

KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Part 4: Matthew 18-22

Notes exclusively from 'Matthew' by David
L. Turner; Baker Exegetical Commentary on
the New Testament



Rosebank
UNION CHURCH

Matthew Series outline - 2024

	Date	Passage	Subject	
1	28 Jan	12:46-50, 13:53-58	Hearing, seeing and doing the word of God	Narrative block
2	4 Feb	14:1-12	The Death of John the Baptist	
3	11 Feb	14:13-36	True Worship	
	(Guest speaker Sam Allberry)			
4	25 Feb	15:1-20	Religion, Tradition & the Commandments of God	
5	3 Mar	15:21-31	The Faith of a Canaanite woman	
6	10 Mar	15:32-16:12	Bread & Leaven	
7	17 Mar	16:13-20	Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ	
8	24 Mar	16:21-28	The Cross & true Discipleship	
	(Series break - 2 weeks)			
9	7 Apr	17:1-13	The Transfiguration	Fourth Discourse (Kingdom Community)
10	14 Apr	17:14-27	Faith & Freedom	
11	21 Apr	18:1-14	The Greatest in the Kingdom	
12	28 Apr	18:15-20	Disunity in the Community	
13	5 May	18:21-35	The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant	Narrative block
14	12 May	19:1-12	Teaching about Divorce	
15	19 May	19:13-30	True Riches	
16	26 May	20:1-16	The Grace of the Kingdom	
17	2 Jun	20:17-34	The Shadow of the Cross	
18	9 Jun	21:1-22	The Triumphal Entry & Cleansing of the Temple	
	(Series break - 3 weeks)			
19	7 Jul	21:23-46	The Authority of the messiah	
20	14 Jul	22:1-14	The Parable of the Wedding feast	
21	21 Jul	22:15-22	Christian Citizenship	
22	28 Jul	22:23-40	Religious Leaders interrogate Jesus	Fifth Discourse (The Future Kingdom)
23	4 Aug	22:41-23:12	Jesus questions Religious Leaders	
24	11 Aug	23:13-36 pt 1	Seven woes to the Scribes & Pharisees	
25	18 Aug	23:13-36 & 37-39	Lament over Jerusalem	
26	25 Aug	24:1-14	Signs of the End of the Age	
27	1 Sep	24:15-35	The Abomination of Desolation & the Coming of the Son of Man	
28	8 Sep	24:36-51	Prepare yourself!	
29	15 Sep	25:1-13	The Parable of the Ten Virgins	Epilogue / Conclusion
30	22 Sep	25:14-30	The Parable of the Talents	
31	29 Sep	25:31-46	The Final Judgment	
32	6 Oct	26:1-30	Preparation of the Death of Christ	
33	13 Oct	26:31-56	Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	
34	20 Oct	26:57-68	Jesus on Trial	
35	27 Oct	26:69-27:10	Peter & Judas respond	
36	3 Nov	27:11-26	Jesus before Pilate	
37	10 Nov	27:27-56	The Crucifixion	
38	17 Nov	27:57-28:10	The Resurrection	
39	24 Nov	28:11-20	The Great Commission	

Review of the structure of Matthew

- Recall that that one of the distinguishing features of Matthew is the unique juxtapositioning of **narrative** and **discourse** sections in the Gospel.
- These junctions are clearly marked by the phrase “*When Jesus had finished...*” (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1)
- We have so far covered three of the five major discourses in Matthew:
 - i. The Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
 - ii. The Missionary Discourse (10)
 - iii. The Kingdom Parables (13)
- We have two left to go, and will kick off this next part of Matthew with the fourth discourse:
iv. Kingdom Community (18)
- This will be followed by the **last narrative section (19-23)**, prior to the last Discourse (Olivet Discourse in 24-25) and subsequent Passion, Resurrection and Commission Narrative (26-28).

A) Discourse 4: Relationships in the Kingdom Community (18:1-19:2)

- In Matthew 16 the subject of the ‘Church’ was introduced for the first time: God’s people gathered in worship, **but now with Christ at the centre of worship**, and the **centre of focus for discipleship** (16:13-28).
- This was emphasised by the subsequent transfiguration story (17:1-13), which should have engraved the person of Christ on their minds as the centre of attention!
- This was followed in turn by a short story on the disciples ineffectiveness in accomplishing their kingdom mission, which resulted in a rather direct reminder of the necessity of faith for the kingdom community (17:14-21).
- **These story units in chapter 17 therefore set-up a fuller teaching by Jesus on this renewed community (‘Church’) that he was building.**
- The Kingdom Community Discourse is thus a sermon on the values of the kingdom, and how these guide the new community in handling interpersonal relationships.
- **This is therefore an important reminder of the central aspect of community**, complete with complex interpersonal relationships, in God’s kingdom purposes prior to Jesus’s return.
- In general, the fourth discourse concerns genuine spiritual greatness and its basis in the kingdom community values. Jesus uses a child to illustrate humility and the duty of hospitality. Then he vividly warns of the opposite of hospitality, offending a disciple by causing them to sin. Instructions follow on handling fellow disciples who sin. Peter questions Jesus about forgiveness for those who continue in sin, and Jesus answers this question with a statement and a parable. **Forgiveness must rule in the community of Jesus’s disciples.**

- Jesus's fourth sermon can be divided into two parts, each ending with a parable:
 - i. 18:1-14
 - ii. 18:15-35
- The section on discipline, 18:15-20 is the hinge or pivot point in the sermon.
- The sermons coherence is seen through Jesus's use of key terms for the disciples:
 - 'Children' (18:2-5)
 - 'Little ones' (18:6, 10, 14)
 - 'Brothers' (18:15, 21, 35)
- These terms also introduce us to the nature of relationships in this new community, which **will be much like a spiritual family**. This is highlighted by the frequent reference to God as 'Father': 18:10, 14, 19, 29, 31, 33, 35.
- Matthew as a literary genius shines through in this discourse too, as seen in many deliberate literary features:
 - The language of 18:8-9 is a symmetrical parallelism.
 - The repetition of 'little ones' and 'Father in heaven' frames 18:10-14 as an inclusio, with the important parable in 12-13 at the centre.
 - There is a repetition of conditional clauses in 18:15-17.
 - The use of 'two or three' links 18:15-17 with 18:18-20.
 - The juxtaposition of heaven and earth provides the basic framework of 18:18-20.
 - The forgiveness of the sinning brother forms an inclusio in 18:21-35.

1. Humility and the value of the 'Little Ones' (18:1-14)

- In this section Matthew contrasts the concerns of the disciples with those of Jesus. The disciples are preoccupied with status, and Jesus redirects their thoughts towards humility, hospitality and restoration of erring brothers or sisters.
- Jesus warns the disciples against pride in the strongest terms (v6-10).
- There is a lot of metaphorical language in this section, including the child, millstone and the sea, the stumbling block, amputation and the lost sheep.

v1

- The setting of this sermon is not clear, although it may be while they are still at Capernaum (17:24).
- The disciples approach Jesus with a question about about greatness. We don't know what exactly prompted the question, but it could be the thoughts about future glory (16:27-28, 17:11) that they believe is immanent that prompted it. Perhaps also they were concerned about the prominence of Peter, James & John (who witnessed the transfiguration).
- In any event, their desire for greatness contradicts what Jesus has just taught in 16:21-28! Clearly the disciples still have much to learn about suffering coming before reward. This preoccupation, sadly, does not go away easily, as seen in 20:20-28.

v2

- Jesus enacts a parable by having a child¹ brought into their midst. The immediate lesson is that total dependence on God is exemplified by a child's dependence on its parents.
- A child as an example of greatness would have been challenging in Matthew's culture (as well as our own!). Matthew's readers have not been challenged with such a seeming contradiction since the beatitudes on the gentle inheriting the earth (5:5).

v3-4

- Central to this enacted parable is therefore **humility**², not necessarily innocence. Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they model humility. Rather, children have no status and are completely dependent on adults. Similarly, disciples must admit they have no status before God and that they depend solely on the love of the heavenly Father.

v5

- Here the use of the child metaphor shifts from a child as a model of humble dependence, to a child as the object of either godly or sinful behaviour.

v6

- Here the metaphor changes from a child specifically to a more general term 'little ones'.
- Verse 6 applies both to the verses before, as well as transitions to the general warnings against temptation after.
- These verses go on to sternly warn against devaluing 'little ones' by causing them to sin. Causing to sin is metaphorically to 'entrap' or 'cause a person to trip or fall'. It is to entice and corrupt the person morally.
- Note that the word used for 'sin' (ESV) is the same root word as used for 'offence' in 17:27. This same word is repeated in verses 8 & 9. It is the Greek word σκανδαλίζω - skandalizō, meaning 'to stumble'.

v7

- There is a double pronouncement of 'woe'³ for those who cause disciples to sin, while at the same time accepting that these 'temptations' are inevitable.
- Instances of causing sin are inevitable yet still culpable.

v8-9

- The repeated pronouncement of woe in 18:7 means that any potential offence must be dealt with promptly and decisively.
- The dual 'woes' in v7 are matched by dual hyperbolic commands in v8-9.
- Failure to deal radically with the disposition to sin means one is in danger of punishment.
- The punishment indicated here is 'eternal fire' and 'hell (gehenna) of fire', ideas introduced in 3:10-12 (fire), 5:22 ('hell of fire'). 5:29-30 & 10:28 ('hell').
- These images are clearly hyperbolic, and as grotesque as these images are, the prospect of eternal punishment is far worse.

¹ It's difficult to know the age of the child, but somewhere from infancy to puberty

² Besides just the obvious idea of 'dependence', note the low view of children in society at the time.

³ Which anticipates a lot more 'woes' in chapter 23!

- Disciples must remember that ridding oneself of hands and feet will not reach the root of sin, the heart, but the point is that one has to deal radically and decisively with sinful tendencies.
- This is especially necessary before one attempts to correct another member of the community, which is to come in a few verses time.

v10-11

- There is an inclusio in v10 & 14 with the ideas of 'Father' and 'Little ones', framing this important unit.
- In addition to dealing decisively with sin in their own lives, disciples must also avoid contempt for fellow members of the community, described here as 'little ones'.

v12-13

- The question 'what do you think?' introduces a brief parable about lost sheep.
- The two certainties in the parable include
 - a) The shepherd searching for a lost sheep
 - b) The joy that will be expressed in finding a lost sheep.
- It is assumed that shepherd would not jeopardise the flock to seek the single lost sheep, although it is not stated.
- The image of straying sheep indicates the danger of apostasy. Intervention from shepherds may prevent backsliding from resulting in lostness.

v14

- The application is from 'sheep' to 'little ones', and the desire of the Father that none would perish.
- The metaphor of believers as sheep is common in Matthew, as indeed all of Scripture (eg Psalm 23).
- The Father's desire is that the leaders of Israel shepherd the sheep, but the critique in Matthew has been that Israel's leaders have not been faithful shepherds, and Jesus is the one who compassionately rescues the lost sheep of Israel (Matt 9:36, 15:24).
- Jesus is leading his new disciples however, to be renewed shepherds who will faithfully tend to the sheep of Israel (10:6) .

2. Rebuke and Forgiveness in the Community (18:15-35)

- This unit contains two sections, the first about the procedure involved in confronting a sinning disciple (v15-20), and the second about the teaching on forgiveness in the community (v21-35)
 - a) Rebuking a fellow disciples who sins (v15-20)
 - These verses contain a three-step procedure for discipline, based on a theological foundation that includes the authority of the church, the promise of answered prayer, and the presence of Jesus through the process.
 - The procedure spelt out here will be necessary, since Jesus has taught that these 'offences' are inevitable.
 - Again, these offences must be dealt with promptly (and fairly), echoing the fathers heart that not one be lost.

- This unit is structured around hypothetical confrontations, followed by a hypothetical response.
- There is an addition of an hypothetical positive response at the end of v15, which is assumed possible at later steps too.
- The following chart summarises the structure of this unit:
 - Hypothetical initial offence (v15a)
 - *First step: Personal confrontation* (v15b)
 - Hypothetical positive response (v15c)
 - Reconciliation (v15d)
 - Hypothetical negative response to personal confrontation (v16a)
 - *Second step: Peer confrontation* (v16b)
 - Scriptural support (v16c)*
 - Hypothetical negative response to peer confrontation (v17a)
 - *Third step: Community confrontation* (v17b)*
 - Hypothetical negative response to the third step of confrontation (v17c)
 - *Fourth step: Extracommunity confrontation* (v17d)*

*Evidently, the positive response and reconciliation of 18:15c-d would be possible here as well.

v15

- As the shepherd rescued the straying sheep, the offended person must take the initiative to reconcile the offender (18:12, 15).
- Disciples are warned to talk *to* the fellow disciple, not *about* them!
- ‘Telling’ the person his fault is the Greek word ἐλέγχω - elegchō, which is a rebuke based on evidence that attempts to persuade the offender of having sinned, and lead towards reconciliation (See Lev 19:17, with this same word in LXX).
- Ideally, the sin of one against another can be reconciled between the two of them.

v16

- A positive response is envisioned in v15, but if it is not, the second step is to bring in one or two other disciples.
- This underlines the gravity of the situation and adds additional wisdom to the solution. Deut 19:15 is cited as supporting this procedure. It also adds additional objectivity for the offender.
- If this rebuke by a small group of peers cannot resolve the matter, it must be taken before the entire local community, the ‘church’.

v17

- Three increasingly grave rebukes provide to the offender every opportunity to acknowledge error, but if the offender will not heed even to the church then there is no higher earthly court of appeal⁴.
- The only remaining course of action is to withdraw community fellowship and consider the person an outsider.
- However, Jesus himself treated notorious sinners and outsiders compassionately, and thus total withdrawal from contact is not necessarily commanded here.
- While this aspect of discipline in a church community is unappealing, the biblical instructions regarding it are numerous: Gal 6:1-5, 1 Cor 5:1-6:11, 2 Cor 2:5-11, 13:1-2, 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15, 1 Tim 5:19-20, 2 Tim 4:2, Tit 2:15, 3:10, 1 John 5:16, 2: John 10, 3 John 10, Jude 20-23.

v18

- The consequences of the disciplinary process are ominous because the community on earth acts in conjunction with the God of heaven.
- The binding and loosing mentioned here recalls 16:19, and is tied to the exercise of the keys of the kingdom.
- The locus of authority here is the local community, not just Peter or the Apostles. The community is authorised to determine whether a sinning disciple continues with the community or is excluded. This depends on the outcome of the process in v15-17.
- Repentance leads to loosing, or forgiveness, and continued fellowship. The lack of repentance leads to binding, or retention of sin, and exclusion.

v19

- The promises of v19-20 must be seen in the context of the solemn matter of the sinning disciples (not often quoted in that context!).
- During the discipline process, the church on earth may be assured that the heavenly Father will guide and confirm its deliberations and prayers.

v20

- The promise of Jesus's presence ameliorates the difficulties in this process. This idea is repeated in 1 Cor 5:4-5.
- The process and promises described in these verses seem mechanical and harsh when isolated from their setting. But the passage is embedded in a section filled with kindness and a pastoral concern for the spiritual well-being of individuals in the community.
- Jesus has been speaking tenderly of his disciples as humble children, little ones, lost sheep and brothers/sisters. He will go on to stress the necessity of forgiveness. Even the discipline process allows three chances for repentance. Those who are involved in it should view themselves as agents of the Father/Shepherd seeking straying lost sheep. Ultimately, the goal is reconciliation and return to the fold, not severance from the flock.

⁴ This is the sense of whatever is 'bound or loosed' *on earth* also being 'bound and loosed' *in heaven*.

b) The Necessity of Forgiveness (18:21-35)

- In this section Peter 'interrupts' Jesus's discourse with a question about forgiveness, which leads to a parabolic explanation by Jesus.
- This important section, combined with v1-14, provide the appropriate context for the disciplinary process of v15-20, guarding against an overly rigorous approach to relationships in the community.
- The corollary of course is that v21-35 also guards against a complacent towards sin!
- A community's error when it comes to sin can be either complacency (against which v15-20 guards) or cruelty (against which v1-14 & 21-35 guards).
- Disciples dare not allow this family of God to be disrupted by offences, yet they cannot resolve offences without a forgiving spirit. As Turner says 'If this delicate balance between discipline and forgiveness is faithfully maintained, excommunication is self-imposed exile'

v21

- The topic of forgiveness has already been introduced, in 5:21-26, 6:12 & 14-15. Here Peter is concerned about the extent to which someone must repeatedly be forgiven. Perhaps Peter is asking how many times 18:15 must be repeated!
- Peter thinks it is adequate to forgive seven times (perhaps thinking that was a lot!)⁵, but Jesus's parabolic answer means forgiveness must be unending. Whoever is counting is clearly not forgiving, but simply biding their time!

v22

- The reason forgiveness must be unending is because disciples have been forgiven by their heavenly Father of much more than they could ever forgive their fellow disciples (5:21-26, 38-48).
- To be forgiven is therefore to be freed and empowered to forgive.
- This response to offence mandated by Jesus is the opposite of Lamech's boast that he will avenge himself seventy-seven times upon anyone who injures him (Gen 4:15, 24).

v23

- The parable of the unforgiving servant is introduced in v23, and applied in v35. It has three scenes, presenting the king's compassion, the forgiven servant's lack of compassion for his fellow servant, and the king's anger at the servant's lack of compassion.
- This parable does not directly answer Peter's question (as Jesus's answer in v22 does), instead it supplies additional motivation to apply forgiveness, expressed ultimately in the warning of judgment by the Father (18:35).
- Additionally, the parable shows that God has forgiven disciples of offences far greater than those for which they need to forgive others.
- The use of 'slaves' should probably be understood as 'officials', since ordinary slaves might not be entrusted with so much money.

⁵ There is a strong biblical theme of the number 7 tied to both forgiveness of sins, and judgment against it. See Gen 4:15 & 24, Lev 16:14, 19, 26:18, 21, 24, 28, Prov 24:16

v24-27

- The servant owes the king an astonishingly large amount of money “ten thousand talents”. A talent was worth about 6 000 denarii, and a labourer was paid a denarius a day. Thus the labourer would have to work sixty million days, or 193 000 years (untold lifetimes!) to earn this much money! This is clearly hyperbolic, perhaps as we would say ‘zillions’!
- The unimaginable large amount is meant to contrast with the relatively small amount owed this servant by his fellow servant.
- It was evidently legal for the king to sell the servant and his family to obtain some satisfaction for the debt, yet the king's heart is compassionate, and astonishingly, instead of merely allowing time for the servant to be repaid the debt, he forgives it!
- The mercy of the King speaks of the great compassion of God, who forgives us an unimaginable amount, thus relieving our ‘imprisonment’ to satisfy our debt.

v28-30

- In the second scene, the forgiven servants’ activity sharply contrasts that of the compassionate King. Although the servant has been forgiven an enormous debt he refuses to forgive his fellow servant a relatively small amount of one hundred denarii, equivalent to four months work for a labourer.
- Comparing the two, the forgiven servant was forgiven 579 times the amount he demanded from his colleague! The hyperbole is in order to demonstrate the monstrous inconsistency between refusing to forgive ‘peanuts’ after having been forgiven ‘zillions’.
- The forgiven servant has no compassion, ‘choking’ the other servant and having him incarcerated.

v31-34

- In the third scene, other servants are horrified at this glaring inconsistency. Perhaps this is indicative of the communities’ role in the disciplinary process of v15-20?
- The other servant tells the King, who angrily reverses his compassionate decision and severely punishes the forgiven servant.
- The irony is that the unforgiving servant is treated in the end as he treated his fellow servant.

v35

- As in 18:14, the application of the story comes at its conclusion: the heavenly Father’s actions towards unforgiving disciples will be like that of the unforgiving servants’ master.
- Ultimately, the unforgiving servant’s behaviour shows that his plea for mercy was a hoax, and that his forgiveness was obtained under false pretences. A heart which has received that amount of mercy will be softened to be merciful towards others.
- The connection with 6:14 is clear: disciples cannot presume that God will forgive them if they are unwilling to forgive their fellows.
- See Eph 4:31-5:2, James 2:13, 1 John 4:11.

B) Narrative 5: Ministry in Judea (19:3-23:39)

- After giving the disciples important instructions regarding relationships within the new community he is building, Jesus begins his final journey to Jerusalem and the cross.
- Matthew's now-familiar 'bookmark' of 'Now when Jesus had finished these sayings' (19:1) ends the fourth discourse and transitions to the fourth narrative.
- This is followed by the geographical setting of Jesus moving from Galilee to Judea.
- Jesus is, as always, followed by large crowds, and despite the prospect of suffering ahead of him, he continues to demonstrate compassion to the crowds and heal them (19:2).
- This fourth narrative continues the escalation of conflict we saw in the third narrative section, an escalation that eventually becomes lethal.
- Coupled with repeated stories of conflict we have many accounts of Jesus teaching his disciples in this narrative block.
- The disciple-oriented sections of Matt 19-20 continue themes from the discourse in Matthew 18 on kingdom values.⁶
- This narrative block consists of four major sections:
 1. Family values and sacrificial service (19:3-20:34)
 2. Jesus acts prophetically in healing, cleansing the temple, and disputing with the chief priests (21:1-22)
 3. Jesus engages in controversy dialogues with various Jewish leaders (21:23-22:46)
 4. Warnings against the Pharisaic practices, and woes to the Pharisees (23:1-39)

1. Family values and sacrificial service (19:3-20:34)

a) Marriage and divorce, singleness and children (19:3-15)⁷

- v3-6
 - While Jesus is still east of the Jordan he is engaged by some Pharisees who wish to test his understanding of biblical divorce law. They desire to show that Jesus contradicts Moses, but Jesus skilfully turns the tables on them, intimating that they have not even read Moses!
 - This passage recalls Jesus's previous teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (5:31-32). The two passages are quite similar, as both allude to the Pharisees' interpretation of Moses, both cite Deut 24:1, and both teach that divorce amounts to adultery unless due to sexual immorality.
 - However, there is extended teaching by Jesus on the reason for the exemption clause in Deut 24, as well as recalling God's design for marriage from Genesis.
 - The rabbinic dispute between Hillel and Shammai (first century BCE) over divorce and Deut 24:1-4 is relevant here. Hillel took a flexible view and permitted divorce for any reason. Shammai, however, interpreted Deut 24:1 strictly as a reference to sexual impropriety.

⁶ Leading some, like me, to see this as the fourth narrative, following the fourth discourse, rather than the fifth narrative introducing the fifth discourse. See page 3&4 of CG manual part 2 (chapters 8-13).

⁷ This is, of course, a sensitive topic, and complex considering some of the textual and grammatical issues. I addressed this passage when the subject of divorce first came up in the Sermon on the Mount, so please listen to that message for additional context (22 May 2023). There was also an extended teaching on the subject, which can be accessed by request.

- Jesus does not focus on Deut 24 but Genesis 1 & 2, stressing God's original purpose for marriage.
- The gist of Jesus's teaching is that the original divine plan for monogamy is normative, not the subsequent concession to human sinfulness in Deut 24:1. The 'one flesh' relationship in marriage (Gen 2:24) makes divorce wrong except if there has been an illicit sexual union outside of marriage, which breaks the character of this union.
- When two people are married, their identity as their parent's children is altered, and their new identity as husband and wife is permanent unless ruined by human sinfulness.
- Divorce thus leads to adultery except in the cases of infidelity.

v7-9

- The Pharisees' view pits the concession of Deut 24 against Jesus's citation of Gen 1-2, as they seem to think Deut 24 *commands* divorce. However, Jesus reminds them God's original purpose for marriage overrides the Mosaic concession for human sin. Moses *permitted* divorce, he never *commanded* it.
- Jesus affirms a view similar to Shammai that only sexual infidelity is permissible grounds for divorce, but his appeals to the creation account, rather than Deut 24, is not found in either of Shammai or Hillel's arguments.
- A textual and interpretative problem exists in understanding the word used for 'sexual immorality', which is 'πορνεία - porneia'. This is a word that can have a broad range of meaning for intimacy between a man and woman, not always restricted to sexual activity.
- Another difficulty is the scope of the 'exception clause', and whether this clause excepts both divorce *and* remarriage or divorce only (thus profiting remarriage under any circumstances). There are notable scholarly views on both sides.
- These cannot be fully resolved through grammatical arguments alone, but the view that both divorce and remarriage are permitted in the case of infidelity is more likely. If divorce does not convey freedom to remarry, it is hardly a restorative concession to the betrayed.

v10-12

- At this point it becomes clear that the Pharisees are not alone in thinking that Jesus's teaching is overly restrictive! The disciples seem to think that celibacy is preferable when considering marriage under such tight constraints.
- Jesus teaches on celibacy using the concept of eunuchs, which were those who could not have a family because of congenital defect (ie by birth) or castration (as a commitment to serving someone under high authority). These are thus representative of those for whom celibacy is enforced. However, Jesus also introduces a third category, those who 'choose' the celibate lifestyle because of their kingdom commitment.
- Among those who fit this latter category include Paul, John the Baptist and Jesus himself.
- 1 Cor 7:32-38 (with 9:5) encourages this decision. For those people, the eschatological urgency of the kingdom takes priority over normal family relationships.
- However, this does not of course lead to an inferior view of marriage or the family, as is seen in the next scene where children are blessed. Asceticism is not the aim here, but obedience to God's particular call on someone's life, which may result in some remaining single rather than choosing to marry.

v13

- Jesus blessing children recalls 18:1-14, and is fitting here, since Jesus has been discussing the family unit.
- Presumably, the disciples thought Jesus would not want to be bothered with such an unimportant task, but Jesus corrects their low view on the family.

v14-15

- Jesus emphatically turns the rebuke back on the disciples with three statements: a command, a prohibition and an explanation.
- They must never keep children from coming to him, because children exemplify the central value of the kingdom in their humble dependence (as in 18:3-5).
- Jesus's statement also implicitly supports marriage & the bearing of children, going against a major secular view today of non-celibate singleness, where children are seen as a time-consuming distraction from career goals and personal pleasure.

b) Wealth and the Kingdom: three conversations on sacrificial discipleship (19:16-20:16)

- This passage addresses the relationship between present sacrifice and future reward three times:
 - i. When the young man refuses to sacrifice his riches to follow Jesus (v16-22)
 - ii. When Jesus interacts with the disciples on this matter (v23-26)
 - iii. When Peter reminds Jesus of the disciples' sacrifice (v27-20:16)
- Each of these changes conclude with Jesus having the final word.

i. The conversation with the wealthy young man (v16-22)

- This passage interweaves a young man's three questions with Jesus's three answers.
- This interchange gives Jesus an occasion to teach the disciples about the incompatibility of the love of wealth in the kingdom.

v16-17

- The man addresses Jesus as 'teacher', which is an inadequate title for the Messiah, but his approach does not indicate he is insincere.
- Jesus's puzzling response perhaps means that the man must focus more on God's goodness than his own. This is not novel, but summarises Lev 18:5.

v18-20

- The man's request is also puzzling, since all the Torah is binding. Perhaps his question is similar to the Pharisees who ask Jesus to identify the great commandment in the law (Matt 22:36).
- Jesus replies citing five of the ten commandments, commands six through nine, followed by the fifth. He adds the golden rule from Lev 19:18.
- The man boldly affirms he has kept all these, but acknowledges he still lacks something.

v21-22

- Jesus now adds his own definitive directives (compare 5:17-48). In order to be 'perfect' the man must sell his possessions and give to the poor.
- The word 'perfect' is the word 'τέλειος - teleios' that we came across in the Sermon on the Mount (5:48).
- In this case, the young man must forsake his wealth since his devotion to it is preventing him from loving God and his neighbour (as seen in his sadness in departure, a sign that he does not truly love his neighbour). Jesus thus gets to the root of this man's problem in discipleship, covetousness. His materialism prevents him from seeking first the kingdom (6:33).
- Jesus's command for total commitment to the kingdom is in reality a gracious gospel offer that calls the man to rely not on wealth but on Jesus and the values of the kingdom (see Matt 6:21, 24, 13:22).

ii. The conversation with the Disciples (v23-26)

v23-26

- The incident with the rich young man provides an occasion for Jesus to teach his disciples about the deceitfulness of riches.
- Wealth can desensitise people to their deepest needs, just as poverty can alert the to the kingdom (Matt 5:3).
- Verse 24 restates verse 23 using hyperbolic language of the largest animal and smallest opening.⁸ It thus paves the way for the disciples' incredulous question in v25, and Jesus's repose that it is only by God's power that we are awakened to our need for him, especially for those who are wealthy.

iii. The conversation with Peter (v19:7-20:16)

v27-28

- Jesus does not rebuke Peter for his question, which means Peter's question about future reward is not out of place for a disciple. Motivations based on Jesus's future kingdom are indeed encouraged.
- Jesus's description of his coming anticipates 25:30-31, and the terminology focusing on the twelve tribes is remarkable, as is the description of the renewal that will be brought about by Jesus at his return (see 5:18, Rom 8:18-23).
- The surprising teaching that the disciples will share with Jesus the rule of the coming kingdom may be based on Dan 7:9, 13-14, 18, 22, 27.
- The eschatological reward of Jesus's followers will far outweigh their present sacrifice and should motivate them to suffer with Jesus in the present.

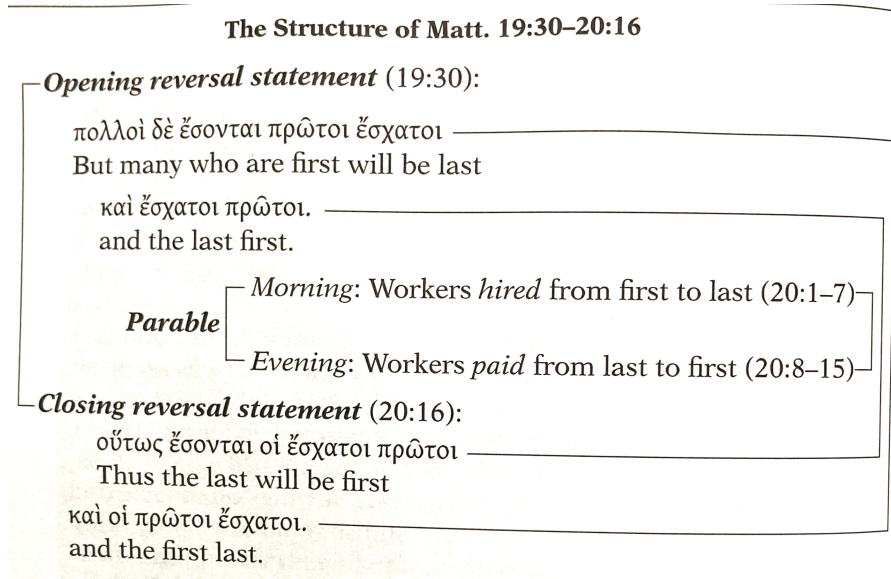
v29-30

- Jesus speaks of the the reward not only for the twelve, but also for all who have sacrificed to follow him.
- The enigmatic saying in v30 is repeated after the parable of the vineyard. Jesus speaks to those who, like the rich young man, are currently among the 'first' in the world, and warns them against a false sense of security.
- The concept of eschatological reversal is thus both a warning and a promise.

⁸ Despite hearing it in sermons, there is no evidence for the existence of a small 'needle gate' in Jerusalem.

20:1-2

- The chapter division at 20:1 is not helpful, since the parable expands the cryptic saying of 19:30 about the reversal of those who are first and last. In the second 'act' to his parable labourers are paid from last to first.
- The reversal structure can be depicted as follows:



v3-5

- The urgency of the harvest means labourers are hired throughout the day, up to 5pm.
- The expectation is that those hired later would be paid proportionately less than those hired earlier.

v6-7

- It is not often pointed out the sad state of those not hired all day, and the resulting kindness and generosity of the landowner. In our context in South Africa we could imagine the joy of those hired later receiving a full day's wage!
- These 'last ones' could also be interpreted as reinforcing the theme of inclusion of tax collectors and sinners as worthy of the kingdom through the call of Jesus.

v8-12

- Those hired last are pleasantly surprised as they receive way more than expected, and those hired first observe this and expect to receive even more themselves. When they are paid the same amount as those who worked only one hour they begin grumbling to the vineyard owner⁹.

⁹ There is probably something in their response that we are to learn about greed vs contentment!

v13-15

- The landowner rather coldly insists that those who worked longer were still paid what was promised. For reasons known only to himself, the owner wants to be especially generous to the last group of workers.
- The landowner has been fair to those who worked all day, and generous to those who worked only a short time, since he wishes to treat all his workers equally.
- The phrase 'begrudge my generosity' is literally 'Or is your eye bad because I am good?'. The reference to 'good' may link the landowner to God, who alone is good (19:17), and the 'evil' eye may indicate the workers intent to do harm.

v16

- The parable is concluded and is framed with the same cryptic expression as in 19:30, except the order is reversed (another reversal on it's own!)
- Perhaps the first reversal statement is an encouragement to the disciples that their status as 'last' will be reversed through reward, but the second reversal statement may be a warning against automatic entitlement of the disciples. Their rigorous service will be fairly rewarded, but they must not grumble about how God chooses to reward others. This also anticipates 20:20-28.
- Peter and the disciples will be rewarded but they must not presume upon God's grace and obsess over rewards. They must accept whatever reward they are given and not compare themselves to others (again 20:20-28 in view).
- Ultimately, God's gracious generosity vastly exceeds human merit-based expectations.

c) The third passion prediction (20:17-19)

v17

- The third Passion prediction is the most lengthy of the three. New details include the involvement of the Gentiles in mocking, flogging, and crucifying him.
- Jesus's focus on his coming suffering in this unit is in stark contrast to his two disciples' focus on their future reigning with him in the next, as well as preoccupation with rewards in the preceding.

v18-19

- This prediction is more explicit than the first two in stating that the Jewish authorities will condemn Jesus to death and the gentile authorities will carry out the punishment. Perhaps this expresses the universality of Jesus's rejection.
- This is also the first mention of the crucifixion itself in the passion predictions.
- Jesus's detailed description of his sufferings anticipates exactly what happens later: mockery, flogging, crucifixion. This reinforces the important idea that the death of Jesus was not accidental nor incidental, and that Jesus willingly undergoes it.
- All three passion predictions conclude with the resurrection, which becomes the central feature of the early church¹⁰ (and something disciples, then and now, tend to forget!)

¹⁰ Acts 2;24-36, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40, 13:30, 33-37, 1 Cor 15:4-28

d) A dispute over greatness in the kingdom (20:20-28)

- The opportunity for teaching comes at the question from the mother of Zebedee's children. The teaching puts two parallel statements about worldly greatness (20:25) in antithesis to two parallel statements about kingdom greatness (20:26-27), which entails following the steps of Jesus on the path of sacrificial service.

v20-21

- In clear contrast to Jesus's projected sufferings, the mother seeks her sons' future glory.
- Sitting at the right and left hand connotes proximity to the king, and hence prestige and authority in ruling the future kingdom, rather than just sitting next to him at the eschatological banquet.
- The fact that the mother makes the request reflects badly on James and John, not the mother¹¹. For all of them however, the problem is that neither understands the significance of Jesus's repeated passion predictions.

v22-23

- Here it becomes clear that none of them understands the gravity of the request, nor how inappropriate it is in the moment.
- Drinking the cup is a metaphor for suffering (26:39, Ps 11:6, 75:8, Isa 51:17 etc).
- Although the brothers' answer to Jesus is sincere, it is brash, since they do not adequately understand what will befall them as disciples.
- James was martyred by Herod Agrippa I, but John was evidently spared such a fate (Acts 12:1-2, John 21:20-23).

v24-28

- James and John's question angers the other disciples, who are probably jealous. Jesus uses the moment to teach the disciples on kingdom values.
- The simple message is that world rulers do not provide a model for Jesus's community!
- Jesus contrasts the world's values with his kingdom values (again! Recall 18:1-14, 10:39, 16:25, 19:30), and then points to his own life and death as the model for his disciples' aspirations for greatness. Jesus's humble service and redemptive ransom are the quintessence of greatness in his kingdom.
- The resounding message is 'to serve is to reign'(see also Luke 22:27, John 13:12-17, Phil 2:5-11).
- The use of 'Son of Man' here refers to the aspect of Jesus's suffering, but in the larger context is a reminder of the three categories of use of 'Son of Man' in the Gospels:
 - i. Those that present him in his earthly role (20:28a)
 - ii. Those that highlight his suffering (20:18-19, 28b)
 - iii. Those that point to his future glory (19:28)
- We are also introduced, for the first time (clearly, at least, apart from the subtle allusion in the temple tax story), to the idea as *how* Jesus will 'save his people from their sins'. We know that he 'must die', but have yet to find out exactly how his death will accomplish saving from sins.

¹¹ she does approach Jesus in a posture of worship

- The idea of 'ransom' is Matthew's first overt description of the efficacy of Christ's death in accomplishing our rescue from sin. The idea of a 'ransom' means the rescue from slavery through the payment of a price. The cost of salvation is nothing less than the death of the Son of Man, and in doing so as a substitute we are 'saved from our sins'.
- This idea of ransom probably draws from Ex 30:12, Ps 49:7-9 and especially Isaiah 53:10-12, since Matthew previously presented Jesus as the Suffering Servant in 8:17 (citing Isa 53:4) and in 12:18-21 (citing Isa 42:1-4).

e) Jesus heals two blind men (20:29-34)

- This story is not an anticlimactic second version of the story in 9:27-31, although it is similar.
- This story is framed by the idea of 'following Jesus', first being the mention of the crowd in v29, and then the two blind men in v34.
- Matthew may be intending to contrast the two blind men with the two self-seeking disciples from v20-24.
- The blind men also introduce us to the familiar title of 'Son of David', preparing us for the voice of the crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem for the 'triumphal entry', as well as Jesus's final encounter with the religious leaders (22:41-46).

v29-31

- Jesus and his disciples leave Jericho and head towards Jerusalem, only about 30km from Jericho.
- A large crowd joins them, perhaps anticipating climactic events as Jesus approaches the city of Jerusalem.

v32-34

- Jesus asks the blind men what they want. Their intention seems obvious, but Jesus likely asks the question to draw out their faith.
- The contrast between Jesus's compassion and the crowds is striking, echoing the theme of 'true greatness' from the preceding story. This story thus closes the section on 'sacrificial service' begun at the beginning of chapter 19.
- Significantly, the men join the crowd following Jesus up to Jerusalem.

2. Approaching Jerusalem: The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)

- This unit is analysed in three parts:
 - i. The preparations (v1-5)
 - ii. The entrance (v6-9)
 - iii. The result (v10-11)
- Scripture references punctuate the first and second sections, with a reference to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9, and the crowds shouting Ps 118:25-26.

v1

- Jesus finally approaches the ultimate destination of his trip from Galilee, where he will be crucified as predicted.

v2-5

- Jesus specifically asks for his disciples to acquire a donkey and a colt from a village near Bethpage. Jesus's instructions highlight his supernatural insight and control of the situation.
- Matthew stresses the humility of Jesus by citing Zechariah 9:9. This prophecy mentions that the coming king will be just, bring salvation, and be humble, but Matthew selects only the last characteristic, humility.
- This is the striking element of an other-wise familiar scene of a king entering the Holy city: he is not paraded on a war-horse, is plainly dressed, and he is meek. Through his ministry Jesus has exemplified humility and downplayed pride, and this scene consolidates all that we have learned from Jesus on the subject.
- The prophecies of Zechariah frequently concern the troubles of Jerusalem, and God's concern for the Holy city. The passion narrative fittingly cites Zech 9-14 several times:
 - 21:4-9 cites 9:9
 - 21:12-13 cites 14:21
 - 25:15-16 cites 11:12
 - 26:26-29 cites 9:11
 - 26:30-35 cites 13:7
 - 27:3-10 cites 11:12-13
 - 27:51-53 cites 14:4-5

v6-9

- The spreading of garments and palm branches on the road marks the festive acknowledgment of Jesus's kingship (see 1 Ki 1:32-40, 2 Ki 9:13).
- The crowds excited shouts echo Ps 118:26. Psalms 113:118 were known as the Hallel psalms, and likely were sung at Passover.
- 'Hosanna' is literally a cry for help ('save!'), but idiomatically expresses jubilant praise.
- Sadly, the excitement of the crowds is only temporary and in the end is not matched by faithful commitment to Jesus.
- There is some irony in their expression of messianic phrases: the expressions are fitting, but they wrongly model the Messiah on a conquering war hero, not a servant who will suffer in their place.
- As the narrative unfolds, the triumphal entry is shown in reality to be a very tragic one. Yet his exit will not be as his entrance, and his return will certainly be triumphant!

v10-11

- Jerusalem is accustomed to crowds during festivals, but Jesus's arrival leads to an uproar. Everywhere people ask about the one who enters the city to such fanfare.
- The crowd's language here is accurate yet inadequate. He is not less than a prophet, but is certainly more: the Messiah.

3. Cleansing and controversy (21:12-17)

- Matthew exhibits another clear structure in the description of Jesus interaction with the activities of the temple:
 - Jesus arrives at the temple (21:12a)
 - Jesus protests against the temple financial activities (21:12b) and heals (21:14)
 - Scriptural support for Jesus's protest (21:13, Isa 56:7, Jer 7:11)
 - Temple authorities protest against Jesus's actions (21:15-16a)
 - Scriptural support for Jesus's action (21:16b, Ps 8:2)
 - Jesus leaves the temple
- It is instructive that Jesus's first action upon entering Jerusalem is not to begin rescuing it from Roman oppression, but from its own hypocrisy. His entrance into the city is royal, but his actions in the temple are prophetic, echoing prophets before who spoke against the corruption of the temple. Therefore, instead of directly threatening the political status quo, Jesus confronts the temple, the religious centre of Israel, and its established leadership.
- These actions also demonstrate the truth of Matt 12:6 "something greater than the temple is here".
- The actions likely also fulfill Zech 14:21, which spoke of a day when there would be no more merchants in the house of the Lord.

v21-13

- Jesus goes to the temple area and disrupts the financial dealings taking place there.
- The outer court of the Gentiles was probably where Jesus drove out the merchants, healed the blind and lame, and received the children's praises
- The first inner court was the Court of the Women, where all Jews could enter. Only ritually pure Jewish males could go further into the Court of the Israelites, where the sacrificial altar stood. Beyond this was the temple proper, or Court of the priests, where only priests could go.
- The buying and selling centred on the sacrifices that were required in the temple. The money changers in the temple serviced the many pilgrims holding foreign currency who came for the major festivals.
- Jesus's disgust is not likely at the activities themselves, as these would be required for the ordinary sacrificial rituals. He is likely perturbed at the fact that they are taking place in the temple area itself (and disrupting the worship of Gentiles!), and/or angry at merchants who were dealing dishonestly with the pilgrims, or charging exorbitant prices for the sacrificial animals. His concern is not directly with the temple and its sacrifices, but the parasitic financial activities.
- Jesus's disruptive acts are based on biblical citations that highlight the incongruity of turning a place of prayer into a den of thieves (Isa 56:7, Jer 7:11).

v14

- This account of the healing of blind and lame is the last healing account in Matthew. It likely occurs in the same Court of the Gentiles, since lame and blind people were excluded from further areas in the temple.
- In any event, Jesus removes the barrier to their full participation in God's house of prayer.
- In a way, his clearing the temple amounts to casting out the insiders, and his healing amounts to welcoming the outsiders.

v15-17

- Jesus's activities in the temple model Hos 6:6: Gd prefers mercy over sacrifice (Matt 9:12-13, 12:7).
- The chief priests and scribes were consulted by Herod as to the place of Jesus's birth, and they appear in two of Jesus's passion predictions (16:21, 20:18). Given their earlier opposition, their indignation here is not surprising.
- They are incensed at both Jesus's miracles, and the messianic overtones of the children's shouts.
- Jesus responds by citing Ps 8:2 to vindicate the children.
- Again Jesus says "have you never read" (Matt 12:3), indicating not so much their ignorance but their obstinance. They have indeed read Ps 8:2, but do not recognise Jesus as the Messiah. By contrast, the children's messianic praise recalls Matthew's "little ones" who receive the kingdom (18:1-6, 19:14).
- Psalm 8:2 is understood messianic ally elsewhere in the NT: 1 Cor 15:27, Eph 1:22, Phil 3:21, Heb 2:6-9, 1 Pet 3:22.

4. Cursing the fig tree (21:18-22)

- This strange incident regarding a fruitless fig tree leads to a teaching by Jesus on prayer. It also takes place as another acted parable with important symbolic significance.

v18-19

- In a moment of hunger Jesus looks for fruit from a fig tree by the side of the road. The tree however, has leaves on it, but no fruit. The leaves create an appearance of life that promises fruit, but without actually producing any. This is the basis for the prophetic parable in action.
- In prophetic texts fruitless trees symbolise judgment (Isa 34:4, Jer 8:13, 24:1-10, Hos 2:12, Joel 1:7). Here the cursed tree symbolises judgment on Jerusalem and the leaders of Israel, particularly the temple leaders, not Israel as a whole. The religious leaders have the appearance of fruit, but are empty, and blind to the Messiah in their midst. Their fruitlessness will be finally and fully denounced in chapter 23.
- This is thus the third symbolic action of Jesus since entering Jerusalem, after the triumphal entry on a donkey and the cleansing of the temple.

v20-22

- The object lesson of the fig tree now receives a new twist, where Jesus uses the disciples question to teach about faith and prayer (not completely dislocated from the previous account on it's own, considering the reference to the temple as a 'house of prayer').
- The subject of faith expressed in asking has already been strongly introduced in 17:19-20 using a similar expression of mountains being moved through prayer¹²! One is reminded that this kind of prayer is within the context of Jesus's primary teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, where our desires in prayer correlate with God's reputation and his rule (6:9-13).
- Still, we are reminded of the assistance at the disposal of believers through prayer, particularly when considering the call to be fruitful, unlike the religious leaders. The disciples clearly still need to develop faith that God will answer prayer.

5. Increasing controversy with the leaders in the temple (21:23-22:46)

- Jesus's final conflict with the Jerusalem religious establishment began when he entered the city and acted prophetically in the temple, but at this point it escalates.
- It is possible to structure this section around the two questions Jesus asks:
 - Jesus's question (21:24-27)
 - Three parables (21:28-32, 21:33-46, 22:1-14)
 - Three controversy stories (22:15-22, 22:23-33, 22:34-40)
 - Jesus question (22:41-46)

a) Three questions about authority (21:23-32)

- The question put to Jesus about the source of his authority is not an innocent one. They are trying to trap Jesus into saying something that could be construed as blasphemy. But Jesus turns the tables on them by asking a question they dare not answer - the question of the source of John's authority.
- Then he asks them to respond to a parable about two sons, and this time their answer condemns them.

v23

- The leading priests and elders are in charge of the temple, so it is not surprising that they question Jesus's activities, which presume an authority that overrides their own (a similar question will arise with the disciples in Acts 4:7).

v24-27

- Jesus's question puts the leaders in a quandary: they answer that John's authority is merely human, they will anger the crowds. But if they recognise John's divine authority, their unbelief will be exposed.
- Once again Jesus's own questions trip up the religious leaders in their attempt to trap him!

¹² There is perhaps an allusion to the judgment coming on the Temple 'Mount' in 70 CE.

v28-30

- The stalemate leads to a parable about two sons who respond oppositely to their father's request to work in his vineyard. This is the first of a set of three parables that rebuke the religious leaders for their unbelief (v33-44, 22:1-14).
- The two responses of the sons are structurally parallel but ethically antithetical. The first son initially refuses but eventually does the work, the second son initially agrees but eventually does not work.

v31-32

- This time the leaders do answer, but their answer condemns them.
- The leaders promise of righteousness without performance liken them to a fig tree with leaves but no fruit (21:19).
- This passage teaches that discipleship is fundamentally about deeds, not words (see 7:21-27). A disciples initial words may be reversed by subsequent deeds.
- Amazingly, the temple officials do not obey the Father's will despite their knowledge of the law. Even more amazing is how the grace of God can draw notorious sinners in repentance into the kingdom.
- Added to this listen is the important point that disciples must not assume the permanence of their position before God based on initial proclamations of faith alone. Disciples are obliged to persevere in both faith and obedience.

b) Parable of the tenant farmers (21:33-46)

- This parable joins two biblical themes - Israel as God's vineyard and its rejection of the prophets - with two new themes: Jesus as the culmination of God's revelation and his rejection as the culmination of Israel's rebellion.
- The parable also continues the answer to the leaders' question about Jesus's authority. In the story Jesus correctly predicts that the leaders will kill Jesus, because they think it will lead to their ongoing authority over the people¹³.
- But the owner of the vineyard will have the last word when he replaces these leaders with Jesus's disciples who will produce fruit. Thus the parable of the wicked tenants is a miniature history of the story of redemption.

v33

- This parable continues with the setting of a vineyard, but this time workers are tenant farmers, not sons.
- The vineyard is Israel, the recipient of God's kingdom blessings, the tenant farmers are Israel's leaders.

v34-36

- The crucial tension in the parable is the owner receiving his share of fruit, again reinforcing the key Matthean theme of obedience (3:8, 10, 7:16-20, 12:33, 13:8, 26, 21:19). Israel's relationship with God covenantally obligated its leaders to righteousness, just as the tenants were contractually obligated to produce fruit for the owner of the vineyard.
- Isaiah 5:1-7 is in the background here, where God decries Israel for inexplicably failing to bear fruit. The resolution of the problem in Isaiah is the destruction of the vineyard, whereas in Matthew the problem of the wicked tenants is solved by replacing them with new tenants who will give fruit to the owner.

¹³ In so doing it would be fair to say this is another prediction of his death!

v37-39

- After two failed attempts to receive his share of the suit, the owner sends his son, but the tenants also kill the son, thinking they will acquire the vineyard if they remove the heir.
- The maltreatment of the slaves and son sent by the landowner is meant to portray Israel's ongoing rejection of its prophets.
- The detail of the son being thrown out of the vineyard before being killed may implicitly refer to Jesus being crucified outside of Jerusalem's walls.
- This parable also anticipates Jesus' accusation in 23:29-39 that his rejection by Israel's leaders is the culmination of their habitual rejection of God's prophets.
- At this point of the story one might be wondering at the patience (if not naivety) of the owner. But the story is not over. How will the owner respond to this atrocity?

v40-41

- Jesus draws his listeners into the story by asking them how it will end. They realise the owner's remarkable patience has reached its end, and do they say the owner will bring the tenants to an end befitting their wickedness and replace them with new tenants. Here the leaders condemn themselves with their own words/

v42-43

- The leaders are again portrayed as ignorant of the scriptures, specifically Psalm 118:22.
- This Psalm has already been cited in 21:9 at the triumphal entry.
- The words for 'son' and 'stone' are similar, and this connects the 'stone' rejected with the 'son' who was murdered.
- The kingdom is then taken away from the religious leaders and given to the twelve disciples who will lead Jesus's church.

v44

- The stone metaphor continues, which echoes Isa 8:14-15 and Dan 2:34-35, 44-45.
- Those who rejected the cornerstone are depicted as stumbling over it and falling, and at the same time their judgment will be like the stone falling on them.
- The temple destruction in 70 CE was part of the judgment Jesus speaks of here. This will become clearer in Matt 24.

v45-46

- It is clear that the tenant farmers represent Israel's leaders, not Israel itself, as the religious leaders Jesus is addressing recognize this themselves. This view is in keeping with the prophetic denunciations in the prophetic works that blame the leaders for causing the people to sin, and stress that the sins of Jerusalem are connected to the temple. This does not mean that the people are not accountable for their sins, but that the leaders' conduct is particularly blameworthy.
- This is therefore an intramural transfer of leadership from the fruitless Jerusalem religious establishment to the fruitful Matthean Christian Jewish community, led by the Apostles of Jesus.
- Tragically, the leaders understand what Jesus is saying, but refuse to agree with it. Undaunted they set out to crush the cornerstone.

c) Parable of the wedding feast (22:1-14)

- This parable is the third in a set that share several themes. Most prominently, they portray the failure of the religious leaders to respond to God's call through the second son, the wicked tenants, and those originally invited to the wedding feast. But the main without wedding clothes in this parable warns those within Matthew's community that they must focus on their own fidelity, not the error of the outsiders/religious leaders.

v1-3

- The standard comparison formula "the kingdom of heaven may be compared to" (see chapter 13) introduces this parable.
- In this third parable the scene shifts to a feast set by a King, who sends slaves to summon those who are invited. Amazingly, the invited guests are not willing to come. In this context there can be little doubt that this portrays the religious leaders, who do not believe God's prophets, and who ultimately reject God's son.

v4-6

- Again, like the previous parable, the King is patient and sends out another servant, armed with more detail about the readiness of the preparations. But still they do not heed the invitation.
- Some are merely disloyal, attending to their everyday concerns instead, but others revolt against the king by apprehending, mocking and killing the messengers. Perhaps this difference between indifference and hostility is meant to portray the varying responses of Israel to Jesus.
- The leaders' recalcitrance is habitual, they have regularly rejected and even killed God's messengers.

v7

- The King's patience gives way to fury as he sends troops to destroy the murderers of his slaves and to torch their city. The destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in 70 CE is a partial fulfillment of this prophecy. God's use of the Romans is not unlike his use of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians etc.

v8-10

- The King then sends out the servants to invite anyone they can find, and the banquet hall is subsequently filled with guests.
- The presence of both good and bad people at the feast is similar to other parabolic portrayals of mixed response to the kingdom message (as seen in similar kingdom parables in 13:20-23, 25-26, 41-42, 49-50).

v11-13

- Without knowing exactly why, the man's inappropriate clothing offends the king. The man cannot explain his inappropriate attire and he is subsequently arrested and severely punished.
- The disastrous end to this man adds a dimension not found in the previous two parables. His garment shows that whilst he responded, he does not truly belong at the wedding. His fate reminds the readers of the false prophets in 7:15-23 and of the lawless ones in 13:41-42.
- Disciples cannot become complacent and forget the necessity of obedience upon them as well. Soon Judas's betrayal will make this point clear: Judas Iscariot was called but not chosen.

v14

- The parable prepares the listeners for the conclusion: "Many are called, but few are chosen." The point of this imagery is, to some extent, similar to that of the parable of the two sons. The established leaders of Israel have rejected Jesus and the kingdom, but some from the dregs of society have repented (9:10-13; 21:31-32). But even among these who overtly respond to the kingdom message, there are both good and bad (22:10; cf 5:45; 7:21-23; 13:19-23, 38, 48). God calls many, good and bad alike, into his kingdom, but not all of them are truly obedient to the call.

d) The Pharisees' question paying taxes to Caesar (22:15-22)

- After narrating three parables that address the question of Jesus's authority, Matthew now presents three further questions from the religious leaders who attempt to challenge Jesus's wisdom and insight into the Torah.
- But Jesus's teaching surpasses that of the Pharisees (22:15, 34), Sadudcees (22:23) and Herodians (22:16).
- Jesus answers all their questions, but when it comes to his turn to question them, they cannot answer even one.

v15-16a

- The Pharisees regroup, and confer how to trap Jesus.
- It would probably be unusual for Herodians to join in common cause with the Pharisees, who did not support either the pro-Roman Herodian dynasty or a tax that was not based on the Torah.

v16b-17

- The mixed group speaks flattering words to Jesus in order to set their trap.
- They wish to catch Jesus in a dilemma. If he supports the Roman tax, he will alienate the Pharisees, and if he rejects the tax, he will alienate the Herodians, and it will amount to treason against Rome.

v18

- 'Jesus recognises the daggers in the men's smiles'. He sees through the flattery and asks outright why they are putting him to the test, which echoes the testing of Satan back in chapter 4.
- Jesus's severe language will only escalate in Matt 23.

v19-22

- Jesus asks his interrogators to produce the coin used for the tax, a denarius.
- When the men reply that the coin belongs to Caesar, Jesus affirms giving to Caesar what belongs to him, and to God what belongs to God.
- The coin would have had an inscription referring to Tiberius Caesar as divine and high priest. By Jesus separating duty to state and to God means that he subtly indicates that Tiberius is neither divine nor a priest, since he does not 'belong to God'.
- 'Giving to God what belongs to God' may also recall the fruit not given to the landowner in Matt 21:33-46.
- Jesus's answer confounds both the Herodians and the Pharisees. Since Jesus befriended tax collectors his interrogators might have expected him to answer their question affirmatively. Since he has recently accepted messianic praise, however, also might have indicated a negative answer. Both groups are astounded at what they hear.

- Jesus does not support the Pharisees by opposing caesar's tax, but neither does he support the Herodians by affirming total loyalty to Rome.
- On another level, whilst there is no precise theory of governmental authority in this passage (see however Rom 13:1-7, 1 pet 2:13-17), this passage does indicate God's providence places governments in authority, and therefore that believers ought to obey governments as long as such obedience is not disobedient to God.

e) The Sadducees' question: marriage in the resurrection (22:23-33)

v23

- The Sadducees now get an audience with Jesus, and approach with a sort of riddle. Again, the question is not sincere, they are trying to trap Jesus with the riddle. They believe their question is unanswerable and that it will discredit Jesus.
- The Sadducees, in their denial of an afterlife, disagreed with the Pharisees, evidently because of their rejection of the oral tradition of the Pharisees and emphasis of the first five books of Moses over the rest of the canon.

v24

- The Sadducees present a hypothetical case based on Deut 25:5-10, the law of levirate marriage, in which a brother is responsible for having a child with his childless deceased brother's widow so that the deceased brother can have an heir.

v25-28

- The caricaturised nature of the Sadducees story means they are likely mocking the idea of the afterlife, an issue with which Jesus agrees with the Pharisees.

v29-30

- Again Jesus does not directly answer his interrogators. Instead he strongly rebukes them, again challenging their apparent ignorance of the scriptures.
- Jesus first responds by saying that people do not live as married couples in the afterlife. The Sadducees err in assuming that the afterlife will be just like the present life.
- While sexuality is a part of the goodness of creation, life in the resurrection will transcend this aspect of creation. Effectively this renders the levirate law moot upon death.

v31-33

- Next Jesus proves the resurrection from the Scriptures, specifically from the Torah, which the Sadducees favour. He cites Ex 3:6, where God speaks from the burning bush identifying himself as the God of the patriarchs.
- What Jesus is affirming is that God's covenantal loyalty with them does not end with their death, and God's ongoing covenantal relationship with them implies their eventual resurrection.
- God's being their God during the 'intermediate state' between their death and resurrection guarantees his relationship with them in their final resurrected state.
- Again, the interrogators have no response, and the watching crowd are amazed.

f) The Pharisee lawyer's question: the greatest commandment (22:34-40)

- This third story of Jesus's debates with the religious leaders is the least controversial. Here Jesus succinctly synthesises the ethical teaching of scripture.
- In view here is Jesus's relationship to, and interpretation of, the law (see 5:17-48, 12:1-14, 15:1-20, 19:1-22). For Jesus, the heart of the Torah observance is love for God and for those created in God's image.
- This principle is the bases of the specific stipulations of the Torah and prophets.

v34

- Ironically, the Pharisees would have agreed with Jesus's answer to the Sadducees, but this has no bearing on their intention to discredit him.

v35-36

- The Pharisee lawyer's question may reflect a debate within Pharisaism at that time, but his purpose is to trap Jesus, not gain insight in understanding of the Torah. The scriptures themselves present summaries of the crucial demands of the law (eg Micah 6:8, Hab 2:4).

v37-38

- Without hesitation Jesus cites Deut 6:5 as the greatest commandment. His citation is meant to express the fact that one must love God with all of one's being, not just some of one's faculties.

v39-40

- Jesus then appends Lev 19:18 as a text of similar importance to Deut 6:5, a passage that echoes the obligation of love first from the first text, but changes the object of love from God the creator to his creatures.
- This placement surprisingly affirms that loving God's creatures is of the same nature as loving their creator. Yet loving humans derives from loving their creator, since Jesus's labelling of Deut 6:5 as the 'greatest and foremost commandment' indicates it must be viewed as foundational for Lev 19:18.
- Fallen creatures can thus not love neighbours as themselves until they have acknowledged their obligation to love God. Gods imitating love to humans enables them to respond lovingly to God and fellow humans.
- This juxtaposition also echoes the two tables of the Ten Commandments.
- Both of these passages were central in the Judaism of Jesus's day, with pious Jews reciting the 'shema', a prayer named for the first word of Deut 6:4 ('Hear!') twice daily.
- After citing these two texts, Jesus states that all of the law and the prophets depend (lit 'hang') on them. In other words, all of scripture is an exposition of the ideals expressed in these two texts.
- The thought is similar to Matt 7:12.
- The absence of a reply by the lawyer makes the episode close with the words of Jesus still ringing in the reader's ears

g) Jesus questions the Pharisees (22:41-46)

- Jesus has responded wisely to three questions from his opponents, and he has silenced them. Now he takes the initiative and asks them some questions.
- This is not a mere counterattack, he really wants them to see the link between David and Himself as Messiah.
- The Jewish leaders and Jesus agree that the Messiah is David's son, but the real question is what it means to be David's son in light of Psalm 110:1.

v41-42

- Jesus's first question regarding the sonship of the Messiah is easily and correctly answered.
- However, the Pharisees evidently view the Messiah's Davidic roots in a nationalistic and militaristic fashion, something Jesus never promises, and they thus look past him. Jesus' next pair of questions is designed to show them this.

v43-44

- Jesus's next question is based on Ps 110:1, which clarifies the Messiah's relationship to David. Jesus understands this verse to say that David refers to this son the Messiah as his Lord. How then could David's son be David's Lord, one who possesses higher authority than the king of Israel?
- Jesus attributes the words in Ps 110 to David, moved by the Spirit. It is thus not the words of a third party (say a prophet), which makes the Psalm messianic. This is confirmed in Acts 1:16 and 2:34.
- There are two different words for 'Lord' here:
 - "The Lord (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonay) sit at my right hand"
- Thus the Messiah is one who sits at the right hand of God Himself, something Jesus overly claims for himself in the important moment of his trial before the religious leaders in Matt 26:64.

v45

- After citing Ps 110:1 Jesus asks how David's Lord can be his son. The answer to the enigma is based on the Matthean teaching of Jesus's dual 'paternity'. He is both the son of Mary, and thus son of David, but also Son of God, and thus David's Lord.
- Matthew's narrative has described Jesus's birth and lineage to David in great detail, but at the same time Matthew has stressed the miraculous circumstances surrounding his birth.
- This 'dual sonship' of the Messiah is also described in prophetic texts such as Isaiah 11:1, 10, where the messiah is both David's offshoot as well as David's root.
- Ultimately, the Pharisees will not accept a Messiah who, as David's Lord, is greater than David.
- This conflict remains a theological watershed still today, where Judaism expects a human Messiah and Christianity worships a divine one.

v46

- The silence of the religious leaders does not mean they have come to agree with Jesus, but that they have abandoned hope of publicly refuting him.
- This verse thus summarises the result of Jesus's debates with the religious leaders going back as far as 21:15.