

Bible Study--100 Key Texts--#3, January 25, 2017

Background for this week: Today we read from the gospel of Matthew. Matthew is believed to have been written around 80-90 CE. The gospel includes almost the entire book of Mark; however, Matthew describes the events and Jesus' words very differently than Mark. Matthew also seems to draw from another source he and Luke have in common. And Matthew includes some material distinctive to this gospel.

Matthew was clearly written by a Jewish author and displays distinctively Jewish concerns. More than any of the other gospels, Old Testament passages are quoted and expanded upon—a sign that the author wants to show that Jesus legitimately fulfilled Biblical prophecy. Jesus is shown to be the long awaited Messiah of Old Testament prophecy.

Yet, Matthew is also very critical of the leaders of Judaism, especially the Pharisees. We read many passages in Matthew in which Jesus threaten the religious leaders with hell itself. Many scholars believe this reflects the situation of the Church post 70 CE (the temple was destroyed by Rome and Judaism began to draw sharp lines of distinction between itself and what it regarded as the Christian heresy). Remember that the words of Jesus were spoken 50 years or more earlier than when Matthew wrote them down—and as words are passed along from generation to generation, they seldom remain just as they were spoken.

Matthew is sometimes called the “Church’s gospel” because it refers to the church on several occasions. Actually, it is the only gospel in which Jesus himself uses the word “church.” The Roman Catholic Church sees in Matthew the beginning of the papal tradition in Peter, “the rock” upon (whom) Jesus will build his church.

There is a lot of teaching material in Matthew, including the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus affirms the place and value of the Law in Matthew. Yet, while Jesus clearly expects his followers to exceed the Pharisees and scribes in terms of obedience to the law, his understanding of the law is radically different than

theirs. In the Sermon on the Mount, he goes up a mountain to expound on the law—some scholars have seen this as a reference to Mt. Sinai and Jesus as the “new Moses,” bringing a new or sharpened understanding of the Law of God.

The text for today: Matthew 5:1-6:4 (The first part of the Sermon on the Mount.) Please feel free to post your answers to these questions on our 100 Key Texts Facebook Page and engage in a discussion.

First, read the entire text. What is very familiar to you in this passage? What surprised you, seemed new to you? Was there anything that really sticks out in your mind after reading it? Questions that arise?

Next, look at the text in parts.

First, read 5:1-12, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. What title is often used to describe these verses of Matthew? Which of these teachings do you most identify with? Which of these seems strangest or most difficult for you? Which of these seems most relevant to the events of our present age?

Taken together, what do you think Jesus’ purpose was in giving us the Beatitudes?

Now read v. 13-16. What is similar and/or different about the images of salt and light? Do we function as salt and light in the world? Share an example of a time when someone acted like salt in your circle of friends or like light in your workplace/school/neighborhood.

Read v. 17-48. Consider the following questions and observations.

- Note how verses 17-20 seem to summarize the theme of the rest of the chapter. The religious leaders of Israel were careful to obey every law in the Old Testament, as well as in the tradition and explanations which had grown up around the law. So they were “righteous” people under the law! What do you think Jesus means when he says “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven?”

- Which of the following statements seems most shocking to you and why.
 1. “If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.” (v 22ff) OR
 2. “I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (v. 28) OR
 3. “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone want to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.”(v. 39-40) OR
 4. “I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (v 44)

- In verse 48, Jesus says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” What is your reaction to this statement?! Is it possible to be perfect? What do you think Jesus means by re-interpreting the commandments in the most radical possible way?

- Apply any of Jesus’ teachings to the world we live in today. Which of these statements seems particularly relevant to you today? Can you cite specific examples?

Read 6:1-4. We are told to give in secret, not in public. Yet, we often see names of generous donors listed in newsletters and on walls. Why is this done? How do you feel about it? What do you think Jesus would say? Why?

A couple of major questions (Please respond to each of these two questions on our 100 Key Texts Facebook Page)

1. In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes some people who do not appear to be particularly fortunate as blessed. What does he mean by that? Is it a

future or a present condition? Can you think of an example of someone who fits one of the Beatitudes?

2. Which word best describes the sermon on the mount for you: a) practical; b) idealistic; c) impossible; d) visionary? Which part of the sermon most convicts you to live differently? How will you attempt to do that?

For your prayers: O God, from you no secrets are hid. You know my strengths and my weaknesses, my sincerity and my hypocrisy. You know when I see things clearly and when I deceive myself. My life is an open book to you.

Keep me, Lord Jesus, from wallowing in self-condemnation, but also keep me from self-praise. Help me to see the gaps between what I believe and how I act. Comfort and trouble me with your unconditional love and grace. Make of me a new creation. Stir me to walk in your way. Amen.