

# Study of the New Testament

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## *Lesson 4: The Gospel according to Matthew*

### **Literary Structure:**

#### ***Outline based on Missionary Journey and Geography:***

The Early Life of Jesus: *Matt. 1:1-4:11*

The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee: *Matt. 4:12-18:35*.

The Ministry of Jesus in Judea: *Matt. 19:1-28:20*.

#### ***Literary Outline:***

Epilogue: The Passion and Resurrection of the Messiah (26-28)

- A. Introduction: The Messianic King (1:1 – 2:23)
  - 1. Genealogy (1:1-17)
  - 2. Infancy Narrative (1:18 – 2:23)
- B. The Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 3:1 – 7:29)
  - 1. The Messiah had Come (3:1 – 4:25)
  - 2. Discipleship Sermon: The Call to the Kingdom – Sermon on the Mount: (5:1 – 7:29)
- C. The Spread of the Kingdom (8:1 – 10:42)
  - 1. Jesus' Miracles and Reactions (8:1 – 9:38)
  - 2. Missionary Sermon: The Apostolic Call to be Emissaries of the King (10:1-42)
- D. Signs and Parables (11:1 – 13:53)
  - 1. Signs and Reactions (11:1 – 12:50)
  - 2. Kingdom Sermon: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-53)
- E. Faltering Faith and True Greatness (13:54 – 18:35)
  - 1. Resisting Faith in Jesus (13:54 – 17:27)
  - 2. Ecclesial Sermon: True Greatness within Kingdom Family Life (18:1-35)
- F. Present Opposition and Future Victory (19:1 – 25:46)
  - 1. Intensifying Opposition (19:1 – 23:39)
  - 2. Eschatological Sermon: Future Victory (24:1 – 25:46)
- G. Culmination of Jesus' Ministry (26:1 – 28:20)
  - 1. Conflict, Discipleship and the Cross (26:1 – 27:66)
  - 2. Resurrection Victory and the Great Commission (28:1-20)

## Faltering Faith and True Greatness (13:54 – 18:35)

### *Last Week: Resisting Faith in Jesus (13:54 – 17:27)*

#### ***Ecclesial Sermon: True Greatness within Kingdom Family Life (18:1-35)***

As Jesus travelled from town to town certainly small groups of followers began to form who believed in him and his kingdom message. If the Sermon on the Mount was preached to communicate how they should live as the righteous and reconstituted Israel being the “salt of the earth”, “light of the world” and the “city on a hill”, the Ecclesial Sermon taught how his disciples should live in relationship to one as brothers and sisters—as Jesus’ ‘little ones’. Likewise, the Gospel writer Matthew recognizes that the movement begun in Jesus’ day expanded and connects to his own. The congregations of believers in his day also needed direction in how to live together faithfully in community with one another.

#### **Humility as Children: 18:2-14**

One of the many challenges for Jesus’ followers was pride. Being personally called by the King, the Son of God, was quite heady. The disciples came to Jesus asking? “Who is the greatest?” Jesus taught that pride had no place in his community. Greatness in the people of God is attained by becoming “like a child”. While the disciples were thinking of themselves as “great ones”, Jesus challenged them to consider themselves as “little ones”. “Whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (18:4)

Paradoxically, by decreasing self-importance, other-importance is heightened. Humility about self enables the disciple to become quite serious about his own sin. (18:7-9) Attentiveness is given to care for the other members of the family so that “these little ones who believe in me [Jesus]” will not be led astray by being caused to sin (18:5-6) or allowed become lost out of concern for the larger flock. Every one of these ‘little ones’ is precious to the Father who is in heaven. (18:10-14) Practically speaking, that means they must never ignore sin within the Father’s family but rather deal with it intentionally and appropriately, but always within the larger context of Jesus’ forgiveness and grace. For, “it is not the will of the Father that one of these little ones would should perish.” (18:14)

#### **Dealing with Sin: 18:15-20**

Jesus established within the community of disciples of the Kingdom a very practical approach to dealing with sin in the community. He provides steps that preserve both the integrity of the individual who has sinned, but also the needs of the one who has been sinned against. By having a progressive approach, both can maintain the highest hopes for preserving the relationship. The goal in any level of confrontation of sin within the church, “or “called out ones” (Greek is *ekklesia*) is never to win the issue, but rather “win the brother”. Jesus promises that in these very challenging and difficult situations for the family, he will be present. (18:20)



Whoever humbles  
himself like this child is  
the greatest in the  
kingdom of heaven.

--Matthew 18:4



## Forgiving Sin: 18:21-35

Peter raises the issue if there are any limits to reconciliation. “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” (18:21-22) In a society which is greatly concerned about personal honor, personal offense is easily taken and relationships are sharply ended as a result. The self-humility of seeing yourself as a “servant” forgiven of an insurmountable debt should be sufficient encouragement to “forgive your brother from the heart.” (18:35)

## Present Opposition and Future Victory (19:1 – 25:46)

As the story of Jesus moves geographically from Galilee to Judea (19:1), it moves dramatically toward its culmination in the cross and resurrection. Matthew tells the story of the intensified conflict between Jesus and his opponents. The discourse in this section will reveal Jesus’ ultimate victory.

### Intensifying Opposition (19:1 – 23:39)

#### Opposition from the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 19:3-8; 21:15, 23; and 22:15-40)

Earlier in the gospel, Matthew reveals the beginnings of tensions with the Pharisees and Jewish leadership. They had come to the conclusion that Jesus was in league with the “prince of demons” (9:34) and Matthew records that after he proclaimed and enacted “the Son of Man as Lord of the Sabbath”, they “went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. (12:14) At this point in the Gospel narrative the Pharisees are directly and openly hostile in their interactions with Jesus. They ask questions designed to trap Jesus, as in Matthew 19:3-8; 21:15, 23; and 22:15-40. They “plotted” using questions related to controversial subjects such as divorce, paying taxes to Caesar, the resurrection of the dead, and the law to “test” him and “entangle him in his talk”. (19:3-8 & 22:15-40) They were “indignant”. (21:15)

### Jesus opposes the Pharisees and Sadducees

#### A Royal Riddle

At the same time, Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders. Not only did he play “solid defense” by using their own questions against them, he went on theological offence and asked a “Royal Riddle” of his own: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is he?” (22:42) And then he quotes Psalm 110:1:

“The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I put your enemies under your  
feet””?

--Matthew 22:44

Psalm 110 refers to the enthronement of the Messiah, the victory of the Messiah over the nations of the World and the eternal priesthood of the Messiah in the order of Melchizedek. The implication of the riddle is that the Messiah is more than just a descendant of David, by David calling him Lord, the messiah will take the throne of YHWH

*“If a would-be king acted in the Temple in such a way as to precipitate a confrontation with the present priestly regime, Psalm 110 was exactly the right text with which to claim legitimation for such an action.” –NT Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, p. 509.*

(see Daniel 7:13-14), his priestly calling supersedes and replaces the Levite priesthood, his victory over the nations will include all enemies of YHWH—even national Israel if it proves to be his enemy. “And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions.

### *Condemning Parables*

Beyond the direct verbal sparring, Jesus also told stories about and against the Jewish leadership. We see this in the parables of the two sons, the tenant farmers, and the wedding banquet in 21:28–22:15. The parable of the two sons reveals the difference between lip service and life service, when the call to prepare for the Kingdom came through John the Baptist, the Pharisees give lip service but did not “change their minds and believe”, but the “tax collectors and prostitutes believed”.

With the parable of the Tenants, Jesus tells a “story” of a land owner, his vineyard and wicked tenants. This is a familiar way (to Jewish hearers) of talking about YHWH’s relationship with Israel, particularly in the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 5:1 we read: “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!” Another key to understanding the parable is the 2 Sam. 7 where the heir of David, the Messiah, is both the “Son of God” and the one who will build YHWH’s temple.

The parable is a crushing condemnation of the Jewish leadership for their rejection of the prophets and their open hostility and for the Messiah. In the story, the wicked tenants plot to kill the son (Hebrew, *ben*) but they find that the Son has come not only to lay claim to the vineyard but also to build the new temple. Only instead of receiving the foundation stone (Hebrew and Aramaic, *eben*) of the temple, the builders have rejected it...and are crushed by it!

The Son and the Stone, the Arabic and Hebrew word for stone is *eben*. *The Son/Stone is the Messiah/YHWH*. Consider Isaiah 8:13-15:

**“<sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. <sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”**

In Matthew 21:44, Jesus also connects his line of thought with Messianic hopes promises of Daniel 2:44:

**“<sup>44</sup> And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...”**

The Jewish leadership got the message loud and clear:

**“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was talking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be *a prophet*.”**  
—Matthew 21:45-46

### *The Prophet Jesus*

The crowds believed Jesus was a Prophet: “And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” (21:10)

A prophet indeed!

Jesus enacted a prophet’s judgment against the chief priests and scribes when Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and drove them out of the temple in Matthew 21:12-16. He then announced seven woe oracles in 23:13-35. Listen to how Jesus rebuked them in Matthew 23:15:

**“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are”**

**--Matthew 23:15**

The hostility of the Jewish leaders was aggravated by the way the crowds still honored Jesus on occasions such as the triumphal entry in 21:15: But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant...” And in 21:46 “And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”

The entire confrontation would dramatically reach its culmination with a crucified Messiah.

### *The Last will Come First*

Jesus encouraged his disciples to put this confrontation with the religious leaders into perspective. The Kingdom of Heaven requires absolute and total sacrifice: an impossible task for any person without God’s intervention. (19:6) Peter acknowledged, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (19:27)

Jesus promised that one day they would sit with him in glory. But in 20:17-19, he also warned them that those glorious days would only come *after his own suffering death*.



**“And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”**



Moreover, Jesus insisted that his disciples would reach glory only after a life of humble suffering. Jesus drove home this point three different times. In Matthew 19:30, Jesus said:

**Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first (Matthew 19:30).**

Then in Matthew 20:16, he said:

**The last will be first, and the first will be last (Matthew 20:16).**

And he repeated this in Matthew 20:26-28, saying:

**Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:26-28).**

Jesus' kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world where "the rulers of the nations lord it over their people, and their great ones exercise authority over them." (20:25) The servants of Jesus Kingdom would suffer, and the King of Israel himself would be killed by the leaders of Israel and Rome. Apparent defeat would come before victory. However...the last will be first.

***Next Week: The Eschatological Sermon: Future Victory (24:1 – 25:46)***

***...and the Culmination of Jesus' Ministry: (26:1-28:20)***