

The Book of Matthew

Portraying Jesus Christ our King

A Bible study guide by pianist David Nevue (<http://www.davidnevue.com/studies>)

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MATTHEW 4:12 – 5:16

Jesus Ministry Begins

Study Notes & Comments...

Having passed his test in the wilderness, Jesus returns to Nazareth, his home, and waits there for a particular event... the arrest of John the Baptist. At the close of John's public ministry, Jesus begins his own.

- 1) 4:12-16: John the Baptist was locked up in prison by Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great – Matt 2), because John spoke out against his taking his brother's wife (Luke 3:19-20). Once John is imprisoned, Jesus travels to Galilee where he begins his ministry. Galilee is in the northern-most part of the land of Israel, and it is a land inhabited by not only Jews, but also Gentiles.

Matthew points out that Jesus ministry in the region of Galilee fulfills prophecy spoken by the prophet Isaiah (9:1-2). The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali (land allotted to those two tribes of Israel) are both in the area of Galilee and Capernaum, exactly where Jesus begins his ministry. Thus the people living there, who "sat in darkness have seen a great light." The Son of God, the Light of the World, had arrived to dwell with them.

- 2) 4:17: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" are the first words of Jesus in his ministry role. Compare to John the Baptist's first words in Matthew 3:2. They are the same. Jesus, in a manner of speaking, takes the baton from John. There is a slightly different meaning, however, when Jesus says these words. For unlike John, **Jesus is the King of the kingdom that is being preached**. The kingdom of heaven is truly nearer for the listeners than it was before, as no the King himself is bringing the message.

The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom (for now). We who have accepted Jesus as Lord, dwell in that kingdom just as we do this earthly kingdom. We'll talk much more about the kingdom of heaven in future studies as Jesus addresses it in his parables, but for now, just read Luke 17:20-21 and John 18:36. The kingdom of heaven is currently spiritual in nature, but upon Jesus' return, the physical realm will be brought under the kingship of Christ as well (See Rev. 11:15).

- 3) 4:18-22: Jesus now begins to gather his disciples. We know from the other gospels, that some of these men already knew who Jesus was. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-39) and introduced his brother Simon Peter to Jesus prior to this event (John 1:42). James and John were partners in business with Simon and Andrew (Luke 5:10), and likely knew of Jesus from talking with them. It is possible, though we are not told specifically, that James and John had previously met the Lord as well.
- 4) 4:23-25: Jesus traveled throughout all of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel,

and healing *every kind* of disease and sickness. This seems to be a ‘golden’ time for Jesus’ ministry, before the religious leaders began to plot against him. Not to say other times weren’t special, but at this point there seems to have been **no distraction** from the task at hand – restoring the hearts, minds and bodies of the people to their Lord. There seems to have been no resistance to Jesus...yet. Note in verse 24 the strong implication that *everyone* was healed. It was truly a joyous time.

This reminds me so much of how ministries often start out – everyone is excited and people are really into it. But we so easily become distracted by things of this world. Internal squabbles, money worries, wrong motives and just plain laziness quickly quench the fire and we soon become discouraged. **We have to keep praying together.** Anytime we start a ministry we enter into serious battle with the enemy. We have to stay connected to our Lord, battling the enemy with the Word and the Spirit. **If we neglect our relationship with the Lord, we will soon find our ministry becomes powerless.**

The Beatitudes

Jesus is now going to go into great depth to teach his disciples about the kingdom of heaven. He begins by giving them an example of the kind of life that is required for kingdom living. As we study this, note how the kingdom of heaven contrasts with the kingdom of this world. Kingdom living requires we do the just the opposite of what is required to succeed in this materialistic world.

Note that Chapter 5, verse 1 and 2 indicate that Jesus is giving this information specifically to his disciples. Though others may be listening in, the teaching is intended for them.

- 5) 5:3-10: ‘Blessed’ means happy –VERY happy. Joyous, in fact. Happy are those...
- ...*who are poor in spirit*: that is, happy are those who realize their need for God’s grace and salvation. We are literally bankrupt in terms of our ability to be righteous before God. Realizing this, we cry out to Him. Those who cry out for salvation will inherit the kingdom of heaven.
 - ...*who mourn*: because we *will* be comforted. The time will come when we will truly understand the purpose behind all the pain and suffering we endure in this world. We’ll see how God used that to mold and shape us and we’ll fully understand how much God loves us. All the pain we experienced in this life will turn to joy.
 - ...*the gentle*: or the meek. The ones that will inherit the earth are not those who are super-religious or haughty, but those who truly humble themselves before God. The word meek here does not mean timid, but ‘controlled strength’. Which earth will we inherit? See Rev. 21:1-7.
 - ...*who hunger and thirst for righteousness*: Are you seeking after the Lord with all your heart? Do you desire, more than anything, to serve him and to stand accepted before Him? If that’s what you hunger and thirst for, God promises you will be satisfied.
 - ...*the merciful*: Those who are merciful will receive mercy. As you do to others, so it will be done to you! See Matt 6:14-15. If you express mercy and forgiveness to others, that same mercy and forgiveness will be extended to you by the Lord.
 - ...*the pure in heart*: That is, those who are steadfast, whose heart is not divided between serving both the Lord and the things of this world. If you are pure in purpose, devoted to the Lord with all your heart, you will see God.
 - ...*the peacemakers*: or those who make peace. Those who seek reconciliation and restoration in relationships, bringing peace between God and man, will be called the sons of God.

Can you see what all of these qualities have in common? **Every one involves removing our ‘self’ from the equation and focusing outward.** They all require humility, patience, gentleness, long-suffering, mercy, grace... they all require the Spirit of God (Gal 5:22-23). None of these qualities are self-seeking. In addition, each of these is a quality of Jesus himself. These are the qualities we ought to seek to conform to, for these are the qualities of kingdom living.

- 6) 5:10-12: The word here for ‘persecute’ is dioko (dee-o-ko) and it means to drive away, to put to flight, to harass... to make life miserable for you. Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness or because of their testimony of Jesus are blessed, and their reward in heaven is very great. Again, this blessing requires a complete lack of selflessness. It requires putting the Lord first before all.

This is also a passage wherein Jesus puts himself on the same level as the Father. Jesus states that just as the prophets were persecuted because of their testimony to the Word of God, so too will we be persecuted because of our own testimony for Jesus. It’s one of the many claims to deity (his equality with the Father) that we see Jesus make throughout the gospels. This one is more subtle than others, but the claim is most definitely there.

- 7) 5:13: Salt brings flavor, salt creates thirst, salt preserves. These are all things we are called to do... to bring the spice of life to others, so that when they see us they become thirsty for what we have, and that they too would seek a relationship with the Lord as a result. If we lose our flavor (and become just like the world) we are useless as salt. The world will trample us underfoot. We have to keep that ‘spice’ in our life, that element that makes us different and stand out – an obedient life in Jesus Christ.
- 8) 5:14-16: The Lord intends for us to shine forth our light to a dark, lost world. How silly would it be to light a lamp, and then cover it up so no one can see it? That’s exactly what Jesus is saying to us here. We know the truth, we have salvation! We know the good news of the kingdom! So let the world see it, let that light shine forth so that it will do some good. Do good works and let the world look at us and marvel, and then we can give glory to Jesus who shines through us! So many people try to hide the fact that they are Christians. **Don’t be ashamed of the Lord! If we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us when he comes to take us home! (Mark 8:39).** Examine your heart. Are you ashamed to be called a Christian? If so, **it’s time to start praying for strength, boldness and courage!** See Philip, 1:20-21, 2 Tim 1:8-12, 2 Tim 2:25, 1 Peter 4:16.

MATTHEW 5:17-48

Jesus Puts the Law in Proper Perspective

Study Notes & Comments...

Having addressed kingdom living, Jesus now relates the law to himself. He does two things: first, he fulfills the law, which we shall see, and secondly, he becomes the lens that we read and understand the law through. Jesus clarifies the teaching of the Law, which man (the scribes and Pharisees) have muddled with their misguided interpretations.

- 1) 5:17-18: Jesus now begins to clarify his relationship to the law (the books of Moses) and the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc.). He first states that his purpose was not to annul the law or the prophets, but to *fulfill* them. You see, **everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus** (Luke 24:44, John 1:45, John 5:46). Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised seed, the foretold Messiah, the suffering servant, and the Holy One spoken of by David in the Psalms. Jesus, by his life, ministry, and death, fulfills the *intent* of the law. **What was the intent of the law?** To demonstrate to lost souls to their need for a savior (Romans 3:19-20). That savior has been provided in Christ Jesus. Jesus fulfills that role.

Jesus goes on to say that not only did he fulfill the law and the prophets by his coming, but that he will *continue* to fulfill the law until heaven and earth pass away (v. 18). You see, there are events yet to be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, his rule and reign on earth, and the resurrection. Jesus is stating here that ALL will be fulfilled, and that in fact he is the executor of that fulfillment. **Jesus is the focal point of the law and the prophets, past, present and future.**

Here's something interesting to ponder: Jesus says that the law will not pass away *until* heaven and earth pass away. But in regards to heaven and earth, in Matthew 24:35 Jesus states that although they will pass away, his words will *never* pass away! Put those two together and what is Jesus saying? **His words will endure even beyond the law!** The law will pass away with heaven and the earth, but Jesus words will endure forever!

- 2) 5:19-20: Jesus explains that no one has the right to set aside the commandments of God. He is instructing his disciples that in the same way that he teaches and lives the law, they too must teach and live the law. But Jesus doesn't *stop* there, he goes on....

Jesus states in no uncertain terms that unless your righteousness *exceeds* that of the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 20). This statement would have absolutely blown the disciples minds! The Pharisees kept the letter of the law to the Nth degree, they were the most strict of the strict in terms of keeping the letter of the law! How is it that they, who were so precise about the letter of the law, could not enter the kingdom of heaven? And if the Pharisees, who keep the letter of the law, aren't righteous enough to enter the kingdom of heaven, how can *we* possibly enter? That was Jesus point, exactly.

You see, though the Pharisees were concerned about living the law *on the outside*, the law was not 'written on their hearts' (Jer. 31:33). The Pharisees used the law to *appear* righteous before men, but on the inside their hearts were prideful and self-seeking. **They did not have the heart of God.**

Now, notice that in verse 19 Jesus states "whoever breaks the *least* of the commandments will be *least* in the kingdom of heaven." What can this mean? It means that *breaking a commandment (the law)* does not necessarily exclude you from the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because **entering the kingdom of heaven is not about the law, it's about righteousness, and righteousness does not**

come by the keeping the law! If it did, the Pharisees, by keeping the law as they did, would be able to enter in. This, I believe, is Jesus' point in verses 19-20.

Look at what Jesus tells the Pharisees about righteousness in Matthew 21:31b-32. **Righteousness isn't about the law, it's about repentance.** It's a condition of the heart. And righteousness is ours if we put our faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-23). See also Romans 4:13,24, 9:31-32, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal 2:21, 3:6, Phil. 3:8-9. Righteousness, which is required to enter the kingdom of heaven, comes only through faith in Jesus.

So put your faith in Jesus and righteousness will follow. If your heart is right before God, then you'll keep the essence of law (See Matt 22:40) by default.

Jesus spends the rest of this chapter comparing the *intent* of the law with the way the Pharisees taught it. The common people of the day did not read or speak Hebrew. (they spoke Aramaic). Only the scholars knew Hebrew. So the only means by which most of the disciples could understand or hear scripture was via the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. So in the following verses, when Jesus says "You have heard..." he's referring to the teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus is taking some of the popular teachings of the Pharisees here and contrasting them to the interpretation of scripture as God intended it.

- 3) 5:21-22: The Pharisees taught that "whoever murders is in danger of judgement." Jesus, however, states that even if a man is simply angry with his brother, he is in danger of judgement. And to call someone 'Raca' (expressing contempt for someone's intelligence) or 'fool' (expressing contempt for one's character) is in danger of the fires of hell.

Jesus, you see, goes to the *heart* condition. The Pharisees taught that until a deed was *performed*, there was no guilt or sin. But God is concerned with the root attitude, not the action. Sin is sin, whether it's at the heart level or the action level. **God is more interested in attitudes than action, because attitudes affect (or give birth to) action.**

Anger, bitterness and contempt lead to murder. So the root of the sin of murder is anger. Being angry with someone enough to want to kill them, or even to defame their character, is sin, period.

- 4) 5:23-26: Jesus now stresses the need for quick reconciliation between brothers. Even if you are at the altar of the Lord, Jesus says if you have something between you and your brother, leave the altar, take care of that issue first, and *then* return. **Jesus emphasizes that while religious duty is important, healing a broken relationship takes precedence.**

Jesus also stresses the need to reconcile *quickly* (v.25) with your adversaries. Do not put it off! The longer you let something stew, the longer bitterness has to brew, and the worse a situation will become! In the illustration Jesus uses, putting off reconciliation resulted in imprisonment! If there is bad blood between you and someone else, take action now! Don't let it fester. Bitterness and resentment do not remain idle. Like a blackberry bush they grow and grow until out of control. You've got to pull them up from the roots.

- 5) 5:27-30: Again, in regards to adultery, Jesus goes to the *heart* of the issue. **It's not just the act of adultery that is sin, it's the heart of adultery that's sin!** Jesus goes on to teach that if any part of your body causes you to sin, remove it! Pluck out those eyes! Cut off your hand!

At this point, if you are like me, you are probably saying to yourself "What hope do I have? I am a terrible, awful sinner!" That's exactly Jesus' point! We *need* to recognize that we are sinners. We are in desperate need of a savior! **The result of hearing this message should be that we cry out to God, saying, "Lord, help me!"** (See Romans 7:24-8:2, Luke 18:10-14). Thank goodness we have a

savior in Jesus Christ!

- 6) 5:31-32: The Pharisees had taken the law from Deut 24:1, and interpreted it in such a way that a man could give his wife a certificate of divorce for practically anything. Is your wife a bad cook? Well, in those days you could find someone to give you a certificate of divorce! Here, Jesus reminds his disciples that marriage is a permanent institution in God's eyes. It is not something to be taken or discarded lightly. Only in the case of adultery should divorce be an option, otherwise the divorcee commits adultery should he or she remarry.
- 7) 5:33-37: The Pharisees had developed levels of 'oaths' that could be taken, some of which were more binding in court than others. In other words, there were oaths you could give that by their very nature had legal loopholes! So the Pharisees would give an oaths that made them look honorable for the moment, but that they could legally slip out of later. Jesus says simply, don't swear by anything. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no. Let your character be such that if you promise something, people will know it's binding because they know your character. **Let your integrity be your oath.**

Jesus also makes the point in verse 36 that ultimately, we have very little control over the things we swear by. How many times have you sworn to do something by a certain date but circumstances prevented you from completing the task? Be careful of the things you swear to do so that your integrity is not undermined. Don't make an oath lightly.

- 8) 5:38-42: This law, from Exodus 21:24, was given as a guide for the judges of Israel so they could judge fairly and evenly in disputes. This law was *never intended* for the common man to use to justify revenge or retribution! Retribution is not the way God wants us to live! Jesus is saying here that turning our cheek is an honorable response, and in fact, **we should resist evil by doing good in return.** And not only should we do good, but we should go the *extra* mile, beyond what is expected! (See also Rom. 12:17-21) In doing so, we heap coals on the head of those who persecute us.
- 9) 5:43-47: The phrase 'and hate your enemy' was added to the law by the Pharisees. It's not in scripture! See Lev 19:18. Jesus says we should *love* our enemies! We should bless those who curse us, do good to those that hate us, and pray for those who spite us and persecute us! Jesus gave us the best example of this himself while he hung on the cross (Luke 23:34) – he asked his father in heaven to forgive those who put him there! How many times do we express our bitterness or frustration with others, even cursing them in our heart. This is not what the Lord desires for us! Our natural response to injustice should be that we bless, do good, and even pray for those who hurt us. Just as God indiscriminately sends sun and rain on both the just and unjust, and on those who are good or evil, (v.45) we should indiscriminately do good to everyone.

Jesus makes the point (v.46-47) that if we express love only to those who love us, we are no different from the world. It's in expressing love to the unlovely that we distinguish ourselves from the world.

- 10) 5:48: Here is the summary of everything Jesus has said so far: "be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Ouch! How can we ever hope to be perfect like God? We can't, in and of ourselves. **Again, the purpose of this message is, in part, to give us true perspective on our position before the Lord. Man, we need a savior!** Jesus, you see, was perfect. And our perfection comes from believing in him! Read Romans 1:16-17, and again, Romans 3:19-24. Praise the Lord for Jesus, he alone who gives us the ability to stand righteous before God (Heb 4:15-16).