular purposes (building an aqueduct). He ruled Judaea for ten years (AD 26–36), and when he was eventually recalled in disgrace no tears were shed in the Middle East.

a notorious brigand leader who (like several other rebel leaders of the time) bore the common name Jesus. ‘Jesus Barabbas’, he was called, and Matthew rubs our noses in the fact of Pilate asking the crowd to choose, for their festival celebration, one of these Jesuses to be released. We are, perhaps, not likely to miss the point Matthew wants to make, but he presses on. By the end of the passage it is crystal clear. Barabbas represents all of us. When Jesus dies, the brigand goes free, the sinners go free, we all go free. That, after all, is what a Passover story ought to be about.

The point for Matthew is that all are guilty: the chief priests and elders who have handed Jesus over; Pilate the weak bully; and the crowds themselves. And part of the reason for stressing universal guilt is that, with the death of Jesus, redemption is offered to all. What happened, close up and in sharp focus, to Barabbas is now open to all. When Jesus dies as King of the Jews, he draws on to himself the guilt and death of Israel, and thence also of the world.

It isn’t just that Jesus is ‘enthroned’, as it were, on the cross, with the title Matthew wants us to see as the true one written above his head. That, to be sure, is striking in itself. Condemned prisoners regularly had a placard above them, indicating their crime. What for Pilate and the soldiers was Jesus’ ‘crime’ – his claim to be Israel’s true king – was for Matthew the sober truth. And the crucifixion was the means by which his kingdom would be established. As he had said to James and John (20.23), there would come a time when he would indeed be enthroned with one person on his right and another on his left; but the throne he had in mind was the cross. Why? Because the kingdom Jesus had spoken of, from the Sermon on the Mount onwards, was never a kingdom to be established and maintained by military force. If it was to be God’s kingdom, it would come about by God’s means; and the means that the true God chooses to use are the means of self-giving love. Notice how, in this passage, parts of the Sermon on the Mount come back into play. Jesus himself, at last, is struck about the face by the soldiers, and doesn’t retaliate (Matthew 5.39). They take off his outer and inner garments, leaving him naked (Matthew 5.40). As he is going out to be crucified, the soldiers use their ‘right’ under Roman law to compel someone to carry a burden for them, just as in Matthew 5.41; only this time the burden in question is the heavy crossbeam on which Jesus will be hung. The point of it all is this: Jesus is leading the way he had spoken of from the beginning, the way of being God’s true Israel, the light of the world. He himself is set on a hill, unable now to remain hidden (5.14).

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (pp. 182-183). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**

**Matthew 27:45-28:20**

* 27:4 Blame shifting to evade responsibility so our conscience is appeased. “That’s not my job” is the cornerstone of apathy.
* 27:6 Wickedness follow the law partially but never seeks what is right or true.
* 27:14 Silence in the face of accusations can be more amazing than a great defense.
* 27:24 Washing your hands and saying you’re not responsible is not the same as being released of guilt. Judas was responsible to submit to Jesus. Chief priests were responsible for what is right. Pilate was responsible for what is just...and all try to dodge their part in this tragedy.
* 27:55 The faithful church has always been built by women. They stay in the face of suffering, refuse to turn from brutality and care beyond themselves.
* 27:56 Families can be reached as we drop our nets to “foolishly” follow Jesus.
* 27:58 The rich can allocate their power and wealth to glorify Jesus and honor his name. it begins with following and least us to request boldly before the seats of power.
* 28:8 Eve is redeemed...the women are first to see.
* 28:8 Joy and fear and obedience are the cocktail of faithfully understanding the God we serve. Filled with joy unlooked for, fear of the holy unknown and obedience to align ourselves with this new reality.
* 28:10 Don't’ be afraid...because his is knowable...his is Jesus...and we get to know him.
* 28:18 The one who sends you is greater and with their word they give you a passport.
* 28:18 There is no other authority for us to submit to. No one to negate or alter his command. It defines us forever. We are the sent ones, redeemed apostles, evidence of his kingdom and witness of his grace.

**The IVP Bible Background Commentary**

27:45. The "sixth hour" begins by noon, the "ninth hour" by 3 p.m.; crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. The latter time, when Jesus dies, was close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time; both Jews and pagans considered eclipses and other darkenings of the sky bad omens. 27:46. Here Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1, which may have been part of the Scripture recitation at this time of day. His opponents do not pause to consider that the psalm ends with the sufferer's vindication and triumph (Ps 22:25-31).

27:48. This offer of a wine-soaked sponge may have been an act of mercy, because the wine could act as a painkiller. Perhaps the man thinks Jesus is delirious from pain. But sour wine was usually a remedy for thirst, and it may have been an attempt to revive him to perpetuate his suffering.

27:51. The veil (or curtain-NIV) is probably the one between the holy of holies-inhabited only by God-and the sanctuary where the priests ministered (Ex 26:33). Matthew may intend this tearing of the veil to recall the rending of clothes at the hearing of blasphemy (Mt 26:65). Although the point of the veil's rending may be that by the cross God provides access for all people into his presence, it is more likely that it indicates instead the departure of God from the temple (as in Ezek 10-11).

27:54. Here a pagan-one of the executioners-is the first person after Jesus' death to recognize, to some extent, his identity, although he may mean "\*Son of God" quite differently than Jewish people and Christians (including Matthew) would have (cf. Dan 3:25, 29): a semidivine hero, son of a deity, rather than \*Messiah.

27:57-58. Arimathea was only about twenty miles from Jerusalem. Joseph is said to have been wealthy; he must have been prominent to have secured an audience with Pilate after his official public hours. When buried, crucifixion victims were normally thrown into common graves; they did not receive an honorable burial in their family tomb. Exceptions were often made when relatives asked for the body, but in the case of treason (as claiming to be the Jewish king would be) an exception would not be made unless the deceased had a prominent advocate. Jesus had a posthumous ally in this man of influence, who was not ashamed to go on record as his follower.

27:61. Women generally took part in preparing bodies for burial in the ancient world. The oldest tradition for the site of Jesus' grave (the Roman Catholic location of the Holy Sepulcher) is a clearly first-century tomb located inside the walls of Jerusalem since the forties of the first century, even though the \*New Testament and Jewish law required that the crucifixion happen outside the city walls. But King Agrippa I expanded the city walls in the forties; at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, that area was still outside the walls. Thus the tradition of the approximate site of Jesus' burial and \*resurrection goes back to within ten years of the event.

That women are chosen as the first witnesses is highly significant; the surrounding culture considered their witness worthless. It fits Jesus' countercultural and counterstatus ministry and certainly runs counter to what outsiders would have valued or anything the later \*church would have chosen to invent.

28:9-10. The witness of women was considered unreliable in that culture, yet Jesus goes against the culture by revealing himself to the women and telling them to bear his message to the other \*disciples. This detail is definitely not one that ancient Christians would have invented, because it did not appeal to their culture.

Like Judas (26:15), the guards act partly on mercenary motives. They should have seen enough to know better than to go along with the religious authorities' plan, but the bribe and the potential penalty they face for allowing Jesus' body to disappear ensures their cooperation. (The officials' promise to protect the guards from Pilate may involve more bribery; Pilate was known to be susceptible to this form of persuasion.) Matthew would be unlikely to report a charge against the \*resurrection that had not actually been made (28:15), and his report indicates that the Jerusalem authorities had sought to explain the empty tomb-but had never tried to deny it.

28:16. God had often revealed himself on mountains in biblical tradition, especially in the narratives about Moses. 28:17. Some who see Jesus' appearance are doubtful, perhaps because it does not fit current expectations of the end time: all the dead were to be raised together, not the \*Messiah first. 28:18. Here Jesus alludes to Daniel 7:13-14. 28:19-20. "Making \*disciples" was the sort of thing \*rabbis would do, but Jesus' followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves. Disciples are made here in a twofold way: (1) By \*baptizing them. Because baptism was an act of conversion (used for 'Gentiles converting to Judaism), it means initiating people to the faith. (2) By teaching them Jesus'

commandments recorded in Matthew. Rabbis made disciples by teaching them. Many Jews outside Palestine sought converts among the "nations" (which can also be translated as "Gentiles" or "pagans"). But only a few converts ever studied under rabbis, so the idea of making Gentiles full disciples-followers of Jesus who would learn from and serve him-goes beyond this Jewish tradition. Isaiah predicted that Israel would be a witness to (or against) the nations in the end time (e.g., 42:6; 43:10; 44:8). Jewish literature only called God omnipresent; Jesus' claim that he would always be with them, coupled with his being named alongside the Father in \*baptism (Jewish people did not baptize in the names of people), constitutes a proclamation of his deity.

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**N. T. Wright - Matthew for Everyone Series**

Judgment has been hanging over the Temple for several chapters now in Matthew; the priests have themselves finally rejected Jesus (verses 41–43); now their power base, the centre of their world, receives a symbolic destruction as potent as the action of Jesus himself a few days earlier (20.12–14). Jesus’ death is the beginning of the end for the system that had opposed him, that had refused to heed his summons, that had denied its vocation to be the light of the world, the city set on a hill to which the nations would flock. Instead, the nations will now flock to a different hill: to the hill called Calvary, outside the city walls, where the king of the Jews has died a cruel and shameful death. As a sign of what is to come (and looking back to the wise men of 2.1–12, the centurion of 8.5–13, and the Canaanite woman of 15.21–28), we see another centurion, standing guard at the foot of the cross, giving voice to the confession of faith that millions more would make, in shocked surprise at the sudden revelation of God’s truth where one would least expect it: ‘He really was God’s son!’

The effect of his giving of his own life; the example of love, non-retaliation, the kingdom-way of confronting evil with goodness; Jesus’ taking of the world’s hatred and anger on to himself; and, way beyond all of these, the defeat of the powers of evil, the blotting out of the sins of the world, the love of God shining through the dark clouds of wickedness – all of this is now to be seen around the world. It is seen, not only in the millions who worship Jesus and thank him for his death, but in the work of healing which flows from it: in reconciliation and hope, for communities and for individuals. The world is indeed a different place because of what Jesus did in his death.

The central claim of the early church was, of course, that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead. The central claim wasn’t that he was a great teacher, a powerful healer, an inspiring leader, or that he was the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice. All of those were true, but they wouldn’t add up to the early Christian faith and life. The crucial fact, they believed, was that Jesus had been bodily raised to life after being well and truly dead and buried. This is what they announced to the startled world, the world of Jews and Gentiles. And of course people laughed at them, and offered alternative explanations. He wasn’t really dead, they said. Or maybe the disciples stole the body. Or maybe someone else did. Or perhaps the women went to the wrong tomb. These were all stock answers to the early Christian message, and we may suppose that from early on stock responses were developed

So the first point is that the tomb was new, readily recognizable, and sealed with a large stone. We need to pause here for a moment, because in most cultures today people don’t bury the dead in the way they did in Jesus’ day. Most Jews in Palestine at that time were buried in caves, sometimes underneath the houses where they had lived. The bodies weren’t put in coffins, or burnt to ashes, but wrapped in a cloth along with perfumes and spices. The body would then be put on a shelf or ledge inside the cave. Then, when the flesh had all decomposed, friends or relatives would collect the bones, fold them up neatly, and put them in a bone-box (known as an ‘ossuary’). Often several bodies would be on ledges in the same tomb. In this case, as Matthew has carefully explained, the tomb was new, and there were no other bodies in it. Grave-robbery was common in the ancient world, so many cave-tombs had huge circular stones, sometimes measuring as much as two metres in diameter, which people would roll across the mouth of the cave to prevent anyone getting in without a great struggle. This is what Joseph did. You can still see some tombs of this sort in the Middle East. The fact that Joseph requested Jesus’ body from Pilate, and that Pilate granted the request, shows well enough that Jesus was indeed dead. Roman soldiers and governors didn’t go in for half-measures when it came to carrying out capital sentences. Any possibility that they had let a condemned rebel leader escape death can be left out of the question. Likewise, the fact that Jesus’ main disciples had nothing to do with the whole procedure, but were in hiding, indicates well enough that they wouldn’t have been in a position to steal the body. Nor, indeed, could anyone else; the chief priests, anxious to avoid such a thing, obtained a guard of Roman soldiers from Pilate. They themselves sealed the stone to make sure it wasn’t moved.

And what God is doing is not just an extraordinary miracle, a display of supernatural power for its own sake, or a special favour to Jesus. What God is doing is starting something new, beginning the new world promised long ago, sending the disciples to Galilee in the first place but then, as we shall see, on to the ends of the earth and the close of the age with the news of what has happened. A whole new world was opening up in front of them.

But the crucial thing is that Jesus’ resurrection is not about proving some point, or offering people a new spiritual experience. It is about God’s purpose that must now be fulfilled. They must see Jesus, but that seeing will be a commissioning, a commissioning to a new work, a new life, a new way of life in which everything he told them before will start to come true.

This event had changed the world for ever. It announced, not as a theory but as a fact, that God’s kingdom had come, that the son of man had been vindicated after his suffering, and that there was dawning not just another day, another week in the history of Israel and the world, but the start of God’s new age that would continue until the nations had been brought into obedience.

Denying the resurrection left everybody’s world-view intact. The Jews could continue as they had done. The Romans could go on running the world their way. Philosophers could still debate their lofty doctrines. Nobody would need to make radical readjustments. But if the resurrection of Jesus was true, and if people were to start reordering their lives by it, they would be on a collision course with the rest of the world. Matthew knew that as well as we do. In fact, what the Jewish leaders did in this story is not very different from what generations of sceptics have done ever since. Don’t be fooled by the idea that modern science has disproved the resurrection of Jesus. Modern science has done no such thing. Everybody in the ancient world, just like everybody in the modern world, knew perfectly well that dead people don’t get resurrected. It didn’t take Copernicus or Newton, or Einstein for that matter, to prove that; just universal observation of universal facts. The Christian belief is not that some people sometimes get raised from the dead, and Jesus happens to be one of them. It is precisely that people don’t ever get raised from the dead, and that something new has happened in and through Jesus which has blown a hole through previous observations. The Christian thus agrees with scientists ancient and modern: yes, dead people don’t rise. But the Christian goes on to say that something new and different has now occurred in the case of Jesus. This isn’t because there was an odd glitch in the cosmos, or something peculiar about Jesus’ biochemistry, but because the God who made the world, and who called Israel to be the bearer of his rescue-operation for the world, was at work in and through Jesus to remake the world. The resurrection was the dramatic launching of this project.

The scene begins on a mountain. No surprises there: a great deal in Matthew happens on a mountain. The temptations; the Sermon on the Mount; the transfiguration; the final discourse on the Mount of Olives; and now this parting scene. Moses and Elijah met the living God on a mountain, and they have appeared in this gospel talking with Jesus; now Jesus invites his disciples to meet him, so that they can be commissioned in turn. What does surprise us is that, according to Matthew, some of them hesitated.

On several previous occasions in the gospel he has used this word (‘worship’) to describe people coming reverently to Jesus. Usually it seems to mean simply that they prostrated themselves before him, adopting an attitude of reverence though not necessarily implying that they thought he was divine. (See 8.2; 9.18; 14.33; 15.25; 20.20; and indeed 28.9.) Now, however, to jump for a moment to the last line of the book, it is clear that Matthew wants us to see that in Jesus the promise of the very first chapter has been fulfilled. Jesus is the ‘Emmanuel’, the one in whom ‘God is with us’ (1.23). Now he declares that he himself is ‘with you always’. The only appropriate reaction to this is indeed worship, worship of the one true God who is now, astonishingly, revealed in and as Jesus himself.

People get very puzzled by the claim that Jesus is already ruling the world, until they see what is in fact being said. The claim is not that the world is already completely as Jesus intends it to be. The claim is that he is working to take it from where it was – under the rule not only of death but of corruption, greed and every kind of wickedness – and to bring it, by slow means and quick, under the rule of his life-giving love. And how is he doing this? Here is the shock: through us, his followers. The project only goes forward insofar as Jesus’ agents, the people he has commissioned, are taking it forward.

those who believe in Jesus, who are witnesses to his resurrection, are given the responsibility to go and make real in the world the authority which he already has.

The first is to make disciples. As Jesus called the fishermen by the sea of Galilee, and trained them up as ‘learners’, imitating his way of life and coming little by little to understand his kingdom-message, so his followers ever since have the responsibility of calling men, women and children to follow him, and training them to understand and follow his message and his way. Evangelism – announcing God’s good news, focused on Jesus, to bring people to faith and obedience – remains central to the way in which Jesus’ authority is brought to bear on the world. The second task is to baptize them. Baptism is not an optional extra for followers of Jesus. Jesus himself linked baptism to his own death; part of the meaning of baptism is to commit us, through plunging into water, to dying with Jesus and coming to share his new life. (Paul spells this out in Romans 6, but many other passages imply it, including the present one.) Baptism is the public, physical and visible way in which someone is marked out, branded almost, with the holy ‘name’.

The third thing they must do is to teach. The gospel of Jesus generates a lifestyle quite different from the way the world lives. Jesus has already highlighted this at various levels, from the personal morality outlined in the Sermon on the Mount to the high demand for forgiveness in chapter 18, and not least to the overturning of the normal way rulers behave (20.25–27).

The reason we are to do these things is because he already possesses all authority; the promise which sustains us in the task is that he is with us always and for ever. He is, as we have said, the Emmanuel. God-with-us turns into Jesus-with-us. There is no greater personal promise than that.

We see, first, the astonishing early results of the gospel. In AD 25 nobody outside a small town in Galilee had heard of Jesus. By AD 50 there were riots in Rome because of him, and by AD 65 his followers were being persecuted by the emperor himself.

We see, second, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Jesus had warned of what would happen to the city and Temple if it refused his message; the warnings came horribly true. This, as we saw in chapter 24, is part of the meaning of ‘the end’. It was, in all sorts of senses, the end of the world for the Israel of old, the end for the chief priests, the Pharisees, and all who had made the Temple the centre of their way of life.

**Wright, Tom (2002-03-22). Matthew for Everyone Part 2: Pt. 2 (For Everyone Series) (p. 210). SPCK. Kindle Edition.**