DIVINE GRACE IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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Ryan Taylor Johnson

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DIVINE GRACE IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Ryan Taylor Johnson

Read and Approved by:

_____
Robert L. Plummer (Chair)

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Jonathan T. Pennington

_____
William F. Cook

Date_____

For the glory of God

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGJU	*Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums*
AT	Acta Theologica
ATR	Anglican Theological Review
BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	*Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BR	Biblical Research
BRev	Bible Review
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BT	The Bible Translator
CB	*Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series*
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CJ	Concordia Journal
CSR	Christian Scholar's Review
CTM	Currents in Theology and Mission
CTQ	Concordia Theological Quarterly
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
EJ	Evangelical Journal
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
FETS	Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series

HTKNT	*Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	The Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JTI	Journal of Theological Interpretation
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JSHJ	Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NAC	The New American Commentary Series
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NT	*Novum Testamentum*
NTS	New Testament Studies
PCNT	Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
PSB	The Princeton Seminary Bulletin
RivB	*Rivista biblica*
SBL	The Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSS	The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Supplements
SBR	Studies of the Bible and its Reception
SNTS	Society for the New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTU	*Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*
TB	Tyndale Bulletin

TBA	The Biblical Archaeologist
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TET	The Expository Times
TS	Theological Studies
TJ	Trinity Journal
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WMANT	*Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*
WUZNT	*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*

PREFACE

I am very thankful for the many professors, peers, and friends that helped me along the way while this project came to fruition. The idea for this study was born out of a second reading of *Paul and the Gift* by John Barclay. For that I must thank Jarvis Williams and Brian Vickers for assigning and discussing the book with me. Jonathan Pennington and Bill Cook both read early article-length attempts at this thesis (or a similar thesis on John's Gospel), and their feedback proved invaluable. My doctoral supervisor Robert Plummer's consistent encouragement and helpful revisions truly made this project possible, and I am very thankful to have studied under such a godly and kind man. Hannah Gleason served faithfully as my copy editor, a truly unenviable job. If my work is clean grammatically, it is in large part due to her efforts. Finally, my parents, Tommy and Debbie Johnson deserve so much thanks. Without heir constant love and support I would not be typing these words.

Ryan T. Johnson

Louisville, Kentucky
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When a reader of the New Testament goes in search of how to understand divine grace, Paul's letters, particularly Galatians and Romans, will likely be the first place he or she turns. This makes sense because of the 155 uses of χάρις in the New Testament, Paul uses the word 100 times (roughly 64.5 percent).[1] Paul also makes direct statements about what grace is and is not. Romans 11:6 says, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." With statements like this, written in prose rather than inferred through narrative or poetry, turning to Paul for a definition of divine grace is understandable. Paul, however, does not, or at least should not, have a monopoly on one's understanding of grace in the New Testament.

Thesis

Despite the lack of direct discussion and definition of χάρις, the Gospels, and Matthew in particular, provide helpful, albeit less direct, data on divine grace. Even though Matthew's Gospel does not make a direct statement defining grace, or even use the word χάρις, one can discern strong patterns of divine grace. Matthew views divine grace as a lavish and permanent outpouring to those who are unworthy to receive it, before they ask for it, and that accomplishes the divine goals behind the giving. This giving is portrayed against the backdrop of divine judgment, and God expects a return of worship and obedience. A defense and explanation of this conclusion will make up the bulk of the dissertation.

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[1] This statistic takes all 13 letters attributed to Paul into account.

Methodology

How can one define grace in Matthew, especially given that Matthew does not use χάρις a single time? John Barclay's work *Paul and the Gift* provides a way forward. Barclay developed a helpful taxonomy of six "perfections" of grace that will guide this work on grace in Matthew.[2]

Barclay's work on grace in Paul and Second Temple literature is not merely a word study of χάρις. In fact, his work is primarily conceptual. His stated strategy is to "place the relevant terms and concepts . . . within the category of gift."[3] The "conceptual field" under study is "best captured by the anthropological category of gift."[4] Placing the theological concept of divine grace within the category of gift allows Barclay to reexamine how Paul, a selection of Second Temple Jewish authors, and a long list of Pauline interpreters understand grace.

Barclay uses the idea of perfection, which he borrows from Kenneth Burke, to develop a way of discussing grace.[5] Perfection "refers to the tendency to draw out a concept to its endpoint or extreme, whether for definitional clarity or for rhetorical or ideological advantage."[6] The idea is to observe when an author, ancient or modern, presses on a concept in order to define it or exclude an idea from being associated with it. An author does not *need* to perfect an idea, and one can speak of a gift that is not a quintessential gift by which all other gifts are judged. In fact, this is the normal way of

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[2] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Barclay's more recent work, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, is a more accessible version of *Paul and the Gift* that also expands his argument in certain ways. In particular, Barclay begins to expand his argument to some of Paul's other letters. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

[3] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 2.

[4] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 2–3.

[5] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 67; Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 292–94; Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966), 16–20.

[6] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 67.

communicating.[7] When one begins to discuss divine giving/grace, however, authors tend to push the concept to the extreme in different ways. In Barclay's words, "[Perfections] are likely to arise in relation to God: since God is *ens perfectissimum* ("the most perfect entity"), concepts used with reference to God are likely to appear in their most complete, extreme, or absolute form."[8] Divine actions are typically done to the uttermost, and so, when describing a divine phenomenon there exists a tendency toward perfecting concepts.

Barclay recognizes that gift or grace is a "multifaceted phenomenon," and thus, it can be perfected in multiple ways.[9] He identifies six common perfections of grace: superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy, and non-circularity. These perfections are intended to function as endpoints on a spectrum.[10] It is important to note that an author can perfect any number of these perfections, or none at all, to varying degrees and even in different ways. One perfection does not entail another.[11] Barclay's perfections of grace function as heuristic categories.[12] They serve as points by which to orient the discussion. It is a taxonomy flexible enough to allow for nuance and discussion but definite enough to move the conversation forward.[13]

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[7] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 68.

[8] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 68.

[9] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 69.

[10] John M. G. Barclay, "The Gift and Its Perfections: A Response to Joel Marcus and Margaret Mitchell," *JSNT* 39, no. 3 (2017): 337 Barclay clarifies this point in response to Mitchell's review. Margaret Mitchell, "Gift Histories," *JSNT* 39, no. 3 (2017): 309–15.

[11] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70 Barclay expresses this in numerous places. He is intent on making this point very clear.

[12] Barclay, "The Gift and Its Perfections," 337.

[13] Douglas J. Moo, "John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* and the New Perspective on Paul," *Themelios* 41, no. 2 (2016): 286. While critiquing Barclay at a number of points, Schreiner speaks positively of the taxonomy. Thomas R. Schreiner, "*Paul and the Gift*: A Review Article," *Themelios* 41, no. 1 (2016): 57.

I will pursue this thesis by applying Barclay's taxonomy to the Gospel of Matthew. I will work from start to finish through the Gospel six times, once for each perfection. Relevant texts will be examined thoroughly, giving due reference to the surrounding context, literary structure, narrative progression, and salvation-historical timeline. This should allow for special attention to be paid to each facet of grace without giving way to proof texting. Because each perfection can stand on its own and does not entail another, considering each by itself should allow for proper nuancing of the concepts involved. Each chapter argues not only whether a certain facet of grace is perfected, but also in what way Matthew develops this theme. In order to better understand what each perfection of grace entails, I have provided below a short summary.

Singularity refers to the attitude of the giver being entirely benevolent. This means that God causes only what is "purely and entirely good."[14] One can conceive of a perfect giver as being one whose only instinct is to be gracious. An emphasis on God's attitude as being only benevolent does cause problems for many who try to reconcile it with the biblical data. Interpreters have perfected this aspect of grace in the past; Barclay cites Seneca, Plato, Philo, and Maricon to name a few, but one must somehow reconcile it with passages dealing with God's just punishment of the wicked in order to do so.[15]

Superabundance "concerns the size, significance, or permanence of the gift."[16] This means that the larger, costlier, or longer lasting a gift is, the more "perfect" the gift is. When discussing divine giving, Barclay acknowledges that it "would be difficult to imagine any depiction of divine gift-giving that does not include this perfection."[17] Divine giving is often expressed in terms of excessive scale because the gift's source is

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[14] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 71.

[15] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 71.

[16] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70.

[17] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70.

from a being greater than the recipient. Different authors, however, will draw out this theme more than others.

Priority concerns the timing of the gift. Specifically, a gift perfect in priority is given before the recipient's initiative. In other words, the giver makes the first move in the act of being gracious. The gift is not given in response to the recipients request. It is easy to see how the gift can be viewed as more gracious when the gift stems solely from the motivation of the giver, rather than as a response to the recipient's prompt. A gift is considered perfect in this way because it is spontaneous, not given as a return to a previous gift, and "is absolutely free."[18]

Efficacy concerns the result of the gift. If an author portrays a gift as accomplishing what the giver intends, efficacy is perfected. One can easily see how a gift that does what the giver intends is more perfect than one that does not. Barclay says, "In some form or another, everyone can agree that God's gifts are effective: the extent to which they are the sole and sufficient cause of the human response is the degree to which this facet of grace has been perfected."[19] Authors discussing divine grace will go into more or less detail on how a gift is efficacious.

An incongruous gift is one given "without regard to the worth of the recipient."[20] In antiquity, due to the use of gift-giving in building social connections, this means giving to someone who may not be able to return the gift or to someone not of high social standing. An incongruous gift could be considered more perfect "precisely because it does not take account of prior conditions of worth."[21]

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[18] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 71–72.

[19] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 74.

[20] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 73.

[21] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 73.

Finally, a gift can be non-circular, or escaping the cycle of reciprocity. This is the notion of what has come to be known as a "pure gift," or a gift given without expectation of return. While not unheard of in antiquity, Barclay notes that this is more of a modern notion of gift giving.[22] Reciprocity can take many forms. In human giving one can imagine gratitude, praise (public or private), or even statues or plaques commemorating a gift. When dealing with divine giving the reciprocity often falls into one of three categories: worship, almsgiving, obedience to commands. Where we see an expectation of reciprocity in response to giving, non-circularity is not perfected.

Barclay gives a short definition of each perfection that is worth reproducing here as a quick reference for any reader unfamiliar with Barclay's work:

1. *Superabundance:* The supreme scale, lavishness, or permanence of the gift;
2. *Singularity:* The attitude of the giver as marked solely and purely by benevolence;
3. *Priority*: The timing of the gift before the recipient's initiative;
4. *Incongruity*: the distribution of the gift without regard to the worth of the recipient;
5. *Efficacy*: The impact of the gift on the nature or agency of the recipient;
6. *Non-circularity:* The escape of the gift from an ongoing cycle of reciprocity.[23]

This taxonomy can be applied to the Gospel of Matthew, and should help reveal the patterns of grace found within the first Gospel's narrative.

Summary of Research

Though the state of Matthean studies is vast, to my knowledge, no major contribution to the topic of divine grace in the first Gospel exists.[24] A monograph length

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[22] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 73.

[23] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 185–86.

[24] For recent trends in Matthean scholarship, see Rodney Reeves, "The Gospel of Matthew," in

treatment of this theme has yet to be produced. Most scholars use the language of grace/gift/benefaction regularly in their writings on the Gospel, but few, if any, have taken the time to specifically examine the patterns of grace in Matthew. A brief survey of recent significant scholars/publications on Matthew will illustrate the typically limited reflections offered on Matthew's teaching on the concept of grace.

Scholars tend to default to the traditional "favor to the undeserving" definition without considering how Matthew develops the theme. In his commentary, Donald Hagner uses the language of grace frequently. He speaks of an "unexpected grace" because God directs the giving to those unworthy to receive it.[25] Hagner even uses the language of the "priority" of grace.[26] He does not, however, use the term in the same sense as Barclay. By the priority of grace, Hagner seems to mean its significance as a part of the overall theological framework with which Matthew writes.

Hagner is typical of the primary way scholars discuss grace. Most scholars recognize its presence, and many see the concept as the backdrop or silent force driving the rest of the narrative. Roger Mohrlang, one of the few scholars who dedicates a section of his work to grace in Matthew, calls grace an "underlying concept" that is "scattered throughout the Gospel."[27] Mohrlang's work is a comparative study of Matthean and Pauline ethics, so when he discusses grace, he does so with an eye to the ethical implications. Grace consists of an underlying structure that is presupposed, but he does not think that Matthew builds ethical demands directly on divine benevolence.[28]

The State of New Testament Studies: A Summary of Recent Research, ed. Nijay Gupta and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 275–96.

[25] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 132; Carson also seems to take this view of grace. D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 225.

[26] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 189.

[27] Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 78.

[28] Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul*, 80.

R. T. France agrees with Mohrlang that Matthew must be read in the context of grace.[29] In fact, France argues that discipleship, which is a process of "increasingly experience[ing] the love and provision of [Jesus'] 'Father in heaven'" should be read as occurring in the realm of gift and grace, not as a wage earned by obedience.[30] France cites Mohrlang positively in regard to the latter's comparison of Paul and Matthew, but the former claims that Matthew does, in fact, develop his ethical system on the foundation of grace.[31]

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison's commentary also contributes to this line of thinking. They say, "Grace comes before task, succor before demand, healing before imperative. The first act of the Messiah is not the imposition of his commandments but the giving of himself. Today's command presupposes yesterday's gift."[32] When commenting on the Sermon on the Mount they claim that the position of the beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon in conjunction with the healing statements of Matthew 4:23–5:2 shows the "precedence of grace."[33] The whole Sermon, therefore, should be placed within the context of grace and "presupposes God's mercy and prior saving activity."[34]

David Holwerda provides one of the lengthier treatments of grace in Matthew, devoting six pages to the topic.[35] Once again, the context for the discussion is the law in Matthew. He recognizes that "[Matthew's] structures of grace are more implicit [than his

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[29] R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 268–70.

[30] France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 269.

[31] France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 270.

[32] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 427.

[33] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 466.

[34] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 466.

[35] David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 114–20.

emphasis on righteousness], and thus are more difficult to discover."[36] Holwerda notes a structure of grace in the first chapters of Matthew, claiming, "Jesus is God's gift of grace."[37] Identifying the content of God's grace with the person of Christ discussed from the opening lines of the Gospel leads Holwerda to claim that God's grace makes Matthew's demand for righteousness possible.[38] Even though he spends more time developing the topic than most scholars, he falls into the same basic position as the others surveyed above.

Not all scholars agree that grace is an active concept in Matthew. In particular Eung Chun Park says, "Since Matthew does not deal with the question of χάρις at the textual level . . . we should not make a presumption as to whether Matthew's soteriology has the dimension of χάρις or not."[39] Due to Matthew's lack of use of χάρις, Park claims the best readers can do is to remain agnostic on Matthew's theology of grace. He does not believe that Matthew's soteriology necessarily denies the concept, but that there are other, more helpful terms that can be applied to Matthew's theology.[40]

One other scholar deserves mention before leaving this section. Conrad Gempf in "Paul, the Gift, and Jesus; or What Happened to the Jesus Tradition?" decries Barclay's lack of use of the Synoptic Gospels in his work.[41] Gempf then applies Barclay's taxonomy to the parable of the unforgiving servant, coming to the conclusion that Jesus "stress[es] precisely those 'perfections' Barclay says Paul stressed:

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[36] Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel,* 114.

[37] Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel,* 115.

[38] Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel,*1 16.

[39] Eung Chun Park, "A Soteriological Reading of the Great Commandment Pericope in Matthew 22:34–40," *BR* 54 (2009): 76.

[40] Park, "A Soteriological Reading of the Great Commandment Pericope in Matthew 22:34–40," 77.

[41] Conrad Gempf, "Paul, the Gift, and Jesus: Or What Happened to the Jesus Tradition?," *EQ* 89, no. 4 (2018): 311–17.

incongruity, superabundance, and priority."[42] Gempf is right to see the value of Barclay's taxonomy, but the main thrust of his article is to critique Barclay for not dealing with the Jesus traditions more in his work. This hardly seems a fair critique of a book within the field of Pauline studies.

Scholars tend to use the language of grace uncritically, either defaulting to classic definitions or only discussing it in relation to the law. Hopefully this survey has shown the need of a concentrated work on grace in the Gospel of Matthew.

Significance

As mentioned above, to my knowledge, no one has produced a monograph length treatment of divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew. My dissertation should fill that void. More broadly, however, this thesis should contribute to the field of Matthean soteriology. Many of the topics under consideration will fall under this umbrella: judgment, the kingdom of heaven, the identity of those receiving grace, etc. This work could also benefit scholars working on the nature of grace in the New Testament or Bible in general. Hopefully it will provide a data point in the grand scheme of divine grace in the Bible.

Argument

The order of the six perfections could be rearranged as each perfection stands on its own, but throughout this study the concepts of each perfection seemed to significantly overlap with one or more of the others. Singularity and superabundance, therefore, act as opposites of one another. Priority and efficacy both touch on issues dealing with predestination and human agency. Finally, incongruity and non-circularity speak to the grace-verses-works discussion ever-present in theology. I have, therefore, decided to arrange the chapters as follows.

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[42] Gempf, " Paul, the Gift, and Jesus," 316.

Chapter 2: Singularity

The Gospel of Matthew emphatically does not perfect this facet of grace. Even a cursory reading of the first Gospel reveals a strong theme of God's judgment. If judgment is not central to the narrative, it is at the very least a crucial element in Matthew's theology.[43] Throughout the Gospel, the evangelist places salvation and judgment side-by-side, as two sides of the same eschatological coin. In other words, Matthew has no issue portraying God as a gracious savior while at the same time showing him to judge and punish the world in his wrath. I will argue that Matthew does not perfect singularity and in fact uses the notion of God's judgment to highlight his gracious saving of sinners.

Chapter 3: Superabundance

Matthew goes out of his way to express the supreme value, permanence, and scale of God's grace. For the purpose of this study, this means that superabundance is perfected in the first Gospel. The back-to-back short parables describing the value of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13:44–46 and the sacrifice of the divine Son of God, illustrate this point nicely. While Matthew usually prefers the language of the kingdom of Heaven, occasionally he speaks of eternal life (Cf. Matt 19:16–30; 25:31–46). This illustrates the permanence of the gift. Finally, Matthew emphasizes the magnitude of the gift when Jesus describes the immensity of the debt God forgave (Matt 18:21–35) These three factors, when combined with a lack of singularity,[44] serve to emphasize the superabundant nature of God's grace.

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[43] Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), xiv; Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Held (London, England: SMC Press, 1963), 62; Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSS 79 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 13; Daniel Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 13; Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 285–98.

[44] Matthew tends to juxtapose texts describing the horrors of judgement with texts describing

Chapter 4: Priority

Matthew's portrait of divine grace perfects priority, meaning that God takes the initiative in the giving without prompting or request from the recipients. This statement may not be obvious, as many passages do in fact show the recipients of grace calling out for mercy before receiving it (Cf. Matt 9; 15:21–28). The healing ministry in particular seems to work against the notion of priority, but when Matthew writes on issues concerning salvation, the first Gospel consistently depicts God as taking the initiative. One can see this first in Jesus's calling of his disciples (Matt 4:18–22, 9:9), and second, Matthew presents the events of the Gospel as part of God's divinely predestined plan. Nothing in the first Gospel happens by accident, and Matthew also emphasizes prophecy fulfillment, which leaves the reader with the theological impression of God's divine predestining of events. In addition to these considerations, God's preparation of the kingdom of heaven as an inheritance "from the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου)" strongly indicates that his grace derives from his own initiative (Matt 25:34).

Chapter 5: Efficacy

Most authors dealing with divine grace will portray it as efficacious. What kind of deity would give a gift that would not accomplish its purpose? That Matthew perfects efficacy in some way is, in many ways, unsurprising. The question, however, is the extent to which Matthew portrays God's giving as the "sole and sufficient cause of the human response."[45] Matthew states purpose/goal of the Christ gift plainly at the outset of the Gospel. Jesus came to "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21), and God accomplishes this goal in the death of Christ (Matt 20:28; 26:26–29). In addition to this conclusion, I will argue for a strong view of divine sovereignty in salvation. First, Jesus's

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the benefits of salvation.

[45] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 73.

parables hide the truth from some and reveal it to others (Matt 13:10–17), and certain passages use categorical language to describe the fate of man (i.e. one is either wheat or chaff, wheat or weed, sheep or goat). These texts communicate that what you *are* determines what you *do*, and what you *are*, is a result of divine revelation. Second, in Matthew 11:25–30 and 16:13–20, Matthew demonstrates that salvific knowledge finds its source in God. Finally, Matthew's use of election language (ἐκλεκτός) combined with the other pieces of evidence mentioned above, leads me to argue that Matthew perfects the efficacy of divine grace.

Chapter 6: Incongruity

In the Gospel of Matthew God gives without regard to the worth of the recipient. In other words, Matthew perfects incongruity in his presentation of divine grace. Much like priority, this facet requires nuance. Jesus says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). Balancing this text, however, is a strong theme of the unworthy entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt 9:13). Jesus reveals the kingdom to children rather than to the wise (Matt 11:25–30; 18:1–6). Tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of heaven before the religious leaders (Matt 21:28–31). The theme of discipleship failure and the inclusion of Gentiles within the eschatological people of God also show that God gives to those who are unworthy to receive it. This does not negate the requirement of righteous behavior and obedience.

Chapter 7: Non-Circularity

Matthew does not perfect the facet of grace known as non-circularity. This means the first evangelist believes that divine grace does not entail an escape from a pattern of reciprocity. On the contrary, Matthew's Gospel displays a strong expectation of response from the recipients of his benevolent action. Response to divine grace takes one

of two forms: vertical (worship/praise and the willingness to follow Jesus, whatever the cost) and horizontal (obedience and forgiveness/mercy to fellow men). At different points in the narrative, particularly after a miracle, different groups are said to praise or worship God and/or Christ (cf. Matt 9:1–8, 14:33, 28:16–20). I will argue that this is a form of expected return for receiving divine grace. Often, however, the recompense for benevolence is shown to other men. In fact, Matthew requires those who receive mercy to show mercy (Matt 18:21–35). The expectation of reciprocity in no way changes the fact that salvation in Matthew is a result of grace, but salvation by grace does not negate or alter the expected response.

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CHAPTER 2

SINGULARITY

Modern pastors and theologians tend to downplay or even argue against attributes of God that grate against modern sensibilities. Of all that can be said about the God of the Bible, the trait of God that is most universally discredited within this trend is God's wrath toward sinners and his judgment of the wicked. Many take issue with considering wrath a divine attribute and with a God who punishes iniquity. In other words, some today would perfect the facet of grace known as singularity.

This aspect of grace concerns the motive with which God gives.[1] Is God's "sole and exclusive mode of operation benevolence or goodness," or does a biblical understanding of justice and judgment necessitate a God who, in addition to being gracious, also visits wrath upon the guilty?[2]

Few conceptions of God and his actions could be further from the teachings of the Gospel of Matthew than one that does not include a robust view of divine wrath and judgment.[3] The first evangelist emphatically does not perfect singularity. In fact, the notion of God's wrath and judgment of sinners constitutes a central theme of the first Gospel.[4] Divine wrath against sin and the coming day of judgment in Matthew acts as the

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[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 70–71.

[2] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 71.

[3] Luz is right when he says, "Perhaps judgement and grace belong in a dialectical relationship. A God who only loves but does not pass judgement would be a forgiveness dispenser who could be manipulated at will. A God who only passes judgement but does not love, first and foremost, would be a monster. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 132.

[4] On the centrality of divine judgment as a theme in Matthew, see: Daniel Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 13; Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSS 79 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 13;

dark canvas on which the painting of the glory of divine grace shines bright.[5] To trace this idea of judgment through Matthew I will begin by looking at the forward-pointing orientation and expectation of the coming day of judgment before examining the details of that judgment.

The Coming Day of Judgment

Matthew's primary orientation in regard to themes of judgment, seemingly ubiquitous in the first Gospel,[6] is toward the final, eschatological day of judgment. There is a coming day when everyone will stand before God and inherit either the kingdom of heaven and eternal life or be cast away into eternal punishment. The Son of Man will come again in power and God will repay each according to what they have done. In other words, most of Matthew's judgment language concerns the final judgment.[7] Matthew uses at least five different phrases to speak of this final day of judgment: (1) ἡ μελλούσα ὀργή ("the coming wrath") (Matt 3:7), (2) ἡμέρα κρίσεως ("day of judgment") or simply ἡ κρίσις ("the judgment") (Matt 10:15; 11:20–24, 12:33–37; 12:38–42), (3) ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ

Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Held (London, England: SMC Press, 1963), 58–62; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, SNTS 88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110; Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 2–3; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 139.

[5] This is the theme that Hamilton traces through the whole Bible, and he argues is the central theme of scripture. In regard to Matthew he says, "The center of the theology of Matthew is the glory of God in salvation through judgment." James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 360.

[6] According to Marguerat and Luz (who cites Marguerat), judgment themes appear in 60 of 148 Matthean pericopes. Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 563; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 139n52.

[7] Most concerns the final judgment, but certainly not all. For a list of texts dealing with reward and punishment in this world, in the world to come, and the final day of judgment, see, Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, 149–52; Mohrlang also seems to make a similar claim about Matthean judgment themes. See Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 51. For more on the present/future tension in Matthean eschatology, see, Ben Cooper, "Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew," *JSNT* 33, no. 1 (2010): 59–80; Donald A. Hagner, "Matthew's Eschatology," in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honour of Robert H. Gundry*, JSNTSS 100 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), 49–71.

ἡμέρᾳ (“on that day”) (Matt 7:21–23; 24:36), (4) το τέλος (“the end”) (Matt 10:22; 24:13), (5) and ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος (“the end of the age”) (Matt 13:36–43; 13:47–50; 24:3; 28:20).[8]

Ἡ μελλούσα ὀργή (“The Coming Wrath”)

John the Baptist arrives on the scene in Matthew 3 preaching a doctrine of repentance in light of the nearness of the kingdom (Matt 3:1–12). Captivated by this strange man, many in Jerusalem and Judea and the surrounding regions went to confess their sins and be baptized by him (Matt 3:4–6). In addition to the crowds, John notices many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to observe him. It is in John’s statement to the Jewish leadership that the first reference to the day of judgment in Matthew’s Gospel appears. John says, γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν,[9] τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς? (Matt 3:7).

This, in fact, is the first and only explicit mention of God’s wrath in Matthew,[10] and as France says, “The language of judgment (here literally ‘anger’) now singles out the negative aspect of the coming of God’s kingship.”[11] This wrath is an apocalyptic[12] and eschatological[13] expression of God’s judgment against those who do

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[8] For this list see both the following sources, Zoltan Erdey and Kevin Smith, “The Function of ‘Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth’ in Matthew’s Gospel,” *AT* 32, no. 1 (2012): 30; Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 114–15.

[9] For the background and function of γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν in Matthew see, Craig S. Keener, “‘Brood of Vipers’ (Matthew 3.7; 12.34; 23.33),” *JSNT* 28, no. 1 (2005): 3–11.

[10] As Nolland says, “God’s ‘wrath’ has not been mentioned to this point, but it is implicit in v. 1 in the call to repent in view of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Though the motif of God’s judgment is prominent in Matthew, God’s wrath is not mentioned again.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 143. For the possible background to the idea of “the coming wrath” see, Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 170–73.

[11] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 110.

[12] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 50; Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 172; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 114.

[13] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004),

not repent of their sins. John provides more details on the form of God's wrath in 3:10–12.

First, John presents God's coming day of judgment as an axe laid at the root of trees, and πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται (Matt 3:10). As Nolland says, "The felling of trees is a prophetic image of judgment in a number of OT texts."[14] The trees are not just cut down, however, they are cut down and "thrown into the fire (εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται)" (Matt 3:10). This is the first of three references to "fire (πῦρ)" within John's short speech. Fire is one of the key descriptors Matthew uses to explain the punishment of the wicked throughout his Gospel.[15] For now, however, it is important to note that God's wrath *burns*, and this use of fire as a descriptor of wrath is important for the following two verses.

After his description of God's wrath as cutting and burning trees, John informs listeners of the mightier one who is to follow him. John baptized with water, but the one who comes after, Jesus, baptizes ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Matt 3:11).[16] Commentators have disagreed sharply over what this phrase entails.[17] Some scholars, appealing to the singular ὑμᾶς who receive the baptism and the one preposition ἐν governing both πνεύματι ἁγίῳ and πυρί, claim this is one baptism. Within the one baptism position some argue the one Holy Spirit and fire baptism is a purifying agent that burns away the bad

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[14] Nolland cites Isaiah 6:13; 10:33–34 (cf. v 15); 32:19; Ezekiel 31:12; Daniel 4:14. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 145; For more on the background of this image see, Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 173–76.

[15] The place of fire in judgment is discussed more below.

[16] Some, like Reiser argue that "in the Holy Spirit" was not an original part of John's message. Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*; Webb has argued convincingly, however, that John's message did indeed include reference to baptism in the Holy Spirit. Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSS 62 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991), 272–75.

[17] For a history of interpretation see, Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 138; Luz cites Marconcini. See, Benito Marconcini, "Tradizione e redazione in Mt 3,1–12," *RivB* 19 (1971): 165–86.

from the people of God,[18] while still others argue the one baptism contains elements of both grace and judgment and that the effect depends upon the recipient.[19] Other scholars maintain that John implies two baptisms, one of grace in the Holy Spirit, and one of judgment by fire.[20] The best solution seems to be the position of Dunn.[21] John here refers to one baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire that visits the recipients in one form or the other, depending on whether one has repented or not. That πυρί refers to a purifying agent and not to judgment seems unlikely. In the previous verse those who do not bear fruit are thrown into the πῦρ as a clear symbol of judgment, and in the following verse the chaff is burned with "unquenchable fire (πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ)" (Matt 3:10, 12). Also, as I discuss below, fire is one of the signatures and recurring features of Matthew's depiction of judgment of the wicked. If πυρί here refers to a purifying agent, it would be the only use in the Gospel that does not refer to God's punishment of the wicked.

Finally, John compares God's coming wrath to the farmer clearing the threshing floor; on the last day the wheat will be gathered into the barn and the chaff will be burned with "unquenchable fire (πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ)" (Matt 3:12).[22] Notice how,

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[18] D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 105; This seems to be the position France takes even though he acknowledges that fire is likely a symbol of judgment. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 113.

[19] James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," *NT* 14, no. 2 (1972): 86; Charette makes this point as well. See, Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 122; This seems to be the argument of McManigal as well, but he does not see a positive side to the one baptism. It is meant as the removal of the wicked. Daniel Wayne McManigal, *A Baptism of Judgment in the Fire of the Holy Spirit: John's Eschatological Proclamation in Matthew 3*, LNTS 595 (London, England: T & T Clark, 2019), 18; Davies and Allison also argue that it should be taken as "fiery breath," and therefore a hendiadys. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 317; This seems to be the view of Köstenberger. He acknowledges that fire refers to judgment but does not give much detail outside of that fact. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Baptism in the Gospels," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (B&H Academic: Nashville, 2006), 18.

[20] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 138; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 147.

[21] Dunn, "Spirit-and-Fire Baptism," 86.

[22] For the background to this image see, Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 176–80; Webb argues that the farmer has already separated the wheat from the chaff, and that the tool used in this verse is actually a winnowing shovel rather than a winnowing fork. While I do not agree with all of his conclusions that he draws from this change to the traditional picture, the article is intriguing. Robert L. Webb, "The Activity of John the Baptist's Expected Figure at the Threshing Floor (Matthew 3:12 = Luke 3:17)," *JSNT* 14, no. 43 (1991): 103–11.

throughout the pericope, Matthew juxtaposes the theme of salvation and judgment. This is meant to drive readers to repentance and faith, and this technique will be used regularly in the first Gospel. The day of judgment will be one of great joy for those who have repented and bore fruit and terrible agony for those who have not.

Ἡμέρα κρίσεως ("The Day of Judgment")

One of the more common ways Matthew refers to the final judgment is through the use of the expression ἡμέρα κρίσεως ("day of judgment") or the shortened ἡ κρίσις ("the judgment") (Matt 10:15; 11:20–24; 12:33–37; 12:38–42). These texts use this phrase to refer to the final, coming day of judgment, and therefore ἡμέρα κρίσεως is an equivalent temporal reference to ἡ μελλούσα ὀργή in Matthew 3:7.[23]

Matthew 10:15. In Matthew 10:15 Jesus is in the middle of instructing his disciples before sending them out to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel (τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ)" (Matt 10:6). Jesus commands his disciples to find a worthy household in which to stay while in a village (Matt 10:11–13). When the twelve encounter someone who will not receive them or listen to them they are to ἐξερχόμενοι ἔξω τῆς οἰκίας ἢ τῆς πόλεως ἐκείνης ἐκτινάξατε τὸν κονιορτὸν τῶν ποδῶν ὑμῶν (Matt 10:14).[24] The group of Israelites that do not receive or listen to the disciples do not fare well in the final judgment. Of this group Jesus says, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀνεκτότερον ἔσται γῇ Σοδόμων καὶ Γομόρρων ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως ἢ τῇ πόλει ἐκείνῃ (Matt 10:15). Jesus claims the final judgment will be worse for those who reject Jesus's disciples than for

[23] Keener provides a list of texts that use "day of judgment" to refer to the final judgment. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 320n24.

[24] For the background on this expression see: Eung Chun Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, WUZNT 81 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 123–24; Athanasius Polag, *Die Christologie der Logienquelle*, WMANT 45 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1977), 69; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, HTKNT 1, 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 369; Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 256–58; George Caird, "Shake the Dust from Your Feet: Mk 6:11," *TET* 81, no. 2 (1969): 40–43.

Sodom and Gomorrah. This is a stunning claim in light of the fact that Sodom and Gomorrah had become proverbial symbols for God's catastrophic judgment and punishment.[25] As Blomberg says, "Rejecting the disciple's message is thus seen as a serious sin, indeed, worse even than the gross rebellion of Sodom and Gomorrah in Old Testament times."[26] The day of judgment, therefore, refers to the final, eschatological day of judgment in which God will pour out his wrath on those who reject his son.

Matthew 11:20–24. The next occurrence of ἡμέρα κρίσεως comes when Jesus begins to denounce the cities where he had performed many of his miracles (Matt 11:20). He starts with a denunciation of Chorazin and Bethsaida, saying that if he had done the same works in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented (Matt 11:21).[27] Jesus then says, πλὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶνι ἀνεκτότερον ἔσται ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως ἢ ὑμῖν (Matt 11:22). Next, the Son of Man turns his ire to Capernaum. Through the use of an allusion to Isaiah 14:13–15 and the satirical song about the king of Babylon,[28] Jesus tells them they will not be "exalted to heaven (ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθήσῃ)" but "will be brought down to Hades (ἕως ᾅδου καταβήσῃ)" (Matt 11:23). Why will Capernaum be brought down to Hades? Jesus informs listeners that if the same works had been done in Sodom, the infamous city would not have been destroyed (Matt 11:23). He concludes, speaking directly to the citizens of Capernaum, by saying, πλὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι γῇ Σοδόμων ἀνεκτότερον ἔσται ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως ἢ σοί (Matt 11:24).

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[25] Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, 125; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 273; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 179; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 246.

[26] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1992), 173.

[27] These towns were not chosen at random but often occur together in prophetic judgment texts. Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 225–26; Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 260.

[28] Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 227; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 38.

The structure of this text is informative. Matthew 11:20–24 uses two series of parallel sayings.[29]

Series 1:

Pronouncement: Woe to Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt 11:21).

Explanation: They saw the mighty works and did not repent as Tyre and Sidon would have (Matt 11:21).

Comparison: The day of judgment will be worse for Chorazin and Bethsaida than for Tyre and Sidon (Matt 11:22)

Series 2:

Pronouncement: Capernaum will not be exalted to heaven but brought down to Hades (Matt 11:23)

Explanation: They saw the mighty works and did not repent as Sodom would have (Matt 11:23)

Comparison: The day of judgment will be worse for Capernaum than for Sodom (Matt 11:24).

As Comber says, "In designing this structure, Matthew exploits the possibilities of repetition and parallelism, by varying elements of Series 2 while keeping other elements constant. The effect is to give emphasis to both the constant elements and those that change."[30] In this case Matthew emphasizes the theme of the final eschatological day of judgment.[31] This theme of the coming day of judgment is central to Matthew as a whole, but is particularly concentrated in chapters 10–12, where every instance of ἡμέρα κρίσεως occurs.[32] Matthew clearly envisions a day where God will distribute punishments to those who do not repent and follow Jesus—and rewards to the righteous, though that is not the focus in this text.

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[29] This structure is found in both Comber and Reiser. Joseph A. Comber, "Composition and Literary Characteristics of Matt 11:20–24," *CBQ* 39, no. 4 (1977): 498; Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 221.

[30] Comber, "Composition and Literary Characteristics of Matt 11:20–24," 501.

[31] Comber, "Composition and Literary Characteristics of Matt 11:20–24," 501.

[32] Comber makes this point about chapters 11 and 12, but I have expanded it to include chapter 10 due to its proximity. Comber, " Composition and Literary Characteristics of Matt 11:20–24," 499.

Matthew 12:33–42. In this section Matthew uses ἡμέρα κρίσεως or the shortened ἡ κρίσις three times. Following Jesus's discussion of the unforgivable sin, he tells listeners[33] that "a tree is known by its fruit (ἐκ . . . τοῦ καρποῦ τὸ δένδρον γινώσκεται)" (Matt 12:33). Jesus uses this metaphor of a tree bearing fruit to show a person's actions, in this case their words, find their origin in their nature (i.e. the state of their heart) (Matt 12:33–35). One's nature, revealed in one's speech, has eschatological implications. Jesus says, λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν ὃ λαλήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀποδώσουσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως· ἐκ γὰρ τῶν λόγων σου δικαιωθήσῃ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων σου καταδικασθήσῃ (Matt 12:36–37). Note that unlike the previous uses of ἡμέρα κρίσεως, this occurrence acknowledges both a positive and negative side to the judgment. "People (οἱ ἄνθρωποι)" must give account for "every careless word they speak (πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν ὃ λαλήσουσιν),"[34] and on this basis they will either be "pronounced righteous (δικαιωθήσῃ)" or "condemned (καταδικασθήσῃ)" (Matt 12:36–37). As Davies and Allison say, "Because words come from the heart, the judgment of an individual will be according to his or her words."[35]

Next, some of the Jewish leaders ask Jesus for a sign (Matt 12:38). Jesus replies that only an "evil and adulterous generation (γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλίς)" seeks a sign, and that the only sign that will be given to them is "the sign of the prophet Jonah (τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου)" (Matt 12:39).[36] After explaining that just as Jonah was in

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[33] In this text, Jesus, picking up on the same language used by John the Baptist, calls the Jewish leaders to whom he is speaking a "brood of vipers." This is twice now that this image has been used in regard to Jesus's Jewish opponents in the context of eschatological judgment. For Matthew's use of this phrase, see: Keener, "'Brood of Vipers' (Matthew 3.7; 12.34; 23.33)."

[34] On this phrase France prefers the "empty words." He says, the point is not the casualness of the utterance, but its fallaciousness: 'not . . . "thoughtless" words, such as a carefree joke, but deedless ones, loafers which ought to be up and busy about what they say.'" France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 486.

[35] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 351.

[36] For more on "the sign of the prophet Jonah," see: Simon Chow, *The Sign of Jonah Reconsidered: A Study of Its Meaning in the Gospel Traditions*, CB 27 (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996); Simon Chow, "The Sign of Jonah Reconsidered: Matthew 12:38–42 and Luke 11:29–32," *Theology and Life* 15, no. 16 (1993): 53–60; Michael Andrews, "The Sign of Jonah: Jesus in

the belly of the fish for three days and three nights Jesus will be in the heart of the earth for the same duration, he says, Ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν (Matt 12:40–41). This statement continues the pattern discussed above but with some important differences. First, rather than cities being denounced, an entire generation is condemned. Second, the Ninevites come through the judgment in a positive manner.[37] In 12:33–37 Jesus compared the cities he was currently addressing to cities renowned for their wickedness, and he said these Jewish cities would end up worse than the famously wicked Gentile cities. Here, this evil generation is compared to the Ninevites, who did repent at the preaching of Jonah. Jesus refers to the whole judicial process, both positive and negative, in this verse. Finally, Jesus refers to the eschatological day of judgment with the shortened phrase, "the judgment (τῇ κρίσει)" (Matt 12:41). Jesus repeats the shortened form in the next verse when he says, βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν (Matt 12:42).[38] Referencing the events in 1 Kings 10:1–10 and 2 Chronicles 9:1–12, Jesus suggests that the queen of the South's response to Solomon will lead to a positive place in the judgment, while the current generation's poor response to Jesus, who is greater than Solomon, will lead to their condemnation.[39]

Summary. Matthew's repetition of ἡμέρα κρίσεως or ἡ κρίσις leads to the conclusion that the final, eschatological day of judgment constitutes a major theme in the first Gospel. This means, first, that Matthew is primarily future oriented in regard to judgment themes, and second, that any conception of divine grace in the first Gospel must reject singularity as a facet of the evangelist's theology.

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the Heart of the Earth," *JETS* 61, no. 1 (2018): 105–19.

[37] Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 226.

[38] For more on this verse see, Larry Perkins, "'Greater than Solomon' (Matt 12:42)," *TJ* 19, no. 2 (1998): 207–17.

[39] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 297.

Ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ("On That Day")

The next phrase used for the final day of judgment is ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ. In Matthew 7:21–23, near the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus informs listeners that not everyone who says "Lord Lord (κύριε κύριε)" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of God the Father. "On that day (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ)" many will protest that they did great works in his name, but Jesus will say to them οὐδέποτε ἔγνων ὑμᾶς· *ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν* (Matt 7:22–23). As Pennington says,

> The reference to 'on that day' in 7:22 seems to come out of the blue unless one notes the thoroughly eschatological nature of 7:13–27 and the fact that 'entering into the kingdom' in 7:21 would have evoked for Jewish hearers reference to God's eschatological return to establish his reign and peace upon the earth.[40]

That ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ is a forward pointing descriptor of the final day of judgment should not be in question.[41] Matthew provides another reference to the eschatological day of judgment where some (i.e., those who do the will of the Father) enter the kingdom, and others (i.e. those who do not bear good fruit and do the will of the father) are banished from the presence of God.

A similar phrase is used in Matthew 24:36. In the middle of the Eschatological Discourse Jesus says, Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατὴρ μόνος (Matt 24:36). The time at which the Son of Man will return and the final judgment will take place is known only to the Father.[42] That Jesus will return is not in question, but only the Father knows when "that day and hour (τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας)" will come (Matt 24:36).[43]

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[40] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 277n17.

[41] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 193; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 294; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 340.

[42] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 991.

[43] For a discussion of the Christological issues and implications of this verse see Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, FETS (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 455–59.

Το τέλος ("The End")

The next phrase that Matthew uses to indicate the eschatological day of judgment is τὸ τέλος. The first occurrence is in the Missiological Discourse. Jesus informs his disciples that they will experience significant persecution for his name sake (Matt 10:16–25). In the middle of his explanation of the various types of suffering they will endure, Jesus says, ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται (Matt 10:22). One possible interpretation of "the end (τέλος)" in this verse is that it simply refers to the end of the persecuted disciple's life. Blomberg offers the better explanation when he says, "The 'end' most naturally refers to the end of the age but would also include the moment of death for those who do not live to see Christ return."[44] In other words, τέλος can refer to both the end of one's life and the end of the age. The end of the age reference is supported by the fact that σωθήσεται most likely refers to eschatological salvation due to the fact that some disciples are indeed martyred for their faith. If Jesus meant that their physical lives would be saved his promise would be proven false by the blood of thousands of martyrs, including his own disciples, throughout church history.[45]

Another factor that supports the eschatological interpretation of τέλος is that Jesus uses the exact same sentence, ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται, in Matthew 24:13.[46] In the latter context the subject matter is "the end of the age (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)" (Matt 24:3). Also, just before Jesus repeats his promise that the one who endures will be saved, Jesus says, μελλήσετε δὲ ἀκούειν πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων· ὁρᾶτε μὴ θροεῖσθε· δεῖ γὰρ γενέσθαι, ἀλλ᾽ οὔπω ἐστὶν τὸ τέλος (Matt 24:6). Jesus warns his listeners that "the end is not yet (οὔπω ἐστὶν τὸ τέλος)" (Matt 24:6). In context this clearly refers to the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man in

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[44] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 175.

[45] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 175.

[46] Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, 138; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 278.

power. Τέλος, therefore, constitutes another way Matthew speaks of the future eschatological day of judgment while also referring to the end of a disciple's life.

Ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος ("The End of the Age")

Finally, Matthew employs the phrase "the end of the age (ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος)" at a number of points throughout the narrative to describe the events surrounding the final day of judgment.[47]

Matthew 13:36–43. The first occurrence comes in Jesus's explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matt 13:36–43).[48] After being prompted by the disciples, Jesus explains how to understand the parable. The sower is the Son of Man, and the field is the world (Matt 13:37–38). The Son of Man sows the good seed, the sons of the kingdom, in the field while the enemy, the devil, sows the weeds, the sons of the evil one (Matt 13:38–39). The servants are instructed to wait until the harvest to reap and gather the seeds, which Jesus now informs listeners refers to "the end of the age (συντέλεια αἰῶνος)" (Matt 13:39–40). The wheat and the weeds (i.e., the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one) are then separated by the angels (Matt 13:40–43). The wheat and the weeds receive strikingly different fates. The weeds are "burned with fire (πυρὶ [κατα]καίεται)" and "thrown into the fiery furnace (*βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός*)," while the wheat "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father (ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν)" (Matt 13:40–43).

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[47] Pennington, rightly in my opinion, sees a Danielic intertext at play in Matthew's use of this phrase. Jonathan T Pennington, "Refractions of Daniel in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, vol. 1 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 81–82.

[48] Many of the exegetical issues that surround this text are outside the purview of this work. For more general treatments of this text see: Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 191–216; Jack Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 93–110; George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 132–35; Ulrich Luz, "Vom Taumellolch im Weizenfeld. Ein Beispiel wirkungsgeschichtlicher Hermeneutik," in *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus* (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1989); Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 292–303.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds makes explicit the future nature of judgment. In the initial telling of the parable, the man who sowed the seeds instructs his servants to ἄφετε συναυξάνεσθαι ἀμφότερα ἕως τοῦ θερισμοῦ (Matt 13:30). In other words, the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one will coexist in the world for a designated amount of time. Evil and good, Christians and non-Christians will continue in their lives together until the end of the age, but make no mistake, the end of the age is coming.[49] At the designated time God will send out his angels to gather and sort the wicked from the godly. Kingsbury goes as far as to say that Jesus's depiction of the last judgment is the "heart of the interpretation of the Parable of the Tares."[50] He goes on to say,

> The key concept is the 'End of the Age' (συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος), a formula found in no other Gospel than the first. It denotes the termination of the existing world order when present history has run its course (24.3; 28.20), after which there will be a transformation of all things, and God will reign supreme (13.43; 25.34, 41; 26.29). The immediate arrival of the End of the Age will be signaled by the return of Jesus Son of Man and the beginning of the last judgment centering in the Great Assize.[51]

At that time God will administer his great and terrible judgment upon the wicked in the form of fire.[52]

Matthew 13:47–50. The next use of ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος comes just a few verses later. In the parable of the dragnet the kingdom of heaven is compared to a net that is thrown into the sea and gathers all kinds of fish (Matt 13:47–50).[53] The fish are then

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[49] Snodgrass says, "While this is not the time for judgment, judgment will certainly come." Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 215.

[50] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 95; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus.*

[51] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 107.

[52] The form of the punishment (i.e., fire and weeping and gnashing of teeth) is discussed below.

[53] Many of the exegetical issues surrounding this passage fall outside the focus of this work. For more general treatments, see: Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 482–92; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 303–9; Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 117–25; Mark Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 7: The Parables of the Dragnet and the Householder," *BSac* 153, no. 632 (1999): 282–96.

sorted; the good are put in containers, while the bad are thrown away (Matt 13:48). Jesus then claims this is parallel to what will happen "at the end of the age (ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος)" (Matt 13:49). The verbal parallels with the parable of the wheat and the weeds make clear that the two parables refer, at least in their depiction of the last judgment, to the same reality. Long portions of the text match word for word:

> οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος (Matt 13:40).
>
> οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος (Matt 13:49).
>
> καὶ *βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός·* ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (Matt 13:42).
>
> καὶ *βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός·* ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (Matt 13:50).

One can hardly doubt that Jesus had the same event in mind when speaking both parables. The end of the age is coming, and with it arrives both grace in salvation for the righteous and terrible punishment for the wicked.

Matthew 24:3. After Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, he goes to the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:1–3). Once there the disciples come to Jesus to ask him two questions.[54] First, they ask "when will these things happen (πότε ταῦτα ἔσται)," and second, they ask καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος (Matt 24:3). This line of questioning prompts Jesus's Olivet (or Eschatological) Discourse.[55] The disciples also employ what has now become a familiar Matthean phrase ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος. Note, however, that in this instance the disciples equate—or at the very least strongly associate— ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος with σός παρουσία through the use of one

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[54] Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 170–74; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 894.

[55] For more on this discourse see: George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993); David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*, Gospel Perspectives 4 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984); Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*.

article to govern both phrases.[56] In other words, Jesus's return and the end of the age which results in separation of the wicked from the righteous are linked in the mind of the disciples. The rest of the Eschatological Discourse (Matt 24:4–25:46) proceeds to answer, at least partially, the disciple's questions, and Jesus provides the two most detailed, if mysterious, descriptions of the second coming and final judgment in Matthew (Matt 24:29–31; 25:31–46).

Matthew 28:20. Before discussing Jesus's description of his return and the final judgment, it is important to note that the disciple's question posed in 24:3 is not the last reference to "the end of the age" in Matthew. In fact, the last words of the first Gospel, in a text some see as foreshadowed in the beginning of the Olivet Discourse discussed above due to its setting on the mountain and the use of similar language,[57] remind readers of the Jesus's return and the coming day of judgment. After giving the eleven disciples their final instructions, in light of the daunting Great Commission, Jesus reassures them he will be with them "to the end of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)" (Matt 28:20). The final words the first evangelist leaves with his readers constitutes a comforting promise of the continuing presence of Jesus, but also serves as a reminder that the end of the age is coming. From start to finish Matthew reminds readers of the grace of God in light of the coming judgment.

Summary. From this discussion three key takeaways emerge. First, when considered in light of all the other references to the final judgment discussed above, the coming final day of judgment and end of the age must be considered a central tenant of

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[56] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 961; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 894n12; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 688; This is known as the Granville Sharp rule. For more on this see, A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 787; Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., Biblical Languages: Greek 2 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 110–11.

[57] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 337; Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, JSNTSS 8 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), 158.

Matthew's theology. Second, on that final day the angels will gather from the earth and separate the righteous from the wicked. This sorting, also mentioned in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31–46), seems to be a key event in the mind of the first evangelist. Finally, the righteous receive their due reward for their faithfulness and endurance, while the wicked receive a terrible and just punishment.

Jesus's Return and The Final Judgment.

As shown above, the first Gospel makes numerous references to the final judgment and the end of the age using a variety of expressions. Matthew provides some information in his description throughout—the repetition of the sorting of the wicked and the righteous, the punishment of the wicked, the close association of the *Parousia*, etc.—but not until the Olivet Discourse does the evangelist give a more detailed account of the two major events that mark the final day: the *Parousia* and the Great Assize.

Matthew 24:29–31. After describing a series of events commonly associated with the tribulation, Jesus tells the disciples about the coming of the Son of Man in power. This text, describing the *Parousia* is worth reproducing in full:

> Εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλῖψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς, καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες πεσοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ τότε κόψονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς· καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης, καὶ ἐπισυνάξουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ᾽ ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἕως [τῶν] ἄκρων αὐτῶν (Matt 24:29–31).

Layered with intertextual allusions, this passage uses apocalyptic imagery and Old Testament quotations to describe the second coming of the Son of Man.[58] As Hagner

[58] For the various allusions see, Gordon Kirchhevel, "He That Cometh in Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30," *BBR* 4 (1994): 105–11; Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 87–90; Pennington in particular notes the intertextual uses of Daniel, and his discussion of Daniel's overall influence on Matthew's eschatology is enlightening. Pennington, "Refractions of Daniel in the Gospel of Matthew," 80–86; For the Old Testament background of the Son of Man saying, see, Peter Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?," in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy of Biblical Theology, a Festschrift for Dr. Geoff Adams* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press for the Toronto

says, "The coming of the Son of Man . . . will be attended by unusual phenomena. Apocalyptic imagery of this sort became commonly used in depicting the coming eschatological judgment."[59]

A few textual features are important to note. First of all, darkness accompanies the coming of the Son of Man. Davies and Allison are instructive when they say,

> The supernatural darkness of the consummation is richly symbolic. Not only does it belong to the correlation of beginning and end, but it is a sign of both divine judgment and mourning and *becomes the velvet background for the Son of Man's splendor* (24.27, 30). Moreover, on the literary level it foreshadows the darkness of Jesus' death (27.45) *while that darkness in turn presages the world's assize*.[60]

Davies and Allison here make a similar case for the use of darkness in this text that I have made for the darkness of the looming divine judgment throughout Matthew. This darkness makes the grace of God shine more brightly. If the *temporary* darkness of the sun and moon at Jesus's return acts as "the velvet background," how much more does the "outer darkness (τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον)" (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), where the wicked are confined for *eternity* increase the perceived greatness of the fact that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father (οἱ δίκαιοι ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν)" *forever* (Matt 13:43).

Second, even though the account is layered with symbolism and apocalyptic imagery, Matthew seems to conceive of this event as one which happens in time.[61] This holds true "even," as Luz says, "If at the parousia the temporal sequence of events reported in chapter 24 ("then"!) ends and there appear to be no further events on the time

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Baptist Seminary and Bible College, 2003).

[59] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 713.

[60] Emphasis mine. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 358.

[61] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 288.

line after the last judgment."[62] This event, coupled with the final judgment, is the culminating event of human history.

Third, the appearance of angels and their work in "gathering (ἐπισυνάξουσιν)" makes the connection with the final judgment clear (Matt 29:31). Interestingly, in this text the gathering role of the angels is a positive action. The angels go throughout the whole world and gather "his elect (τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 24:31). This is noteworthy because, as Hagner says, "The involvement of the angels in this eschatological gathering of the people is referred to also in 13:41; 16:27; 25:31–32, where, however, in each case the gathering concerns the judgment of the wicked (a twofold gathering for judgment and blessing is found in 13:30, but gathering of the righteous remains implicit in 13:41)."[63] Usually the task of the angels describes an undesirable outcome for the wicked, but here, the angel's arrival alongside the Son of Man is cause for celebration.

Matthew 25:31–46. Jesus ends the Eschatological Discourse with the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.[64] This harrowing picture of the final judgment has garnered considerable attention throughout church history.[65] Matthew uses the image of the Son of Man returning, sitting on his throne, and sorting the sheep and the goats to give readers a

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[62] Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 288.

[63] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 714.

[64] As Snodgrass and others have noted, technically speaking Matthew 25:31–46 is not a parable. I will use the term simply for convenience. For more on the genre of this text see, Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 543–44; John R. Donahue, "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats: A Challenge to Christian Ethics," *TS* 45, no. 1 (1986): 9–11.

[65] For a small taste of the various literature on this text, see: Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534–63; Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 307–12; Donahue, "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats"; Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 114 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Ulrich Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46): An Exercise in 'History of Influence' Exegesis," in *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David Bauer and Mark Powell, trans. Dorothy Weaver (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 309–30; Egon Brandenburger, *Das Recht des Weltenrichters: Untersuchung zu Matthäus 25, 31-46*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 99 (Stuttgart, Germany: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980); Philip Bligh, "Eternal Fire, Eternal Punishment, Eternal Life (Mt 25:41, 46)," *TET* 83, no. 1 (1971): 9–11; John Court, "Right and Left: The Implications for Matthew 25:31–46," *NTS* 31, no. 2 (1985): 223–33.

lasting image of what the final day will be like. Based on the beginning of this pericope where Jesus says, Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ, τότε καθίσει ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ (Matt 25:31), he seems to connect this text with 24:29–31. Between these two texts dealing with *Parousia* and the final judgment, concepts already demonstrated to be conceptionally linked, Jesus repeats a number of important words or phrases. In both texts Jesus speaks of "the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)," his "coming (ἔλθῃ)" with "angels (οἱ ἄγγελοι)," and in "glory (τῇ δόξῃ)" (Matt 24:30–31; 25:31).[66] One gets the sense that, despite the intervening material, Jesus wants listeners to understand that the coming of the Son of Man is immediately followed by the gathering, sorting, and judgment of the nations. In the first text, only "the elect (τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς)" are gathered, but the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats confirms that the angelic gathering here concerns "all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη),"[67] not just God's elect.

All the nations are gathered before the Son of Man's throne, and he then separates the sheep, who go to the right, and the goats, who go to the left (Matt 25:31–33).[68] Those on his right, the sheep, are called "blessed (οἱ εὐλογημένοι)" and told to "inherit (κληρονομήσατε)" the kingdom of the Father (Matt 25:34).[69] The sheep, later defined as "the righteous (οἱ δίκαιοι)" (Matt 25:46), showed compassion to the Son of

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[66] The grammatical forms and tenses differ slightly in the two texts. The one's quoted above are from 25:31. The former forms are τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἐρχόμενον, τοὺς ἀγγέλους, and δόξης (Matt 24:30–31).

[67] This is a highly debated phrase. For the various interpretive options, see, Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 422; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 554–55 I will argue later that "all the nations" refers to everyone, Jews and Gentiles, gathered before the throne for the final judgment.

[68] Even though I disagree with his conclusions regarding who is gathered before the throne and who the "least of these" refers to, he does provide helpful background on the idea of sorting to the left and to the right. Court, "Right and Left," 223–33.

[69] Nathan Eubank argues that κληρονομήσατε should be read as "acquiring." Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 70; Even though I strongly disagree with many of Runesson's conclusions, he is right to reject Eubank's reading. Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, 420–25.

Man through their merciful actions to "the least of these my brothers (τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων)" (Matt 25:40).[70] In addition to inheriting the kingdom, the righteous also receive "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)" (Matt 25:46). The final judgment, therefore, is not all bad. Indeed, the inheritance the righteous receives reveals the magnitude of the grace of God.[71]

On the other side of the judgment (quite literally), the goats on the left meet a vastly different fate. The "cursed (κατηραμένοι)" are told to "depart (πορεύεσθε)" from the presence of the Son and "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον τὸ ἡτοιμασμένον τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 25:41). Jesus concludes the parable with the same sentiment, even if less descriptive, when he says that those on his left go into "eternal punishment (κόλασιν αἰώνιον)" (Matt 25:46). Sim summarizes this point well when he says, "[Matthew 25:31–46] specifies with crystal clarity the evangelist's view that all opponents of God, be they angelic or human, will share the same terrible fate."[72]

Summary

The Gospel of Matthew is abundantly clear; the final judgment and the end of the age are coming. From beginning to end of his work the first evangelist leaves reminders of this fact to encourage readers to repent and follow Jesus.[73] To this point I have described the coming day of judgment to show that Matthew's depiction of divine grace does not include singularity. God will judge the world, punishing the evil and

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[70] For a history of interpretation of this verse, see, Gray, *The Least of My Brothers*.

[71] This is discussed further below in the chapter on superabundance.

[72] Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 136.

[73] I did not develop the theme of judgment as a motivation for right behavior in this chapter. For more on the relationship between judgment and ethics, see, Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul*, 48–71; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 599; Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 120; Amos Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

rewarding the righteous. What remains to be discussed is Matthew's often graphic depiction of the nature and place of this punishment.

The Fate of the Wicked: Fire and Darkness in Hell

In addition to repeatedly announcing that the final judgment is coming, Matthew also provides some details as to what the punishment for the wicked entails. Some commentators believe that Matthew is withholding in regard to the details of the punishment,[74] while others seem to argue that the first evangelist provides ample data concerning the fate of the wicked.[75] The answer probably lies somewhere in the middle. Matthew discusses hell[76] frequently but does not give the same level of detail as some of his contemporaries.[77]

Just as the first Gospel employs varied language to refer to the day of judgment while still connecting the various uses via similar imagery and repetition, Matthew uses a similar technique in regard to the details concerning the fate of the wicked.[78] Scattered throughout Matthew are textual clues that allow the attentive exegete to piece together various "judgment passages that communicate a holistic theology of end-of-time judgment."[79] The center piece to this varied portrait of punishment is found in the phrase

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[74] Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 287.

[75] Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 114–40.

[76] For a discussion of the development of the doctrine of hell, see Alice Turner, *The History of Hell* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993); For a discussion of the various theological positions on hell, see William V Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2010); Preston M. Sprinkle, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed., Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

[77] For examples of "tours of hell," texts that take the reader on a journey through the place of punishment, see: Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[78] For Matthew's use of repetition, see, Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSS 91 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994); Erdey and Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in Matthew's Gospel," 35.

[79] Erdey and Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in Matthew's Gospel," 41.

"weeping and gnashing of teeth (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων)" (Matt 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30). In fact, Erdey and Smith list four functions of this phrase in Matthew: A mnemonic device (Matthew makes the phrase unforgettable), a prophetic anticipation (a regular reminder of the coming fate of the wicked), a thematic intensifying device, and a literary connector.[80] These six uses either directly or indirectly connect all of the depictions of the fate of the wicked in Matthew.

Beginning with the phrase itself, two important facts arise. First, in terms of its meaning, Kingsbury is correct when he says, "'Weeping' most likely alludes to the intense distress ('strong pain') that the godless must endure . . . and the 'gnashing of teeth' to the despondency and rage that reputedly engulf the godless when, after death, they realize that they are impotent to alter their plight. . . . The whole expression, then, is one of anguish and remorse."[81] Repeatedly, therefore, Matthew brings to mind the pain and helplessness of the wicked who have been sentenced to punishment.

Second, the phrase includes a spatial aspect. The full sentence is, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων)" (Matt 8:12). The use of the adverb of place ἐκεῖ[82] adds this spatial dimension to Matthew's understanding of the plight of the wicked. This adverb refers back to one of three places mentioned in the sentence preceding "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Most commonly, in half of the citations in fact, the place referenced by ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων is "the outer darkness (τὸ σκότος τὸ

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[80] Erdey and Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in Matthew's Gospel,"35–41.

[81] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 140; Other options are "misery and rage," a "reaction to pain and suffering," or "remorse and self-reproach." For these options, see, Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 140; Erdey and Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in Matthew's Gospel," 32; Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 141; Baird suggests that this phrase illustrates the wrath of God and the sorrow felt rather than describing torment in hell. I do not find his argument very convincing. J. Arthur Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

[82] Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 56.

ἐξώτερον)" (Matt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). "The outer darkness (τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον)" signifies the lack of the presence of God. As Charette says, "Inasmuch as light suggests the glory and radiance of God this phrase describes a place which is far removed from his presence."[83]

This place of darkness, removed from the presence of God, where people weep and gnash their teeth, is best understood as a reference to hell. In three of the six references to "weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matthew refers to "the outer darkness." It is safe to assume, then that the other three references to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" would have the same place in mind. As shown below, the other three references to the place where people "weep and gnash their teeth" refers to "hell (γέεννα)" either directly or indirectly. It is also possible to indirectly link "the outer darkness (τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον)" to Gehenna through the repeated occurrence of the those doomed to τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον being "thrown into (ἐκβάλλω + εἰς)" this terrible place (Matt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). In other passages the bad trees that do not bear fruit are said to be cut down and "thrown into (βάλλω + εἰς)" the "fire (πῦρ)" (Matt 3:10, 7:19). As discussed below, the use of "fire (πῦρ)" usually entails a reference to Gehenna.

The stronger connection of "the outer darkness (τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον)" to Gehenna, however, comes in the other three references to "weeping and gnashing of teeth (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων)" (Matt 13:42, 13:50, 24:51). Beginning with the last reference, the wicked servant who does not work until his master's return is cut into pieces and put "with the hypocrites (μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν)" (Matt 24:45–51). It is in the place with the hypocrites where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων)" (Matt 24:51). In and of itself, "with the hypocrites" does not provide any specific details, but when considered in light of

[83] Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 143; Marguerat and Sim also make similar statements, see, Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 252; Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 140.

Matthew 23:13–15, the spatial reference becomes clearer. There Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites (ὑποκριταί)" who "shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces (κλείετε τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων)" and make proselytes "twice as much a child of hell as [themselves] (υἱὸν γεέννης διπλότερον ὑμῶ)" (Matt 23:13–15). The place "with the hypocrites," therefore, seems to be Gehenna, hell.

The other two texts dealing with a place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" refer to the place of punishment as the "fiery furnace (τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός)" (Matt 13:42, 50). This reference to fire is best understood as a reference to Gehenna and hell.[84] Green, McKnight, and Marshall sum up the background of the Gehenna well when they say,

> Behind the word *Gehenna*, as it frequently appears in English translation stands the Greek *geenna*, which is a transliteration of the Aramaic *gēhinnām*. The Aramaic is itself derived from the Hebrew *gē hinnōm* (Josh 15:8; 18:16) and *gē ḇen hinnōm* (Josh 15:8 which refer to a valley located on the south slope of Jerusalem (Josh 15:8; 18:16), literally, the 'Valley of (the son of) Hinnom.' It gained its infamous notoriety during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, both of whom burned sacrifices to Molech, even to the point of sacrificing their own sons on the fire (cf. 2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; 2 Kings 16:3). This elicited prophetic condemnation on the valley, identifying it as the scene of future carnage and desolation resulting from God's judgment (Jer 7:30–33; 19:1–13; 32:34–35; cf. also Is 31:9; 66:24; 2 Kings 23:10; Lev 18:21).[85]

This place, Gehenna, came to be associated with the place of eschatological judgment, and it is particularly associated with fire. Twice in the first Gospel Jesus refers to a

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[84] For the connection of "fiery furnace" to Gehenna, see: Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics: Part 1," *BSac* 149, no. 595 (1992): 324–37; Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics: Part 2," *BSac* 149, no. 596 (1992): 454–70.

[85] Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 310; How the valley south and west of Jerusalem came to be associated with the eschatological place of judgment is debated. For more on this, see: Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 515; Lloyd Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *TBA* 49, no. 3 (1986): 187–91; Chaim Milikowsky, "Which Gehenna: Retribution and Eschatology in the Synoptic Gospels and in Early Jewish Texts," *NTS* 34, no. 2 (1988): 238–49; For other general treatments of γέεννα, see, Joachim Jeremias, "Γέεννα," in *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 657–58; Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 548; Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 218–22; Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 141.

"Gehenna of fire (τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός)" (Matt 5:22; 18:9). Jesus's use of the phrase in 18:9 is instructive due to parallel phrasing in Matthew 5:29–30 and 18:8:

> συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου βληθῇ εἰς γέενναν (Matt 5:29).
>
> συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου εἰς γέενναν ἀπέλθῃ (Matt 5:30).
>
> καλόν σοί ἐστιν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν κυλλὸν ἢ χωλὸν ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον (Matt 18:8).
>
> καλόν σοί ἐστιν μονόφθαλμον εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός (Matt 18:9).

The parallels from chapter 5 to chapter 18 are not exact, but in each text, Jesus claims that the preferred outcome is to lose part of your physical body now in order to avoid Gehenna later. Matthew 18:8 is the only verse quoted that does not have an explicit reference to Gehenna, but the proximity and parallel phrasing of 18:8 and 18:9 make certain that τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον of 18:8 and τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός of 18:9 refer to the same place.[86] Finally, one last and slightly more tenuous connection between Gehenna and fire exists in the verbal overlap of Matthew 3:7–12 and 23:33. In both texts, Jesus or John the Baptist refer to the Jewish leaders as a "brood of vipers (γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν)" (Matt 3:7; 23:33). John the Baptist refers to the "coming wrath (τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς)" and then proceeds to illustrate that wrath with reference to "burning (κατακαύσει)" and "fire (πῦρ)" (Matt 3:7–12). Jesus speaks simply of the scribes and Pharisees trying to escape "the judgment of hell (τῆς κρίσεως τῆς γεέννης)" (Matt 23:33). The parallels make it likely, however, that Jesus and John the Baptist refer to the same punishment.

Matthew also uses ᾅδης twice in his Gospel (Matt 11:23; 16:18). Ἅδης was used by the LXX to translate *Sheol*.[87] Commentators are divided on whether ᾅδης and

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[86] Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics: Part 1," 334.

[87] Green, McKnight, and Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 309; Joachim Jeremias, "ᾅδης," in *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 146; Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 153; Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 228; Davies and Allison,

γέεννα refer to the same or different places.[88] I am inclined to agree with those who argue that they refer to the same place, though I find it difficult to be dogmatic about it one way or the other.

Two reasons lead me to this conclusion. First, in Matthew 11:23 Jesus contrasts being "exalted to heaven (ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθήσῃ)" with being "brought down to Hades (ἕως ᾅδου καταβήσῃ)" (Matt 11:23). This sounds like a contrast between the place of eternal life and the place of eternal punishment (i.e. heaven and hell). In Matthew 18:9 Jesus contrasts "entering into life (εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν)" with being "thrown into Gehenna of fire (βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός)" (Matt 18:9). Later, Jesus clarifies that "entering life (τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν)" is equivalent to both "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)" and "entering the kingdom of heaven (εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν)" by using them interchangeably in Matthew 19:16–30. It is likely, therefore, that being "brought down to Hades (ἕως ᾅδου καταβήσῃ)" functions as a reference to the eschatological judgment of being sentenced to Gehenna. Second, the mention of the day of judgment in 11:23 leads to the conclusion that "brought down to Hades (ἕως ᾅδου καταβήσῃ)" has a final, end of the age type referent.

Finally, Nathan Eubank argues that Jesus's use of debtor's prison imagery in Matthew 6:9–15 and 18:23–35 does not equate to eternal punishment in hell, but rather a temporary punishment and payment for sins.[89] This is mistaken. The unforgiving servant

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Matthew 8–18, 269.

[88] For scholars who argue for a distinction between Hades and Gehenna, see: Joachim Jeremias, "ᾅδης," in *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 148; Jeremias, "Γέεννα," 658; Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 548; Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 222; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 439; For scholars who argue for an equivalence (or at least close association) between the two, see: Green, McKnight, and Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*; Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 142; Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 228; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 269; Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 137; W. J. P. Boyd, "Gehenna - According to J. Jeremias," in *Papers on the Gospels* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980), 9–12.

[89] Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, 51–63.

is handed over to "the torturers (οἱ βασανισταί)" which is best understood as being sentenced to eternal punishment in hell.[90] As Sim says,

> The consigning of the wicked to the fires of Gehenna can thus be compared favorably with the handing over of a wayward servant to the torturers. That this is how Matthew envisaged the fate of the wicked is confirmed by examining the episode of the Gadarene demoniacs in 8:28–34 (//Mark 5:1–20). In the Marcan story the demons plead with Jesus not to torment or torture (βασανίζω) them by performing the exorcism (5:7). For Mark, the torture of evil spirits results from their expulsion from the human body they now possess and their potentially homeless state thereafter. Matthew's redaction of this verse in 8:29 is rather striking and gives an entirely new meaning to the torture motif. The demons ask Jesus, 'Have you come to torture us (βασανίσαι ἡμᾶς) before the time (πρὸ καιροῦ)?' There is no doubt that πρὸ καιροῦ here refers to the final judgment and its aftermath, which, in Matthew, means consignment to the eternal flames (cf. 25:41).[91]

Matthew has a consistent picture of the future fate of the wicked. He describes this reality in a number of ways, but they all connect at one point or another. The fate of the wicked is to be sentenced to eternal fire and punishment in hell, in perpetual darkness, cutoff from the presence of God. It is a terrible fate indeed.

Conclusion

Far from describing a God that only shows grace, the Gospel of Matthew's theology contains a robust theme of divine judgment. Matthew emphatically does not perfect singularity. Other than Revelation, no book of the New Testament contains as many references to the judgment and coming punishment of the wicked.

Why begin a work on divine grace with a lengthy discussion of judgment and hell? It is against this dark background that the wonderful grace of God that also fills the pages of Matthew's Gospel will stand out all the more. As I will argue below, God's grace in Matthew is meant to be seen as superabundant and all-surpassing. One of the ways Matthew lets readers see how great is their salvation, is by repeatedly drawing attention to the terrible fate from which they have been saved.

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[90] Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 138.

[91] Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew,* 138–39.

CHAPTER 3

SUPERABUNDANCE

Is divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew portrayed as lavish, permanent, and extremely significant? This is another way of asking whether or not Matthew perfects the facet of grace known as superabundance. Superabundant grace does not concern the content of the gift, which, as Barclay notes, can take many different forms, but rather addresses the extreme scale and permanence of the gift.[1] One can easily see that larger, longer lasting, more lavish gifts are more perfect than smaller, temporary gifts.

Ancient and modern authors alike commonly perfect this facet of grace. In fact, Barclays says, "It would be difficult to imagine any depiction of divine gift-giving that did not include this perfection."[2] How can a divine being give a gift that is anything less than lavish and lasting from a human perspective? Different authors, however, portray this seemingly ubiquitous aspect of grace in varying ways. Matthew portrays divine giving as superabundant, lavish, and extreme. At different points throughout the first Gospel, Matthew speaks of divine gifts so as to emphasize their supreme value, permanence, and magnitude. I will examine texts that speak to each of the three categories.

The Supreme Value of Divine Gifts

Matthew emphasizes the supreme value of divine gifts both directly, when discussing the kingdom, and indirectly, through his portrayal of Jesus as the divine Son of God who gives his life on behalf of the many.

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[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 70.

[2] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift,* 70.

The Value of the Kingdom

Before turning to Matthew 13:44–46, where Jesus uses the Parable of the Treasure in a Field and the Pearl of Great Price to describe the value of the kingdom of heaven, it is necessary to establish that access to the kingdom is actually a gift. In other words, in order for the kingdom parables to show the superabundance of divine grace, it must first be shown that the kingdom falls within the realm of grace for Matthew.

The kingdom as a gift. Before the Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl, Jesus tells his disciples that the reason he speaks to them in parables is that they δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 13:11).[3] The passive form as well as Jesus's use of the verb δίδωμι show that this knowledge is a gift and did not originate within themselves. To be precise this does not speak directly of being given the kingdom reward in itself but the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom. The distinction, however, seems minor. Moreover, the next verse also speaks of the abundance (περισσευθήσεται) of the person who receives this divine gift. The benefit of being given understanding compounds to abundance, just as the loss of not having understanding compounds to greater loss.[4]

Matthew 19 brings the second text that places the kingdom in the realm of grace. A man comes to Jesus asking how to have eternal life, and he goes away sad because Jesus requires him to sell all of his possessions (Matt 19:16–22).[5] Jesus proceeds to compare the difficulty of a rich person entering the kingdom to a camel passing through the eye of a needle (Matt 19:24). The disciples take this to mean that no one can be saved (Matt 19:25). Jesus responds, παρὰ ἀνθρώποις τοῦτο ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν, παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά (Matt 19:26). While not a direct statement that the kingdom is a divine gift, it certainly implies that divine benevolence is

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[3] I will not belabor the point with this text because I discuss it more extensively in the chapter on efficacy.

[4] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 512. This loss, as seen above, results in disastrous consequences. Here the abundance of divine grace is accentuated by a comparison with divine judgment.

[5] This text will be discussed in more detail in the section dealing with the permanence of the gift.

required to enter the kingdom. Kingdom access is, therefore, once again within the realm of grace.

Matthew 21:43 comes in the midst of confrontations with the chief priests and elders. Jesus tells the Parable of the Wicked Tenants[6] where tenants refuse to allow the master of the house to collect the fruit, and eventually the master sends his son who is subsequently killed by the wicked tenants. The Jewish leaders recognize that the punishment would be severe for tenants who behave in this manner, and Jesus, after quoting Psalm 118, tells them that the kingdom of God[7] will be taken (ἀρθήσεται) from them and given (δοθήσεται) to a people producing fruit (Matt 21:42–43). Jesus's words, therefore, imply that the kingdom is a gift. .

Finally, Jesus's famous picture of the final judgment involves the separation of mankind into sheep, who go to eternal life, and goats, who go to eternal punishment. This parable includes the notion that the kingdom, prepared for the sheep from the foundation of the world, is inherited (κληρονομήσατε) by those blessed by the father (Matt 25:34). As noted earlier, Nathan Eubank takes issue with the translation of κληρονομήσατε as "inherit." He says that the emphasis "is not on 'inheritance' but on recompense for righteousness."[8] Louw and Nida suggest, however, that regardless of translation the term indicates gaining possession of something "which has not been earned."[9] The kingdom of heaven is best viewed as a divine gift to God's people, and this gift is of inestimable value.

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[6] For more on this parable, see Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*, WUZNT 27 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983); Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 276–99; Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGJU 25 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1995), 381–406.

[7] On the language of kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven see: Jonathan T Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

[8] Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 70–71.

[9] J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989); For a cogent argument against Eubank's position, see: Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 420–25.

The treasure and the pearl. The Parabolic Discourse in Matthew 13 includes seven (or eight if Matthew 13:51–52 is included) parables of varying length and complexity. Jesus provides interpretations to some parables, like the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Others, like the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price, are not given explanations. The latter two are the ones that occupy our attention.

Immediately following the explanation of the Parable of the Weeds Matthew includes two short kingdom parables in quick succession. They are worth reproducing in full:

> Ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν θησαυρῷ κεκρυμμένῳ ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ, ὃν εὑρὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔκρυψεν, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτοῦ ὑπάγει καὶ πωλεῖ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει καὶ ἀγοράζει τὸν ἀγρὸν ἐκεῖνον. (Matt 13:44)
>
> Πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ ἐμπόρῳ ζητοῦντι καλοὺς μαργαρίτας· εὑρὼν δὲ ἕνα πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην ἀπελθὼν πέπρακεν πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν καὶ ἠγόρασεν αὐτόν. (Matt 13:45–46)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to the case of a man finding a buried treasure in a field and a merchant finding an extremely valuable pearl.[10] Beginning with the first parable, a man finds a treasure hidden in a field. As many commentators note, it was not uncommon in antiquity, long before the invention of banks and safe deposit boxes, to bury one's valuables in order to hide them and keep them safe.[11] The unidentified man,[12] after finding the treasure, covers what he has found. The action of re-hiding the treasure has prompted readers to question whether the man acted ethically or not. It appears that the purchase of the field was an

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[10] Carson argues that "neither the Aramaic nor the Greek may legitimately be translated as, 'It is like. . .' but 'It is the case with . . . as with . . .'." D. A Carson, "The Homoios Word-Group as Introduction to Some Matthean Parables," *NTS* 31, no. 2 (1985): 277.

[11] Mark Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6: The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl Merchant," *BSac* 156, no. 622 (1999): 177; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 241; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 391; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 436; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 540; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 396.

[12] Hultgren notes that some commentators posit that "he must have been a day laborer working the field of a wealthy landowner." He, rightly I think, rejects this notion. It goes beyond the narrative details provided and has no basis other than assumption. Plus, if he were merely a day laborer, how did he have the means to purchase the field from a wealthy landowner? Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 411.

intentionally deceptive act.[13] The man clearly paid less than what the combined cost of the field and treasure should have garnered. In light of this, Crossan argues that the parable demands abandonment of even our morals (and paradoxically, parables themselves).[14] The ethical issues raised by this passage, however, take the reader far afield of the purpose of the narrative. Whether or not Rabbinic authorities would have considered the man's actions ethical or legal, which is one way commentators have addressed the issue,[15] matters little. The question apparently did not interest Jesus when he told the parable because he provided no details or more information about the subject.[16] After the man properly buries the treasure, he goes in joy (χαρά) and sells all he has to buy the field.

In the second short parable, Jesus changes the scene to one of a "merchant (ἔμπορος)" seeking fine "pearls (μαργαρίτας)" (Matt 13:45). While pearls in modern times are expensive, most authors today would not use a pearl as an example of something supremely valuable. In Jesus's day, however, that was not the case. Pearls were of the highest value, in some instances even more so than gold.[17] The merchant is fortunate enough to find one, and much like the man who discovered the treasure in the field, he sells all he has in order to purchase it.

Given the proximity of these two parables many readers have focused on the similarities between the two. Both parables compare their narratives to the kingdom of heaven. Both parables contain a discovery of something immensely valuable, and both main characters,

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[13] John Sider, "Interpreting the Hid Treasure," *CSR* 13, no. 4 (1984): 371.

[14] John Dominic Crossan, *Finding Is the First Act: Trove Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable*, SBLSS 9 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 93ff.

[15] Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 179.

[16] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 244; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 277; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 436; D. A Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 328.

[17] Jack Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 113; Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 186; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 250; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 566; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 360n109; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 439; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 541; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 397.

the man and the merchant, perform the same actions in the same sequence; they find, go, sell all they have, and buy. Some have also noted that this section of the Parabolic Discourse forms a chiastic structure with the two parables in question at the center.[18] These observations lead many scholars to say that these two parables make the same main point, even if they do not always agree on what that main point is.[19]

Other commentators have noted numerous differences between the two. First of all, the Treasure parable uses the historic present while the Pearl uses the aorist and imperfect tenses.[20] In the Treasure parable, it is the treasure (θησαυρῷ) that leads off the narrative, while in the Pearl parable a searching merchant appears first.[21] While the actions of the two are the same, except for the man covering up the treasure, the words used for going and selling are different.[22] The Treasure uses ὑπάγω for "go" and πωλέω for "sell," while the Pearl uses ἀπέρχομαι for "went" and πιπράσκω for "sold" (Matt 13:44–46). The Treasure specifically mentions the joy (χαρά) of the finder while Pearl does not,[23] and finally, the man in the Treasure accidentally finds the treasure while the merchant is actively seeking a valuable pearl.[24]

It is important to determine whether these two parables make the same point before

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[18] S. M. B. Wilmshurst, "The Historic Present in Matthew's Gospel: A Survey and Analysis Focused on Matthew 13.44," *JSNT* 25, no. 3 (2003): 284; John Charles Fenton, "Expounding the Parables: The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl (Matt 13:44–46)," *TET* 77, no. 6 (1966): 178; Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 178.

[19] Sider, "Interpreting the Hid Treasure," 368; Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 110–17; Wilmshurst, "The Historic Present in Matthew's Gospel," 284; Jeffrey Gibbs, "Parables of Atonement and Assurance: Matthew 13:44–46," *CTQ* 51, no. 1 (1987): 20; Jacques Dupont, "Les Paraboles Du Trésor et de La Perle," *NTS* 14, no. 3 (1968): 409; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 242–43; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew 13–28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 47; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 278; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 329; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 397; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 539.

[20] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 418; Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 176; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 539; Wilmshurst, "The Historic Present in Matthew's Gospel."

[21] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 418.

[22] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 418.

[23] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 418; Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 176.

[24] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 418.

deciding what point they are trying to make. If they are parallel then they may help to interpret one another. If they are not then using interpretive clues from the other parable may lead readers to a wrong conclusion. Ultimately these parables make the same main point(s). The similarities appear in the major actions and salient details given in each short story. The fact that in both parables the kingdom is compared with a person *finding* something *valuable*, who then *goes, sells everything* he owns, and *buys* the valuable item signals to the reader that the parables are parallel. Most of the differences, other than the use of the historic present, are attributable to different narrative details appropriate to the analogies chosen in each circumstance.[25]

The question, then, is what point was Jesus trying to make with this pair of parables? Commentators tend to take one of four main positions: the sacrificial work of Christ, the joy of finding the kingdom, the sacrifice (both the joy and demand) required to obtain the kingdom, or the essential value of the kingdom.[26]

Taking each in turn, Gibbs argues that these two parables are atonement parables.[27] By this he means that the man and the merchant actually refer to Jesus who finds the treasure and the pearl. The valuable objects in this interpretation stand for the disciples, Christ's people. Jesus then "sells all he has" in order to purchase his people. This acts as a reference to Christ's sacrificial death. The parables, therefore, use the image of a found treasure and pearl to illustrate the kingdom of heaven because this is how Jesus redeems a people. While this interpretation is theologically satisfying, it is exegetically unlikely. Snodgrass notes that most interpretations of this kind are motivated by a desire to avoid any sense of a salvation by works soteriology.[28] These parables, however, are not intended to discuss the mechanics of salvation at all. One

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[25] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 539.

[26] I adapted Bailey's list, changing the order and the second position from "the reward of the righteous in the age to come" to the joy of finding the kingdom because in my research that was the more common position. Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 180; For a history of interpretation see, Dupont, "Les Paraboles Du Trésor et de La Perle," 410–13; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*.

[27] Gibbs, "Parables of Atonement and Assurance: Matthew 13:44–46."

[28] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 244.

cannot purchase the kingdom because, as shown above, it is the gift of God. Moreover, while some parables do lend themselves to allegorical interpretation, this one does not require specific identification of all the details. As Snodgrass says, "If we remember that the intent of the introduction is 'The kingdom is like the situation [of such a finding]' and that this is an analogy, then identification of the details is uncalled for. Similitudes do not focus on correspondences."[29] The interpretation of the Treasure and the Pearl as atonement parables is wanting.

A second interpretation offered is that the emphasis lies on the joy of finding the kingdom or the joy of receiving the gospel.[30] Joy (χαρά) is explicitly mentioned in the parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matt 13:44). After the man finds the treasure and covers it up, he then goes in "joy." The problem with seeing joy as the main point of both parables, however, is that joy is only mentioned in the Treasure parable and is absent from the Pearl. If these parables are parallel and make the same point, it would be strange for the main emphasis to be absent in one of the narratives. One can assume the merchant did experience joy when he found the pearl, but it is unlikely that the main point would be implied in the second parable. This interpretation should therefore be rejected.

Probably the most common suggestion is that these parables emphasize the cost of discipleship or the sacrifices necessary to obtain the kingdom.[31] The idea is that the value of the kingdom is obvious and that even though the valuable object changes from one parable to the next, the actions of the main character do not. In both parables the man or merchant gives up everything he has (πωλεῖ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει (Matt 13:44), πέπρακεν πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν (Matt 13:46)). These scholars believe Jesus drew attention not to the value of the discovery (though some acknowledge that this passage does not require a sharp dichotomy and that the two can be

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[29] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 245.

[30] Bruner, *Matthew 13–28*, 47.

[31] Sider, "Interpreting the Hid Treasure," 371; Crossan, *Finding Is the First Act*, 94; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 413; Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 116; Dupont, "Les Paraboles Du Trésor et de La Perle," 410; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 277; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 539.

complementary), but to the conduct of the discoverer.[32] This interpretation holds up to scrutiny well in that its proposed main point is repeated in both parables and it connects to a theme found elsewhere in Matthew (i.e., Matt 16:24–26).

Finally, some readers claim that the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl emphasize the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven.[33] What drives the action in both parables is the discovery of an extremely valuable object. The value of this object is underscored by the joy of the finder (at least in the first parable) and the lengths the men go to obtain it. A willingness to sacrifice *everything* underscores the fact that the thing obtained is worth even more. The value of the kingdom and the fact that neither the man nor the merchant felt as if the sacrifice in selling all they had was actually a loss, best explains the actions and emotions of the characters involved.[34]

Ultimately, choosing between the value of the kingdom and the cost required to obtain it is unnecessary.[35] Both themes are explicitly present and are, in fact, complementary. If the treasure and the pearl were not of surpassing value, the willingness to sacrifice everything in order to obtain it would be viewed as lunacy not as an action to be commended, and if the kingdom were obtained with less than a full commitment, it would cheapen its value. The point of these parables is that the kingdom of heaven is of such great value that it is worth every sacrifice in order to obtain it.[36]

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[32] Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 413; Dupont, "*Les Paraboles Du Trésor et de La Perle*," 410; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 277.

[33] Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 183; Carson, "The Homoios Word-Group as Introduction to Some Matthean Parables," 280; Keener claims it is the value of the kingdom and the joy of finding it. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 392; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 397.

[34] Bailey, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13 Part 6," 184; Eta Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 100.

[35] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 245; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 435.

[36] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 328.

How do these parables influence Matthew's portrayal of divine grace? It should be said that the Treasure and the Pearl are not ultimately about salvation by grace.[37] The passage also does not teach that someone can buy the kingdom or that selling everything one has will lead to entrance into the kingdom. How a person enters the kingdom according to Matthew must be discerned by the whole Gospel's narrative. Matthew's full treatment of this theme, partially discussed above, places entrance into the kingdom as a gift from God. This gift can be received, however, only by those willing to be fully dedicated to it (Matt 16:24–26; 19:22). The Treasure and the Pearl illustrate that this sacrifice is completely worth it because the value of this gift far surpasses any earthly possessions. God's gift of the kingdom to his people is of inestimable, all-surpassing, superabundant value.

The Divine Son of God

The kingdom of heaven is not the only valuable gift given by God in the Gospel of Matthew. In addition to the kingdom, Matthew portrays God's grace as supremely valuable in his giving of himself in the person of Jesus, the eternal Son of God. With Jesus's arrival in Bethlehem near the beginning of the millennium comes the gift of the divine presence, and Jesus giving his life on behalf of sinners brings the gift of salvation. While Matthew does not specifically state that these gifts are particularly valuable (though one could argue that the gift of Christ himself is so intimately tied to the gift of the kingdom that the argument above also applies here), they are self-evidently so. What could be more valuable than God himself, and as Jesus says clearly in the Gospel of John, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The gift of God himself in the person of Jesus and the sacrifice of his Son on behalf of sinners is supremely valuable.

[37] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 246.

The divinity of Christ.[38] The Gospel of Matthew reveals Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of David,[39] the Son of Abraham,[40] and the new Moses,[41] but the first Gospel also presents Jesus as the incarnate creator, Yahweh himself.[42] While there are a number of ways to approach this issue, I will begin by examining two of the titles the Gospel gives to Jesus.[43] Next, I will detail how some of the actions of Jesus as well as the response of those around him show his divinity. Finally, I will look at a few texts where Matthew draws on Old Testament texts that refer to Yahweh but are then applied to Jesus.

Beginning with the announcement of Jesus's birth to Mary, after Joseph is told Mary will have a child from the Holy Spirit who will save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21), Matthew applies Isaiah 7:14–16 to Jesus's birth. (Matt 1:23). He says, "τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· *ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ,* ὅ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον *μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός*" (Matt 1:22–23).[44] While Matthew's use of "virgin (παρθένος)" garners most of the

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[38] Because this is not a work on Christology in Matthew, this section will be necessarily brief. For a good treatment of the divinity of Christ in Matthew see, Charles L. Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 133–90.

[39] Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUZNT 216 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 73–98; Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 65–100.

[40] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 99–132; Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*, 169–206.

[41] Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993); Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 33–72; Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*, 131–69.

[42] When I say that Jesus is God himself I mean this in the trinitarian sense that affirms the unity of the Godhead in the divine nature but maintains a distinction between the persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit. It is the Son, not the Father or the Spirit, who becomes man. The individuality of the divine persons can be seen in Jesus's baptism where it is the Son who is baptized while the Spirit descends and then the Father speaks (Matt 3:13–17).

[43] I am choosing only to examine two titles for space purposes. There are other titles that point to Jesus's divinity as well, most notably, "Lord" and "Son of God." For more on this, see: Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 253–83; Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 142–52.

[44] The scholarship on this verse is massive, and much of it falls beyond the scope of this chapter. For the text for see, Martinus Menken, "The Textual Form of the Quotation from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23," *NT* 43, no. 2 (2001): 144–60.

attention, for the purpose of this chapter I will focus specifically on Jesus's second naming in four verses. Matthew says that Jesus's name will be "Immanuel (Ἐμμανουήλ)," and even helpfully informs readers that this name translates to "God with us." The divine presence is here in the person of Jesus Christ. This idea brackets the entire Gospel in that Jesus promises to be with his disciples until the end of the age after his resurrection (Matt 28:20).[45] This placement forms an *inclusio* that signals to readers that this is a major theme, even if the details are not spelled out immediately. In fact, Hays says,

> The readers must continue on to find out what it means to say of Jesus that he is Emmanuel, and *in what* sense God is made manifest in him. Whatever we make of the complexities of Matthew's appropriation of Isaiah 7:14, his placement of this scriptural citation at the beginning of his narrative sounds a major keynote for his Gospel: Israel's God is present to his people precisely in the person of Jesus. The reader of Matthew's Gospel is thereby alerted to watch closely for the ways in which the story elaborates this central message about Jesus' identity through additional scriptural intertexts.[46]

The most extensive treatment of this theme is David Kupp's *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*. Unfortunately, after showing that this theme of divine presence is present throughout the first Gospel, he then backs away from the implications of his study by saying, "Matthew never openly asserts that Jesus is divine. Although I have used the term 'divine presence' continuously in connection with Jesus, it does not require that Jesus is God."[47] I am inclined to agree with Hays and Gathercole who believe that the weight of evidence (some of which will be explained below) suggests that Matthew presents Jesus as divine.[48] Carson notes the enormity of the emphasis on the gift of Jesus as the divine presence when he says, "No greater blessing can be conceived than for God to dwell with his people (Isa 60:18–20; Ezek 48:35; Rev 21:23). Jesus is the one called 'God with us': the

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[45] Richard B Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 162–63; Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 153.

[46] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 165.

[47] David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 220.

[48] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 174–75; Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son*, 75–76.

designation evokes John 1:14, 18."[49] This sums up well the application of Jesus as Immanuel to the superabundance of divine grace.

Immanuel is not the only title applied to Christ that shows Jesus's divinity. Twenty-five times throughout Matthew Jesus refers to himself as "the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)."[50] While not every instance of the "Son of Man"[51] language appears in a context that directly shows Jesus's divinity, many do. When Jesus declares his authority to forgive sins, which is a divine prerogative especially in light of the scribes thinking that Jesus was blaspheming, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man before healing a man to prove he has this authority (Matt 9:2–8).[52] Later, Jesus declares the Son of Man is "Lord (κύριος) of the Sabbath (τοῦ σαββάτου)" (Matt 12:8).[53] The Son of Man is said to send or come with "his angels" (Matt 13:41, 16:27, 24:31). Who could have angels at their disposal other than God himself? Jesus also declares that the Son of Man will one day "sit upon his glorious throne (καθίσει ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 19:28, 25:31). In the latter text the nations are gathered before him and he separates them into sheep and goats. This, as it turns out, is an act of judgment with eternal consequences that is appropriate for God alone to perform. Finally, Jesus references the Son of Man coming on his clouds in his glory (Matt 24:30, 26:64). In Matthew 24 he sends out his angels to gather "his elect (τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 24:30). In Matthew 26 Jesus has been arrested and stands falsely accused. The high priest demands that Jesus tell them whether or not he is the Christ, and Jesus says, σὺ εἶπας. πλὴν λέγω ὑμῖν· ἀπ᾽ ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν *υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ *ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*

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[49] D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 80.

[50] The case of "the Son (ὁ υἱὸς)" changes based on its use in the sentence, but the "of Man" portion is always in the genitive case (Matt 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 12:32, 12:40, 13:37, 13:41, 16:13, 16:27–28, 17:9, 17:12, 19:28, 20:18, 20:28, 24:37, 24:30 (twice), 24:44, 25:31, 26:2, 26:24, 26:45, 26:64).

[51] For the different ways to interpret this title see: Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, SNTS 107 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[52] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 172.

[53] This text will be discussed more thoroughly later.

(Matt 26:64). The high priest hears this as a blasphemous claim and calls for his death. He recognized a claim to divine identity in Jesus's answer.

If Jesus's use of the title "Son of Man" in Matthew is not enough evidence, when combined with the Old Testament background to the phrase the intent seems clear. The title, drawn from Daniel 7:13–14[54] is messianic, and as Quarles says, "The image of riding on the clouds or being surrounded by clouds implies that Daniel is describing an appearance of God himself."[55] The author of Daniel's use of a "generic term to describe service to the Ancient of Days, yet a term reserved for divine worship to describe service to the Son of Man, is unexpected and telling."[56] Daniel's Son of Man is viewed as a divine figure, and Jesus has no qualms about applying that title, and the predictions that accompany it, to himself.

In addition to the titles applied to Jesus showing his divinity, certain deeds he performed point to him being more than a mere man. Two in particular, his calming of the storm in Matthew 8 and his walking on the sea in Matthew 14, act as proof that he is God incarnate.[57]

In Matthew 8:22–27 the disciples wake Jesus on their journey across the sea because a storm threatened to sink their ship (Matt 8:23–25). Jesus rises, rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith, and then rebukes the winds and the sea (Matt 8:26). The men marvel and ask the rhetorical question, ποταπός ἐστιν οὗτος ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ ἡ θάλασσα αὐτῷ ὑπακούουσιν (Matt 8:27). The mastery of winds and waves recalls numerous Old Testament texts that attribute this power to God and God alone (e.g. Job 38:8–11; Pss 65:5–8, 89:8–9, 107:23–30).[58] The men

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[54] For Matthew's use of Daniel, including the Son of Man theme, see: Jonathan T Pennington, "Refractions of Daniel in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, vol. 1 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 65–86; For a good discussion of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, see: Peter Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?," in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy of Biblical Theology, a Festschrift for Dr. Geoff Adams* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press for the Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College, 2003).

[55] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 134.

[56] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 136.

[57] Other actions could be mentioned like his healing of a leper or his action in eschatological judgment (mentioned above), but for space purposes I limited myself to these two. Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 167–72.

[58] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 334; David R. Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction*

on the boat, while amazed, reveal that their understanding is only partial because they ask what sort of man could still a storm.

While the men who experienced Jesus's first maritime miracle marveled (ἐθαύμασαν), his second nautical adventure will inspire worship (προσεκύνησαν) (Matt 8:27, 14:33). After Jesus miraculously feeds over five thousand people (Matt 14:15–21), he sends the disciples in a boat across the sea (Matt 14:22). Jesus then spends time in prayer alone on a mountain (Matt 14:23). Meanwhile, the boat had advanced a long way out to sea (Matt 14:23). Jesus comes to the disciples in the boat by walking on the sea (Matt 14:24–25). The disciples are initially terrified, but Jesus calms them by saying, θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (Matt 14:27). Peter asks to be allowed to get out of the boat, and he walks on the water to Jesus. He becomes afraid, however, when he sees the wind and the waves (Matt 14:28–30). Jesus reaches out his hand to save Peter, and after they are all safely in the boat, they worship (προσεκύνησαν) him as the Son of God (Matt 14:33).

Three details in this narrative point to Jesus being presented as a divine figure. First of all, the Old Testament background of this image of someone walking on the sea is a distinctively divine action (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16, Hab 3:15).[59] France says this imagery is a "potent symbol of the Creator's control over the unruly forces of his world."[60] While man may walk *through* a body of water dried by the Lord (Exod 14; Josh 3), only God himself walks *on* the waters. Second, Jesus's calming call to those on the boat, θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε, echoes the divine name, "I am" (Matt 14:27).[61] Carson says, "Jesus' 'Take courage' and his 'Don't be afraid' bracket the central reason for these calming exhortations: 'It is I.' Although the Greek *egõ eimi* can have no more force than that, any Christian after the Resurrection and

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to Matthew (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 273; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 215.

[59] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 600; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 566.

[60] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 566.

[61] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 344; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 506.

Ascension would also detect echoes of 'I am,' the decisive self-disclosure of God (Exod 3:14; Isa 42:10, 51:12)."[62]

Finally, the disciples, unlike at the end of the calming of the storm narrative, worship (προσεκύνησαν) Jesus and declare him to be the Son of God (Matt 14:33). As Bauer notes, "Perhaps the strongest indicator of Jesus' deity in the Gospel of Matthew is that Jesus is worshiped."[63] The verb προσκυνεῖν can mean simply to bow down or pay homage and does not entail that the one to whom the honor is paid is divine.[64] In some texts, particularly those involving postulants, it seems better to take the use of προσκυνεῖν as simply kneeling and showing respect (e.g. Matt 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, 18:26, 20:20).[65] Its use in the visit of the three Magi is ambiguous; it is unclear whether they mean to worship or merely pay homage, though I do tend to lean toward worship given that Matthew has just declared that this baby is Immanuel, God with us (Matt 2:2, 8, 11). Four times, however, the verb refers to worship. In the temptation story in Matthew 4:1–11, Satan tempts Jesus to fall down and worship (προσκυνήσῃς) him. Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 (LXX) saying that one should only "worship (προσκυνήσεις)" and "serve (λατρεύσεις)" the Lord (Matt 4:10). Yahweh, then, is the only proper object of "worship." Keeping this in mind, as Hays says,

> In view of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as 'God with us' and his use of the verb in settings where it unmistakably narrates an appropriate human response to Jesus' epiphanic self-manifestation (14:33, 28:9, 28:17), it is hard to deny that, in and through these references to worshiping Jesus, Matthew is identifying him as nothing less than the embodied presence of Israel's God, the one to whom alone worship is due, the one who jealously forbids the worship of any idols, images, or other gods.[66]

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[62] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 344.

[63] Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God*, 274.

[64] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 167; Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son*, 69; For an in-depth study of this language see, Joshua E. Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar: The Father and the Son*, WUZNT 402 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[65] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 167.

[66] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 167.

More than applying titles that imply divinity or recording actions that do the same, Matthew also takes Old Testament texts that refer explicitly to God himself and applies them directly to Jesus.[67] First, John the Baptist comes on the scene preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and Matthew informs readers that his ministry of baptism and calling for repentance fulfills a prophecy from Isaiah 40 (Matt 3:1–3). John is the one crying in the wilderness and preparing the way for the Lord (κυρίου). In Matthew this text, as the subsequent narrative shows, refers to Jesus, but in Isaiah, the messenger in the wilderness prepares the way for God himself (Matt 3:4–17; Isa 40:3).[68] This strongly implies that Matthew viewed Jesus's coming as the coming of Yahweh.

In another prophecy concerning John the Baptist, Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 to say that John the Baptist is the one who prepares the way (Matt 11:10). Davies and Allison explain this text well when they say,

> Mal 4.5–6 interprets Mal 3.1 as a prophecy about Elijah. Our text does the same (cf. 11.14). It thus makes John the Baptist (=Elijah) the messenger preparing the way for Jesus. (The OT has 'my messenger before me', 'me' being Yahweh. Matthew's σοῦ is Jesus. So Jesus has replaced Yahweh).[69]

In both texts, then, John the Baptist fulfills the role of the messenger preparing the way for the Lord (Yahweh), and Jesus fulfills the role of the coming of the Lord God himself.

Similarly, as Quarles says about Matthew 4:16, "Jesus's residence in Capernaum fulfills important details of the Isaiah 9 prophecy, which climaxes with the promise of a child who will rule over David's kingdom and bear four exalted titles, including *Mighty God*, a title specifically reserved in the Old Testament for Yahweh."[70] Matthew again takes a portion of

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[67] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 161.

[68] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 102; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 105; Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 161.

[69] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 250.

[70] Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, 162.

Isaiah that refers to God himself and applies it to Jesus.[71]

One final Christological text should be considered, Matthew 12:1–8. Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field on the Sabbath, and the disciples begin to pick heads of grain to eat (Matt 12:1). The Pharisees see them and claim that they are breaking the Sabbath laws (Matt 12:2). Jesus responds by making three arguments to show that what they had done was not sinful. First, he points to historical precedent of David eating the bread of the Presence (Matt 12:3–4). Second, he shows that the priests in the temple break the Sabbath by working, and that their doing so is guiltless. Jesus's argument in this case is that if the priests can break the Sabbath by working, then "something greater (μεῖζόν) than the temple" takes precedence over the Sabbath laws as well (Matt 5–6). Due to μεῖζόν being in the neuter case and its use in comparison with the temple, interpreters have offered a number of suggestions as to what the "something greater" refers to,[72] but the best answer in light of Matthew 12:39–42, where μεῖζόν is also used as a neuter but in comparison with people, is that Jesus is the one greater than the temple. As Carson says, "The neuter . . . can refer to persons when some quality is being stressed rather than the individual per se."[73] Jesus claiming to be greater than the temple is a shocking pronouncement due to its place as the presence of God amidst his people and a "symbol of nationhood."[74] The second argument, then, is that because Jesus is greater than the temple, he has the authority to interpret the law, and, therefore, the actions of him and his disciples do not incur guilt.

Finally, Jesus continues his justification of their actions by claiming not only that he has the authority to interpret the law and act accordingly, but also that the Pharisees do not and that they interpret the law incorrectly (Matt 12:7–8). Jesus finishes with an astounding

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[71] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 380.

[72] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 281–82.

[73] Carson, *Matthew 1–12,* 281.

[74] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 460.

pronouncement. He says, κύριος γάρ ἐστιν τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (Matt 12:8). France sums up the implications of this saying well when he says,

> This concluding pronouncement is Christologically even more daring than what has preceded it in vv. 3–6. Not only is the Son of Man greater than David and the temple, but he is 'Lord' of the institution which is traced in the OT to God's direct command (Gen 2:3), enshrined in the decalogue which is the central codification of God's requirements for his people, and described by God as '*my* sabbath' (Exod 31:13; Lev 19:3, 30; Isa 56;4, etc.) Against this background to speak of humanity in general as 'Lord of the Sabbath' would be unthinkable; to speak of an individual human being as such is to make the most extraordinary claim to an authority on par with that of God himself.[75]

Not only does this text suggest very strongly that Jesus is God, it also uses comparative language to express the greatness of his coming compared to long established institutions that constituted the center of the Jewish religion. The gift of Christ's coming (and his death on behalf of sinners as shown below), surpasses David, the temple, the Sabbath, Jonah, or Solomon. Matthew's language strongly implies that divine grace in the person of Jesus is the greatest gift imaginable.

The death of the divine Son of God. This Jesus, the divine Son of God incarnate, does not merely come and live among his people, though this would be a supremely great gift. No, the Son of Man came to die so that his people may be redeemed and saved. In two places Matthew characterizes this self-sacrifice in the stead of sinners as a gift (δίδωμι): Matthew 20:28 and 26:26–28—the second text refers literally to the giving of bread and wine, but Jesus interprets this as a prediction of his coming death on the cross.

In the first instance Jesus responds to a question asked by the mother of the sons of Zebedee about allowing her sons to sit at the right or left hand of Jesus in his kingdom (Matt 20:20–23). Jesus tells them that this is not his decision to make, and the rest of the disciples were upset at this line of questioning from the brothers (Matt 20:24). Jesus takes this as an opportunity to remind them that to be truly great in the kingdom one must actually be a servant. In reality, this is exactly what the Son of Man came to do. He came not διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ

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[75] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 463.

δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν (Matt 20:28).[76] Jesus said that the purpose for his coming was to give his life as a ransom for many. As quoted above, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The willingness of Jesus to die on behalf of others, especially given the exalted nature of Jesus's true identity discussed above, in and of itself is a gift of incalculable value, but Matthew also stresses the extent of the efficacy of this saving act. Jesus's death acts as a ransom for "the many (πολλῶν)."[77] As Carson says, "'The many' underlines the immeasurable effects of Jesus' solitary death."[78]

This line of thought continues at the institution of the Lord's Supper, immediately preceding Jesus's arrest. At the last supper Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples (Matt 26:26). He commands them to eat and also tells them that it is his body (Matt 26:26). Jesus then takes a cup of wine, commands them to drink of it for it is his blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:27–28). The acted parable clearly means to predict Jesus's death that will soon come, and just like in the ransom saying, Jesus's death is said to accomplish the forgiveness of sins for "the many (πολλῶν)" (Matt 26:28). Here again Matthew combines the supremely valuable content of the gift (the Son of God's sacrificial death) and the great extent/effect of the gift (the forgiveness of sins for many).

Summary

Matthew's Gospel presents both the kingdom of God and the person and work of Jesus as immensely valuable gifts. The superabundant grace of God is detailed first in the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price. Whether one says it is the main point or a main point of the twin parables, the kingdom of heaven, which Matthew does present as a gift

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[76] Many issues in this passage go well beyond the scope of this dissertation. For a few resources on some of those issues see, Rupert Davies, "Christ in Our Place: The Contribution of the Prepositions," *TB* 21 (1970): 71–91; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 11–64; Royce Gruenler, "Atonement in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 90–105.

[77] Hagner notes the use of ψυχήν for "life" and πολλοί for "many" are 'Semitisms.' Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 538.

[78] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 433.

throughout his Gospel, is shown to be of surpassing value. In addition to the kingdom, Matthew presents God as giving the gift of his presence in the person of the divine Son of God. Moreover, the Son of God and Man gives his life, the highest value gift a man can give, in order to save many.

The Permanence of Divine Gifts

Divine gifts in the first Gospel are not only presented as extremely valuable but also as permanent. In particular, two texts speak of the gift as "eternal (αἰώνιος)" (Matt 19:16–30, 25:31–46). The gift of eternal life is a gift of superabundant grace.

Matthew 19:16–30

In Matthew 19:16–30 a rich man comes to Jesus and asks what "good thing (ἀγαθὸν)" he must do to obtain "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)" (Matt 19:16). Jesus responds by telling him that if he wants to "enter life (εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν) he must "keep the commandments (τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς)" (Matt 19:17). After telling the man which commandments he must keep by quoting half of the ten commandments and the second greatest commandment, the rich young man tells Jesus that he has done all of these things (Matt 19:18–20). Jesus then tells him that if he wants to be "whole/complete/perfect (τέλειος)"[79] he must sell everything he has and give it to the poor (Matt 19:21). This happens to be the one thing the man would not do. He was a very wealthy man and would not part with his possessions in order to obtain life (Matt 19:22). Jesus then famously says εὐκοπώτερόν ἐστιν κάμηλον διὰ τρυπήματος ῥαφίδος διελθεῖν ἢ πλούσιον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (Matt 19:24).[80] The astonished disciples take this to mean that no one can be saved, but Jesus assures them that, while with man this would be true, with God "all things are possible (πάντα δυνατά)" (Matt 19:26). Peter points out they have left

[79] For this term see, Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 69–86.

[80] For the camel through the eye of a needle saying see, Ernest Best, "The Camel and the Needle's Eye: Mk 10:25," *TET* 82, no. 3 (1970): 83–89; J. Duncan Derrett, "A Camel through the Eye of a Needle," *NTS* 32, no. 3 (1986): 465–70.

everything to follow Jesus, and asks what the disciples will obtain for this sacrifice. Jesus replies that in the "new world (παλιγγενεσίᾳ)"[81] they will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:27–28). Moreover, anyone, not merely the twelve, who sacrifices to follow Jesus ἑκατονταπλασίονα λήμψεται καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσει (Matt 19:29).

A few features of this text are worth noting. First, in Matthew 19:16–30 six different terms are used to describe salvation.[82] The man initially asks how to obtain "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)," and this phrase is used again in verse 29 when Jesus says that those who have left everything and everyone to follow him will receive a hundredfold and eternal life (Matt 19:16, 29). Jesus also shortens ζωὴν αἰώνιον to just ζωὴν in verse 18. In between the references to ζωὴν αἰώνιον the various characters in the narrative use parallel phrases to refer to the same reality. Jesus's reply to the young man's claim that he has kept all the commandments says that if he would be "whole/complete/perfect (τέλειος)" then he should sell his possessions and then he will have "treasure in heaven (θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς)" (Matt 19:21). After the young man goes away sad, Jesus uses "kingdom of heaven (τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν)" and "kingdom of God (τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ)" as interchangeable phrases where both are the object of the preposition εἰς and follow the verb εἰσέρχομαι (Matt 19:23–24).[83] Finally, the disciples, dismayed at Jesus's pronouncement at the difficulty for a rich person to enter the kingdom, ask who can be "saved (σωθῆναι)" (Matt 19:25).

For Matthew, eternal life, perfection/wholeness, treasure in heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, and salvation all refer to the same reality—or, at the very least, are closely associated with one another—even if each word or phrase approaches the concept from a

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[81] J. Duncan Derrett, "Palingenesia (Matthew 19:28)," *JSNT* 6, no. 20 (1984): 51–58; David C. Sim, "The Meaning of Palingenesia in Matthew 19.28," *JSNT* 50 (1993): 3–12.

[82] Turner counts only 5. The difference is whether one counts "treasure in heaven" as a parallel phrase in the narrative. David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 473.

[83] Turner, *Matthew*, 473; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 789; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 95; For the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven in Matthew see, Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*.

different angle. This allows readers to import what Matthew tells us about each of these realties from other parts of the Gospel into his or her understanding of these divine gifts. Earlier I demonstrated that the kingdom is supremely valuable, and this is reiterated by Jesus's insistence that sacrificing the things of this earth will be no sacrifice at all in comparison to the immeasurable blessings of the age to come.[84] Moreover, and more salient for this section, we are now told that this gift is permanent or "eternal (αἰώνιον)," which BDAG claims to be a "period of unending duration."[85] Matthew 19:16–30 therefore shows that divine grace is not only superabundant in value but also in duration.

Matthew 25:31–46[86]

At the end of the Eschatological Discourse, Jesus presents a harrowing picture of final judgment. The nations are gathered before his throne as sheep and goats. Jesus divides the group by sending the sheep, "the righteous (οἱ δίκαιοι)," to his right and into eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) and the goats to his left and eternal punishment (κόλασιν αἰώνιον) (Matt 25:31–46). Two details of this passage remind readers of Matthew 19:16–30. First of all, just as in the former text, Matthew moves seamlessly from using "kingdom (βασιλείαν)" language to that of "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)" (Matt 25:34, 46).[87] Second, in both texts the rewards are spoken of as an "inheritance (κληρονομέω)" (Matt 19:29, 25:34). If more proof is needed that these words refer to the same concept (even if they are drawing on different theological realities), notice in 19:29 it is "eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)" being inherited while in 25:34 it is the "kingdom (βασιλείαν)." Here again Matthew presents divine gifts as both valuable and permanent.[88]

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[84] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 566; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 802.

[85] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[86] I have dealt with this text in more detail in my chapter on efficacy, so the discussion here will be brief. See my footnotes there and Snodgrass for a discussion of some of the issues and for a bibliography. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 543–63.

[87] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 683; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1034.

[88] Another argument for the superabundance of divine grace is that its value, while inherit in some gifts and explicitly detailed in others, is also evident when considered against the alternative of eternal fire and

The Magnitude of a Gracious Salvation

In addition to the value and permanence of divine grace, Matthew stresses its magnitude. One text in particular, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21–35, emphasizes the scale of divine benevolence.

At the end of the Ecclesiological Discourse Peter comes to Jesus and asks how many times does one have to forgive his brother (Matt 18:21). Jesus famously replies that believers must forgive their brothers not seven times but ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά (Matt 18:22).[89] Jesus then transitions to the parable where the kingdom of heaven is compared to a king settling accounts. Some have noted that the parable does not seem to fit where it stands because it does not illustrate the repetitive forgiveness Jesus just demanded of his followers. As Snodgrass says, however, "The parable is *not, and was not intended to be*, an illustration of 18:21–22."[90] The parable is simply related to the preceding by picking up on the theme of forgiveness and looking at it from a different vantage point.[91] The Unforgiving Servant acts, in some ways, as a parenetic device to encourage forgiveness among brothers in light of the forgiveness they have already received. If Jesus's initial answer to Peter's question gives the "how many," the parable provides the "why."

The Unforgiving Servant tells a narrative of a king who decides to settle his accounts, and he calls one in particular who owes him 10,000 talents (Matt 18:23–24). The servant could not pay the extraordinary sum, so the king decides to sell the servant and his whole family along with all of his possessions in order to recoup some of the losses (Matt 18:25). The servant then begs for more time to pay back the money he owes, but the king, rather than grant this request, decides to forgive the entire debt (Matt 18:26–27). After having just received a new lease on life

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punishment. Judgment, as I will discuss in the chapter on singularity, acts as the dark backdrop on which divine grace in Matthew shines brightly.

[89] For the translation of this phrase, see: Iver Larsen, "Seventy-Seven Times or Seventy Times Seven Times?," *BT* 48, no. 4 (1997): 442–45.

[90] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 67 Emphasis his.

[91] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*,67; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 791–94.

the servant leaves the king's presence only to come across a fellow servant who owes him 100 denarii. Rather than extend the same mercy that the king had shown to him to his peer, the unmerciful servant rejects his fellow servant's plea for more time and throws him in prison (Matt 18: 28–30). Disgusted at what just happened, other servants turn him in to the king who then cancels his previous offer of forgiveness (Matt 18:31–33). The servant is thrown in prison until he can pay off the debt (Matt 18:34).

The best explanation of the parable is that it is an exhortation for someone to forgive others of their sins against them in light of the even greater forgiveness that God has bestowed on him or her for their sins against God. That "debt" refers to sin should not be in question.[92] The passage uses two different words to refer to the financial obligations discussed throughout the parable: ὀφειλή in 18:24, 38, 32, 34 and δάνειον 18:27. de Boer and others note that δάνειον actually means "loan" rather than "debt," but this distinction does not play a major role in the parable because the δάνειον is only used once while ὀφειλή is used throughout and both words refer to the same 10,000 talent financial obligation (Matt 18:27, 32).[93] In Matthew 6:12, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches believers to pray for "forgiveness (ἀφίημι)" using the same word for debt as in the parable, ὀφείλημα. After the Lord's prayer Jesus switches from debt language to that of "trespasses (παράπτωμα)" by saying that if you "forgive (ἀφίημι)" others their "trespasses (παράπτωμα)" God will forgive you, but if you do not forgive, neither will God (Matt 6:14–15). Jesus similarly concludes the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant by saying ὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ποιήσει ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ ἀφῆτε ἕκαστος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν καρδιῶν ὑμῶν (Matt 18:35). The Lord's prayer gives the positive impact of forgiving one's brother while the Unforgiving Servant provides the negative, dire warning to those who do not.

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[92] Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, 53; Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 27–39; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 703.

[93] Martinus C. de Boer, "Ten Thousand Talents: Matthew's Interpretation and Redaction of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23–35)," *CBQ* 50, no. 2 (1988): 215–16.

The most salient detail in the parable for superabundance is the amount of sin/debt discussed in the parable. The servant has amassed a debt of "10,000 talents (μυρίων ταλάντων)" (Matt 18:24). Just how big is a 10,000-talent debt? It is enormous. As Snodgrass says,

> A 'talent' is a measurement of weight of gold, silver, or copper. It varied but was between approximately 60 and 90 pounds. 10,000 talents would be about 204 metric tons. Depending on which metal was used, a talent was equivalent of about 6,000 denarii, which would make the first servant's debt 60,000,000 denarii, and at one denarius a day (as in Matt 20:2) would require a day laborer over 164,000 years to repay![94]

The total, however, may actually be more than that. As a number of commentators have noted, in Greek μύριοι is the largest possible number the language has and can be used to express an "unspecified vast number ('myriads')," [95] while τὰλαντον is the largest unit of measurement.[96] The point is that when Jesus says a servant owes μυρίων ταλάντων it is meant to represent an impossibly high debt. Some have tried to argue that the number is not unreasonably high by claiming that the "servant (ὁ δοῦλος)" is a tax farmer for a region and that his appeal for more time is legitimate.[97] Even if the servant is meant to be a tax farmer or high ranking official, which is by no means certain given the lack of details in this regard, that he could pay back this enormous debt is unlikely. As Keener says, "The combined annual tribute of Galilee and Perea just after the death of the repressive Herod the Great came to only 200 talents; the tribute of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea came to 600 talents. This fact starkly reveals the laughably hyperbolic character of the illustration: the poor man owes the king more money than existed in

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[94] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 66.

[95] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 756.

[96] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 706; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 456; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 471n30; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 756; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 538; Bernard Scott, "The King's Accounting: Matthew 18:23–24," *JBL* 104, no. 3 (1985): 438n27.

[97] J. Duncan Derrett, "The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant," in *Law in the New Testament* (London, England: Dartman, Longman, & Todd, 1970), 32–47; Snodgrass seems to agree with the designation of the servant as a tax farmer but still holds the number was meant to be impossibly high. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 68.

circulation in the whole country at the time!"[98] The debt is a hyperbole meant to shock the hearer, especially in light of the paltry sum the second servant owes the first.[99]

The point, remember, is to motivate hearers to forgive one another as God has forgiven them, but the secondary point being made is for readers to marvel at the enormous debt they have been forgiven. Matthew illustrates the magnitude of God's gracious forgiveness of sin by use of an insanely high debt owed by a servant.[100] God's grace in the forgiveness of sins is incalculably large.

Conclusion

The first Gospel presents various divine gifts as a lavish outpouring of favor on his people. The kingdom is supremely valuable, as is the death of the God-man on behalf of sinners. Matthew also shows that the kingdom of heaven is interchangeable with eternal life and is, therefore, permanent. Finally, the forgiveness necessary to enter this life is on an unimaginably large scale. God has forgiven a myriad of sins. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is superabundant.

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[98] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 458.

[99] Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: C. Schribner's Sons, 1972), 30.

[100] de Boer argues that the number is actually a Matthean redaction. The original sum, argues de Boer, was likely more like 10,000 denarii, and Matthew changed the denomination in order to shock readers. While I am not convinced that this was a Matthean redaction, if de Boer is right, this adds further weight to the claim that Matthew was trying, at least in part, to press upon readers the immense debt they have accrued by their sin against God. Boer, "Ten Thousand Talents: Matthew's Interpretation and Redaction of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23–35)."

CHAPTER 4

PRIORITY

In Matthew, when God shows grace to his people, who takes the initiative? Does God spontaneously give or does he require prompting? This is another way of asking whether or not Matthew perfects the facet of grace known as priority.[1] A gift given before the recipient asks and not "obliged by a previous gift . . . signals the superiority of the giver."[2] The giver is not in a position where he is required to give or to return a favor, so when he chooses to bestow his generosity, it is a free and willing act that shows his gracious character. Priority, therefore, concerns the timing of the gift.

Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is, at least in the case of salvation and forgiveness of sins, given prior to the prompting of the recipient. In most narratives concerning Jesus's healing ministry, the beneficiary takes the initiative by going to Jesus or calling out for help. Even in certain healing stories, however, Jesus reveals God's priority in grace by responding to the postulant's greater need (forgiveness of sins) before healing them. Divine grace also reaches the twelve disciples without their prompting in the two calling narratives (Matt 4:18–22, 9:9). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Matthew shows God's initiative in grace through his foreordination of events throughout the Gospel. Matthew leaves the impression that nothing recorded in the first Gospel happened by accident but was a part of the divine plan for man and the world from the beginning.

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[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 71–72.

[2] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 72.

Healings and Unexpected Forgiveness

One type of text that might work against the notion of priority in Matthew are the numerous healing narratives dispersed throughout the first Gospel.[3] The normal pattern—though not the exclusive pattern—is that the postulant approaches Christ about being healed before Jesus acknowledges or approaches the one in need. Five times throughout the first Gospel Matthew gives a summary of Jesus's activity that includes healing diseases or casting out demons (Matt 4:23–25, 9:35–36, 14:34–36, 15:29–31, 19:1–2). The first two generalized accounts are so similar they seem to constitute a reiteration rather than separate instances of mass miracles (Matt 4:23–25, 9:35–36). In both cases, Jesus is the one going to an area in order to teach, proclaim, and heal. In that sense, the initiative lies with Jesus, but after word spreads that people are being healed, large numbers begin to bring their sick, wounded, and possessed to Jesus, thus taking the initiative for themselves (4:23–25). Between the two summary accounts in Matthew 4:23–25 and 9:35–36, many people oppressed by demons were brought to Jesus to be healed while he was at Peter's house (Matt 8:16–17). In Matthew 14:34–36, the men of Gennesaret recognized him and began to bring the sick and suffering to him. This scene is repeated near the Sea of Galilee and Judea (Matt 15:29–31, 19:1–2). When Jesus arrives in an area it does not take long before the crowds come bringing sufferers for a chance to be healed. Therefore, the initiative for the general healing accounts lies primarily with the crowds.

The more detailed accounts of individual healings show a repeated pattern of the supplicant coming to Jesus, not the other way around. Immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, a leper approaches Jesus, kneels before him, and beseeches Christ to heal him (Matt 8:1–4). After the healing of the leper, Jesus goes to Capernaum where a centurion approaches to have Jesus heal his servant who is paralyzed (Matt 8:5–13).

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[3] For a defense of the historicity of these accounts see: Craig S Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Jesus, impressed with the man's faith, heals the servant from a distance (Matt 8:10–13). In the middle of a conversation with the disciples of John about fasting, a man comes to Jesus asking to heal his daughter who has just died (Matt 9:14–18). Jesus goes with the man, and on the way a woman who has suffered from a discharge of blood for over a decade approaches Christ to try and touch his fringe to be healed (Matt 9:19–21). He turns to her and heals her for her faith, and then proceeds to raise a girl from the dead (Matt 9:22–25). In both the case of the raised girl and the woman with the problem of blood, the one in need approaches Jesus. This turns out to be the first two of a quick succession of healings where the petitioner approaches Jesus first (9:18–34). Later, a demon-oppressed man afflicted with blindness is brought to Jesus and healed (Matt 12:22). In the narrative of the Canaanite woman, it is the woman herself who cries out repeatedly to have her daughter healed of a demon (Matt 15:21–28). After Jesus was transfigured on the mountain (Matt 17:1–13), a man came to Jesus to have his son healed of seizures after the disciples were unable to cast the demon out due to their little faith (Matt 17:14–20). Finally, as they were leaving Jericho, two blind men cried out time and again for Jesus to heal them in spite of the crowd who tried to silence them. Jesus healed them, and they recovered their sight (Matt 20:29–34). In each of these healing narratives the people in need, or someone on their behalf, approaches Jesus to receive healing and mercy. They take initiative to receive the gift of healing.

One exception to the pattern of the postulant seeking the healing on their own initiative is when Jesus enters Peter's house (Matt 8:14–15). Jesus goes to Peter's house where his mother-in-law is sick with a fever (Matt 8:14). Jesus touches her hand, seemingly on his own initiative, and she is healed (Matt 8:15).

Finally, one other individual healing deserves mention. After healing a possessed man, Jesus gets in a boat and crosses over to Capernaum (Matt 9:1). A group of people then bring a paralytic man lying on a bed to Jesus (Matt 9:2). The initiative, so far, lies with the paralytic man (or at least the group of people tasked with carrying him).

Jesus, rather than simply healing the man, as he had done and will do many times throughout Matthew, proclaims that the man's sins are forgiven (Matt 9:2). An altercation with the scribes ensues, and eventually Jesus heals the man of his paralysis in order to show that he has the authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:3–8). While the initiative of the two parties is certainly not the primary point of the narrative, Jesus's response in forgiving the man of his sins rather than simply healing him signals his prerogative to do more or differently than is asked of him. In other words, he took the initiative for *salvation* even though the supplicants took initiative in bringing the man in the first place.[4]

Despite the evidence of Jesus's healing ministry seeming to point away from priority in grace, the exception of Jesus forgiving the paralytic man of his sins before healing him shows that the situation is more nuanced than one might initially suppose. Matthew does not take issue with certain acts of grace being given in response to a request, but in matters of eternity, the first evangelist highlights the priority of divine benevolence.

Jesus's Initiative in Calling Disciples

One area where Matthew shows Jesus taking initiative in bestowing grace is when he calls his disciples.[5] Matthew narrates two instances of Jesus calling part of the twelve disciples, and also provides a parable where a king calls various groups to come to a wedding feast.

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[4] I think this is also seen in Matthew 18:21–35. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant the servant simply asks for more time, but the king responds in superabundant grace by forgiving him his massive debt of sin. The king takes the initiative in the greater act of "saving" grace. Conrad Gempf, "Paul, the Gift, and Jesus: Or What Happened to the Jesus Tradition?," *EQ* 89, no. 4 (2018): 311–17.

[5] For more on the history and background of the Apostles, see W. Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

Matthew 4:18–22[6]

The first instance where Jesus calls people to follow him comes after his temptation in the desert and his moving to Capernaum (4:1–17). In this short text Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee and sees two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, fishing (Matt 4:18). Jesus calls out to them saying δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων (Matt 4:19).[7] The brothers "immediately (εὐθέως)" leave their nets and follow Jesus (Matt 4:20). Continuing his walk along the sea, Jesus then spots two other brothers, James and John, in their boat with their father repairing their nets (Matt 4:21). Readers are not told what Jesus says to the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus "calls (ἐκάλεσεν)" them; these brothers do exactly as the previous pair did and drop their nets to follow Jesus (Matt 4:21–22).

In Jesus's call of his first four disciples, the initiative clearly lies with Jesus. The Son of Man sees the fisherman, not the other way around, and he is the one who speaks first—in fact, he is the only one who speaks throughout the narrative.[8] One does not volunteer to be a disciple, one is called to be a disciple.[9] This constitutes a reversal of

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[6] If one compares this text to John 1:35–42, one can easily assume a discrepancy between the Synoptic accounts of the call of Jesus's first disciples and John's. This need not be. As Blomberg says, "It is sometimes alleged that Jesus' gathering his first disciples here conflicts with the Synoptic call narratives, but this is the case only if one reads into the latter accounts the unstated assumption that Jesus was there meeting these men for the first time." Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 80; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 153–54; Craig S Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 1:466. This solution does not cause a problem for my argument that grace is prior in the first Gospel. Even if this is not the first time these men met Jesus, Matthew's narration emphasizes the initiative taken by Jesus. Plus, a prior relationship does not negate the fact that in the formal call of the disciples, Jesus takes the initiative.

[7] For "fishers of men" see, Wilhelm H. Wuellner, *The Meaning of "Fishers of Men"* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); Jindřich Mánek, "Fishers of Men," *NT* 2, no. 2 (1957): 138–41; Charles W. Smith, "Fishers of Men," *HTR* 52, no. 3 (1959): 187–204; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish, Fishers of Men: What We Know of the First Disciples from Their Profession," *BRev* 15, no. 3 (1999): 48–49.

[8] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 150; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 120; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 394–95; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 76–77; Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, SNTS 80 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137; Warren Carter, "Matthew 4:18–22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," *CBQ* 59, no. 1 (1997): 66–67.

[9] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 394; Carter even notes that those who volunteer are often sent away (Matt 8:18–22, 19:16–22). Carter, "Matthew 4:18–22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," 66–67; Carter cites Kingsbury when making this point. Jack Kingsbury, "On

the typical rabbinic pattern where disciples typically chose their masters.[10] The fact that it is a reversal of custom heightens the emphasis on who takes the initiative in the call. Davies and Allison note that it more closely resembles a prophetic call and is reminiscent of 1 Kings 19:19–21.[11] This calling narrative, placed where it is in the context of the plot of Matthew as a whole, constitutes more than a mere call to learn from a rabbi. As Carter says,

> The audience interprets Jesus' call to the fishermen as one consistent with his identity and mission defined by 1:1–4:17 and expressive of them. Jesus' call to the fishermen is an invitation to repent and acknowledge God's reign (4:17), to experience deliverance from sin (1:21) and the devil (4:1–11), and to know God's presence (1:23) and eschatological vindication (3:11–12).[12]

Continuing with this line of thought, this call, when considered in light of its placement in the plot sequence, is also paradigmatic of the call all future disciples receive.[13] The twelve clearly hold a unique position in salvation history, but they also "embody patterns that are meant to be seen as pertinent to all Christians, who in a more general way recognize themselves to have been called by Jesus."[14] Jesus's initiative in calling his first four disciples lays the foundation for his initiative in calling the rest of his disciples continuing until the present day.

Following Jesus: The 'Eager' Scribe and the 'Reluctant' Disciple," *NTS* 34, no. 1 (1988): 45–59.

[10] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 150; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 76–77.

[11] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 396.

[12] Carter, "Matthew 4:18–22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," 64.

[13] Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, 136–37.

[14] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 180; See also, Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 407; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 78; Carter, "Matthew 4:18–22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective," 61; Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, 136–37.

Matthew 9:9

In Matthew 9:9, Jesus performs the same series of actions as he does in the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. After healing a paralytic (Matt 9:1–8), Jesus left, and he "saw (εἶδεν)" a man working at his profession (Matt 9:9). Matthew, of course, is not a fisherman but a tax collector.[15] Jesus commands him to "follow (ἀκολούθει)" him, and Matthew does (Matt 9:9). The only two differences between this calling and the previous one are that Jesus uses a different word for "follow" (δεῦτε ὀπίσω in 4:19 and ἀκολούθει in 9:9) and that in the first narrative Jesus calls pairs of brothers rather than an individual. Just like in Matthew 4, Jesus sees someone at their work, and he takes the initiative in calling them to drop what they are doing and follow him. The favor shown to Matthew comes not from his own request or prompting, but is freely given from the leading action of Jesus.

Matthew 22:1–14

Finally, Jesus tells a parable involving a king throwing a wedding feast in honor of his son (Matt 22:1–14).[16] In this kingdom parable the king sends out servants to "call (καλέσαι)" those who were invited to the feast to come, but they refuse (Matt 22:1–3). The king repeats this act with different servants and with more urgency in the call, but again the invited guests rebuff his summons, this time actually committing acts of violence against the messengers (Matt 22:4–6). Finally, after the king destroys their cites and enacts vengeance against the ungrateful invitees, he sends out his servants to gather people from streets in order to fill the wedding hall (Matt 22:7–10). When the king joins the feast, however, one man is not wearing a wedding garment, and after questioning

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[15] I discuss this text and the implications of Jesus calling a tax collector at length in the chapter on incongruity.

[16] The literature on this parable is vast. For a good overview and bibliography see, Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 299–325; Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 341–51.

him, the king binds him and throws him out of the hall into the outer darkness. (Matt 22:11–13). The parable ends with a proverb that says, πολλοὶ γάρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί (Matt 22:14). While many aspects of this parable are debated, for the purpose of this chapter, simply note that it is the king who sends out the servants with invitations in order to call those who have received them to come to the feast. The initiative is entirely with the king in the offer to both the invited and uninvited guests.[17]

Summary

The repeated pattern in the first Gospel is that when calling disciples to follow him, Jesus takes the initiative. He is the one who sees, approaches, and speaks, and the appropriate response is to drop everything and follow him. Following Jesus in the path of discipleship is the way of salvation in Matthew, so grace bestowed on believers is prior to their prompting or even desire to be a disciple of Christ.

Predestination and Prior Grace

One final area where Matthew shows that divine gifts are given by the initiative of God and not at the request of the recipient is God's sovereign preordination of the events that transpire in the pages of the Gospel. Matthew does not leave a reader feeling that anything he recorded happened by accident. One gets the distinct impression that the events of the first Gospel take place in order to fulfill the eternal plan of God. In particular, three types of texts speak to this reality: Old Testament prophecy fulfillment, Jesus's repeated predictions of his death, and the kingdom's prior preparation.

Old Testament Prophecy Fulfillment

Matthew's use of the Old Testament has garnered intense scrutiny from a litany of different scholars. This is due both to the first Gospel's numerous references to

[17] I discuss many of the debated aspects of this parable in my chapter on efficacy.

the Old Testament[18] but also the way in which the evangelist cites the text.[19] While these questions are important, they are not of direct relevance here. Instead, I want to focus on the *theological impression* that Matthew's seemingly constant appeal to prophecy makes on readers. One would be hard pressed to read the first Gospel and think that Matthew believed that any of the events he recorded happened by accident. To the contrary, Matthew's use of the Old Testament, whatever else one might say about it, leaves the reader with the firm impression that for the evangelist, the events that transpire in his Gospel were *planned by God* long before they took place. In fact, Matthew leaves readers with the belief that God sovereignly orchestrated the exploits of the first Gospel to fulfill his gracious will toward his people.

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[18] Matthew quotes from many different books of the Old Testament in different parts of his Gospel. For the use of the Old Testament in Matthew 1–2 see: R. T. France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication," *NTS* 27, no. 2 (1981): 233–51; Krister Stendahl, "Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Matthew 1–2," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 56–66; George M. S. Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1–2* (Rome: Biblical institute Press, 1976); For the baptismal narratives see: David B. Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," *BBR* 9 (1999): 37–49; For Matthew's use of Jeremiah see: John Upton, "The Potter's Field and the Death of Judas," *CJ* 8, no. 6 (1982): 213–19; Bruce Dahlberg, "The Typological Use of Jeremiah 1:4–19 in Matthew 16:13–23," *JBL* 94, no. 1 (1975): 73–80; Douglas J. Moo, "Tradition and Old Testament in Matt 27:3–10," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, vol. 3 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), 157–76; Martinus Menken, "The References to Jeremiah in the Gospel According to Matthew," *ETL* 60, no. 1 (1984): 5–24; For Matthew's use of Isaiah see: Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:14–16," *JBL* 119, no. 3 (2000): 503–20; Craig A. Evans, "On the Isaianic Background of the Sower Parable," *CBQ* 47, no. 3 (1985): 464–68; Rikki E. Watts, ""Immanuel: Virgin Birth Proof Text or Programmatic Warning of Things to Come (Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23)?," in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 92–113; Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel*, SNTS 123 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); For Matthew's use of Micah see: Anthony Petrotta, "A Closer Look at Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 28, no. 1 (1985): 47–52; Anthony Petrotta, "An Even Closer Look at Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 33, no. 3 (1990): 311–15; Homer Heater, "Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 26, no. 4 (1983): 395–97; For Matthew's use of Hosea see: Tracy Howard, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: An Alternative Solution," *BSac* 143, no. 572 (1986): 314–28; For Matthew's use of Zechariah see: Cecil Roth, "Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah 14:21," *NT* 4, no. 3 (1960): 174–81; For essays on the various text forms used by Matthew see, Maarten J.J. Menken, *Matthew's Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist*, BETL 173 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004).

[19] For more general treatments of Matthew's hermeneutic see: G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1–110; Richard B Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 105–90; Craig L. Blomberg, "Interpreting Old Testament Prophetic Literature in Matthew: Double Fulfillment," *TJ* 23, no. 1 (2002): 17–33; Matthew Black, "Christological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," *NTS* 18, no. 1 (1971): 1–14.

Throughout the first two chapters of Matthew, God's sovereignty in prophecy fulfillment is prominent. An angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and told him what to name the child that Mary will bear, and this fulfills the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 (Matt 1:19–23). After Jesus is born in Bethlehem, which in and of itself fulfills another prophecy, God warns Joseph in a dream that Herod will try to destroy the child (Matt 2:1–13). The young family flees to Egypt as they were told, and this fulfills Hosea 11:1 (Matt 2:13–15). Herod, enraged that he had been duped by the Magi, kills all the male children two years old or younger (Matt 2:16). Even this awful tragedy fulfills a prophecy in Jeremiah (Matt 2:17–18). After Herod's death Jesus, Mary, and Joseph move back to Israel, but are again warned in a dream to go to Galilee (Matt 2:19–22). They settle in Nazareth which Matthew says fulfills the word spoken by the "prophets (τῶν προφητῶν)" (Matt 2:23).[20]

This theme, however, does not stop after the first two chapters or apply only to the actions of Jesus. After the infancy narratives John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus and fulfills a prophecy from Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3 (Matt 3:1–3, 11:10). The Pharisees and Scribes fulfill Isaiah 29:13 when they are said to honor God only with their lips and that they worship in vain (Matt 15:7–8). The Jewish leaders fulfill a prophecy from Jeremiah when they take the money that Judas returned after betraying Jesus and buy a field with it (Matt 27:3–10).[21] In Matthew, the events of the Gospel are a part of God's plan for the world that God himself foretold through the prophets.

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[20] This verse is notoriously difficult because this quote cannot be found in any one particular prophet. The use of the plural "prophets (τῶν προφητῶν)" leads some to believe that it gives the substance of a few passages rather than a particular quote. Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 96–97; August makes a similar argument: Jared August, "'He Shall Be Called a Nazarene': The Non-Citation of Matthew 2:23," *TB* 69, no. 1 (2018): 63–74; For other options see: John Roskoski, "'He Shall Be Called a Nazarene': The Old Testament Background of Matthew 2:23," *JBL* 1, no. 3 (2018): 80–92; Martinus Menken, "The Sources of the Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23," *JBL* 120, no. 3 (2001): 451–68.

[21] This verse is difficult due to the fact that Matthew attributes the quote to Jeremiah but it appears to be from Zechariah. For more on this problem and a possible solution see: Moo, "Tradition and Old Testament in Matt 27:3–10."

Whatever one makes of Matthew's use of his sources, he clearly wants to communicate that the events that unfolded in the lives of Jesus and those around him fulfill the promises of God in the Old Testament (Matt 5:17). As Matthew Levering says, "In teaching that Christ Jesus fulfills God's promises and covenants with Israel, the New Testament writings present providence and election as a Christocentric reality of mercy."[22] God's grace in Christ is given on his own initiative, prior to anyone's prompting, because Jesus's life and actions constitute the fulfillment of promises made long before he was born as a man in Bethlehem. In the law, the prophets, and the writings God told Israel what he was going to do. In Jesus he did it.

Jesus Predicts His Own Death

Matthew not only includes predictions from ancient prophets, but also from Jesus himself. In particular, at a number of points in the latter half of his Gospel, Matthew reveals that Jesus, far from being caught off guard, understands his purpose for coming as directly related to his being betrayed, arrested, and put to death at the hands of the Jewish leadership.[23] Jesus's claim that his death on behalf of sinners was his reason for coming and his prior knowledge of this fact shows that this most gracious act of God was part of the predetermined divine plan for salvation. In other words, Jesus's knowledge of his coming death and resurrection shows that God's grace in Matthew is prior to the initiative of the recipients.

After Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, Jesus ἤρξατο . . . δεικνύειν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἰεροσόλυμα ἀπελθεῖν καὶ πολλὰ παθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν

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[22] Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Levering draws on Seitz who makes a similar argument. Speaking on prophecy he says, "Because the word is God's, he undertakes to carry it through time and outfit it to do what he proposes: to show that it is his word, that he did what he promised, and that inside of every one of his promises there is a providentially overseen surprise as well." Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 252.

[23] For a defense of the historicity of these accounts see, Michael Licona, "Did Jesus Predict His Death and Vindication/Resurrection?" *JSHJ* 8, no. 1 (2010): 47–66.

πρεσβυτέρων καὶ ἀρχιερέων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθῆναι (Matt 16:21).[24] Peter does not believe Jesus, and as a result, Peter is strongly rebuked (Matt 16:22–23). Despite his disciple's lack of understanding at his first death and resurrection prediction, this text reveals that the events surrounding Jesus's death were a part of God's plan. In fact, Jesus claims that he "must (δεῖ)" go to Jerusalem and be put to death (Matt 16:21). It is the will and plan of God.

When Jesus, Peter, James, and John come down from the mountain after the transfiguration, Jesus commands them to not tell anyone what they have seen until he is "raised from the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγερθῇ)" (Matt 17:9).[25] The disciples then ask him about Elijah coming, and Jesus, speaking of John the Baptist, tells them that he has already come (Matt 17:10–12). He also says that he will suffer just as John the Baptist did (Matt 17:12–13). These represent indirect prophecies of his coming death and resurrection and betray a knowledge of what must happen to him.

When Jesus finally makes his way to Jerusalem, he takes the twelve disciples aside and tells them specifically what will happen to him in the city (Matt 20:17–19). He will first be delivered to the Jewish leaders who will condemn him to death (Matt 20:18). Then he will be delivered to the Gentiles who will revile and crucify him (Matt 20:19). Finally, Jesus predicts his resurrection on the third day (Matt 20:19). Later, while fielding questions about the disciples' places in the coming kingdom, he reveals that his coming death is exactly why he came in the first place (Matt 20:28). Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). His death and resurrection at the hands of the Jewish and Gentile rulers were part of God's plan to "ransom (λύτρον)" his people (Matt 20:28).

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[24] I discuss this text in more detail in the chapter on incongruity.

[25] Tàrrech argues that the divine voice that speaks in the episode of the transfiguration makes clear Jesus's identity as the divine Son as well as the disciple's task of accepting Jesus's announcement of his impending suffering and death, spoken in the previous chapter. While the rest of the discussion does not focus on the transfiguration in itself, this acts as another subtle indication of Jesus's sufferings as a key part of the divine plan. Armand Puig i Tàrrech, "The Glory on the Mountain: The Episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus," *NTS* 58, no. 2 (2012): 151–72.

Finally, after finishing the Eschatological Discourse, Jesus predicts his death three times in quick succession. First, he directly says to his disciples that he will be delivered up to be crucified (Matt 26:1–2). Next, a woman pours an expensive jar of "ointment (μύρου)" over Jesus's head (Matt 26:6–7).[26] The disciples were upset because the woman seemed to waste something that could have been sold and benefited those in need (Matt 26:8–9). Jesus corrects this opinion, however, by saying that what she has done was a beautiful action and has, in fact, prepared him for his burial (Matt 26:10–12). This constitutes an indirect prediction of his impending demise. Lastly, at the last supper Jesus breaks the bread and pours the wine, and interprets them as symbols of his coming death for the instigation of a new covenant and for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:26–28).

Jesus's death did not catch him off guard. To the contrary, Jesus marched directly to the city where he knew his death must happen. Jesus's betrayal, death, and resurrection were all predicted and were a central part of God's plan of salvation for his people. God's plan *from the beginning* was for Jesus to die on the cross on behalf of sinners. Matthew's repeated presentation of Jesus predicting his own death and resurrection shows that the grace shown through the cross was perfect in priority.

The Kingdom's Prior Preparation

At the end of the Eschatological Discourse Jesus paints a picture of the final judgment where all the nations gather before him on his throne, and they are divided into sheep and goats (Matt 25:31–46).[27] The sheep, who are the righteous, go to the right to

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[26] For a history of interpretation on this text see, Claus-Peter März, "*Zur Traditionsgeschichte von Mk 14,3–9 und Parallelen*," *SNTU* 6–7 (Linz, Austria: A. Fuchs, 1982), 89–112.

[27] The literature on this text is vast. For a good overview of the issues see, Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 543–63; Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 309–30; Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 207–37; For a good bibliography of literature pertaining to this text see, John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1022–23; Klyne

inherit eternal life and the kingdom, while the goats, who are the wicked, go to the left to eternal punishment. Important for any discussion of the priority of divine grace in Matthew is verse 34. After the sheep and goats are divided, Jesus says, Τότε ἐρεῖ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ· δεῦτε οἱ εὐλογημένοι τοῦ πατρός μου, κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (Matt 25:34). So, the sheep on the right are "blessed (οἱ εὐλογημένοι)," and called to inherit a kingdom. Jesus describes this kingdom in two ways. First, the kingdom is said to have been "prepared (τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην)" for the sheep (Matt 25:34). Quarles is right when he says that this perfect tense participle "seems to be resultative and describes the ongoing state brought about by a divine blessing on the heirs of the kingdom that was granted earlier."[28]

Second, the kingdom has been prepared for the sheep "from the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου)" (Matt 25:34). This is a phrase familiar not only from earlier in Matthew (Matt 13:35), but also from other parts of Scripture and second temple literature.[29] The phrase speaks to the idea that the kingdom was prepared from the foundation, meaning the beginning, of the world.[30]

That the kingdom the righteous will inherit was prepared from the foundation of the world demonstrates that this was a part of God's eternal plan.[31] From the beginning of time God prepared a kingdom to give to his people. The eternality of this plan

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Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent, 563.*_

[28] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, EGGNT (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017), 304; See also, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 637n64; Contra, Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1027.

[29] See Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3, 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8, 18:8; The Assumption of Moses 1:14; 4 Ezra 6:1; Barnabas 5:5. Turner, *Matthew*, 609n15.

[30] Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 637n65.

[31] Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 637; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 743; D. A Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 521; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 425; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1028; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 277–78; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 963.

necessitates that the grace shown in it came from God's own initiative, before any prompting from the sheep, because it was prepared before any of the sheep existed. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is perfect in priority.

Conclusion

Even though the first Gospel contains numerous accounts of Jesus reacting to the pleas of supplicants, divine grace in salvation is still given prior to the prompting (or even existence) of those receiving it. This is most clearly seen in Jesus's calling of the disciples and Matthew's presentation of the events of the Gospel that show that they are all a part of God's eternal plan. Nothing happens by accident in Matthew. To the contrary, God's sovereign predestination of the events in Jesus's life shows that for the first evangelist divine grace is perfect in priority.

CHAPTER 5

EFFICACY

Does the Gospel of Matthew perfect the facet of grace known as efficacy? This question, as a reminder, turns our attention to the effect of the gift; Does divine grace "fully [achieve] what it [is] designed to do?"[1] Matthew does perfect this facet of divine grace. This is a somewhat uncontroversial thesis as almost no one would argue a divine gift does not accomplish its purpose. My claim, however, is that Matthew's portrayal of divine grace includes a strong sense of divine efficacy that sovereignly brings about God's desired response while not eliminating human responsibility.

I will argue this thesis in two major steps. First of all, I will examine the goal of grace, namely, saving God's people from their sins (Matt 1:21), and its accomplishment in Jesus's death. Second, I will examine numerous texts from the First Gospel, grouped for convenience into three categories: categorical texts that group mankind into eschatologically significant groups, texts that address the source of salvific knowledge, and passages using the language of election.

The Goal of Grace

Matthew provides a clear statement of the purpose of Christ's incarnation at the beginning of his Gospel. Matthew 1:21 says, Τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. From the outset of his Gospel, Matthew invites readers to view Jesus's ministry through soteriological lenses. Upon a second reading of the Gospel one would find it difficult not

[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 73.

to read this verse as pointing, from the outset, to Jesus's death. Clearly, for Matthew, the passion, Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross, accomplishes the goal of Jesus's incarnation.

Many commentators note the connection between the beginning and end of the First Gospel.[2] In particular, Davies and Allison say, "The passion already comes into the picture for it is at the crucifixion that Jesus pours out his lifeblood εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτινῶν (26.28). Thus the entire gospel is to be read in light of its end."[3] Matthew claims Christ came to "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Jesus then interprets his own death as accomplishing that goal. This has profound implications for one's view of salvation in Matthew and Jesus's death. First of all, the two are intimately tied together; Jesus even goes so far as to say his betrayal and crucifixion happen in order to fulfill scripture (Matt 26:53–56). Jesus's death did not take him by surprise. On the contrary, Jesus marched directly into the city where he had already predicted his death three times (Matt 16:21–23; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Going to Jerusalem and "suffer[ing] many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be[ing] killed, and on the third day be[ing] raised," was "necessary (δεῖ)" (Matt 16:21).

Secondly, this connection between salvation and Jesus's death places salvation firmly in the category of grace. Continuing the quote from Davies and Allison, they say, "1.21 makes clear from the outset that, notwithstanding Matthew's insistent demand for human righteousness, salvation is the gift of God. This fact will be reiterated in 20.28 and 26.28."[4] Finally, these considerations—the necessity of Christ's death and salvation

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[2] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 210; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 19; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 54; Boris Repschinski, "'For He Will Save His People from Their Sins' (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews," *CBQ* 68, no. 2 (2006): 248–67.

[3] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 210.

[4] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 210.

being a gift from God—suggest strongly that Matthew perfects efficacy in his portrayal of divine grace. Christ came as a gift from God to accomplish salvation for his people, and he did so through his death and resurrection. Repschinski helpfully says, "The saving act of Jesus is his death on the cross as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. . . . The salvation brought in the passion of Jesus is the forgiveness of sins that sets the believer into a new relationship with God."[5]

The above discussion demonstrated that, broadly, grace in Matthew shown through Christ and his death accomplishes the goal of salvation for his people. The question that remains, however, is how this grace and salvation is *applied* to his people. Jesus's death accomplishes the forgiveness of sins for his people, but how does one become a part of this group? The next section argues God's grace in salvation is efficacious to the point of bringing his people into the kingdom of heaven.

Application of Salvation

In this section I will survey three different types of texts that either directly or indirectly show a strong view of efficacy in divine grace. First, I will survey what I am calling categorical[6] texts: passages that divide humanity into two or more eschatologically significant groups (i.e. Sheep and goats, wheat and weeds, etc.). Next, I will examine passages that discuss the source of knowledge and understanding. Finally, I will discuss the passages that use the language of "election (ἐκλεκτοί)."

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[5] Repschinski, "For He Will Save His People from Their Sins" (Matthew 1:21)," 261.

[6] I wrestled with what to call these texts for some time, and I recruited classmates and professors alike to come up with a good name for this category. These are texts that divide humanity into eschatologically significant groups (i.e. Sheep and goats, wheat and weeds, etc.). I considered ontological, metaphorical, analogical, and agricultural as possible names, but I finally decided on categorical. I have yet to come across a name for this group of passages in the literature.

Categorical Passages

In this section I will examine a series of texts that divide humanity into categories using some sort of agricultural metaphor. These passages, taken in light of one another and in the context of Matthew's narrative as a whole, demonstrate what you *are* determines what you *do*, and what you are is an eternally significant category. To say this another way, the category individuals find themselves in—individuals are either good trees or bad trees, wheat or weeds, sheep or goats, etc.—determines the actions they perform and the words they speak.[7]

Before turning to the actual texts, however, I do want to acknowledge most of these passages have a parenetic function at their core. They seek to encourage and command people to bear fruit and behave in certain ways. These texts, however, also seek to show that one's actions are a symptom of a deeper, more fundamental reality. That deeper reality—in other words, being a good tree that bears good fruit—is the application of divine saving grace. In order to behave rightly or bear the good fruit of godly behavior, one must have had their inner being transformed by the grace of God. I will examine each text in the order it appears in Matthew.

Matthew 3:7–12. The first text that brings a categorical division of humanity comes in the description of John the Baptist's ministry. John's preparatory ministry preached a message of repentance due to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 3:1–3). Despite his unusual appearance, John drew large crowds who came to him to be baptized and confess sins (Matt 3:4–6). When the Pharisees and Sadducees began to come to his baptism, however, John's words turned harsh, saying, Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης; ποιήσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας (Matt 3:7–8). The idea of "bearing fruit (ποιήσατε καρπὸν)" is a theme that recurs often

[7] Charette discuses many of the same texts discussed here. While he does not disucss them in light of efficacy and divine/human agency, he does make the point that one's fruit reveals the "basic direction of one's heart." Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSS 79 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 121–40.

in Jesus's ministry, and ties directly to the first categorical description of humanity later in the passage; humanity is compared to trees with an ax laid at the root, and one is either a good tree that bears good fruit or a bad tree that does not bear fruit (Matt 3:10). The bad trees are cut down and burned. In other words, the "fruit in keeping with repentance" is necessary to escape the coming judgment, and the exhortation to repent is made in light of God's wrath against those who do not.[8]

John then switches metaphors in the second half of the text. After mentioning the difference between his baptism and the baptism of the one who is coming after him, he claims the latter comes with a "winnowing fork (πτύον)" in his hand to clear the threshing floor (Matt 3:11–12). Humanity is then placed into two categories: wheat gathered into the barn and chaff burned with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12).

In the span of six verses people are divided into either good and bad trees or wheat and chaff. John uses these categories and the looming judgment of God to call the people to repentance. In that sense the pericope is properly parenetic.[9] So, while this passage's main point is to encourage repentance, it does begin a trend of classifying people into groups that are either saved or doomed. Later passages will pick up on this theme and give more detail as to how someone finds themselves in one category or another.

Matthew 7:15–23. Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns hearers to προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν, οἵτινες ἔρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἐνδύμασιν προβάτων, ἔσωθεν δε εἰσιν λύκοι ἅρπαγες (Matt 7:15). This verse serves as a heading for the passage stretching from verse 15 to verse 23.[10] Jesus then explains his "exhortation

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[8] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 305; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 112; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 139; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 145.

[9] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 139.

[10] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 275.

with two images (7:16–20, 21–23)."[11] First, and most relevant for my purposes, Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor similar to the one John the Baptist employed earlier: healthy trees bear good fruit and diseased trees bear bad fruit. John here asks a rhetorical question: "Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" (Matt 7:16). The idea present throughout is that one's nature determines one's actions,[12] and that it is possible to recognize someone's true nature by their actions, the fruit they produce.

Second, Jesus presents a picture of the final judgment in which not everyone who claims Christ are truly known by Christ (Matt 7:21–23). This "knowing (ἔγνων)," Pennington helpfully notes, "in the biblical tradition communicates having a relationship, even sexually at times, but also serves as a way to speak of 'God's special relationship with his people as in Amos 3:2.'"[13] Many of those who say κύριε κύριε, despite their apparent good works in the name of Christ, were never truly known, never a part of God's covenant people.

These two images taken together, along with the initial example of a wolf in sheep's clothing, seem to offer two contradictory points: you will recognize them by their fruits (Matt 7:20), and their actions are not indicative of their true dubious nature. Is it possible to reconcile these two ideas? Pennington offers a possible answer when he says,

> The solution is that while both images function with the wholeness (*teleios*) idea—internal and external together are necessary—they both also recognize that there is an *eventualness* to the ability to discern the inner truth. As with a tree, the fruit does not appear immediately but eventually, revealing then the true nature of the tree. So with these false prophets—sooner or later, and definitely in the eschatological judgment, the false prophet and the wolf will be shown for what they truly are.[14]

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[11] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 275.

[12] "Growing things produce according to their nature, either good or bad." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 277; Nolland states something similar when he says, "The fruit of a plant is in accord with the identity of the particular plant." Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 337.

[13] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 277; Pennington cites: France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 295.

[14] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 278.

I think this answer works well. It makes sense of the passage in context and accords nicely with the metaphors used. The eventuality of fruit revealing the nature of someone also brings to mind parts of the Parable of the Sower in which there is initial growth, giving the appearance of health, but while the initial growth is encouraging, eventually the plant dies and does not produce fruit because of other factors (Matt 13:4–23).

How does all of this tie into the efficacy of grace in Matthew? This text represents another, more clear use of the principle that what you are determines what you do. Thornbushes do not produce grapes, thistles do not produce figs, and diseased trees do not bear good fruit. While this passage does not answer how one becomes a good tree, it does continue the principle, repeated through Matthew, that nature determines action.

Matthew 12:33–37. Matthew 12 brings another example of a categorical text. Here Jesus is in a confrontation with the Pharisees. They claim he is casting out demons by Beelzebul, and Jesus responds to this line of thinking (Matt 12:24ff.). Jesus says a house divided against itself cannot stand and eventually comes to the famous text about the unforgivable blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.[15] It is in this context that Jesus turns to the now familiar good tree bad tree categorization. Again, the point is the tree is known by its fruit—fruit here refers specifically to words (Matt 12:34, 36)—or, to drop the metaphor, a person is known by his or her actions or words.[16] One's nature, here represented by discussion of the heart or treasure, determines the type of speech or action one does (Matt

[15] For more on this, see: John O'Neill, "The Unforgivable Sin," *JSNT* 6, no. 19 (1983): 37–42; James Williams, "Note on the Unforgivable Sin Logion," *NTS* 12, no. 1 (1965): 75–77; M. Eugene Boring, "Unforgivable Sin Logion Mark 3:28–29/Matt 12:31–32/Luke 12:10: Formal Analysis and History of the Tradition," *NT* 18, no. 4 (1976): 258–79; Myk Habets, "Jesus, the Spirit, and the Unforgivable Sin: A Contribution from Spirit Christology," *JTI* 12, no. 1 (2018): 38–57.

[16] D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 293; Craig Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 366; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 485; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 351.

12:34–35).[17] This passage, like the others, does not reveal the source of a good or bad heart, but, again, uses categorical imagery that speaks of a person's actions, in this case speech, as an eschatologically significant outworking of one's state (Matt 12:36–37).

Matthew 13:4–23. Matthew 13, otherwise known as the Parabolic Discourse, brings with it the next example of a categorical text. The famous parable of the sower[18] categorizes man into four different kinds of soils corresponding to different ways in which the Word is received or not. A sower sows seed in a field, but some of the seed falls upon the path, rocky ground, or among the thorns (Matt 13:3–7); these represent, as the explanation of the parable will show, the first three categories of man (Matt 13:18–22). The fourth category is the good soil that bears fruit a hundred, sixty, or thirty-fold (Matt 13:8).

Jesus's telling and explanation of this parable is separated by the disciples asking Jesus about why he speaks to them in parables at all (Matt 13:10–17). Placing this text between the telling and explanation indicates the interpretation of both the parable and the narrative interruption are closely related. As Snodgrass says, "It is *the* parable about parables."[19] Jesus replied to the disciples' question saying, ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἐκείνοις δε οὐ δέδοται (Matt 13:11). Jesus's

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[17] Carson calls the heart the "center of human personality." Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 293.

[18] The literature on the parable is voluminous and there are many different exegetical and textual issues discussed. To keep this section manageable I have provided this footnote for a reference to some issues that, while important, are not directly related to the theological questions relevant to this chapter. For the history of interpretation of this passage see: Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 530n25; Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 155–56; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 238; For the meaning of "parable" see: France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 511; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 234; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 371–75; For the possibility of an exilic background see: N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 230–39; For the structure of this parable and/or Matthew 13 as a whole see Robby Kagarise, "Divine Sovereignty, Human Responsibility, and Jesus' Parables: The Structure and Meaning of Matthew 13:10–17," *EJ* 19, no. 1 (2001): 30–33; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 370–72; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 501; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 236.

[19] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 145 emphasis his. See also, Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 238.

answer in verse 11, which is then unpacked in different ways in verses 12–17, shows that positive reception of the "word of the kingdom (τον λόγον τῆς βασιλείας)" leading to bearing fruit finds its source in divine grace (Matt 13:19).

The "ὅτι" at the beginning of verse 11, while sometimes treated merely as a colon or beginning quotation mark, should be taken as casual for two reasons: first, that is the more common use in Matthew and second, it makes sense that Jesus's reply to the question "Why?" is met with a casual response.[20] Carson says, "Jesus' answer cannot legitimately be softened: at least one of the functions of parables is to conceal the truth, or at least to *present it in a veiled way*. The point is strengthened if the *hoti* is not 'recitative' . . . but fully causal, 'because.'"[21] Jesus speaks in parables *because* knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to some, the disciples, but not others, the crowds.

The repeated passive verb δέδοται is a divine passive, with God as the implied acting subject.[22] Kagarise notes, "The passive 'has been given' (*dedotai*) indicates God sovereignly chose to give knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom to the disciples and to withhold it from those outside the band."[23] Verse 11 read in isolation would take a strong predestinarian stance.

Most of the debate on this passage, however, concerns verse 13. Matthew has changed the ἵνα plus subjunctive of Mark 4:12 to the causal ὅτι (Matt 13:13). Some scholars see this as a deliberate softening of Mark in order to accent human responsibility in the hardening.[24] The argument is that the switch from "in order that" to "because"

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[20] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 506n1.

[21] D. A Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 307 emphasis his.

[22] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 372; Even though they disagree with the theological point I am making, Snodgrass and Luz, among others, see the verb as a divine passive. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 172; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 245.

[23] Kagarise, "Divine Sovereignty, Human Responsibility, and Jesus' Parables," 34.

[24] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 392; Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah*

makes Jesus' speaking in parables a response to their obduracy, not the cause of it. This, so argues Davies and Allison, places the emphasis in this passage decidedly on human responsibility.[25] The parables are not about divine hardening or predestination but are a sort of judgment on "Israel's refusal to hear the messengers of God."[26]

I question, however, whether this is the whole picture. It is doubtful whether the change from ἵνα to ὅτι accomplishes as much theologically as some commentators claim. In his discussion on the change France says,

> Much is often made of the different conjunctions used by Matthew (*hoti*, 'because') and by Mark and Luke (*hina,* 'in order that'). It is assumed that Matthew's version is a deliberate softening of the original saying, making the use of parables a response to people's obtuseness rather than the intended cause of it, a means of enlightenment for the otherwise unreachable instead of a means of concealing truth from outsiders. There may be some truth to this suggestion, but it is not the panacea for the problems of this passage which it is sometimes supposed to be. Matthew, no less than Mark and Luke, has the secrets given to some and not to others in v. 11, and his v. 12 has compounded the inequality. Moreover, his full quotation of Isa 6:9–10 in vv. 14–15 makes explicit what is only implicit in the summary, that the people's failure to understand keeps them from repenting and so from being healed. Set in that context, Matthew's 'because' does not seem so different from Mark's 'in order that'; intentions and results are blended into a scenario which is not at all hopeful for the enlightenment of the outsiders.[27]

Isolated from verse 11, verse 13 might be taken as a deliberate change, but Jesus's initial answer prevents adopting this interpretation in its entirety. Carson's comment is instructive and, in my opinion, offers a better explanation of the text. He says,

> Verse 11 most likely embraces a strictly predestinarian viewpoint, more strongly than Mark 4:11 and doctrinally, though not verbally, like Mark 4:12. The reply to the disciples' question (Matthew 13:10) is thus given in terms of election in v. 11, which is further explained in v. 12. Verse 13 recapitulates the reason for speaking in parables but now frames the reason, not in terms of election, but in terms of spiritual

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6.9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 110; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 247.

[25] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 392.

[26] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 163.

[27] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 517; Keener agrees that the sense is basically the same in both Mark/Luke and Matthew. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 381n27.

> dullness. Matthew has already given Jesus' answer in terms of divine election (v. 11); now he gives the human reason.[28]

This text, therefore, does not ride roughshod over human responsibility. It may in fact soften the tone if not the theology of Mark, but Matthew seems to espouse a view of human freedom known as compatibilism.[29] The first evangelist, to borrow the subtitle from Carson's book, holds, "biblical perspectives" of divine sovereignty and human responsibility "in tension."[30] Jesus's parables are a means of revelation to those whom God has given knowledge, and it is a means of hiding and judgment on those with dull ears and eyes. "It is naïve," says Carson, "to say Jesus spoke [parables] so that everyone might more easily grasp the truth, and it is simplistic to say that the sole function of parables to outsiders was to condemn them."[31] Now the question is, how does this understanding of the purpose of the parables help the interpretation of sower?

After answering the disciples, Jesus interprets the initial parable for them. Those who hear the word but do not "understand (συνιέντος)" it, the seed sown on the path, have it snatched away by Satan (Matt 13:19). The seed sown on the rocky ground which shows immediate growth but eventually dies away does so because of persecution. The thorns represent the "deceitfulness of riches (ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου)," which choke out the Word, leaving it unfruitful (Matt 13:22). The good soil represents those who hear the word truly and understand it. They bear great amounts of fruit for the kingdom (Matt 13:23). While man has been divided into four groups in the parable, in reality they are divided, again, into two: those who bear fruit and those who do not.[32] This corresponds

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[28] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 309.

[29] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 309; Hagner does not use the term compatibilism, but his explanation seems to fit with what I am arguing. See Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 381.

[30] D. A Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

[31] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 309.

[32] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 507.

nicely with the answer given to the disciples' question found in the middle of the parable and its interpretation. The three types of soil that do not bear fruit are those "to whom [the secrets of the kingdom of heaven] have not been given" (Matt 13:11). What this group lacks is repeated throughout both the purpose of the parables passage and the parable's interpretation; they lack "understanding (συνίημι)" (Matt 13:13–15, 19).

The understanding, or "knowledge (γνῶναι)" as it is stated in verse 11, is the difference between the good soil and the rest. True understanding, true knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, cannot be snatched away, fall away, or choked out, and bringing the discussion back to the purpose of this chapter, God is the one who gives this knowledge. Davies and Allison say, "The normal state of humanity is ignorance of God's eschatological secrets. Human beings as human beings do not know the truth about the kingdom of heaven. If therefore some have come to know that truth, it can only be because of God's gracious dealings with them . . . eschatological knowledge is the gift of God."[33] Whether the parables hide or not, this knowledge that bears fruit is a divine gift, a grace of God that brings about its desired end. What man is, either a good soil or a type of bad soil, determines what man does, and what man is comes from God.

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43. The parable of the wheat and the weeds, much like the parable of the sower which it follows, is fraught with difficulty, much of which lies outside the purview of this study.[34] The parable, meant to show what the kingdom of heaven is like, tells the story of a man who sowed good seed in his field. An enemy then comes and sows weeds among the wheat. Both the wheat and the weeds appear, and the master decides to let them grow up together in order to not root up the wheat when pulling up the weeds. The wheat is then gathered and the weeds are burned (Matt 13:24–

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[33] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 389–90; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 508.

[34] While I may not agree with every exegetical decision, Snodgrass provides a good explanation of the different exegetical difficulties as well as a history of interpretation and bibliography. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 191–216.

30). Later, Jesus interprets the parable (Matt 13:37–43). The master and sower is the Son of Man, while the field is the world (Matt 13:37–38). The good seeds are "the sons of the kingdom," while the weeds "are the sons of the evil one" (Matt 13:38).[35] The parable shows the end of the age to be the harvest.

Jesus attributes the planting of good seed to himself. The sons of the kingdom, the righteous in verse 43, are such because of his agency and action. Interestingly, the weeds are said to be planted by the devil. The "causes of sin and law-breakers" are gathered out of the kingdom and punished with fire (13:41). This leads Snodgrass to say,

> God is not the only one at work, and not all actions in this world can be attributed to God. God often gets blamed for every event that occurs, but he is not the cause of every event. Evil happens that can only be identified as the work of an enemy. Accordingly, this parable should slow down an overemphasis on the sovereignty of God or a naïveté that attributes every event to God's manipulation.[36]

This seems to be an overreaction. First of all, this text is not primarily about the sovereignty of God. Jesus uses this parable to teach about the presence of evil even while the kingdom is present, as Snodgrass himself notes.[37] This means, secondly, while Snodgrass correctly says God is not the only one working, the parable does not function as a metaphor for causation. The parable's point is not to give a lesson on primary or secondary causation. The devil's action is, clearly, the immediate cause of weeds being present, but the parable does not give any information about ultimate or final causes. That falls outside the point of the parable.

What, then, can be said about divine and human agency in regard to these texts? Humanity is divided into two groups, one for the kingdom and one for the fire. As

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[35] Snodgrass is right to reject the reading that says this passage illustrates a mixed community in the church or Rutledge's position that it represents both good and evil within individuals. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 203–4; Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 141.

[36] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 215.

[37] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 212.

is the nature of these categorical passages, one's being determines one's destiny. The only clue about what makes one a wheat or a weed is that the sons of the kingdom are planted by the Son of Man, while the lawbreakers are planted by Satan. It is possible to tie the wheat planted by the Son of Man to the good soil that grows because they have been given the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven from the previous parable, and Jesus does not seem to have any doubt the wheat will grow even alongside the weeds. While this may be true, it does take us far afield of the main purpose of the parable, so no major conclusion can be drawn from this text.

Matthew 13:47–50. The third categorical text in the Parabolic Discourse is the parable of the dragnet. Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a process of fishing, gathering all the kinds of fish, and collecting the good while disposing of the bad (Matt 13:47–50).[38] This text divides mankind into two groups, described in two ways. First, while maintaining the metaphor, Jesus describes the fish as either καλά or σαπρά (Matt 13:48). Second, after dropping the fish metaphor Jesus describes the people as either δικαίων or πονηρούς (Matt 13:49). The parable does not, however, give any information on how one becomes a good or bad fish, it merely recognizes the existence of both. The parable of the wheat and the weeds also acknowledges the existence of both good and evil while the kingdom is present, and emphasizes that while the current state is one of both good and bad people living together, at the final judgment there will be a great gathering and separation.[39] This separation will be based on one's state as either a good/righteous person or a bad/evil person. One's nature determines one's destiny.

Matthew 15:10–20. Matthew 15 brings conflict with the Jewish leadership. The Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus to question him on why the disciples do not

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[38] Snodgrass notes that the kingdom is not like any one part of the parable, but the full process itself. See, Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 491.

[39] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 491; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 331.

wash their hands before they eat (Matt 15:1–2). Jesus turns the question around and questions the leaders about why they teach it is ok to break the law of God in order to fulfill their tradition (15:3–6). Jesus then claims that Isaiah 29:13, which he quotes, prophesied of the Jewish leadership. The point of this Isaiah quote is while their words pay lip service to honoring God, their heart and true being does not match what they say. They have external righteousness but are not "whole, complete (τέλειος)" (Matt 5:48).[40] Coming now to the text at hand, Jesus explains that the tradition about washing hands is of little importance because οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον (Matt 15:11). The Pharisees are upset about Jesus's response, and when the disciples tell him, he responds with the next categorical text. Jesus says, Πᾶσα φυτεία ἣν οὐκ ἐφύτευσεν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνοις ἐκριζωθήσεται (Matt 15:13). Mankind is divided into two categories, even though one is only implicit. People are referred to as plants, a now familiar metaphor, that are either planted by the Father or not. Those not planted by the Father—in context the Jewish leaders, even though the verse has a proverbial feel that can likely be applied more broadly—are rooted up.

Similar to the wheat and the weeds text discussed above, the point seems to be man will eventually be judged, and one's true nature will determine one's destiny. Here, it is clear those who will be saved, which in context refers to those who are whole/complete and worship the Father from their heart, are those planted by the Father. In line with the other categorical texts, this one encourages readers to have a pure and right heart displayed in right action and worship. One's nature determines one's actions, and one's nature, according to verse 13, comes from the Father.

Matthew 25:31–46. The final categorical text comes at the end of what has come to be known as the Olivet or Eschatological Discourse. Jesus ends his final block of

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[40] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 69–85.

teaching with a harrowing picture of final judgment.[41] The Son of Man sits on his throne in judgment of the nations who are gathered before him. The phrase "all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη)" has caused considerable debate (Matt 25:32). Although there are six possible interpretations,[42] the two most relevant are that it refers to all non-Jewish nations[43] or that it is a universal term encompassing all people, Jewish and Gentile, Christian or not.[44] Given the judgment of Jerusalem in Matthew 24,[45] the eschatological tone of the passage,[46] the fact that eternal destinies are at stake,[47] and the overall missions perspective throughout the first Gospel,[48] it is best to agree with the majority of interpreters and say πάντα τὰ ἔθνη has a universal referent, including all Jews and Gentiles.

With all mankind gathered before the Son of Man, they are then separated into two groups, the sheep on the right side and the goats on the left (Matt 25:32–33). Once again, Jesus has categorized mankind into two eschatologically significant groups. The

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[41] Whether this is the final judgment or not is disputed by dispensational scholars. See, Eugene Pond, "Who Are the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31–46," *BSac* 159, no. 635 (July 2002): 299; Countering this claim Keener points to the fact that eternal destinies are at stake in the passage, so the judgment cannot refer to those being admitted to the millennial kingdom. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 604.

[42] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 422.

[43] Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 26.

[44] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 554; Daniel Marguerat, *Le Jugement Dans l'evangile de Matthieu*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 506; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 521; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 961; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 742; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 422; Luz sees a universal reference but does not think the text answers whether Israel is included. Ulrich Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46): An Exercise in 'History of Influence' Exegesis," in *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David Bauer and Mark Powell, trans. Dorothy Weaver (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 294–95; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 275.

[45] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 961.

[46] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 961.

[47] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 604.

[48] One should note that Luz claims the text does not tell us whether Israel is included. The missions emphasis line of reasoning refers to the fact that the phrase includes all nations, Christian or not. Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46)," 294.

sheep at the Son of Man's right hand are "blessed (εὐλογέω)" by the Father and κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (Matt 25:34).[49] The goats on the left hand, however, meet a different and terrible fate. To them the King says, πορεύεσθε ἀπ᾽ [οἱ] κατηραμένοι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον τὸ ἡτοιμασμένον τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ (Matt 25:41). In both cases, after giving their sentence the king says, "for (γάρ)"[50] they either did or did not perform acts of mercy for the τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων (Matt 25:40, 45).[51]

Focusing specifically on divine agency within the passage, first note the Son of Man divides the throngs gathered before him *by what they are*. People are either sheep or goats. Are good deeds and being kind to the "least of these" what makes a sheep a sheep? That conclusion is unlikely. First of all, the sheep are said to be "blessed by [his] Father" (Matt 25:34). The word for blessed is εὐλογημένοι not μακάριοι as in Matthew 5:3 and other places.[52] This points to a stronger, active favor from God.[53] While discussing the difference between "macarisms" and "blessings," Pennington says, "Blessings (and the

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[49] Eubank takes issue with the translation of κληρονομήσατε as "inherit." He argues that the emphasis "is not on 'inheritance' but on recompense for righteousness." Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 70–71; Louw and Nida suggest that whether one wants to translate the term as "inheritance" or not, the term indicates gaining possession of something "which has not been earned." J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989); For a critique of Eubank's position, see: Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, 420–25.

[50] The γαρ at the beginning of verses 35 and 42 has garnered considerable debate. The question is whether or not this "because" teaches works righteousness. Snodgrass is right to point out that these debates miss the point. "The narrative is not intended to be a complete statement of Matthew's view of discipleship or the way to salvation...it warns that judgment will be determined by acts of mercy, but does not address whether this mercy is the result of redemption or its cause" (559). Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 558–59.

[51] Much ink has been spilled on the meaning and history of interpretation of this phrase. For the comprehensive account see, Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 114 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); For more succinct summaries see: Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 555ff.; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 519–20; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 957–58; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 428–29.

[52] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 521.

[53] Timo Laato, "Salvation by God's Grace, Judgment According to Our Works: Taking a Look at Matthew and Paul," *CTQ* 82, no. 3 (2018): 166.

corresponding negative, curses) are divine, effectual speech."[54] Luz goes as far as to say "'You blessed of my father' implies, without spelling it out, the concept of predestination which was self-evident in the Jewish world of that day."[55] Second, when the notion of divine blessing is combined with the fact that the sheep will "inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world," one gets a strong sense of efficacious divine activity in the process of salvation (Matt 25:34). The timing suggests that man's good deeds correspond to one's identity as a sheep or a goat. Carson says, "This glorious inheritance, the consummated kingdom, was the Father's plan for them from the beginning."[56] God's purpose for this group of people is unchanging.[57] Therefore, before any ethical description is given, before any deeds are listed, Jesus appeals to divine benevolence as the effective cause of their salvation. This does not, however, negate the importance or necessity of loving the least of these. Sheep, those blessed by the father, act like sheep. They act in accordance with their nature which is one of divine blessing. Action evidences a changed heart so God can judge men by their works knowing what they *are* determines what they *do*.

Summary. Regularly throughout the first Gospel, Jesus divides man into different categories. These categories often result in one group receiving life and the other receiving terrible punishment. The division is made based on nature (good/bad, sheep/goats, etc.), and one's nature is demonstrated in bearing fruit in ethical behavior or not. One's nature and ability to bear fruit is a grace of God. No text throughout this section suggested someone *given* knowledge, understanding, or blessings by God would not produce the desired fruit. This suggests the efficacy of divine grace.

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[54] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 53.

[55] Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46)," 298.

[56] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 521.

[57] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 743; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 425.

The Source of Knowledge and Understanding

Two categorical texts (Matt 13:4–23; 25:31–46) demonstrated that the source of knowledge and blessing is God himself. In this section, two passages state this explicitly and are, thus, important texts for this chapter.

Matthew 11:25–30. After Jesus finishes giving his instructions to the disciples in the block of teaching known as the missions discourse in Matthew 10, John the Baptist inquires of Jesus whether he is the one they have been waiting for or if another will come after Jesus (Matt 11:2–3). Jesus replies by pointing to the various signs and wonders happening in his ministry (Matt 11:4–6). He then calls attention to John's ministry, showing John is the prophet Elijah who comes before the Messiah (Matt 11:7–15). Neither John nor the Son of Man, however, was accepted by the people (Matt 11:16–19). Jesus then denounces the cities where he had done most of his miracles because of their lack of repentance (Matt 11:20–24). He condemns Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they saw mighty works and chose to remain in their sin. Why would these cities who were privileged to get to see the Son of Man in action not repent in spite of the fact that Jesus claims the famously wicked cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom would have repented if given the same opportunity? Matthew provides at least part of the answer to this question in Matthew 11:25–30.

After denouncing the unrepentant cities, Jesus declares public thanks to God for his hiding and revelation of "these things (ταῦτα)" to some and not others (Matt 11:25). Matthew's transition phrase ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ties this passage to the preceding verses. It makes clear the subject has not changed in verses 25–27.[58] The unrepentant cities, then, are the "wise and understanding" that remained obstinate in the face of mighty works.

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[58] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 470; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 443; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 318.

The titles Jesus uses for God in this verse are striking. First, he refers to God as πάτερ which anticipates verse 27 where Jesus expresses the intimate relationship as υἱός he has with the Father. Second, Jesus calls God κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς (Matt 11:25). This, as Carson notes, "recognizes God's sovereignty over the universe and prepares for vv. 25–26. God is sovereign and free to conceal or reveal as he wills."[59] Jesus's titles for God pave the way for the two main themes of verses 25–27: sonship and sovereignty. Much like in Matthew 13 and the purpose of the parables passage discussed above, Matthew attributes the action of hiding and revealing to God. Those who do not repent are, surprisingly from the world's point of view but not from a Christian standpoint (cf. 1 Cor 1:20–24, 3:18–23), the σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν (Matt 11:25).[60] Those receiving revelation in repentance and faith are the νηπίοις (Matt 11:25). Hagner says, "God's mysterious sovereignty lies behind both belief and unbelief, yet without obviating the culpability of those who fail to believe. That some believed and others did not believe the message of Jesus can be described from this perspective as God either concealing or revealing the truth of that message."[61]

What exactly does the Father reveal or hide? Verse 25 provides just the indefinite ταῦτα. Commentators agree the phrase is ambiguous, and as a result there are almost as many interpretations as interpreters. Most broadly, Luz claims it refers to the whole story of Jesus and Israel.[62] Carson offers an array of options (not mutually exclusive but cumulative); he thinks the demonstrative pronoun refers to the significance of Jesus's miracles, the messianic age unfolding largely unnoticed in their midst, and the

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[59] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 274; For the themes of heaven and earth see, Jonathan T Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

[60] This theme will be developed further in the chapter on incongruity.

[61] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 318.

[62] Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 169.

content of Jesus's teaching.[63] Luomanen posits that, if it has a definite meaning at all, it is Jesus's ministry in general.[64] France and Nolland similarly make reference to Jesus's ministry as its referent but with France referring to the "whole process" including both his teaching and identity while Nolland appeals to the purpose of God in the Son's ministry and, uniquely, John the Baptist's ministry.[65] Each of these options has some appeal. The context of chapter 11 warrants reference to both Jesus's ministry and miracles. That this verse follows Jesus denouncing cities for their lack of repentance in the face of his mighty works, his defense of the ministry of John the Baptist, and the missions discourse leads to the conclusion that "these things" is, in part, a broad reference to Jesus's ministry and miracles. Nolland's inclusion of John the Baptist is helpful because of John's place in the narrative of chapter 11 as well as his role in Jesus's mission in general. Verse 27, however, requires broadening the referent still further. There Jesus describes his relationship to God as one of Father and Son. With this in mind, it is best to include Jesus's identity, particularly his identity as the Son of God, within the scope of "these things."[66] Additionally, the second half of verse 27 says knowledge of the Father should also be included. The Father has given the Son the ability and right to choose to reveal the Father to anyone the Son chooses (Matt 11:27). In sum, it is best to understand ταῦτα as a broad understanding of the identity of the Father and Son, the purpose and meaning of the Son's ministry and miracles, as well as John the Baptist's role within salvation history.[67]

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[63] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 274.

[64] Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation*, WUZNT 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 116.

[65] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 443; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 470.

[66] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 346.

[67] Davies and Allison note that "these things" has the same referent as the "secrets of the kingdom of God" from Mark 4 and Matthew 13. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 277.

Matthew 11:25–27, therefore, presents salvation as a divine prerogative and as a form of understanding and knowledge that results in right action. One might be tempted to think this strong statement of sovereignty overrides man's responsibility, but, as Matthew 11:28–30 and the preceding narrative reveals, this is not the case. Much like the pattern shown above in Matthew 13:10–16, Jesus states salvation-oriented realities first in terms of divine election and then in terms of man's response. Only those to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father will be saved (Matt 11:27), yet the invitation Jesus gives in the next verse is universal. He invites πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ κεφορτισμένοι το δεῦτε προς με (Matt 11:28). Those who come and experience rest owe their repentance and understanding entirely to God's revelation, yet those who do not come and remain steadfast in their sin owe their inevitable doom to their own hard hearts.

Matthew 16:13–20. In Matthew 16 the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign, and he rebukes them while also warning the disciples to beware of their teaching (Matt 16:1–12). When they came to Caesarea Philippi, however, Jesus asks, τίνα λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (Matt 16:13). The disciples answer by listing the various responses from the crowds they encountered during their previous adventures (Matt 16:14). Jesus then asks the same question to the disciples, saying, τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι (Matt 16:15). Simon Peter famously replies, σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱος τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (Matt 16:16). This proves to be the answer for which Jesus was looking. Jesus then commends Peter saying, μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι ἀλλ᾽ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Matt 16:17). The answer continues when Jesus proclaims he will build his church on this rock, a play on Peter's name, and he will give him the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:18–19).

The most relevant portion for the purpose of this chapter, however, is in verse 17.[68] This text represents another clear indication of the source of knowledge that saves.

[68] For a history of interpretation of this text in general see: Tucker Ferda, "The Seventy Faces of Peter's Confession: Matt. 16:16–17 in the History of Interpretation," *BibInt* 20, no. 4 (2012): 421–57

Throughout Matthew, knowledge of the Father or Son or of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven comes from divine revelation. Many commentators recognize the connection between Matthew 11:25–27 and Matthew 16:17.[69] The divine source of this knowledge is undisputed, and it seems the content, in this case, specifically refers to Jesus's identity as Messiah and Son of God. This salvific and eschatological revelation[70] seems to come through the process of discipleship the twelve experienced by spending time with Jesus.[71] Much like in Matthew 11, no man can reveal this knowledge to the disciples, and it seems this gracious God given insight is effective in that Jesus plans to build the future of the church on the one to whom this special revelation has been bestowed. One could argue that the following pericope, in which Jesus reveals the suffering nature of his mission leading to a harsh and surprising rebuke of Peter by the Lord himself, mitigates any conclusions about the efficacy of this revelation (Matt 16:21–23). How can I claim the gracious revelation is efficacious if immediately following the commendation Peter receives a harsh condemnation of his lack of understanding? The answer seems to be that the revelation works insofar as Jesus plans for the future around these men, but their perfection or complete understanding is not guaranteed. They are still sinful men who will fail to do and understand rightly. This in no way means Peter's salvation is uncertain. God's grace is effective to save, but the process of discipleship and growth is ongoing.

Summary. This section argued that Matthew presents God himself as the source of knowledge and understanding necessary for salvation. God graciously bestows understanding on those whom he wills and hides this revelation from the proud and

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Ferda also has a specific section on the history of interpreters that focused on the mode of knowledge (450–456).

[69] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 346; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 366; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 619; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 666.

[70] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 469.

[71] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 346; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 469.

obstinate. These texts contain no suggestion that this gracious revelation can or does fail. It works to the end that it is designed, namely, coming to the Son for rest and salvation.

Election Language

Texts containing election language, by which I mean passages that use the word ἐκλεκτοί, are sparse in the first Gospel. Matthew uses the term only four times, always in the plural and noun form (Matt 22:14; 24:22, 24, 37). My argument is this language, building on the themes and topics discussed above, indicates the efficacy of grace and points to divine sovereignty in salvation.

The first instance of ἐκλεκτοί occurs in the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1–14). The parable seems to continue a line of thinking began in the previous chapter, where Jesus uses another parable, the parable of the tenants, to show the kingdom of God belongs not to those who are privileged by birth, but to those producing fruit (Matt 21:28–46). The parable of the wedding feast depicts the kingdom of heaven as a king throwing a wedding feast for his son (Matt 22:2). The king sends servants to the invited guests to call them to the feast that was set to begin (Matt 22:3). The invited guests refuse even his second entreaty, and they even went so far as to mistreat and kill the servants the king sent (Matt 22:3–6). The king then responds with judgment and punishment, killing those responsible and burning their city (Matt 22:7). Not allowing the feast to be ruined by ungrateful invitees, the king next sends his servants to gather anyone who would come, including πονηρούς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς (Matt 22:9–10). The king sees the invited guests but notices a man who has no wedding garment (Matt 22:11). The king questions the man about how he got in without one, and the accused is left speechless (Matt 22:12). The man is then thrown out to the outer darkness,[72] and the parable closes with the proverb πολλοὶ γάρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί (Matt 22:14).

[72] For more on this text see the chapter on singularity and the following: J. Paul Tanner, "The 'Outer Darkness' in Matthew's Gospel: Shedding Light on an Ominous Warning," *BSac* 174, no. 696 (2017): 445–59; Zoltan Erdey and Kevin Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in

It seems likely that at least the first part of the parable is meant to be a rebuke of Israel. Those who were privileged with the invitation but did not come have been supplanted by a general call for any who would come. Given the context of Matthew 21–22, therefore, at least part of the point is the people of God are being redefined—a topic discussed in more depth in the chapter on incongruity.

Three points, however, warrant attention in regard to the efficacy of grace in this text. First of all, who is this man who comes to the wedding without a wedding garment? To answer this, the first thing that should be noted is the newly invited guests are made up of both "bad and good (πονηρούς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς)" (Matt 22:10). Given the almost exact verbal parallel found in Matthew 5:45, where it unambiguously refers to all humanity, it seems likely that the phrase has the same referent here.[73] With this consideration in mind, most commentators agree the man without a wedding garment is representative of a class of people, and it does not seem too far a stretch to conclude it represents the people described as πονηρούς (Matt 22:10).[74]

Secondly, this raises the question of what exactly the wedding garment is. Numerous suggestions have been made throughout church history,[75] but three warrant attention here.[76] The most common suggestion is the wedding garment represents good works, obedience, or bearing fruit.[77] Keener suggests confidently that the wedding

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Matthew's Gospel," *AT* 32, no. 1 (2012): 26–45.

[73] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 320.

[74] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 204; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 320.

[75] For a concise history of interpretation see, Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 58–59; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 321.

[76] Davies and Allison suggest that the wedding garment is the resurrection body or garment of glory. This does not seem likely, so I am leaving it out of the discussion. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 204.

[77] Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 56; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 823; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 631.

garment is repentance, appealing to Matthew 3:2 and 4:17.[78] Finally, Carson and Snodgrass argue the referent is intentionally vague and readers cannot know for sure.[79] Given the context of the whole Gospel, I think readers can infer at the very least certain possibilities as to what this man was missing that lead to his being cast into the outer darkness. The first two views mentioned, bearing fruit and repentance, are not mutually exclusive. While both John the Baptist and Jesus's messages are summed up as a call to repentance in light of the kingdom of heaven, John connects bearing fruit and repenting in his message to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 3:8). It might be that the wedding garment, which seems to determine one's place in the kingdom of heaven could be broadly defined as "salvation," with all the various facets expounded throughout the text of the first Gospel. This would include repentance, bearing fruit, and, as noted above in the section on categorical texts, the power behind bearing fruit, namely divine election. It is telling that the summary of the parable that immediately follows the scene regarding the man's missing wedding garment deals with election. It might be the man was missing the evidence of true righteousness, namely bearing fruit, because he was part of those who were not given the secrets of the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven. As a result, the man tried to obtain the kingdom of heaven, to attend the wedding feast, on his own terms and was met with tragic but foreseeable judgment. Ultimately, however, it is hard to be dogmatic about any suggestion without more information.

Finally, the proverb to end the parable is key. There seems to be a growing consensus that the phrase is a Semitism meaning "all are called, not all are chosen."[80] This implies the emphasis is not on the number of people saved being small, but simply

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[78] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 523.

[79] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 457; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 321.

[80] Ben Meyer, "Many (= All) Are Called, but Few (= Not All) Are Chosen," *NTS* 36 (1990): 89–97; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 321; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 632; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 206.

that not everyone will be saved. The number of those chosen is smaller than the number of those being called.[81] The question, then, shifts to the meaning of the word ἐκλεκτοί.

The other three uses in Matthew come in rapid succession in the eschatological discourse. Matthew 24 speaks of a great tribulation that comes, and only the ones who endure to the end are saved. After describing the horrors of that time, Jesus claims if God had not graciously cut short those days, no one would be saved, but that διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτους κολοβωθήσονται αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι (Matt 24:22).[82] The tribulation is cut short for the sake of the elect, but false prophets arise to try to lead people astray, even, if possible the elect (Matt 24:24). Finally, after the tribulation the Son of man returns "on clouds of heaven with power and great glory," and the angels are sent out to gather τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ (Matt 24:29–31). What information regarding election can be gleaned from these verses? First, the elect are those disciples of Christ who, though threatened, endure to the end.[83] Second, standing behind this endurance is divine purpose and power.[84] Finally, the notion of being elect has a distinct messianic and eschatological orientation. The elect are those who, at the second coming of Christ, are gathered for salvation—not unlike how the wheat or good fish are gathered (Matt 3:12; 13:30; 13:48).

Returning now to Matthew 22:14, it seems the statement means, while the call to salvation is universal, just like in Matthew 11:25–30, the application of that salvation is not. The "few" who are chosen are disciples of Christ who will endure to the end by the divine power and purpose of God to be gathered for salvation by the angels. This text, therefore, seems to be a strong point in the case of divine efficacy in salvation. As Meyer

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[81] Meyer, "Many (= All) Are Called, but Few (= Not All) Are Chosen," 92.

[82] Quarles notes that Δια with the accusative "identifies the motivation for God's action: "for the sake of." Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, EGGNT (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017), 286.

[83] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 827; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 891; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 632.

[84] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 891.

says, "The accent falls not on the human subject's decision and perseverance in it, but on God's sealing of it by 'election.'"[85] The implication, then, is that Matthew sees divine grace as accomplishing salvation for the elect, evidenced in coming to the wedding feast the right way.

Conclusion

In sum, Matthew perfects efficacy in his portrayal of divine grace. God's grace accomplishes its purposes. It is regularly viewed in conjunction with his sovereignty in salvation. First and foremost, God saves his people from their sin through his decisive action of Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, securing their salvation. The application of that salvation is also consistently tied to his sovereign will. Man must respond, repent, come, believe, and bear fruit. That responsibility is not altered or mitigated at all, but Matthew's consistent portrait is of a people who do all of these things by the effective grace of God.

As a reminder, so far, we have seen that God's grace is a lavish outpouring of favor before the recipients ask for it. This grace shines more brightly against the dark background of the looming eschatological judgment where the righteous, those efficaciously brought into the people of God by his gracious revelation of himself, will receive eternal life, and the wicked will receive eternal punishment. Next, we will see that the people of God are unworthy to receive these great gifts.

[85] Meyer, "Many (= All) Are Called, but Few (= Not All) Are Chosen," 89.

CHAPTER 6

INCONGRUITY

In the Gospel of Matthew, when God gives good gifts, does he give them to people who are worthy or unworthy to receive them? Asking this question is another way of asking whether or not Matthew perfects the facet of grace known as incongruity. It focuses specifically on the recipient(s) of divine benevolence in regard to their worth. Does God consider the *prior* worth of the recipient or not when being gracious? The perfection of incongruity contains an element of time; the question is in regard to their worth at or leading up to the time of receiving the gift, not whether they become worthy *as a result* of receiving the gift. Those familiar with Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* will recall that incongruity is the characteristic perfection found in Romans and Galatians.[1]

Matthew's portrayal of divine grace perfects incongruity. In other words, when Matthew speaks of divine grace, he speaks of giving gifts to a people who are not worthy to receive them. I also want to show that even though the recipients of divine benevolence are not worthy when they receive the gift, through the process of discipleship they grow to become more and more worthy of the gift, even if they are never completely deserving.

I will argue this thesis in three steps. First, I will examine texts dealing with tax collectors, sinners, and little children which show that those Jesus came to save are, by all accounts, the unworthy and lowly of society. Second, I will look at the themes of "discipleship" and "discipleship failure" to demonstrate that Jesus's inner circle of disciples were not the religious elite one would expect, but normal men who fail often on

[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 6.

the path of discipleship. Finally, I will discuss the redefinition of the people of God from ethnic Israel to a Gentile inclusive group based on reception of Jesus rather than ancestry.

Tax Collectors, Sinners, and Little Children

Throughout the first Gospel, two themes directly related to incongruity appear. First is that Matthew consistently portrays Jesus's mission in terms of his coming to save sinners and the disreputable of society. Second, Jesus wants the humble and lowly, particularly referred to as little children, to come to him. He holds them up as an example of the humble character and submissive attitude he expects of his disciples. I will consider each theme in turn.

Tax Collectors and Sinners

Though many texts are relevant to this section, two passages stand out for their emphasis on Jesus's gracious attitude being incongruous with the character of the people with whom he associates. The first is Matthew 9:9–13, and the second is Matthew 21:28–32.

Matthew 9:9–13 appears in a section running from Matthew 4:23 through Matthew 9:35. Notice the almost identical wording of the two passages:

> Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ (Matt 4:23).

> Καὶ περιῆγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν (Matt 9:35).

It seems Matthew wanted readers to view Matthew 4:23–9:35 as a unified section. So, following the Sermon on the Mount—i.e., teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom—Jesus begins doing miracles and performing his healing ministry (Matt 8–9). At one point a group of people bring Jesus a paralytic man to be healed. Jesus, instead of immediately healing his physical problem, proclaims that his sins have

been forgiven (Matt 9:1–2). This incenses the scribes, and Jesus then shows his authority to forgive sins by healing the paralytic (Matt 9:3–8). Jesus's first negative encounter with the Jewish leadership when healing this man leads into the next, where the Pharisees question the disciples about why Jesus keeps the company he does.

After the crowds glorify God because of what they had seen Jesus do, Jesus leaves and sees Matthew sitting at a tax booth (Matt 9:9).[2] There is much debate on the name "Matthew" due to the fact that Mark 2:13–17, the parallel story, has the name "Levi" for the tax collector called to follow Jesus. The simplest, and I think correct, explanation of this aberration is that Matthew and Levi are the same person with two Semitic names.[3] Jesus then calls Matthew to follow him, a call to which Matthew immediately responds by rising and following Jesus. It seems that the author wants this call of Matthew to resemble the call of the other apostles in Matthew 4:18–22 even though the wording for Jesus's command is different—δεῦτε ὀπίσω in Matthew 4, ἀκολούθει in Matthew 9.[4] The parallels between the accounts could be to underscore the fact that despite Matthew's unpopular profession, a point I will discuss later in more detail, he is just as much a member of the twelve as Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

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[2] For the structure of Matthew 9:9–13 see, Christof Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott: ein Exegetischer Beitrag zum Konzept der matthäischen Soteriologie im Anschluß an Mt 9,9–13*, WUZNT 133 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 49–64.

[3] For this view, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 352; Craig Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 293n81; D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 224; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 237; For the list of interpretive options see, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 98–99; Kiley believes that the switch is due to a play off the relationship of "Matthew" and "discipleship" so that Matthew functions "as the apostolic representative of the learning-discipleship to which all addresses of the Gospel are invited." Mark Kiley, "Why 'Matthew' in Matt 9:9–13," *Biblica* 65, no. 3 (1984): 350; Bauckham does not think that they are the same person, and claims that the author took over Levi's call to explain the apostle's call. It means, however, that the apostle Matthew was the author of the Gospel. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 108–12.

[4] Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, JSNTSS 204 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 217; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 385.

Matthew's immediate response to the call of Jesus leads them to a house for a celebratory meal. The term συνανέκειντο more than likely "indicates that this is no ordinary meal but a banquet, probably in the teacher's honor."[5] The author does not indicate whose house the party went to for the meal, so it seems that the more pertinent information is the guests of the meal. In fact, the guests being τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ drives the rest of the narrative. The author claims that πολλοὶ τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἐλθόντες συνανέκειντο τῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ (Matt 9:10). So, when the Pharisees come along in the next verse and ask why Jesus does this, their identification of the guests is not in question (Matt 9:11). This is not a case of the Pharisees identifying a group of people as worse than they really are or imposing their own standard or view of the law on a group of normal people. Jesus ate with a large group of people known to be the disreputable of society. So, who are the τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, and why would Jesus's eating with them be a cause for scandal?

Τελῶναι (tax collectors) were hated by their fellow Jewish people, but why were they hated?[6] The tax collectors in the Gospels, which are probably more accurately translated as toll collectors,[7] were not senior officials in charge of the tax system, but were normally "local subordinates"[8] who were employed by local Jewish aristocrats.[9] This collaboration with the Gentile overlords led to the view that tax collectors were quislings, collaborating with Rome in the suppression of the Jewish people for personal

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[5] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 296.

[6] For a comprehensive historical examination of tax collectors, see, Fritz Herrenbrück, *Jesus und die Zöllner: historische und neutestamentlich-exegetische Untersuchungen*, *WUZNT* 41 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990).

[7] John R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification," *CBQ* 33, no. 1 (1971): 54.

[8] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 159.

[9] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 292.

gain.[10] Keener even compares this hatred, though to a lesser extent, to the way "the Dutch or French felt toward local collaborators with the Nazis or the Africans felt toward the *slatees*, African assistants to European slave traders."[11]

In addition to intense feelings that tax collectors were traitors, the tax system[12] itself was oppressive and easily abused. The taxes were often "exorbitant even without overcharging,"[13] and the system also encouraged corruption where the tax collectors would charge more than they were required in order to fill their own pockets with the money of the poor.[14] Tax collectors became associated with corruption and dishonesty. Moreover, their dealings with the Gentile rulers could also lead to them being seen as potentially ritually unclean.[15]

All of this leads to the τελῶναι being equated in some way with ἁμαρτωλοὶ in Matthew 9:9–13 and 11:19,[16] and with "prostitutes (αἱ πόρναι)"[17] in Matthew 21:28–32. Matthew 11:18–19 in some ways just recapitulates the claim made in Matthew 9. In the latter text Jesus compares his ministry with John the Baptist's. John did not eat or drink and they claimed he had a demon (Matt 11:18). Jesus, the Son of Man, did eat and drink, and he is called a glutton, drunkard, and friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19). Therefore, Jesus seems to be reiterating the charge the Pharisees leveled against him. In

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[10] E. P. Sanders, "Jesus and the Sinners," *JSNT* 6, no. 19 (1983): 9; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 292; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 159; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 238.

[11] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 292.

[12] For an overview of the tax system during this period see, Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners," 42–49; Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, SNTS 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 73–79.

[13] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 293.

[14] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 269; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 292; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 159; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 238.

[15] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 159.

[16] Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott*, 87.

[17] For a helpful excursus on prostitution, see: Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 508–9.

Matthew 21, however, Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and cleansed the temple when the chief priests and elders of the people challenge his authority to perform these actions. Jesus then tells them the Parable of the Two Sons,[18] which is the context for the juxtaposition of τελῶναι and αἱ πόρναι.

A man sends his two sons, one at a time, into the vineyard to work. The first initially declines, but then has a change of heart and does what his father asked. The second initially responds positively, but never actually goes to the vineyard to work. Jesus asks which son did the will of the father, to which the Jewish leaders correctly reply, the first (Matt 21:28–31). Shockingly, Jesus then says, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι προάγουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (Matt 21:31). The point, explained in the next verse, is that the tax collectors and prostitutes believed John but the Jewish leaders, who should have been better positioned to recognize a righteous messenger, did not (Matt 21:32). One's entrance into the kingdom of God seems to be determined not by one's present moral purity, but one's response to and belief in the revealed word of God.

Why were tax collectors juxtaposed with prostitutes? On the surface this seems to be a strange pairing. Gibson argues, rightly I think, that "the main reason prostitutes and tax collectors were linked together is that both groups were regarded by their contemporaries as prime examples of the type of Jew who collaborated with the occupying forces of the Roman government."[19] While their particular type of betrayal differed, the groups were both associated with being immoral traitors.

Returning to Matthew 9, the question is, who are the ἁμαρτωλῶν? The scholarly consensus seems to be that ἁμαρτωλῶν are "the wicked," meaning the

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[18] For more information on this parable see: Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 266–75.

[19] J. Gibson, "HOI TELŌNAI KAI HAI PORNAI," *JSNT* 32, no. 2 (1981): 430.

intentional or blatant transgressors of the law.[20] This means that, contra previous scholarship, ἁμαρτωλῶν does not refer to the '*am-hā'āreṣ*,[21] the common people who did not follow the ritual purity laws of the Pharisees.[22] Sanders in particular has made a strong case that ἁμαρτωλῶν does not include the common people but translates *resha'im*, which he says "is virtually a technical term. It is best translated 'the wicked,' and it refers to those who have sinned willfully and heinously and who did not repent."[23] There seems to be a moral component to the term,[24] and, according to Carter, the designation is polemical, showing that the referent of this label is denied covenant status and awaiting judgment.[25] In the context of Matthew 9, therefore, the people with whom Jesus ate were willful and unrepentant covenant breakers.

Jesus says a few verses later that οὐ . . . ἦλθον καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλούς (Matt 9:13). This statement of Jesus's purpose for coming, made in such absolute tones, suggests that there is more to Jesus's notion of ἁμαρτωλῶν than initially meets the eye. Did Jesus only come to call the people sitting at the table with him? He also called 11 other disciples besides Matthew the tax collector; are we to understand that each of them were *resha'im*, the wicked, intentional and noticeable covenant breakers? If not, I am suggesting that Jesus's understanding of who qualifies as "sinners" is broader than the table guests who rankled the Jewish leaders. First of all, at the beginning of the Gospel, Matthew informs readers that Jesus's goal is to save his people ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (Matt 1:21). The word for sins, ἁμαρτιῶν, of course, shares the same

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[20] Sanders, "Jesus and the Sinners," 8; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 295; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 100; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 238.

[21] Please note that I have standardized the spelling across various sources for clarity.

[22] Sanders, "Jesus and the Sinners"; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 353; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 100.

[23] Sanders, "Jesus and the Sinners," 8.

[24] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 353.

[25] Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 219.

root as the word for sinners, ἁμαρτωλῶν. This acts as a signal to readers that God's people are in fact sinners. They are wicked covenant breakers in need of saving, and that category includes everyone, from those who strive to keep the law to those the Pharisees rightly label ἁμαρτωλῶν.[26]

Second, when Jesus teaches the crowd how to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, part of that prayer is for forgiveness of their debts as they also forgive their debtors (Matt 6:12). That this refers to sin seems clear because immediately following the prayer Jesus tells them that they will be forgiven if they forgive others their τὰ παραπτώματα.[27] The language is not of ἁμαρτωλῶν, but enshrined in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray is a request for forgiveness (ἀφίημι) which is the same word Jesus uses in relation to the paralytic in Matthew 9:1–8. In the case of the paralytic, it is his αἱ ἁμαρτίαι that are "forgiven (ἀφίενταί)".

Third, Jesus, also in the Sermon on the Mount, calls all those listening πονηροὶ (Matt 7:11). In context, he is teaching the listeners to ask for what they need. He demonstrates the Father's generosity by comparing their willingness to give good gifts to their children in spite of being evil with the Father who is in heaven giving good things to those who ask him (Matt 7:11). This may be a case of hyperbole,[28] but at the very least it is meant to show that they are imperfect human followers of a perfect God. Finally, the presence of the term ἁμαρτωλῶν in Matthew 9:9–13 creates a connection back to the previous pericope where Jesus heals a paralytic man and forgives his sins (Matt 9:2, 5,

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[26] Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 127–28; Patte is cited in Barnet. John A. Barnet, *Not the Righteous but Sinners: M.M. Bakhtin's Theory of Aesthetics and the Problem of Reader-Character Interaction in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSS 246 (London, England: T & T Clark International, 2003), 6.

[27] Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[28] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 265.

6).[29] There seems to be a strong theme of universal sinfulness running through the first Gospel.

Please note, I am not claiming that the fellowship Jesus keeps in Matthew 9 should be broadened to include the '*am-hā'āreṣ*. Sanders and the others discussed above are correct, in this regard. I merely want to show that, while in this case the referents of "sinners" are the quislings and notoriously wicked, that is not necessarily so throughout the whole Gospel, or even in the proverbial statement that concludes the passage. That these τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ are in fact sharing a table with Jesus heightens the incongruity in the narrative. It also causes the point of contention with the Pharisees because table fellowship in that culture was not merely eating but had profound social and religious implications.[30] Sharing a meal with someone was a sign of identification[31] and closeness or even oneness.[32] In fact, it also has a connotation of approval or full acceptance.[33] Davies and Allison also argue that it is a prophetic symbol showing that God's mercy is open to all in Israel.[34] The profound implication of Jesus eating with τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ is explained well by Landmesser when he says,

> *Daß aber der Sohn Gottes, der nach Mt 1,23 der, Gott mit uns' ist, mit den als Sünder geltenden Zöllnern Tischgemeinschaft pflegt, heißt ja genau dies: Gott selbst tritt in den heilvollen Kontakt mit den Sündern*.
>
> But that the Son of God, who according to Mt 1:23 is 'God with us', maintains table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, means precisely this: God himself enters

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[29] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 386.

[30] Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott*, 89 For a description of the meaning of table fellowship also see pages 89–90 of this same work.

[31] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 353.

[32] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 238.

[33] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 293; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 238.

[34] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 101 I would not limit the statement to just Israel, however. .

into healing contact with sinners.[35]

God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, extends his mercy to those least deserving of it.

As a result, the Pharisees confront the disciples about Jesus's companions at dinner. Jesus overhears and responds by saying, οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλ᾽ οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες (Matt 9:12). Jesus connects his healing ministry, displayed throughout Matthew 8 and 9, with his saving ministry.[36] Nolland notes that it is common in the Old Testament to refer to God's people as ill and in need of healing.[37] Jesus also makes the same connection in the previous narrative where he forgives a paralyzed man of his sins before healing him of his infirmities (Matt 9:1–8). Jesus's healing ministry, therefore, should be viewed as a crucial part of his saving ministry. He heals the physical manifestation of sin on his way to the cross where he will deal with the full reality of judgment against sin. This connection could make a strong case that the whole context of Isaiah 53 (the suffering servant) is at work in the first Gospel even though the only part quoted deals with Jesus bearing illnesses and diseases (Matt 8:17). Jesus bearing illnesses and diseases is another way of saying that he bore sin and suffering on behalf of his people. Regardless, Jesus describes his mission, his reason for coming, in terms congruent with incongruity. Those who are sick need a doctor (Matt 912). Those who are sinners need salvation (Matt 1:21, 9:13).

That this is Jesus's point is made abundantly clear by his use of Hosea 6:6 as well as his closing statement (Matt 9:13). Using a rabbinic expression, Jesus tells the Pharisees to πορευθέντες . . . μάθετε τί ἐστιν, and then quotes Hosea 6:6 (Matt 9:13).[38]

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[35] Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott*, 91 Translation mine.

[36] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 255.

[37] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 387.

[38] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 104.

Quoted also in Matthew 12:7, the quote from Hosea says, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν (Matt 9:13).[39] The term rendered ἔλεος[40] by Matthew and the LXX is חסד. The question is whether or not Matthew imports the sense of covenant-loyalty that almost certainly stands behind the term in Hosea.[41] Nolland suggests that "the move to Greek here shifts the emphasis clearly to human interaction (which is also possible for the Hebrew). Covenant loyalty to God is not at all what springs to mind in the Matthean context."[42] Hill, on the other hand, argues that "it is reasonable to suggest that something of [the sense of covenant-loyalty] passes into the meaning of the quotation."[43] This may be a distinction without a difference especially as Hill continues to say that "compassionate attitude and merciful action" is what gives "concrete expression to one's faithful adherence to and love for God."[44] The point, then, is that covenant-loyalty to God, in part, means to reach out to those people who are in need of a savior. The Pharisees with all their ritual purity have missed the greater righteousness and adherence to the "weightier matters of the law" because they have not shown mercy (Matt 5:17–20, 23:23).[45] This is in fact in line with God's will and, when considered with the other instance of the quote in Matthew 12:7, points to the merciful character and dealings of God himself.[46]

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[39] Hill briefly discusses the text form of this quotation, ultimately arguing that the best text tradition shows that Matthew is independently rendering the Hebrew. David Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 24, no. 1 (1977): 108–9.

[40] Barclay discusses the overlap of "gift" and "mercy" in Jewish literature. The semantic fields are not exactly the same, but the terms are often mixed. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 450.

[41] Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew's Gospel," 109.

[42] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 387.

[43] Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew's Gospel," 110.

[44] Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew's Gospel,"110.

[45] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 225.

[46] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 387.

God desires mercy and not sacrifice because Jesus's mission is to call sinners, not the righteous (Matt 9:13). While this is in line with the meaning of ἔλεος, it does seem to be the opposite of what listeners would have expected to hear, especially in light of Matthew 5:17–20 and Jesus's proclamation that their righteousness (same root word) should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if they are to enter the kingdom of heaven. The status of the "righteous," therefore, is an interpretive problem. Davies and Allison give four possibilities for how to understand their status. First, it is possible that "Jesus did not call the righteous because they were presumed to be saved already."[47] This seems unlikely given the discussion above about universal sinfulness. Second, "Jesus did not call the righteous because he knew it would do no good: they were too stubborn to heed his proclamation."[48] Third, "all the emphasis lies on the 'sinners' and one should not draw any inferences at all about the status of the righteous."[49] Fourth, "Jesus could have been saying that he came to call sinners only, it being presupposed that everyone is a sinner (cf. 7.11; Rom 3.9–18). The 'righteous' would then simply be those who failed to see that they were no better off than everyone else."[50] Options two through four are all possibilities. It does seem that the emphasis lies on "sinners," but also, as France says, "it is hard for the 'righteous' . . . to recognize their need for a messiah whose role it is to 'save his people from their sins.'"[51] The best view may be, as Carson argues, that the verse is not dividing man into two groups but changing what they thought about what the Messiah came to do.[52]

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[47] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 106.

[48] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18,* 106.

[49] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18* ,107.

[50] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*,107.

[51] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 355.

[52] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 225.

Whatever the status of the "righteous," Hagner sums up this section well when he says, "At its heart, Jesus's healing ministry is about mercy—granting of unmerited favor to the unworthy."[53] Besides being a classic definition of divine grace, Hagner's quote fits exactly what I am arguing in this chapter. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is, in part, incongruous with the recipient's nature. Jesus's mission, as stated in Matthew 9 and elsewhere, is to call sinners to follow him and to heal the sick. This mission is an expression of incongruous divine mercy and grace.

Little Ones and Children

Throughout Matthew runs a theme of God showing favor to people described as "children" or "little ones." This notion, exemplified through varied vocabulary and applied in different contexts, demonstrates that God is gracious to the lowly, humble, and undeserving. The call for disciples to be like children and the fact that divine revelation comes to children shows that Matthew perfects incongruity in his portrayal of divine grace.

The first instance of grace shown to "little children" comes in Matthew 11:25. Having just pronounced John the Baptist the Elijah who is to come and denounced various cities for their lack of repentance, Jesus thanks his Father for hiding "these things (ταῦτα)" from the σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν and revealing them to νηπίοις (Matt 11:25). Since I discussed this text at length in the chapter on efficacy, there is no need to repeat that discussion here. Part of Jesus's point, however, seems to be that God graciously reveals "these things" not to people who are worthy to receive them, but to the lowly and undeserving. Jesus contrasts the "wise and understanding" with the "little children" (Matt 11:25).

Νήπιος is one of four Greek terms employed by Matthew to refer to children

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[53] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 239.

or, as I will argue later, humble disciples. Matthew uses this term just one other time in his Gospel, Matthew 21:16. In the later context, Jesus has just entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey with the crowds spreading cloaks and branches on the road and shouting ὡσαννὰ τῷ υἱῷ Δαυίδ (Matt 21:9). Jesus then clears the temple, and the chief priests and scribes, seeing what he had done and hearing what the people were saying, confront him (Matt 21:15). He replies by quoting Psalm 8:2 saying, ἐκ στόματος νηπίων καὶ θηλαζόντων κατηρτίσω αἶνον (Matt 21:16). Here the term in question, νήπιος, is used in conjunction with a substantive participle of θηλάζω (Matt 21:16). God has prepared praise out of the mouths of νηπίων καὶ θηλαζόντων (Matt 21:16). Θηλάζω refers to breast feeding an infant and nursing babies, and is used as a synonym with νήπιος. Even if it does not carry the same exact meaning in Matthew 11, the point is the same; God's gracious revelation comes to those who do not deserve to receive it. If anyone "deserved" God's revelation, one would probably point to those who are "wise," but God's gift of knowledge is incongruous with the nature of those who receive it.

The next occurrence of the language of "little ones" or "little children" is found in Matthew 18:1–14.[54] This text constitutes the beginning of what has come to be known as the Ecclesiological Discourse. The disciples come to Jesus and ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus replies by calling a child (παιδίον) over to him and placing them in their midst.[55] He then says, ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδία, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 18:3). So, the disciples ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus's immediate reply is to tell them

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[54] Most commentators agree that Matthew 18:11 should be omitted as later edition because it is missing from some of the better manuscripts and is likely borrowed from Luke 19:10 to connect verse 10 to verses 12–14. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Sttugart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 2012), 36; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 525; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 437; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 684; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 740.

[55] For a discussion about the spatial implications of this text and the parallels see: Daniel Patte, "Jesus' Pronouncement about Entering the Kingdom like a Child: A Structural Exegesis," *Semeia* 29 (1983): 3–42.

how to enter the kingdom. He then tell them that whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and that receiving such children in Jesus's name is equivalent to receiving Jesus himself (Matt 18:4–5). Next, Jesus offers a dire warning for anyone who causes a "little one (μικρός)" to sin and explains the drastic efforts believers should go to in order to avoid sin (Matt 18:6–9).[56] Finally, Jesus his treatment of the theme of "little ones" with the parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd leaves the 99 to go in search of the one who went astray (Matt 18:10–14).[57]

Scholars debate the referent of "child" and "little ones" in this text. This section begins by using παιδίον for "child" but then shifts to μικρός in verses 6–14. Most agree that the beginning of the passage refers to literal children.[58] So when Jesus calls a παιδίον into their midst, he is calling an actual young child. Most also agree that the meaning shifts from a literal child to followers of Jesus at some point in the passage. The debate is where that takes place. Davies and Allison logically suggest that the shift in subject corresponds with the shift in vocabulary. Therefore, Jesus calls a literal child into their midst, the literal child is held up as an example of the greatest in the kingdom, and whoever receives a literal child in Jesus's name receives Jesus himself. The shift comes when Jesus begins to talk about the "little ones (τῶν μικρῶν)" being caused to stumble and sin. They say, "παιδίον is the key word in vv. 1–5, μικρός in vv. 6–14. In our

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[56] In particular, those that cause a little one to sin would be better off having a great millstone fastened around their neck and drowned. For more on this image about the millstone see, Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 433; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 763; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 449.

[57] For more on this parable see: Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation*, WUZNT 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 247–48; Jacques Dupont, "Les implications christologiques de la parabole de la brebis perdue," in *Jésus aux origines de la christologie*, ed. Jacques Dupont, BETL 40 (Journées bibliques de Louvain, Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1975), 331–50; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 95–111; On the issue of guardian angels see Bogdan Bucur, "Matt 18:10 in Early Christology and Pneumatology: A Contribution to the Study of Matthean Wirkungsgeschichte," *NT* 49, no. 3 (2007): 209–31; Erikki Koskenniemi, "Forgotten Guardians and Matthew 18:10," *TB* 61, no. 1 (2010): 119–29; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 451; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 441–42; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 770–72.

[58] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 754; D. A Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, ed. Frank Gaebelein, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 397; Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven*, 236.

judgment, then, the first paragraph 18.1–5 concerns literal children while the next two paragraphs, 18.6–9 and 10–14, have to do with believers."[59] I agree with the proposal that μικρός refers to believers and that in Matthew 18:6–14 that is the subject in view. This seems clear due to the fact that they are characterized as those who "believe in [Jesus]" (Matt 18:6).[60] I disagree, however, that the change in vocabulary is the clean break in meaning. Verses 5–6 are one sentence, and ἓν παιδίον τοιοῦτο and ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων seem to function as parallel phrases. First, Jesus makes a positive statement about receiving ἓν παιδίον τοιοῦτο, and then he proceeds to give the negative statement about causing ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων to stumble (Matt 18:5–6). Because of this, I think the better reading is to see the one such child received in Jesus's name as referring to the disciple who humbles himself like a child and that this is then confirmed by the shift in vocabulary from that point on.[61]

Why did Jesus command his disciples to become like children or little ones?[62] What qualities did Jesus want to see in his disciples that made a child the right comparison? Verse four confirms that humility is the operative feature of a child that his disciples are to imitate.[63] In fact, if Jesus's disciples are meant to imitate him, the word for "humbles (ταπεινώσει)," is simply the verbal form of the same word Jesus uses to describe his own heart in Matthew 11:29. The word for humble could be a sign to the

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[59] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 754; Savvas Agouridēs, "'Little Ones' in Matthew," *BT* 35, no. 3 (1984): 329–334. Agouridēs seems to agree with this proposal and bases this on the use of the term *mikros* outside of this passage.

[60] Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven*, 237.

[61] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 398 It is hard to be dogmatic about it either way. Another possible solution is that the first phrase is pulling double duty, referring back to the literal child and forward to the little one who is a believer.

[62] For a history of interpretation of what this meant for the lives of the disciples see, Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 427–28.

[63] G. Todd Wilson, "Conditions for Entering the Kingdom According to St. Matthew," *PRS* 5, no. 1 (1978): 48; David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 198; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 397; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 757.

reader that, even though the word for "little one" is different in the two texts, the idea is the same in the two passages. Either way, children are not "self-consciously humble,"[64] but rather, their humility stems from their low social status.[65] As Wilson says, "For Matthew, to become as a child is to have a childlike faith marked by humility and receptivity. The childlike person recognizes that he is in himself helpless and that he is totally dependent upon God."[66] Jesus's followers are not meant to be proud and self-sufficient, they are meant to be humble and dependent on the Lord for everything. His disciples are the lowly and unworthy of society who believe in him.

Finally, Matthew 19:13–15 brings one other instance of Jesus's positive disposition toward children. "Children (παιδία)" are brought to Jesus that he might lay hands on them, but the disciples rebuke the people, trying to keep them from Jesus (Matt 19:13). Jesus then says, ἄφετε τὰ παιδία καὶ μὴ κωλύετε αὐτὰ ἐλθεῖν πρός με, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 19:14). The Son of Man then laid hands on the children and departed (Matt 19:15). This text, when read in light of 18:1–14 provides another piece of evidence that shows Jesus's care for the marginalized of society, and, just like in chapter 18, Jesus uses a literal child to make a broader point.[67] Davies and Allison say "there are two lessons: show respect to children, embody humility."[68] The kingdom of heaven does not belong to literal children per se, but to those like them.[69]

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[64] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 757.

[65] Wilson, "Conditions for Entering the Kingdom According to St. Matthew," 48; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 448n2; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 397; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 757.

[66] Wilson, "Conditions for Entering the Kingdom According to St. Matthew," 48.

[67] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 727.

[68] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 32.

[69] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 420.

Summary

This section developed two themes throughout the first Gospel. The first is that Jesus's mission was to save wicked sinners. His expressed purpose was to call a people that needed a savior to follow him. In other words, divine grace in salvation in the Gospel of Matthew is expressly shown to those least deserving of it. The second theme picked up on a series of texts that show Jesus's concern for the socially insignificant and dependent through his gracious disposition toward children. Jesus wants his followers to emulate him in humility and repeatedly employed children as an object lesson to make this point. This extension of divine favor to children acts as another proof that divine grace in the first Gospel is incongruous with the nature of those who receive it.

Disciples and Discipleship Failure

If my thesis that divine grace in Matthew perfects incongruity is correct, then one would expect Jesus's closest group of followers to be made up of common people and sinners rather than the religious elite.[70] This is, in fact, exactly what we find in the first Gospel. This section will first examine briefly who the disciples were, and second look at their many failings mentioned throughout Matthew. That Jesus chose these men, normal people who failed and doubted often, demonstrates that God extends grace to those unworthy to receive it.

The Twelve Disciples

Matthew does not narrate the call of all twelve of the disciples, but he does provide a list in Matthew 10:2–4, right before Jesus sends them out with the Missionary Discourse. This text, however, provides little information about who these men were other than a few epithets mentioned.[71] Since there are two Simons, Matthew distinguishes

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[70] For more on the history and lives of the Apostles, see W. Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

[71] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 107–8.

them by reminding readers that one is called Peter and one is a "Zealot (ὁ Καναναῖος)" (Matt 10:2–4). On the Zealot, Nolland says, "Καναναῖος ('Cananean') transliterates the Aramaic *qan'ānn* (*ān'*), meaning 'zealous one,' probably with reference to an approach to piety which drew inspiration from the zeal of Phineas and Elijah, perhaps in connection with some otherwise unknown movement, but also possibly as a merely personal epithet."[72] Readers are told that Matthew is a tax collector which makes certain that this is the same Matthew whose call narrative was given in the previous chapter, and finally, Judas Iscariot, mentioned last in all of the disciple lists across the New Testament, is declared to be the one who betrayed the Lord. This group of Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas make up Jesus's closest followers (Matt 10:2–4).

While this is the only text where Matthew mentions all twelve of the disciples by name, he gives the reader some background information on five of the disciples through their call stories. Because I discussed Matthew's call at length earlier I will not discuss it further here. That leaves Matthew 4:18–22 where Jesus calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him.

After Jesus enters Galilee following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus began preaching, using the same message that John had, namely: μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 4:17). Then he encounters Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew fishing in the Sea of Galilee ἦσαν γὰρ ἁλιεῖς (Matt 4:18). Jesus calls them to follow him and says that he will make them "fishers of men (ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων)" (Matt 4:19).[73] The brothers leave their nets and follow Jesus. The scene is repeated in the next two verses with the sons of Zebedee leave their boat, father, and nets after Jesus's call

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[72] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 412.

[73] For more on this phrase, see: Jindřich Mánek, "Fishers of Men," *NT* 2, no. 2 (1957): 138–41; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish, Fishers of Men: What We Know of the First Disciples from Their Profession," *BRev* 15, no. 3 (1999): 48–49; Wilhelm H. Wuellner, *The Meaning of "Fishers of Men"* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

(Matt 4:21–22). In this text readers learn that four of Jesus's twelve disciples were fishermen. Given Jesus's proclamation in verse 17, it is surprising that his first followers are not religious or social elite. For, as France says, "If the announcement of 'God's kingship' in v. 17 might lead the reader to expect some dramatic development in world history, the character of these first recruits offers a different perspective: four local fishermen do not sound like a world-changing task force."[74] Jesus's call goes out to those by all accounts undeserving to receive it, but I do not want to overstate the lowliness of his first four disciples. Fishermen, while by no means wealthy, were not destitute peasants.[75] While probably an anachronistic description, they were likely lower middle class.[76] They were not, however, professionally trained rabbis, and the way Jesus frames his call, for them to be "fishers of men (ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων)," seems to point to the idea that Jesus would equip them to do the work he wants them to do with the skillset they already have or would develop.

The twelve disciples, therefore, consist of twelve ordinary men from varied backgrounds. Readers are not told of any special training or qualities that might have made them worthy candidates to be a disciple, and, at least in the case of Matthew being a tax collector, had qualities that were decidedly *unworthy* of following a religious teacher. Matthew's depiction of the disciples and their backgrounds points to the incongruity of divine grace, and his inclusion of the twelve's repeated failures throughout the Gospel's narrative strengthens this point even further.

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[74] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 146.

[75] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 151; Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 120; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 397.

[76] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 397.

Discipleship Failure

Matthew makes evident that the disciples were imperfect men unworthy of the call they received not only through his discussion of their humble or unsavory origins but also by including accounts of their failure and lack of faith in Jesus's person or power. All but two of these texts are connected by the term ὀλιγόπιστος (Matt 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20).[77] The other two texts are Jesus's rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16:21–23 and the doubt experienced at the post resurrection appearance of Jesus at the end of the Gospel in 28:16–20.

Matthew 8:23–27. Immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins his ministry of healing and miracles. In Matthew's narrative he heals a leper, a centurion's son, and Peter's mother-in-law in quick succession (Matt 8:1–17). A scribe and another one of the disciples, presumably not one of the twelve, come to Jesus looking to follow him. Jesus responds, however, with statements about the cost and difficulty of discipleship. Readers are not told whether the scribe and disciple follow him after that (Matt 8:18–22). That discussion of discipleship sets the stage for the following narrative. The disciples get in a boat with Jesus when a great storm springs up and threatens to sink the boat. The disciples beseech Jesus to save them—interestingly it is the first time that σῴζω has appeared in connection with receiving help from Jesus other than 1:21.[78] Jesus then says to them, τί δειλοί ἐστε, ὀλιγόπιστοι (Matt 8:26). He goes on to calm the storm, and the men marvel at his power and authority (Matt 8:26–27).

Jesus rebukes the disciples for their little faith before he rebukes the wind. Despite the fact that they are a group with multiple fishermen among them and therefore would know that the danger presented was likely very real, as Nolland says, "The

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[77] The term is also found in 6:31, but I've chosen to leave it out of the discussion because of the questions surrounding the audience of the Sermon on the Mount. Also, 17:20 employs a cognate term "ὀλιγοπιστία."

[78] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 371.

disciples' terror is a mark of little faith. It indicates that they have lost sight of the reality of the power and presence of their Lord."[79] These are the men Jesus chose to have follow him, and they were guilty of a lack of faith and cowardice right from the beginning of his ministry.

Matthew 14:22–33. Turning now to another sea adventure, after Jesus learns that John the Baptist has been put to death by Herod, he moves in a boat to a place to be alone. The crowds, however, had other plans. They follow him *en masse,* and Jesus has compassion on them by healing their sick. The disciples want to send them away so that they can go and find food, but Jesus tells them that will not be necessary. They are to give the crowd something to eat. Jesus then takes the five loaves and two fish, blesses the food, and feeds the crowd of five thousand men plus women and children. After this miracle Jesus sends the disciples across the sea in a boat while he dismisses the crowds. Jesus then catches up to the boat by walking on the sea. The disciples are understandably terrified to see what they think is a ghost walking towards them across the sea, but Jesus reveals himself to them. Peter then asks Jesus to command him to come out on the water. Jesus does and Peter walks on the water to the Lord. What, at this moment, has the makings of a triumphant moment of discipleship quickly turns sour when Peter sees the strong winds and begins to sink. He cries out for Jesus to save him— σῷζω again—and Jesus reaches down and takes hold of the drowning disciple. Much like in the previous nautical narrative Jesus then says, ὀλιγόπιστε, εἰς τί ἐδίστασας (Matt 14:31). Peter and Jesus return to the boat, the winds cease, and those in the boat worship Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 14:32–33).

While not the all of the disciples this time, here again is a disciple, in fact the *de facto* leader of the disciples, failing to trust Jesus to provide the safety he needed. Jesus chastises Peter for not having sufficient faith and for "doubting (ἐδίστασας)" (Matt

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[79] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 371.

14:31). This word will appear again in Matthew 28:17—and only here in the rest of the New Testament—when some of the disciples doubt Jesus after the resurrection.[80] Davies and Allison sum up well the connection to incongruous grace when they say, "Peter is an example of the believer who suffers from a lack of faith in Jesus: after taking the first few steps of a difficult endeavor he falters when opposition begins to buffet. But—and this is what counts for the evangelist—Jesus is there to save *despite* inadequate faith."[81] This is true throughout the Gospel. Jesus remains faithful to his frequently faithless disciples.

Matthew 16:5–12, 21–23. After another miraculous feeding and a test by the Jewish leaders, Jesus warns his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 15:32–16:6). This confuses the disciples because they had not brought any bread with them (Matt 16:7). Jesus then immediately rebukes them saying, τί διαλογίζεσθε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ὀλιγόπιστοι, ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε (Matt 16:8). He continues to scold the disciples because they had not learned from the two miraculous feedings of over four and five thousand (Matt 16:9–11). The disciples continue to miss the meaning of Jesus's miracles, and they continue to not trust that he will provide for them what they need. Their lack of faith can no longer be excused by it being early in the ministry of Jesus.

In fact, as Matthew 16:21–23 shows, Jesus is now on his way to Jerusalem to be killed and rise again. After Peter's confession and Jesus's commendation of his understanding, Jesus then begins to predict his death and resurrection. Peter tries to correct the Lord and say that these things will never happen to him, but then Jesus, with shocking force, turns to Peter and says, ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ· σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων (Matt 16:23).[82] The same disciple that

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[80] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 571; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 602.

[81] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 509 Emphasis his.

[82] For the translation options for the opening phrase see, Dennis C. Stoutenburg, "'Out of My Sight!', 'Get Behind Me!', Or 'Follow After Me!': There Is No Choice in God's Kingdom," *JETS* 36, no. 2 (1993): 173–78; For some of the major interpretive options of this text see, B. A. E. Osborne, "Peter:

just made the famous confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος)" and was called blessed by Jesus himself is now referred to as Satan and a stumbling-block. Evidently Matthew wishes to show readers that the rock on which Jesus will build his church is still very much a flawed disciple in need of incongruous grace. Indeed, the structure of these three short narratives indicates this fact. Notice that the high mark of Peter's faithfulness and discipleship is surrounded by two stories demonstrating his (as well as the other disciples') lack of faith and misunderstanding of what the Messiah came to accomplish.

> A – Disciples fail to understand Jesus's teaching and show a lack of faith in his ability to provide (Matt 16:5–12).
>
> B – Discipleship success and understanding in Peter's confession (Matt 16:13–20).
>
> A' – Discipleship failure in Peter's misunderstanding of Jesus's mission (Matt 16:20–28).

The point seems to be that even though the disciples are "blessed (μακάριος)" and given understanding from the Father, they are not somehow inherently deserving or better than those that did not receive it. Matthew demonstrates this by bracketing Peter's correct and good confession with examples of their utter failure and lack of trust. This places their understanding and belief firmly in the realm of incongruous grace.

Matthew 17:14–20. Following Jesus's strong rebuke of Peter, Jesus gives a harrowing account of what it means to follow him. True disciples are expected to take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). This sacrifice is not without reward, but the sacrifice expected is nothing short of one's life (Matt 16:24–28). Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves and is transfigured before them (Matt 17:1–8). He then instructs them about John the Baptist being Elijah and that he would suffer similarly (Matt 17:9–13). The crowd then comes to Jesus

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Stumbling-Block and Satan," *NT* 15, no. 3 (1973): 187–90.

requesting that he heal a demon possessed boy with seizures who the disciples were unable to heal.[83] First, Jesus denounces the "faithless and perverse (ἄπιστος καὶ διεστραμμένη)" generation (Matt 17:17). They then bring the boy to Jesus who promptly rebukes the demons and heals the boy instantly (Matt 17:18). The disciples ask Jesus why they could not cast the demon out, and Jesus replies, διὰ τὴν ὀλιγοπιστίαν ὑμῶν· ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν ἔχητε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, ἐρεῖτε τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ· μετάβα ἔνθεν ἐκεῖ, καὶ μεταβήσεται· καὶ οὐδὲν ἀδυνατήσει ὑμῖν (Matt 17:20). Here again, the disciples are rebuked for their lack of faith. This time their ὀλιγοπιστία manifests itself in being unable to perform an exorcism. The disciples, despite three of them having just been shown the true nture of the Lord in the transfiguration, still lack faith. Jesus does seem to make a distinction, however, between a "faithless (ἄπιστος)" generation and disciples who have "little faith (ὀλιγοπιστίαν)" (Matt 17:17, 20). Even though the disciples do not have *enough* faith, they are true followers. They are simply imperfect followers on a journey of discipleship that moves from extreme highs to embarrassing lows at breakneck speed.

Matthew 28:16–20. Coming to the end of the first Gospel, Jesus's disciples have abandoned him at his most difficult hour: falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36–46), fleeing after a brief attempt to defend Jesus (using violence and further proving they have not fully grasped what Jesus came to do) (Matt 26:47–56), and Peter denying he knew Jesus three times just as Jesus predicted (Matt 26:69–75). Their little faith was on full display at Jesus's hardest moments. Jesus then dies and rises again, only to be discovered by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt 28:1–10). Jesus meets his disciples, now eleven instead of twelve, on a mountain in Galilee. When the eleven saw Jesus they αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν (Matt 28:17). The

[83] For the debate on whether it is medically accurate to refer to the boy as having epilepsy. John Wilkinson, "Case of the Epileptic Boy," *TET* 79, no. 2 (1967): 39–42.

meaning of this phrase is debated. Did all the disciples worship and only some doubt? Did another group of people doubt while the disciples worshiped, or did the disciples both doubt and worship? The best answer seems to be that all the disciples worshiped and doubted.[84] Reeves makes a convincing case that while all the options are grammatically possible, the most likely is that the same group that worshiped also doubted.[85] This also raises the question of what exactly they doubted, but Reeves again helpfully shows that the intransitive phrase οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν is intentionally without a direct object.[86] Comparing the verse to Matthew 14:31, the only other use of διστάζω in the New Testament, he concludes their doubt is neither "disbelief nor unbelief" but an "imperfect faith."[87] Reeves says, "The disciples worship, but they waver in their faith. In short, they still have 'little faith.'"[88]

In spite of all that has happened over the preceding days, the disciples, standing before the risen Lord Jesus still have imperfect faith. Jesus chose disciples that were undeserving and, in some ways, remained unworthy of the grace they received. In Matthew's final recorded words of Jesus, however, the disciples are not chastised for their lack of faith, but given a commission to make disciples and a reassurance that Jesus will be with them while they do so (Matt 28:18–20).

Conclusion: The Goal of Discipleship

Jesus's first followers were not special men with heightened levels of piety or superior intellect. Jesus called failing and floundering sinners to follow him. Divine grace

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[84] Keith Reeves, "They Worshipped Him, and They Doubted: Matthew 28.17," *BT* 49, no. 3 (1998): 344–49.

[85] Reeves, "They Worshipped Him, and They Doubted: Matthew 28.17," 344–49.

[86] Reeves, "They Worshipped Him, and They Doubted: Matthew 28.17," 348.

[87] Reeves, "They Worshipped Him, and They Doubted: Matthew 28.17," 348.

[88] Reeves, "They Worshipped Him, and They Doubted: Matthew 28.17," 349.

is incongruous with the nature of the people that receive it. Has the discussion above, however, ignored certain texts like Matthew 5:20, where Jesus requires righteousness exceeding that of the religious elite in his day? Does this not undermine the notion that divine grace in Matthew perfects incongruity? I do not think it does. While it is true that Matthew's Gospel makes regular demands for righteousness, justice, and whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, the process of discipleship is designed to make recipients of divine grace into followers that are worthy, or at least more worthy, of the call they received. The self-denying, cross-bearing, faithful following of Jesus in the path of true discipleship changes unworthy men and women into whole-hearted believers in Jesus. There is, therefore, a temporal element to incongruity; *when* grace comes to a person they are not worthy to receive it, but that does not mean they stay that way.[89] Even though no one will reach perfection, as is evident in the life of Jesus's closest companions, a disciple should see increasing fruit and evidence of righteousness in their lives.

Gentile Inclusion

The final piece of evidence for incongruous grace is Matthew's prominent theme of including Gentiles among the people of God who will enter the kingdom of heaven. These non-Jewish people have no rightful claim on the Jewish Messiah, but are still saved and among Jesus's people. This constitutes a redefinition of the eschatological people of God in the first Gospel from the common Jewish conception of an exclusively or primarily Jewish kingdom to one including both Jews and Gentiles. The inclusion of this unworthy group—i.e., the nations—shows that divine grace comes to those unworthy to receive it.

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[89] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 73.

Gentiles Disparaged

Before discussing the theme of Gentile inclusion, it is necessary to briefly examine why this theme entails incongruity. The main reason is that the first Gospel consistently condemns Gentile culture, even while routinely praising individual Gentiles for their faith. When Jesus hears of John the Baptist's arrest he withdraws to Capernaum in Galilee. He fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah by moving to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, which is referred to as "Galilee of the Gentles (Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν)" (Matt 4:15). Isaiah characterizes the people there as ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει and τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου (Matt 4:16). Even if Jesus is referring specifically to Jews living in this land, it shows the negative attitude toward Gentile populated areas. Carson says,

> Matthew is not interested in the mere fact that some prophecy was fulfilled in Galilee but in this particular prophecy: from of old the Messiah was promised to 'Galilee of the Gentiles', a foreshadowing of the commission to 'all nations.' Moreover, if the messianic light dawns on the darkest places, then the Messiah's salvation can only be a bestowal of grace—namely, that Jesus came to call, not the righteous, but sinners (9:13).[90]

Matthew 4:12–17 shows both the negative portrayal of Gentiles and points to their inclusion in God's people. This combination strongly points, as Carson says indirectly, to incongruous grace.

The negative characterization of Gentiles does not stop there. When teaching the disciples to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that the Gentiles βατταλογήσητε in their prayers in order to be heard because of their long prayers (Matt 6:7). This serves as a critique of Gentile culture and theology. Later, Matthew compares excommunication to treating someone as a ὁ ἐθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης (Matt 18:17). The point Jesus makes to his Jewish audience is that they would treat someone who refuses to repent even after being brought before the church as if they were not a part of the

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[90] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 117 Notice that Carson assumes incongruity in his use of grace.

covenant community. It does not mean that Gentiles and tax collectors are not to be a part of the covenant community, otherwise his call of Matthew in chapter 9 would not make sense. It seems that he uses Gentiles and tax collectors as examples of people typically treated in Jewish culture as those outside the covenant community. They were despised. Gentile culture serves as a strong enough foil to be compared to excommunication. Finally, Gentile rulers are said to lord their authority and exercise a domineering presence over their subordinates (Matt 20:25). Jesus uses this piece of Gentile culture to contrast how the disciples are to treat one another, particularly those under their authority and care.

Throughout the first Gospel, Matthew employs Gentile culture as an example of how not to act. That these non-Jewish people with morally a inferior culture and no right claim to be a part of the Messianic community are in fact included shows that divine grace comes to those who do not deserve it.

Jesus as the Blessing to the Nations

From the opening of the first Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as the son of David and the son of Abraham, and while the Davidic side of the opening verse emphasizes monarchial elements in Jesus's mission,[91] the Abrahamic side speaks to familial themes.[92] As the latter theme develops through Matthew's narrative it becomes clear that Jesus as the son of Abraham is the one who fulfills the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12). In other words, the people of God are defined anew, and Matthew develops this theme by portraying Jesus as the son of Abraham that fulfills the promise. Patrick Schreiner says,

Matthew, through portraying Jesus as the new Abraham, reveals that the people of

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[91] Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 65–130.

[92] Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe,* 169–205.

> God are redefined. The new people of God, the church (ἐκκλησία), are those who have faith (πίστις), both Jews and Gentiles. Thus, not only those who are ethnically Abraham's children are Abraham's progeny; Abraham's seed are those who have Abraham's faith and who will 'do the will of [his] Father in heaven' (Matt 12:50). This includes Israel, but also more than Israel. The People of God are those from the east and west who recline at Abraham's table (8:11) and those who produce fruit consistent with repentance (3:8). But this mission to all nations is not presented in a flat or imprecise manner; there is narrative development.[93]

That narrative development begins with the opening verses and Jesus's genealogy. Tracing Jesus's lineage back to Abraham and through David—which is unsurprising given the opening words—the genealogy is not without some surprises (Matt 1:1–17). Most notably, the presence of four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (called "the wife of Uriah"), has caused considerable debate.[94] The most likely solution, given that "Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth a Moabite, and Bathsheba was the wife of a Hittite,"[95] is that these four foreign women serve as a signal of Gentile inclusion. Abraham, through his son Jesus, will be the father of a multitude of nations (Gen 17:4–5).

Matthew picks up the children of Abraham theme again in John the Baptist's teaching. Large crowds attended John's baptism, but when the Pharisees and Sadducees started coming he called them a γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν and called them to repent along with the rest of the crowd (Matt 3:7–8).[96] John then says, καὶ μὴ δόξητε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ (Matt 3:9).[97] The Baptist destroys any Jewish notion that ethnic

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[93] Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*,170.

[94] For previous interpretive options see Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and The Nations: Matthew 1.1-17*, LNTS 441 (London, England: T & T Clark, 2011), 88–118.

[95] Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*, 178–79; See also, Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and The Nations*, 119–38.

[96] For "children of vipers," see: Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 122–23; Craig S Keener, "'Brood of Vipers' (Matthew 3.7; 12.34; 23.33)," *JSNT* 28, no. 1 (2005): 3–11.

[97] Charette notes that the notion of raising children up from stones is probably an allusion to Isaiah 51:1–2. Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSS 79 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992).

descent, being born of a Jewish mother, was a sufficient condition for salvation.[98] Davies and Allison doubt whether, when these words were first uttered, they were a reference to Gentile inclusion, but they do believe that, given the "connections between Abraham and the Gentiles in both Jewish and Christian tradition," that for Matthew it implies non-Jewish believers and Gentile Christians.[99] I see no reason for this distinction. If it is true, as they themselves say, that a strong connection between Abraham and the Gentiles exists in both "*Jewish* and Christian tradition," then there is no reason that John the Baptist, as a Jew, could not have meant the same thing.[100] Therefore, the kingdom belongs to those who repent and bear fruit, and racial boundaries have no final say in the matter.

After the Sermon on the Mount and healing a leper, Jesus enters Capernaum only to have a centurion approach him to have his servant healed of paralysis (Matt 8:5–6).[101] Jesus replies, ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν (Matt 8:7). Keener says that the "empathic Greek 'I' in 8:7 suggests that Jesus's words there are probably better translated as a question: 'Shall *I* come and heal him?'"[102] The idea, then, would be that Jesus "erects a barrier between the centurion and himself as he does in the Canaanite woman."[103] The centurion must acknowledge that he comes to Jesus as a supplicant. He does, and tells Jesus that he is not "worthy (ἱκανὸς)" to have Jesus come under his roof (Matt 8:8). His use of the language of worth in itself places this miracle in the category of incongruity, but the narrative does not stop there. Jesus marvels at what he has just heard and then makes the connection to the Abrahamic theme currently under investigation. Before

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[98] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 307–8.

[99] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 309.

[100] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 309 Emphasis mine.

[101] For the background on centurions see: Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 264–65.

[102] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 266.

[103] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 267.

eventually healing the Centurion's servant Jesus says, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, παρ᾽ οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὗρον. Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἥξουσιν καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακὼβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβληθήσονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (Matt 8:10–12). Jesus shames ethnic Israel by means of a faithful Gentile. He then extends this one example to an eschatological level by bringing in the imagery of the messianic banquet where "many will come from east and west (πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἥξουσιν)" to eat with the patriarchs (Matt 8:11). Jesus flips the eschatological expectations of the Jewish people upside down in one sentence.

Does this text mean that the Gentiles replace Israel as the people of God that will be at the messianic banquet in the last days? I believe the answer is no for a few reasons. First of all, while the "many from east and west" does refer to Gentiles and foreigners, the expression might also include faithful Jews returning from exile,[104] contra Davies and Allison.[105] Either way, as France says, "It is not said that *all* the 'sons of the kingdom' are excluded, and the presence of the Hebrew patriarchs at the feast makes it clear that what is set out here is not a Gentile takeover to the total exclusion of Jews, but a messianic community in which ancestry has ceased to be a determining factor."[106] Those previously unworthy and unable to be a part of the people of God have now been brought to the table.

After an unfortunate encounter with Pharisees that left the Jewish leaders conspiring to destroy Jesus, he withdrew from there and performed more healings (Matt 12:15–16). This was done in order to fulfill a prophecy from Isaiah 42. Matthew

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[104] Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel*, 71.

[105] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 27–28.

[106] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 318.

identifies Jesus with Isaiah's Spirit endowed suffering servant who will κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ (Matt 12:18). The translation of κρίσιν has caused some debate. The main two options are either "justice"[107] or "judgment."[108] I lean toward the positive "justice" because of the inclusion of the Septuagint version of Isaiah 42:9 that speaks of the Gentiles hoping in the servant's name (Matt 12:21). The coming of Jesus as the servant/son[109] of God gives hope to the nations for salvation. Though Abraham is not explicitly mentioned in this text, the connections to Matthew 3 with its implications for Gentile inclusion as well as the pouring out of the Spirit make this connection likely.

The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel

Does the argument above conflict with direct statements of the intended recipients of the gospel in Matthew? In two separate passages in the first Gospel Jesus either sends his disciples only πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ or says that he himself was sent only εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ (Matt 10:6; 15:24). The first text begins what is known as the Mission Discourse.[110] Jesus sends his disciples to perform a kerygmatic mission of proclaiming the kingdom (Matt 10:7) and a mission of deeds where the sick, dead, and possessed are healed, raised, and exorcised respectively (Matt 10:8).[111] He specifically restricts their mission, however, to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:6). Jesus tells them to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans. How does this square with the data above or, even more pointedly, with the Great Commission in Matthew 28?

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[107] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 338.

[108] Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 193–94.

[109] Παῖς can be translated as either son or servant: Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 338.

[110] Eung Chun Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, WUZNT 81 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995).

[111] Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation,* 99.

It seems that the pattern in Matthew—and elsewhere in the New Testament, like Romans 1:16—is that Jesus's mission and salvation comes first to the Jews and then to the nations. In fact, the second text that mentions the lost sheep of the house of Israel seems to show that it is through the mission to Israel and its subsequent hardening that the Gentiles are blessed.[112] That text is the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28.[113] Jesus withdraws to Tyre and Sidon and is approached by a γυνὴ Χαναναία (Matt 15:21–22). That description already is a change from Mark's version of the same story. There Mark calls her a Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει (Mark 7:26). It seems likely that Matthew redacted Mark's phrase in order to emphasize the distinction between what Jackson calls Old Testament "heroes (Israelites) and villains (Canaanites)."[114] This woman, already characterized as a quintessential enemy of Israel, asks Jesus to heal her daughter who is oppressed by a demon (Matt 15:22). Jesus, somewhat uncharacteristically, dismisses her by telling her that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24). The woman persists, and Jesus responds again by saying, οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις (Matt 15:25). Rather than disagreeing with Jesus, the woman agrees but also notes that even the dogs eat the crumbs when they fall from the table (Matt 15:26). Jesus then praises her faith and heals her daughter (Matt 15:28).

The picture of crumbs falling from a table to be a blessing to the dogs (Gentiles) suggests that the Gentiles are blessed by the mission to Israel. Schreiner says, "The order is part of the means of including Gentiles. When the children eat the bread, some *will* fall, and then the dogs can also eat from their master's table. Israel's eating of

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[112] Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*, 195.

[113] For an extensive study of the reception history of this text see Nancy Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman: Constructions of Christian Identity in the Afterlife of Matthew 15:21-28*, SBR 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

[114] Glenna S. Jackson, *"Have Mercy on Me": The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15.21-28*, JSNTSS 228 (London, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 70.

the bread is the means by which Gentiles receive crumbs."[115] Israel is not rejected *in toto*, but when they are hardened the mission expands to the Gentiles, even the hated Canaanites, if they have faith in Christ.

The Great Commission and other texts that speak of Gentile inclusion do not, therefore, contradict Matthew 10 or 15. Jesus blesses the nations by first coming to Israel and then to the Gentiles. After his death and resurrection Jesus sends out his followers to μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (Matt 28:19). The plan all along was for Israel to be a blessing to the nations. Jesus accomplishes this purpose.

Summary

Matthew's prevalent theme of Gentile inclusion shows that divine grace comes to those who least deserve it. The Gentile culture and pagan way of life was universally condemned, but Jesus's mission to Israel as the son of Abraham was always meant to include anyone from any nation that followed him. Those outside of the old covenant, with no claim on the Messiah or the benefits of being in ethnic Israel, are brought into the new covenant and made a part of the family of God.

Conclusion

Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is given to those who are least deserving of it. The sinners, outcasts, traitors, failing disciples, and Gentiles receive grace that they have no claim to other than the incongruous grace of God. They are efficaciously saved by the superabundant grace of God, given prior to their prompting. Jesus truly is a friend of sinners, but as we will see in the next chapter, that grace is incongruous does not mean that Matthew envisions licentiousness as an option for the recipients of grace. On the contrary, those who begin as unworthy recipients receive thorough instructions on how the act in a manner worthy of the grace they receive.

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[115] Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*, 195.

CHAPTER 7

NON-CIRCULARITY

When God gives the gift of salvation to his people in the Gospel of Matthew does he require a return from the recipients, or does the divine act of giving escape the cycle of reciprocity? This is another way of asking if Matthew perfects the facet of grace known as non-circularity. A gift perfect in non-circularity, which is a common facet of gifts in the modern period, is given without expectation of the gift being reciprocated in some form.[1] This is not to say that a gift that is not perfect in non-circularity somehow falls into the category of commerce and loans rather than a gift. The categories of gift and commerce were distinguishable in antiquity even though this facet of grace was uncommon.[2] With a loan or a sale, return can be demanded; with a gift, while return may be expected, it cannot be demanded.

In Matthew one sees a strong sense of expectation of return for divine gifts. Even though the return will not, indeed could not, be a material benefit for God, his gifts come with an expectation of worship and obedience. Worship is the expected vertical response to the gracious revelation of the divine person to man, while obedience is the expected horizontal response. In other words, when God gives good gifts in Matthew, man's response should be honor and worship to God and merciful behavior toward his fellow man. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is not perfect in non-circularity.

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[1] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 74.

[2] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 74.

Vertical Responses to Divine Grace

When God graciously reveals himself to his people it comes with an expectation of a proper response, namely, worship and adoration. This expectation of return in terms of honor and glorification on the part of the recipients means that when God gives, his giving does not escape the cycle of reciprocity. God expects a return, even if that return is not and could not be commensurate with what God has given man.

Worship: A Proper Response

Matthew 2:1–12. The first Gospel contains numerous texts that show recipients of God's grace, whether in the form of revelation or healing, responding properly to receiving divine blessing. The first instance comes immediately following the birth of Jesus. Unlike the Gospel of Luke, Matthew tells readers virtually nothing about the circumstances of Jesus's birth. Matthew does narrate, however, the appearance of the "wise men (μάγοι)"[3] who come to Jerusalem trying to find the newborn king of the Jews (Matt 2:1–2). These Magi saw Jesus's "star (τὸν ἀστέρα)"[4] arise and came to "worship him/pay homage to him (προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ)" (Matt 2:2). Herod and the citizens of Jerusalem were disturbed at this news, and in response to the Magi's question of location of the one born the king of the Jews, Herod assembles the chief priests and scribes to

[3] Powell takes issue with the notion of the Magi being "wise men" and instead argues that they were fools and thus perfect candidates of divine revelation. I am taking no stance on the issue. I am simply providing a common translation. Mark Powell, "The Magi as Wise Men: Re-Examining a Basic Supposition," *NTS* 46, no. 1 (200AD): 1–20; For more on their identity and the historicity of the narrative see: Edwin Yamauchi, "The Episode of the Magi," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 15–39; On their identity see: R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 66–68; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 99; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 26; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 112.

[4] This astronomical aberration has caused much debate. For the common interpretive options see, France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 68–69; Allison makes the case that the "star" actually referred to an angel that guided the Magi. Dale C Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Pennington and Campbell argue for the angel position as well. Constantine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 54.

determine where "the Christ (ὁ χριστός)" was to be born (Matt 2:3–4). Citing Micah 5:2 the Jewish leaders respond that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:5–6).[5]

After secretly determining the timing of the star's appearance from the Magi, Herod sends them to find the child so that he too may "come and worship him/pay homage to him (ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ)" (Matt 2:7–8). The Magi leave Jerusalem and follow the star which had come to rest over where Jesus and his mother were (Matt 2:9). Overflowing with joy, they went into the house to see Mary and Jesus (Matt 2:10–11). They prostrated themselves before Jesus and, fulfilling their stated goal, "worshiped him/payed homage to him (προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ)" (Matt 2:11). They then presented Jesus with "gifts (δῶρα)" of "gold, frankincense, and myrrh (χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν)" (Matt 2:11). The Magi then thwart Herod's plans by returning via a different route after they were warned to do so in a dream (Matt 2:12).

The narrative of the Magi's adoration, as Leim notes, is structured around "the thrice-repeated phrasing ἔρχομαι + προσκυνέω."[6] The phrase appears first in the Magi's statement of their goal for coming to Jerusalem (Matt 2:2). Herod then uses the phrase to deceive the Magi into believing that they share the same desires in finding the child (Matt 2:8). Finally, Matthew uses the phrase again when the Magi finally reach their destination (Matt 2:11). The question, however, is whether προσκυνέω should be interpreted as merely "homage/obeisance rendered to a king or, more strongly, as 'worship,' which Matthew will later tell us (4:10) is due to the κὺριος ὁ θεός alone."[7] Given that when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem they inquire about the location of the "king (βασιλεὺς)" and that

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[5] For more on this quotation see, Homer Heater, "Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 26, no. 4 (1983): 395–97; Anthony Petrotta, "A Closer Look at Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 28, no. 1 (1985): 47–52; Anthony Petrotta, "An Even Closer Look at Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources," *JETS* 33, no. 3 (1990): 311–15.

[6] Joshua E. Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar: The Father and the Son*, WUZNT 402 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 52.

[7] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar,* 53.

"prostration was a familiar act of homage in Eastern society," some commentators see the adoration of the Magi as a gesture of respect given to royal persons.[8]

On the other hand, as Davies and Allison say,

> One might translate προσκυνέω by 'pay homage'. Yet the child before whom the magi bow (2.11) is the Son of God. Moreover, ἔρχομαι followed by προσκυνέω denotes a cultic action in the LXX, and the Jews tended to think of complete *proskynesis* as directed only towards the one God. So 'worship' is perhaps implied in 2.2. Almost everywhere else in Matthew such a translation is probably fitting.[9]

One should also note that the quote in 2:6 also connects Jesus's birth to the wider purpose of his mission. Leim says, "1:21 and 2:6 work together to tighten the link between Father and Son—they both rule and redeem 'Israel,' further pointing to 'worship' as the appropriate nuance of προσκύνησις."[10]

In addition to prostrating themselves and offering προσκύνησις to the newborn Son of God, the Magi also "offer him gifts (προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα)" (Matt 2:11). This phrasing is important for our understanding of προσκυνέω because of the cultic implications that lie behind the phrase used for "offering gifts." Here again Leim is helpful when he says,

> 2.11 includes the magi's 'offer' (προσφέρω) of gifts. . . . Several points are worthy of note. First, προσφέρω in the LXX is 'mostly a sacrificial term for bringing offerings.' This is especially the case when it is used with 'gift' language (δῶρον), as can be seen in the two terms' ubiquitous use together in Leviticus and Numbers. Second, Matthew's narrative reuses προσφέρω + δῶρον three more times, all of which refer to an offering made to the Father in the Temple (5:23, 24, 8:4). Third, like (προς) ἔρχομαι + προσκυνέω, scholars have noted that προσφέρω with Jesus as its object occurs too frequently in Matthew to be considered incidental. The

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[8] France, Keener, and Hagner all note that in the context of Matthew both understandings are possible and that Matthew may intend readers to retroactively see more than mere submission to royal authority. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 69; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 105; Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 28, 31; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 114; Nolland opts for "to do obeisance" in order to mark the ambiguity between the two possible interpretations in this text. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 111.

[9] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 237.

[10] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 59.

> language of Israel's cult—its bringing (προσφέρω) of gifts to the 'Lord'—now articulates that which belongs to Jesus.[11]

For these reasons I favor understanding προσκυνέω as "worship" in this text, while acknowledging with Leim and others that this requires the rest of the narrative to develop the theme more fully.[12]

Turning now to the gifts themselves, the Magi offer Jesus "gold, frankincense and myrrh (χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν)" (Matt 2:11). Historically these gifts were interpreted allegorically with gold representing Jesus's kingship, frankincense his divinity, and myrrh marking him as the one to die.[13] The more likely explanation, however, is that these are simply valuable gifts meant to show honor to the recipient.[14]

How does this discussion factor into our understanding of divine grace? The narrative is particularly relevant for non-circularity in that it provides both a proper response to the appearance of the Son of God in the adoration of the Magi and a wicked response by Herod. God's providential revelation of the birth of his Son to foreigners from the east created an expectation of a response. That the Magi represent the proper response to divine revelation is obvious, especially against the foil of Herod, who, ironically, should have been better positioned to respond in worship and obedience to the coming of God's Son. As Leim says,

> I must disagree with Müller when he says: '*Das Verhalten [die Huldigung] der Magier, mit dem sich die Leserinern und Leser identifizieren können, aber nicht müssen, wird nicht weiter eingeordnet, sondern es wird eine erzählerische Leerstelle offen gleassen*.' On the contrary, the narrative goes to great lengths to stress that the magi's journey from beginning to end is guided providentially and receives the Father's approval. They declare that they have come to 'worship' Jesus (2:2), are

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[11] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar,* 60–61.

[12] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar,* 68; D. A Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 86; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 111.

[13] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 249; Leim represents a modern interpreter who makes a case for this interpretation or at least a form of it, arguing for a cultic connection in the gifts. Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 59ff.

[14] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 249; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 75–76; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 117; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 114–15.

> then providentially led to the fulfillment of that goal (2:9–11), and likewise are guided home (2:12). Their 'great joy' in finding Jesus (2:10) and their προσκύνησις of him are clearly in harmony with what comes before and after this episode; they stand in obvious contrast to the fearful and sinister response of Herod/Jerusalem (2:3, 8, 12). The reader is, as it were, 'taught' from the beginning what the appropriate (and inappropriate) response to Jesus is, of which προσκύνησις is an inextricable piece.[15]

Man should respond to the revelation of God with honor and worship. Normally, this is the only way that man *can* respond to God's grace vertically. In this instance, however, the Magi are able to give gifts to the Son of God materially. Man cannot now, of course, directly give materially back to God in response to his grace. This episode in salvation history, however, shows that divine grace in Matthew comes with certain expectations.

Matthew 4:1–11. After his baptism Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Matt 4:1–11). After forty days and forty nights of fasting the Devil comes to Jesus and tempts him three times. In the first temptation, using Jesus's hunger against him, the Devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread (Matt 4:3). Jesus replies by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, and he withstands the first allurement (Matt 4:4). Next, the Devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and places him on the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to throw himself off so that God would save him (Matt 4:5–6). Jesus again resists the trap by quoting Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6 verse 16 (Matt 4:7). Finally, Satan takes Jesus to a mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. He offers all these to Jesus if he will "fall down and worship (πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς)" him (Matt 4:8–9). Satan "asked of him that which represents the core of Israel's devotion to its God—worship—in trade for worldwide dominion."[16] Jesus refuses

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[15] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 67–68; He cites, Markus Müller, "Proskynese und Christologie nach Matthäus," in *Kirche und Volk Gottes: Festschrift für Jürgen Roloff zum 70* (Neukirchen, Germany: Neukirchener, 2000), 212 The German portion of the quote translates to, "The behavior [the homage] of the magicians, with which the readers can, but need not identify, is not classified further, but a narrative void is left open."

[16] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 73.

by returning to Deuteronomy 6 and says, κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις (Matt 4:10).

Satan's final temptation, for Jesus to πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς should be understood as temptation not to pay homage to someone of high standing but in the stronger sense of a temptation to break the first commandment.[17] Jesus's response, where he quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 and says that προσκυνήσεις can be shown to God and God alone, in addition to the fact that Satan has just claimed worldwide dominion, makes this reading likely.[18] This text obviously does not speak of someone responding to God's grace with worship, but it is important for this study for two reasons. First, it demonstrates an implicit expectation that worship and service *should* be shown to God. In context, this means that worship should be shown to God and not to any other being, but it also means that worship is expected to be shown to God. Second, this text is important for determining the meaning of other passages using προσκυνέω. Since προσκυνήσεις should be shown to God alone, when we see passages that employ this language and are either commended or at least not rebuked for it, then the likely conclusion is that this is in fact *worship* and not mere *homage*.[19]

Matthew 9:1–8. In Matthew 9 Jesus heals a paralytic upon the sight of the faith of those who brought him to Jesus (Matt 9:1–8). Before physically healing the paralytic, however, Jesus forgives his sins (Matt 9:2). In order to prove that he has the authority to do this, Jesus then heals the man of his paralysis (Matt 9:4–7). When the man

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[17] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 371.

[18] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 75–77 Leim also argues that the text form Matthew uses shows this as well.

[19] Not every instance can be conclusively taken as worship. As I say above, texts involving postulants are difficult to determine. This text, however, particularly in light of Jesus's occasional "epiphanic self-manifestation" does impact our understanding of later text using προσκυνήσεις. As Hays says, "Once this commandment has been forcefully set forth in the narrative, readers have little choice but to interpret Jesus' acceptance of worship from other characters as an implicit acknowledgment of his divine identity." Richard B Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 167.

gets up and leaves, "the crowds (οἱ ὄχλοι)" then react by being afraid (ἐφοβήθησαν) and "glorifying God (ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν)" (Matt 9:8). Some manuscripts have that the crowd "marveled (ἐθαύμασαν)" rather than feared, but the best manuscripts have ἐφοβήθησαν rather than ἐθαύμασαν.[20] One can see how a copyist might think fear an inappropriate reaction and want to soften it to "awe" or "marveling," and so made the change.[21]

Fear, however, is an appropriate response to an encounter with the divine. As Carson says, "Men should fear the one who has the authority to forgive sins. Indeed, they should fear whenever they are confronted by an open manifestation of God. *Such fear breeds praise*."[22] This reaction is expected and occurs a number of times throughout Matthew. In his instructions to his disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus commands his followers to not fear man but to φοβεῖσθε . . . τὸν δυνάμενον καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γεέννῃ (Matt 10:28). Later, when Jesus comes to them walking on the water, the disciples were terrified until Jesus revealed his identity (Matt 14:26–27). When Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John, and God the Father speaks from the heavens, the three disciples fall on their faces in terror before Jesus tells them to rise and not be afraid (Matt 17:1–8). Finally, the guards outside Jesus's tomb encounter an angel of the Lord and fall down in fear, becoming like dead men (Matt 28:4). Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" run away terrified, but again Jesus comforts them (Matt 28:1–10). Even though Jesus, in his compassion towards his people, comforts his followers and tells them not to be afraid, there is a strong current of healthy fear of God that flows through

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[20] Metzger gives ἐφοβήθησαν an "A" confidence. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Sttugart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 2012), 20; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 250.

[21] Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 20; Turner, *Matthew*, 250; Morris argues that even though ἐφοβήθησαν is the right reading, the correct sense is that the crowds were "awe-struck." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 217n17.

[22] Carson, *Matthew 1–12*, 222.

the first Gospel. To not fear the one who determines the fate of mankind's eternity is folly.

Godly fear, however, should also lead to glorification of the Father. That is the case with the crowd in Matthew 9. They both "fear (ἐφοβήθησαν)" and "glorify (ἐδόξασαν)" God who gave the authority to forgive men to man (Matt 9:8). While this may signal some Christological confusion on the part of the crowds, their response is a genuine, correct, and expected response to God's gracious revelation.[23]

Matthew 14:22–33. After Jesus feeds the 5,000+ men, women, and children, he sends his disciples across the sea in a boat to the other side (Matt 14:13–22). Jesus remains behind, however, to pray alone on a mountain (Matt 14:22–23). He then comes to them walking on the sea (Matt 14:24–25).[24] The disciples are terrified because they think they are seeing a ghost (Matt 14:26). Jesus calls out to them telling them θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (Matt 14:27).[25] Peter then requests to come out on the water, and after Jesus's approval, Peter gets out of the boat and begins to walk on the water to Jesus (Matt 14:28–29). This seafaring stroll is short-lived, however, and Peter begins to sink. He is saved by Jesus, and when they both get into the boat the storm ceases. At this point Matthew tells readers, ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες· ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ (Matt 14:33).[26]

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[23] Hagner, *Matthew 1 – 13*, 234.

[24] On the possibility that this story isn't meant to convey a genuine miracle France says, "All three evangelists go out of their way to eliminate some sort of rationalistic explanation which some modern scholars have proposed, such as that Jesus was walking on a hidden reef or sandbar. Not only is this hardly likely to have impressed fishermen who knew the lake well, but all the evangelists emphasize that the boat was a long way from the shore." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 567; France cites Derrett who argues that it was a shallow or sandy area. J. Duncan Derrett, "Why and How Jesus Walked on the Sea," *NT* 23, no. 4 (1981): 330–48.

[25] As Carson notes, readers after the resurrection and ascension would likely see in this a reference to the "decisive self-disclosure of God" in the use of the egō eimi. D. A Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, ed. Frank Gaebelein, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 344.

[26] For a discussion of the Old Testament context of this passage see, John Paul Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt. 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52, and John 6:15b–21* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 17–66.

For the first and only time in Matthew the disciples openly "worship (προσεκύνησαν)" Jesus with an explicit reference and confession of his identity.[27] The disciples respond properly to a clear epiphanic revelation of God in the person of the Son. While this knowledge was not complete, and the disciples would need to continue to re-learn and test their understanding of who Jesus is, "the disciples nevertheless offered a correct response."[28] The narrator does not comment on this action, but simply moves on to the next event. If the actions of the disciples were inappropriate, however, it is safe to assume Jesus would have stopped them from blaspheming. Instead, the silence of the narrative leads readers to surmise Jesus's acceptance of worship. Προσκυνήσεις, therefore, is the expected and right response to God. More than that, however, the worship of Jesus by the disciples "prefigures the worship of the church."[29] The expected response to God's grace in self-disclosure (cf. Matt 11:25–27) is worship.

Matthew 15:1–31. Matthew 15:1–31is a series of three narratives that share a common theme of proper and improper responses to God (i.e. proper and improper worship). First, Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem come to Jesus to confront him about why his disciples do not follow the traditions of the elders by washing their hands before they eat (Matt 15:1–2).[30] Jesus responds by asking why they break God's commandments for the sake of their tradition (Matt 15:3). Jesus chooses the command to honor your father and mother as his example (Matt 15:4). The Pharisees taught that they can circumvent this command to care for their parents by devoting their gift to God (Matt

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[27] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 128 I discuss in a previous chapter that this and other texts strongly indicate that for the first Gospel, Jesus is God incarnate.

[28] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 408; See also, Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 345.

[29] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 603.

[30] On the tradition of hand washing see: John C. Poirier, "Why Did the Pharisees Wash Their Hands," *JJS* 47, no. 2 (1996): 217–33; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 609n122, 611–15; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 521–22; On the purity laws behind this tradition see Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7*, JSNTSS 13 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986).

15:5–6).[31] Jesus claims this nullifies the word of God, and he calls the Pharisees "hypocrites (ὑποκριταί)" for the first time in Matthew (Matt 15:6–7). Jesus, quoting Isaiah 29:13 which he claims prophesied of the Pharisees, says, *ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χείλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ· μάτην δὲ σέβονταί με διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων* (Matt 15:8–9). Finished speaking to the Jewish leaders, Jesus turns to the crowd and proclaims the principle that it is not what goes into but what comes out of the mouth that defiles someone (Matt 15:10–12). The disciples, still not understanding what Jesus meant, ask for an explanation (Matt 15:15). Jesus then explains to the disciples that while what someone ingests is digested and expelled, what comes out of their mouth comes from the heart (Matt 15:17–20). The evils that come from the heart "defile (κοινόω)" someone, not eating with unclean hands (Matt 15:20).

The Jewish leaders followed the traditions of the elders in order "to protect against the violation of the Torah," but these traditions, instead of preventing sin, fostered it.[32] Their obedience was merely external and did not emanate from a heart truly devoted to God. To use the image Matthew will use later, they were "whitewashed tombs (τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις)" that are outwardly beautiful, but internally unclean (Matt 23:27). Jesus's point was not that they had not responded to God. As Nolland says, "The Pharisaic investment in the worship of God is undeniable; indeed, it is a distinguishing characteristic. But inasmuch as it is wrongly directed, it does not achieve its proper end."[33] The quote from Isaiah makes clear that the Pharisees do "worship (σέβονταί)" but they do so "in vain (μάτην)" (Matt 15:9). Their worship, to quote France, is "superficial, empty, meaningless, because it derives from human invention rather than God's

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[31] Hagner argues that honoring one's parents clearly involved respect but also implied financial care as well. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 431.

[32] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28,* 431.

[33] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 619.

instruction."[34] God's expectation of human reciprocity as recipients of divine favor, therefore, is not just any worship and praise, but, rather, worship and praise that is rightly informed and directed. True and Godly worship finds its source in a heart changed by divine power that results in obedience to the "weightier matters of the law (τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου)," namely τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴν πίστιν, in addition to keeping the rest (Matt 23:23). So, not only does God have expectations for those who receive his gift(s) of grace, Matthew tells readers, here in chapter 15 and throughout the rest of the narrative, what they are.

The Jewish leadership from Jerusalem, therefore, represent the improper response to God. The next pericopes, the narrative of the faith of the Canaanite woman and the response of the crowds to Jesus's healing, show proper responses. A woman Matthew refers to as a Canaanite woman cries out to the Son of David for help for her demon possessed daughter (Matt 15:21–22).[35] The disciples try to send her away, but Jesus answers, telling her that he was sent εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ (Matt 15:42). She persists in her supplication, and the woman "came and knelt (ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει)" before Jesus (Matt 15:25). After another exchange Jesus eventually praises the woman's faith and heals her daughter (Matt 15:26–28).

With the juxtaposition of the two narratives, one involving Jewish leadership from the holy city and the other a woman characterized with the name of the quintessential Old Testament villains,[36] the contrast in their responses to Jesus is likely meant to be jarring. The Jewish leaders respond in vain worship and complaints about broken tradition, while the Canaanite woman comes and kneels before the Son of David.

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[34] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 582.

[35] For a history of interpretation of this text, see Nancy Klancher, *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman: Constructions of Christian Identity in the Afterlife of Matthew 15:21-28*, SBR 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

[36] Glenna S. Jackson, *"Have Mercy on Me": The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15.21-28*, JSNTSS 228 (London, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 70.

Notice that Matthew uses the same combination of ἔρχομαι + προσκυνέω to describe the actions of the woman as he does in the description of the actions of the Magi in Matthew 2. Even though I offered the translation "knelt" above, Matthew's use of a word that can mean "worship" is likely an intentional choice that makes the contrast in response between the two narratives starker.[37] While the Jewish leaders "worship (σέβονταί)" in vain, the Canaanite woman, "worships (προσεκύνει)" Jesus with an acute demonstration of humility. Fittingly, the woman is praised for her great faith while the Pharisees are rebuked for their hypocrisy.

Finally, Jesus moved on from Tyre and Sidon, and as he sat on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee large crowds brought those who needed healing to him (Matt 15:29–30). Jesus heals many, and when they saw the miracles Jesus performed they "marveled (θαυμάσαι)" and "glorified the God of Israel (ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραήλ)" (Matt 15:31). The proper response to God's grace is to give praise and honor to God himself.

Matthew 28:9, 16–20. Finally, after Jesus has been crucified and buried, Pilate places a guard at the tomb in order to make it secure from the disciples who they thought might try and steal the body (Matt 27:62–66). Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" went to see the tomb, and as they approached there was an earthquake (Matt 28:1–2). An angel of the Lord appeared from Heaven, terrifying the guards and causing them to faint (Matt 28:2–4). The angel speaks to the women, telling them that Jesus has risen from the dead (Matt 28:5–6). They are instructed to go tell the disciples what has happened (Matt 28:7). As they run off to execute their assignment, Jesus meets with them and greets them (Matt 28:8–9). The women respond in the exact manner the Gospel would lead a reader to expect. Matthew 28:9b says, αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ.

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[37] Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*, 161n122.

Notice first that this dramatic moment in the first Gospel brings another occurrence of the now familiar pattern of (προσ)ἔρχομαι + προσκυνέω. The women "came (αἱ προσελθοῦσαι)" and "worshiped him (προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ)" (Matt 28:9). They also "took hold of his feet (ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας)" (Matt 28:9). As Hagner says, "In that culture the grasping of feet (note the fact that Jesus was tangible) was to make obeisance, usually to a ruler or king, expressing submission and homage."[38] Most commentators rightly see this combination of foot grasping and προσκυνήσεις as worship.[39] This is the proper response to seeing the risen Lord.

The unalloyed worship Mary and Mary offer to Jesus is repeated by most of the eleven disciples when they come face to face with Jesus (Matt 28:16–20). When they see Jesus the disciples προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν (Matt 28:17). Even here, after all they had been through with Jesus, some still "doubted (ἐδίστασαν)" (Matt 28:17). The Gospel ends with both proper and improper responses to God's grace.

Summary. The pattern displayed above is that part of the proper and expected response to God's grace is unabashed worship. God expects his followers to come and worship. The implied invitation to readers is to do the same. When God gives good gifts to his people they are to respond in thankful worship and glorification of the giver in the way that the giver has expressed. In other words, divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is not perfect in non-circularity.

Following Jesus Whatever the Cost

In addition to worship, God expects his people, the recipients of divine favor, to be willing to give up everything, including their lives, to follow Jesus.

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[38] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 874; For this position, also see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1102; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1252; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 607.

[39] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 874; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1102; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1252; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 589; Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 607; Leim, *Matthew's Theological Grammar*.

Matthew 4:18–22, 9:9. Twice in the first Gospel Matthew narrates Jesus calling five of his eventual twelve disciples. In the first instance, Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, calls Simon (Peter), his brother Andrew, James and John, the two sons of Zebedee (Mark 4:18–22). In response to this calling both pairs of brothers have a similar reaction. Peter and Andrew εὐθέως ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ (Matt 4:20). While the sons of Zebedee εὐθέως ἀφέντες τὸ πλοῖον καὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ (Matt 4:22). In both cases the response is "immediate (εὐθέως)," and they "leave (ἀφέντες)" their fishing equipment to "follow him (ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ)" (Matt 4:20, 22). The only difference between the responses is that in the case of James and John they leave their father Zebedee in addition to their profession (Matt 4:21–22). While Matthew does not take time to praise this response, the narrative leaves the impression that when one encounters Jesus's call to discipleship Peter, Andrew, James, and John exemplify a proper response. Namely, those who encounter God's grace in the call to discipleship respond immediately with a willingness to abandon all worldly attachments, even family. For the devoted disciple, one's true family is found in those who do the will of God (Matt 12:46–50).

When Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector to follow him, the response, though less detailed, is similar. Upon hearing the call to discipleship Matthew "rose and followed him (ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ)" (Matt 9:9). Though Matthew does not specify that the response was "immediate (εὐθέως)," one can assume that it was. At the very least, no narrative time passes between the call and response. Matthew, just as the first four disciples did, leaves his place of work to follow Jesus. While each disciple may be in a different life circumstance that necessitates a different response to God's gracious call to discipleship, the expectation in the first Gospel is a willingness to drop everything and follow Jesus.

Matthew 16:24–27. Following Peter's confession and subsequent rebuke, Jesus tells his disciples that the path of discipleship and following Jesus means a radical

self-denial, even to the point of death (Matt 16:24–27). Jesus illustrates this point with a gruesome and vivid image of the disciple "taking up his cross (ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 16:24). As Keener says, "'Taking up one's cross' in antiquity hardly meant the relatively minor burdens assumed by many popular readers of the text today . . . it meant marching on the way to one's execution, shamefully carrying the heavy horizontal beam (the *patibulum*) of one's own death-instrument through the midst of a jeering mob."[40] Jesus's words, therefore, mean that the cruciform path of discipleship entails radical self-denial on the part of those who would accept the call.[41] Playing on the word for "life (ψυχή)," Jesus says, ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ᾽ ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ εὑρήσει αὐτήν (Matt 16:25). In the first half of the verse ψυχή refers to one's present, physical, earthly life, while in the second half ψυχή refers to eternal life in the kingdom.[42] In other words, even though discipleship is a hard, costly path, Jesus wants his disciples to know that the sacrifice is worth it.

To those outside the church,[43] those who have not had Jesus's true identity revealed to them by the Father (Matt 16:17), a willingness to sacrifice one's present and tangible life seems foolish, but Jesus reminds them that this is not the case with three facts: those who lose their lives actually find eternal life, one's "soul (ψυχή)" is of inestimable value, and God will "repay (ἀποδώσει)"[44] everyone "according to what he

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[40] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 434.

[41] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 669; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

[42] Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 135.

[43] As Allison says, "The teaching is for the church, not the world at large." Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 670.

[44] France rightly says, "'Repay' is used for divine rewards in 6:4, 6, and 18, and here, too, the primary emphasis in context is probably on the reward for loyalty even to the point of martyrdom." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 640; This, of course, goes against Eubank's thesis that the discussion of "reward" in the Gospel is mistranslated and that the Gospel places a strong emphasis on earning God's favor partially through our actions but also through Jesus's action on the cross that earns a surplus of heavenly treasure. This surplus then acts as our ransom payment to God. Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin*.

has done (κατὰ τὴν πρᾶξιν αὐτοῦ)" (Matt 16:25–27). This emphasis on paying everyone back according to what they do does not mean that life in the kingdom is *earned*. As Carson says, "Death to self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it."[45] Remember that this account follows Peter's confession of Jesus as "Christ, the Son of the living God (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος)" (Matt 16:16). This knowledge, according to Jesus, comes from divine revelation, not human wisdom (Matt 16:17). Self-denial and cross-bearing, therefore, are rightly understood as a necessary result of and response to God's gracious self-disclosure.

Matthew 19:16–30. In Matthew 19:16 a man approaches Jesus to ask what he must do in order to have eternal life. Jesus responds that he must keep the commandments, and then goes on to list half of the decalogue plus the command to love your neighbor as yourself from Leviticus 19 (Matt 19:17–19). The man claims to have done this,[46] and therefore asks what he still lacks (Matt 19:20). Jesus tells him that if he wants to be "perfect/whole/complete (τέλιος)" then he must sell all his possessions and give to the poor (Matt 19:21). Jesus's final words to the man are a motivation of reward and a command. He says, ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι (Matt 19:21). Unfortunately, the young man leaves disappointed because he had great wealth. In that moment, when Jesus explained what is required for a true disciple, the young man could not bring himself to fully commit to following Jesus.

Jesus then turns to his disciples and, using a proverb about a camel fitting through the eye of a needle,[47] proclaims the difficulty with which a rich person enters the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:23–24). The shocked disciples, presumably assuming the

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[45] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 379.

[46] This isn't necessarily a false claim either. Paul makes a similar statement in Philippians 3:4–6, so it is possible that the rich young man was pious and an ardent law keeper.

[47] J. Duncan Derrett, "A Camel through the Eye of a Needle," *NTS* 32, no. 3 (1986): 465–70; Ernest Best, "The Camel and the Needle's Eye: Mk 10:25," *TET* 82, no. 3 (1970): 83–89.

common Jewish idea of a correlation of one's piety with one's number of possessions,[48] ask, τίς ἄρα δύναται σωθῆναι (Matt 19:25). Jesus replies, παρὰ ἀνθρώποις τοῦτο ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν, παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά (Matt 19:26). Peter then points out that the disciples have in fact left "everything (πάντα)" to follow Jesus, confirming the reading of Matthew 4:18–22 and 9:9 discussed above (Matt 19:27). Finally, Jesus confirms that their sacrifice will not go unrewarded, and he then expands the promise of eternal life and a "hundredfold (ἑκατονταπλασίονα)" reward to everyone, not just the disciples, who left their families and possessions to follow Jesus (Matt 19:28–30).

What does this text teach in regard to divine grace and recompense? First of all, it is important to note that obedience to the commandments and a total commitment to following Jesus is necessary for entrance into the kingdom. In the narrative of the rich young man Jesus lists a number of commands from scripture, but also requires specifically for this man the command to sell all his possessions and give money to the poor (Matt 19:21). The universal principle, however, is Jesus's command to follow him. As Carson says, "Matthew shows no strong tendency toward asceticism. Therefore, the basic thrust of v. 21 is not 'Sell your possessions and give to the poor' but 'Come, follow me.'"[49] The call to be willing to abandon everything and follow Jesus is one that transcends this particular passage.

The constant refrain of scripture is that keeping God's commands is necessary for salvation. Matthew is no different. "Greater righteousness" is required to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20). This does not, however, mean that eternal life or entrance into the kingdom is *earned*.[50] Jesus's point is not that one can simply do the law

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[48] Allen Stanley, "The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation," *BSac* 163 (2006): 56–57; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 729.

[49] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 424; Or as France says, "The essence of Jesus' demand is not disinvestment but discipleship." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 735.

[50] Eubank's argument gets very close to this idea. Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, 139ff.

and be saved. In fact, that seems to the point of Matthew 19:26.[51] With man alone, salvation is impossible. A divine act is necessary and has been given in the person of Jesus and his revelation of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 11, 13). This means grace is incongruous, given without regard to the worth of the recipient, but not non-circular.[52] Carson explains this idea well when he says,

> 'If you want to enter life, obey the commandments' (v. 17) does not mean that Matthew, unlike Mark, thinks eternal life is earned by keeping the commandments. After all, Mark himself is about to report Jesus' exhortation to keep specific commandments. The entire debate has been bedeviled by a false split between grace and obedience to the will of God. No less staunch a supporter of grace than Paul can insist that without certain purity a man cannot inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9–10). Jesus tells this young man, in a similar vein, what good things he must do if he is to gain eternal life, precisely because he perceives his questioner has little understanding of such things. But that is still far from telling him that by doing these things he will *earn* eternal life.[53]

To use France's language, this means that obedience is *necessary* but not *sufficient*.[54] Protestant theologians often avoid the language of reward, recompense, or requirement so as to avoid any notion of a works-based salvation. That does not need to be the case. Matthew, and the rest of Scripture for that matter, presents good works and following Jesus with one's whole life as a necessary response to God's grace. The righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven emanates from a heart changed by the efficacious grace of God given to those who do not deserve it.

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[51] This is, again, contra Eubank's understanding of 19:26. He understands this verse as an offer of hope to people like the rich young man who do not earn heavenly treasure through the sacrifice of their possessions. He ties this in with the ransom saying, meaning that Jesus's ransom payment to God acts as the heavenly treasure necessary to save those who do not have any. Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin.*

[52] In his new and shorter version of *Paul and the Gift*, Barclay develops this thought, that grace is "unconditioned but not unconditional" further, including expanding to other letters other than Romans and Galatians. John M. G Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

[53] Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 423.

[54] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 733.

Loving God and Loving Neighbor: Matthew 22:34–40

Following the parable of the wedding feast is a series of four confrontation narratives (Matt 22:15–45). In the first three the Jewish leadership, either the Pharisees or Sadducees, try to trap Jesus with tricky politically or theologically charged questions (Matt 22:15–40). Following these questions, Jesus asks the Jewish leaders a question for which they have no answer (Matt 22:21–45).

The pericope at hand, however, is the final test the Pharisees throw at Jesus before he rebuffs them with his question about Psalm 110. A lawyer among the Pharisees, after hearing of Jesus's successful silencing of the Sadducees, tested Jesus by asking him ποία ἐντολὴ μεγάλη ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (Matt 22:36). Jesus responds by first quoting part of the *shema* from Deuteronomy 6:5 as the "great and first commandment (ἡ μεγάλη καὶ πρώτη ἐντολή)," and then quoting Leviticus 19:18 as "the second (δευτέρα)" which is "like it (ὁμοία αὐτῇ)" (Matt 22:37–39). The "great and first commandment" says, *ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου* (Matt 22:37), and the second says, *ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν* (Matt 22:39).[55] Jesus claims that "all the Law and Prophets hang (ὅλος ὁ νόμος κρέμαται καὶ οἱ προφῆται)" on the double command to love God with everything you are and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:40).[56]

This text, therefore, summarizes and connects the proper vertical responses to God's grace discussed above and the horizontal expectations discussed below.[57] In fact, by Jesus bringing these two fundamental commands together in one answer to the

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[55] For a discussion of the text forms of these quotes see, Paul Foster, "Why Did Matthew Get the Shema Wrong?: A Study of Matthew 22:37," *JBL* 122, no. 2 (2003): 309–33; Arland J. Hultgren, "The Double Commandment of Love in Mt 22:34–40: Its Sources and Compositions," *CBQ* 36, no. 3 (1974): 373–78.

[56] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 911; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 846; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 241.

[57] Hagner also employs the language of vertical and horizontal dimensions. Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 648.

lawyer's question, he makes them mutually interpretative. As Hagner says, "The first entails the second; the second presupposes and depends on the first."[58] These two commandments provide the hermeneutical principle by which the people of God read and apply the law.[59]

Other scholars, like Eung Chun Park, rather than seeing this as an example of proper responses to God's grace, view this as a statement of Matthew's "rubric of soteriology" that shows that for Matthew the "Torah is salvifically efficacious and binding as opposed to the Torah-free soteriology advocated by the perceived Paulinism."[60] Park says,

> Jesus says that the one who *does* the will of God (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς; Matt 7:21b) enters the kingdom of heaven. This Matthean soteriology certainly seems, at least at the level of the text, to be at odds with the Pauline soteriology of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (justice/righteousness of God through faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ) in Rom 3:22 (also in Gal 2:16), since it is described as χωρὶς νόμου (without/apart from the Torah; Rom 3:21). In contrast, Matthew's soteriology is based on the Torah and its condition is not believing but doing. In other words, Matthean soteriology appears to go contrary to the great Reformation doctrine of salvation *sola fide*.[61]

This is mistaken. While it is true that "the one who does the will of God" will enter the kingdom of heaven, Park neglects to ask who Matthew says actually does the will of God and how they are able to do so. Matthew presents a picture of salvation where good works are necessary, but are the result of a changed heart devoted to God. Jonathan

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[58] Hagner, *Matthew 14 – 28*, 648.

[59] Powell argues that this ethical interpretation of the law is the meaning of "binding and loosing" in Matthew 16 and 18. Mark Powell, "Binding and Loosing: A Paradigm for Ethical Discernment from the Gospel of Matthew," *CTM* 30, no. 6 (2003): 438–45.

[60] Eung Chun Park, "A Soteriological Reading of the Great Commandment Pericope in Matthew 22:34–40," *BR* 54 (2009): 73.

[61] Park, "A Soteriological Reading of the Great Commandment Pericope in Matthew 22:34–40,"76; In contrast to this perspective, Pennington correctly says, "Paul is as radical about the need for a transformation of the heart as Matthew is (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22–24), and Matthew is as radical about the need for faith in Christ as Paul is (Matt. 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; 21:21; cf. 6:30; 13:58)." Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 302.

Pennington, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, sums up this point well when he says,

> God's grace through Christ makes sinful and spiritually dead people come alive and into a new covenantal relationship with the triune God, worked out through the abiding presence of the Spirit. This indicative is the ontological and chronological foundation for salvation. Even though there is great overlap between the New Testament teachings and Aristotle in terms of the focus on character, unlike the Greek virtue tradition, God's grace undergirds and overarches this whole message. . . . This grace/indicative reality is the starting point, but it is neither the whole story nor the whole gospel. The indicative exists in a dialectical and mutually informing relationship with the imperative. Rooted in God's initiating work, his creatures who are redeemed (and appropriately called a 'new creation' in 2 Cor. 5:17) are called to respond with faithfulness and obedience, to be true to the transference of servitude (Rom. 6:1–23) and kingdom allegiance that they have experienced.[62]

In this quote Pennington uses terms drawn from Pauline theology. To sum up what he said in the idiom employed in this work: eschatologically significant works originate in grace that is given prior to the initiative of the recipient and brings about the desired response (good fruit, see above) in a people that do not deserve it.[63] To say that soteriology in Matthew is based on doing rather than believing also ignores the numerous texts that discuss (or at the very least praise) the necessity of faith and understanding that comes from God. Mankind *will* be judged by the fruit each individual produces (Matt 3:10, 7:15–20, 12:33–37, 13:4–23, etc.), but that fruit comes from the saving grace of God. Finally, Park's expression of Matthean soteriology seems to leave no place for the cross. It is not clear why Jesus needed to die the way he did if Matthew's iteration of the doctrine of salvation only requires Torah observance.

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[62] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 305–6; Pennington later cites Talbert who helpfully says, "Matthew's way . . . is neither soteriological legalism nor legalistic covenantal nomism. Like Paul, his soteriology is by grace from start to finish. Matthew just uses a different conceptual repertoire." Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 27; R. T. France also makes a similar case. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 268–70.

[63] Park claims that we cannot know Matthew's view on *sola gratia* because Matthew neglects to use χαρίς. My hope is that this dissertation shows that this is false. Eung Chun Park, "A Soteriological Reading of the Great Commandment Pericope in Matthew 22:34–40," *BR* 54 (2009): 61–78.

The command to love thy neighbor, therefore, speaks of the proper *response* to God's grace. Loving God with one's whole being, as shown above, requires right worship and a willingness to give up everything, even one's own life, to follow Jesus. Now we turn to the way Matthew details the horizontal response to divine grace: loving your neighbor.

Horizontal Responses to Divine Grace

If the vertical response to divine grace is more typical of normal reciprocal giving relationships in that they are given directly to the original giver, the horizontal returns are still a crucial part of the expected reciprocity given to God. As Barclay says, "Paying it back is performed through paying it forward: believers give themselves to the Lord by participating in the sharing of gifts."[64] Part of the return to God, then, is giving to one's fellow man. As noted above, the controlling paradigm of how one interacts with other people as a result of divine grace is to "love your neighbor as yourself (ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν)" (Matt 22:39). In all ethical dilemmas that may arise in the community of believers, the commands to love God first and neighbor second act as a governing paradigm. A different way of saying this is how Jesus says it in the Sermon on the Mount: Πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν θέλητε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς· οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται (Matt 7:12).

Matthew develops a horizontal response to divine grace in at least two ways. First, this horizontal attitude and effort is modeled on God's prior grace to believers. In other words, believers are to practice, in some ways, *imitatio Dei*. Second, God's grace creates a community of believers among whom they are to practice loving one's neighbor as him/herself.

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[64] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 125.

Imitatio Dei

The clearest statement of the necessity to imitate God appears in the Sermon on the Mount. Summarizing the preceding section dealing with "greater righteousness" that runs from 5:17 to 5:48, Jesus says, ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν (Matt 5:48).[65] The expectation is that true disciples of Jesus will imitate God. As Pennington says, "All of this life in the imitation of God comes only in and through grace, but the command for the necessity of greater righteousness is not thereby muted or emasculated."[66] By God's grace a true disciple must be τέλειός as God is τέλειός. This does not negate the discussion above on Matthew's understanding of salvation. Obedience, in this case described as the *imitatio Dei*, and grace are not antithetical to one another.[67]

Matthew 5:7, 6:15–16, 18:23–35. God does not leave his people without an example of how to interact as people redeemed by the blood of Christ. In addition to the *imitatio Christi*, where believers follow Christ's example by picking up their crosses and following him, believers are to imitate God in that they are to show mercy to others as God has shown mercy to them. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes, Jesus first introduces this principle that it is the merciful who receive mercy (Matt 5:7).

Continuing this theme in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus teaches his followers how to pray, he includes a prayer for forgiveness even ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν (Matt 6:12). After the prayer, however, Jesus explains why he taught them to pray for their own forgiveness while also mentioning that they too should

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[65] For 5:17–48 as one section see, Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 203.

[66] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing,* 206.

[67] Again, Pennington helpfully says, "The requirement of wholeness or heart-affections-behavior righteousness in 5:48, in imitation of God the Father, is a great summary of the gracious invitation of the gospel, not its enemy." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing,* 206.

forgive their "debtors (τοῖς ὀφειλέταις)" (Matt 6:12). Jesus says, Εὰν γὰρ ἀφῆτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, ἀφήσει καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος· ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἀφῆτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οὐδὲ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἀφήσει τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν (Matt 6:14–15).

Matthew returns to the principles stated in Matthew 5:7 and 6:15–16 in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35).[68] Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king wishing to settle accounts (Matt 18:23). The king forgives the servant's enormous debt of "ten-thousand talents (μυρίων ταλάντων)", but the servant then proceeds to attack his fellow servant over a paltry one hundred denarii (Matt 18:24–28).[69] The second servant begs for more time just as the first did, but instead of offering the same mercy he had just received, the first servant threw the second into prison (Matt 18:29–30). After being informed of the behavior of the servant he had forgiven the master then calls the servant back to answer for this ignominy (Matt 18:31–32). Matthew's telling of the parable then makes two key statements that lexically link this parable with the Matthew 5:7 and 6:15–16. The king in the parable first says, οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεῆσαι τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ὡς κἀγὼ σὲ ἠλέησα (Matt 18:33). Then Jesus closes the parable, presumably in his own voice, by saying, οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ποιήσει ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ ἀφῆτε ἕκαστος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν καρδιῶν ὑμῶν (Matt 18:35). The parable of the unforgiving servant, therefore, is designed to illustrate how those who have received "mercy (ἔλεος)" and been "forgiven (ἀφίημι)" should show mercy and forgiveness to others. In other words, divine grace comes with the expectation

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[68] Space prohibits a lengthy discussion of this text, but for a good discussion of the various exegetical issues as well as a short bibliography on this parable see Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 61–77.

[69] For the size of the debt see: Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,*66; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 756; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 706; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 456; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 471n30; Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 358; Bernard Scott, "The King's Accounting: Matthew 18:23–24," *JBL* 104, no. 3 (1985): 438n27; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: C. Schribner's Sons, 1972), 30.

of imitating God in forgiving and showing mercy, especially in light of the much greater forgiveness and mercy disciples of Jesus have already received. [70]

Matthew 10:8. Another instance of the *imitatio Dei* principle found in Matthew comes in the missiological discourse. Jesus is instructing his disciples on the mission they are about to carry out. Part of their mission to Israel, in addition to proclaiming that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand (ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν)" and thus picking up the same message Jesus himself came proclaiming, they are to perform miracles of healing, raising the dead, and exorcisms (i.e. imitating Christ's miracle work) (Matt 10:5–8). Jesus then tells them, δωρεὰν ἐλάβετε, δωρεὰν δότε (Matt 10:8b), emphatically telling them that they are not to receive compensation for the work of proclaiming the kingdom and performing miracles, just as they were not required to pay for their hearing of the gospel.[71] Recipients of God's grace (i.e. faithful disciples) are to imitate God in freely "paying forward" the good news to others.[72]

Matthew 25:31–46. Finally, at the end of the Eschatological Discourse, Jesus closes his teaching with an image of the final judgment.[73] The nations are gathered before the Son of Man, and he separates the sheep (i.e., the righteous) from the goats (i.e., the wicked) (Matt 25:31–32). Important to note for non-circularity is that the criteria for eternal life or eternal punishment is both blessing from the Father and their treatment of "the least of these my brothers (τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων)" (Matt 25:40).[74] God's blessing and kingdom preparation is prior to the actions of the sheep, but

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[70] Barclay notes that while grace and mercy are not semantically identical, the concepts are often mixed and mutually interpretative. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 450.

[71] As Hagner says, "In both cases [freely] is emphatic because of its position." Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 272.

[72] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 125.

[73] For a good discussion of the various exegetical issues and a short bibliography see Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 543–564.

[74] For the history of interpretation of this text see Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 114 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); John R. Donahue, "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats: A Challenge to Christian

when Jesus explains why they are receiving eternal life he lists a number of ethical actions done by the sheep to Jesus described in this text as "the least of these (τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων)" (Matt 25:34–40). The best explanation is that the ethical behavior on the part of the sheep stems from a changed heart by the grace of God.

Why discuss this text here? First of all, Jesus's words express a clear expectation of showing kindness to some group of people.[75] Read in the full context of Matthew's presentation of divine grace, this is best understood as the proper and necessary response to divine benevolence and becoming a disciple of Jesus. Genuine believers treat others with compassion. Second, whoever the phrase "the least of these my brothers (τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων)" was intended to signify were clearly lowly, needy, and not "worthy" of the kindness they received. Jesus describes them as "hungry (ἐπείνασα)," "thirsty (ἐδίψησα)," "a stranger (ξένος)," "naked (γυμνὸς)," "sick (ἠσθένησα)," and "in prison (ἐν φυλακῇ)" (Matt 25:35–36). Whoever they are, their descriptions match some the depictions of exactly those Jesus came to save. In other words, "the righteous (οἱ δίκαιοι)" who go to eternal life are called to imitate God in showing incongruous grace.

A Community of Believers

Above I established that part of man's necessary return to God is given by kindness and compassion shown to one's neighbor. As Barclay says, "Gift sharing between believers can be viewed both as an inter-human interaction and as an interaction with God—not either or but both and."[76] In Matthew, Jesus clearly expects this grace to be shown to everyone: neighbors, brothers, and even enemies (cf. Matt 5:44). With that in

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Ethics," *TS* 45, no. 1 (1986): 3–8.

[75] The identity of "the least of these" has garnered an incredible amount of attention. So much so that Donahue argues that it can often detract from the "richer dimensions of the passage." Donahue, "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats," 8.

[76] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 131.

mind, however, Matthew also envisions a community created by God's grace where followers of Jesus practice among one another the same kind of kindness they received in their salvation.

The creation of this community by the grace of God appears explicitly in Peter's confession (Matt 16:13–20). Jesus pronounces Peter blessed because his Father in heaven had revealed Jesus's true identity to him (Matt 16:17). Jesus then says,

> κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Matt 16:18–19).[77]

Here Jesus states that he is creating a permanent group of followers, those changed by God's grace, that will have the power to "bind (δήσῃς)" and "loose (λύσῃς)" (Matt 16:18–19). This authority has typically been interpreted in one of three ways:[78] teaching authority,[79] authority over who is included or excluded from the community,[80] or forgiveness of sins.[81] Although I have some reservations about the inclusion of forgiveness of sins, which seems to be a divine prerogative in Matthew (Matt 9:1–8), Barber is right that choosing between the options is unnecessary.[82] The salient point in

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[77] This is one of the most debated texts in Matthew. For a history of interpretation see Tucker Ferda, "The Seventy Faces of Peter's Confession: Matt. 16:16–17 in the History of Interpretation," *BibInt* 20, no. 4 (2012): 421–57.

[78] Barber gives these three as the main interpretative options, and he actually argues that a choice is not necessary because they all fall under a priestly role which is here given to Peter. Michael Barber, "Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter's Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16–19," *JBL* 132, no. 4 (2013): 947ff.

[79] Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18–19)," *CBQ* 50, no. 3 (1988): 449–52; Powell, "Binding and Loosing."

[80] Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 473; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 626; Ulrich Luz, "The Primacy Text (Mt 16:18)," *PSB* 12, no. 1 (1991): 46–47; Carson, *Matthew 13–28*, 373.

[81] Hans Kvalbein, "The Authorization of Peter in Matthew 16:17–19: A Reconsideration of the Power to Bind and Loose," in *The Formation of the Early Church* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 145–76.

[82] Barber, "Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter's Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16–19," 947.

regard to non-circularity is that Jesus envisioned a community of disciples, created by God's grace (Matt 16:17), that will withstand any attack (Matt 16:18).

Jesus does not leave his church uninstructed in how to behave and interact. Other than the obvious concentration of ethical teaching found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), the Ecclesiological Discourse in chapter 18 teaches the disciples how a community of believers are to interact. Disciples are to be humble like little children, not asserting their rights over the wellbeing of others (Matt 18:3–14). Jesus gives instructions on how to handle situations where a brother sins against another (Matt 18:15–20), and Christians are to assume a posture of regular forgiveness when someone sins against them (Matt 18:21–35). Jesus's vision for the church is one of a group of committed disciples who are humble, quick to forgive, and quick to show mercy to one another.

Man's proper horizontal response to God's grace does not happen in a vacuum; it occurs in a close community of disciples that comprise a new eschatological family of believers who, even though they will occasionally sin against one another, will continue the pursuit of righteousness together.

Conclusion

When God bestows grace upon his people, his generosity, while given freely to a people who do not deserve it, comes with a strong expectation of return. The reciprocal expectations come in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Vertically, God expects recipients of his benevolence to respond in worship and praise as well as a whole-life commitment to following Jesus. Horizontally, divine favor brings an expectation of imitating God in showing mercy and kindness to those undeserving of it. God's grace also creates a community of disciples that are expected to act toward one another in certain ways.

Discussing non-circularity and incongruity hits at the center of the discussion

of grace verses works. When some hear that certain expectations and ethical requirements are a necessary part of salvation they assume that this represents a lapse into works-based salvation and righteousness. This should not be and biblically is not the case. In Matthew's presentation, divine grace is given to those who are unworthy to receive it, but those blessed recipients do not stay in the same unworthy state they were in when they received God's grace. True disciples, true recipients of divine benevolence, necessarily display their salvation through worship and good deeds. To use the common Matthean terminology, true disciples bear fruit. In other words, divine grace is *incongruous* but not *non-circular*.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Matthew presents divine grace as a lavish and permanent expression of favor to those who are unworthy to receive, before they ask for it, and that accomplishes God's intended purposes. Matthew portrays this giving against the dark backdrop of divine judgment, repeatedly present throughout the first Gospel, and this grace creates an expectation of return to God in the form of worship and obedience. In other words, divine grace in Matthew is superabundant, incongruous, efficacious, and prior, but is not non-circular or perfect in singularity.

As a reminder, I began this study by examining the theme of judgment in Matthew. While some ancient authors tried to portray God as purely benevolent and only gracious,[1] this conception of God's disposition towards man could not be further from Matthew's. The coming day of God's judgment of sinners and execution of wrath on those who have rebelled against him and his son constitutes a key part of Matthew's theology. Astute readers will notice this first by Matthew's repeated reference to a coming day of eschatological judgment. Matthew varies his language throughout, using at least five different phrases to refer to this coming day,[2] but regardless of the different terminology employed, the coming day of judgment is clearly an important issue for the first evangelist. On that fateful day, conceptually and arguably temporally linked to the

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[1] For ancient examples of this, see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 71; John M. G Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 14.

[2] Zoltan Erdey and Kevin Smith, "The Function of 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' in Matthew's Gospel," *AT* 32, no. 1 (2012): 30; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, SNTS 88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 114–15.

return of the Son of Man described in Matthew 24:29–31, the wicked and the righteous will be gathered, separated, and sentenced. The righteous will receive entrance into the kingdom of heaven and eternal life in the presence of the Father, while the wicked will be cast into hell where eternal, unquenchable fire and perpetual darkness apart from the light of the Father await. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is explained, and its glory is emphasized, in contrast to this literally dark reality. Grace in Matthew does not include singularity.

The stark reality of divine judgment gives way to the great and abundant grace of God in the first Gospel. Even though Matthew repeatedly explains the consequences of not receiving divine grace, he also emphasizes the lavish and permanent nature of the reward for those who do. One can see the superabundance of divine grace in the supreme value Matthew ascribes to two divine gifts in particular: the kingdom of heaven and the sacrifice of the Son of God. The kingdom of heaven's value is explicitly detailed in two parables, the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price (Matt 13:44–46). Matthew also emphasizes the permanence of this gift through the association of the kingdom with eternal life (Matt 19:16–30, 25:31–46). Central to Matthew's theology is the person of Jesus and his crucifixion. A key part of Matthew's doctrine of the person of Christ is his presentation of Jesus as divine. This means the one who is crucified at the end of the Gospel is the eternal Son of God. God's gift of his own Son and in particular the life of his own Son means that divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is supremely valuable. Divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is perfect in superabundance.

God gives his surpassingly great gifts to recipients before they ask for it. In other words, the initiative lies with God and not with man. Despite the potential counter evidence in the miracle narratives, where the recipients almost always take the initiative in asking to be healed, Matthew's depiction of divine grace in regard to the gift of salvation leaves no doubt that the initiative lies with God. Matthew demonstrates the priority of divine grace first in the calling narratives of the disciples. Jesus clearly takes

the initiative in calling his disciples (Matt 4:18–22, 9:9). Second, Matthew consistently presents the events of the Gospel as a part of God's divinely predestined plan. Nothing happens by accident. In particular, Matthew's use of the language of Old Testament prophecy fulfillment, which leaves the theological impression of the divine predestination of events, Jesus's predictions of his own death, and the fact that the kingdom was prepared "from the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου)" (Matt 25:34), strongly suggests that divine grace in Matthew is prior to the initiative of the recipient. While there is admittedly more material on the other five perfections, whether for or against, Matthew includes enough information on the initiative of the giver to conclude that divine grace in Matthew is perfect in priority.

This great grace given before the initiative of the recipient also efficaciously brings about the desired aims of the giver. The goal of the Christ gift in Matthew is plainly stated from the beginning. Christ came to "save his people from their sins (σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν)" (Matt 1:21). The accomplishment of that goal is also clear in that it is seen in Jesus's death (Matt 20:28, 26:28). The stronger claim, and one that I think can be seen in Matthew, is that God also sovereignly brings about his desired response, faith and obedience described as bearing fruit, without eliminating human responsibility. In other words, both the accomplishment and application of salvation is a gift of God. The second half of that statement, the divine application of salvation to human recipients is best seen in three kinds of texts. First, categorial texts divide humanity into eschatologically significant categories. People are either sheep or goats, wheat or weeds, or good trees or bad trees. These texts demonstrate that what you are, one's nature, determines what you do, one's actions, and what you are is a result of divine revelation. Second, Matthew makes this connection between nature and revelation explicit in the discussion of the source of knowledge and understanding. Two passages, Matthew 11:25–30 and 16:13–20 demonstrate that God is the source of knowledge that saves. Finally, Matthew employs the language of the "elect (ἐκλεκτοί)" (Matt 22:14,

24:22, 24:24, 24, 37). This language, in light of both the categorical texts and the texts revealing the source of saving knowledge, suggest strongly God's sovereignty in salvation. None of this, however, overrides human responsibility. Man is still commanded to respond to Jesus in faith and obedience. Responsibility is not altered or mitigated, but Matthew's consistent view is of a people who repent and believe by means of the efficacious grace of God.

This grace efficaciously saves sinners who are unworthy to receive this it. Three facts make certain that divine grace in Matthew is perfect in incongruity. First, Jesus came to save tax collectors, sinners, and little children. Matthew consistently portrays the recipients of divine grace as sinners and the disreputable of society. Tax collectors, infamous in their day, are shown kindness and given an opportunity to repent (Matt 9:9–13, 21:28–32). In addition to tax collectors and sinners, Jesus shows particular favor to Little Children, who by their very nature are unable to repay the kindness. Second, Jesus's inner circle, the twelve disciples, is made up of a group of men who regularly fall short of their calling. Discipleship failure, sometimes of the highest order, shows that God's grace is shown to those unworthy to receive it. Finally, throughout the first Gospel Matthew redefines the eschatological people of God. The recipients of divine grace are not exclusively the Jewish people, but rather, the kingdom of God expands to include Gentiles who repent of their sin and follow Jesus. Gentile culture was reviled, and Matthew's insistence on the inclusion of non-Jewish people within the eschatological people of God shows that God extends divine grace in the first Gospel to those unworthy to receive. Divine grace in Matthew is perfect in incongruity.

Finally, even though grace is given to a people unworthy to receive it, they are not to remain unworthy of their calling. God's grace, while given and received freely, comes with an expectation of righteousness on the part of the recipient. In other words, God's grace in Matthew is not non-circular. It creates an expectation of a return to God. Man, of course, cannot physically or financially give back to God for the kindness he has

shown him, so the expected reciprocity in Matthew comes in two forms. First, vertically, recipients of divine grace are to respond in proper worship and love of God and his Son and by a willingness to follow Jesus whatever the cost. Second, horizontally, man responds to divine grace by obedience and imitating God in showing grace and kindness to those who are unworthy to receive it. God's grace creates a community of believers, the church, among whom believers are to practice this radical generosity and kindness, modeled on the grace they received from God. Matthew summarizes and connects the vertical and horizontal expectations laid on recipients of divine benevolence in the command to love God with everything you are and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:37–39). These requirements in no way make salvation earned or move the benefits of salvation from the realm of grace to that of commerce, but any discussion of Matthew's theology of grace that does not clearly articulate that while grace is free it comes with strong expectations, is not doing justice to Matthew.

Moving Forward

While I believe this project fills a void in Matthean scholarship, I do not have the last word in regard to Matthew's theology of grace. Throughout the research and writing of this dissertation I felt as if each one of the six perfections of grace could warrant a book length discussion. Much more work remains to be done in regard to divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew.

At its core, this is a work of Matthean soteriology. While it is a narrow slice, in some regards, of this broader field, to discuss divine grace in a book is to ask questions that deal directly with the doctrine of salvation. The six perfections of grace cover many of the perennial questions raised in soteriological discussions. Singularity asks what man is to be saved from, if anything. Priority and efficacy touch on the tricky questions of predestination and election. Incongruity and non-circularity get to the heart of anthropology and ethics; in other words, who is being saved (and why do they need

saving) and what are they to do once they receive salvation, if anything? Superabundance requires a conversation of what kind of salvation man receives and how long it lasts. So, while this work does not claim to be a complete account of Matthew's soteriology, it does ask many of the same questions.

Matthean soteriology remains an area where much work needs to be done. There are a number of recent publications within this field, but each contains serious flaws in its ability to explain all the data.[3] There remains a need for high level scholarship to answer some of the claims in these and other works.

Conclusion

Matthew's Gospel contains a rich and beautiful understanding of divine grace. This wonderful, all-surpassing, glorious grace of God deserves deep consideration and worshipful meditation from followers of Jesus. While many Christians will continue to turn to Paul's letters for their understanding of divine grace, one of my goals with this project is to show that Matthew deserves to have his contribution to this important doctrine heard. May the superabundant, efficacious, incongruous, and prior grace of God cause us all to "love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart[s] with all [our] soul[s] and with all [our] mind[s]" (Matt 23:37).

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[3] Three that come to mind are: Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016); Mothy Varkey, *Salvation in Continuity: A Reconsideration of Matthew's Soteriology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

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ABSTRACT

DIVINE GRACE IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Ryan Taylor Johnson, PhD
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Chair: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

Divine grace is a perennial topic in New Testament studies, but little work has been done on grace in the gospels. This work examines the theme of divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew by using John Barclay's taxonomy of six perfections of grace as a heuristic tool by which to explain how this concept is developed. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that divine grace in the Gospel of Matthew is a lavish outpouring of favor to those who do not deserve it before they ask for it. God's grace, made to appear more glorious because of the dark backdrop of judgment, accomplishes its purposes in the recipients and comes with an expectation of both horizontal and vertical return. In other words, Matthew perfects superabundance, efficacy, priority, and incongruity but not singularity and non-circularity.

VITA

Ryan Taylor Johnson

EDUCATION

BBA, University of Central Arkansas, 2014
MDiv, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017

ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 2020
Online Teaching Assistant, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 2017–21
Accelerate Books Briefer 2021-

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Keynote speaker, Various organizations, 2010–
Recreation Director, Camp Siloam, Siloam Springs, Arkansas 2011-2013
Interim Youth Pastor, Quitman First Baptist Church, Quitman, Arkansas, 2014