



Bible Readers Club

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Week

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Matthew 1-14 & Matthew 15-28

Dear Friends, Having read now through the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, we shift now to the first book of the New Testament—the Gospel of Matthew. This is the first of the Four Gospels according to the order presented in the Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), but it is almost certainly not the first to be written. Scholars generally agree that Mark came first and the writer of Matthew (and Luke) based his story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection on Mark's account, rearranging and including episodes from Jesus' life from other sources to fit his God-inspired purposes.

Week

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Here is a basic outline for this Book:

1. Birth of Jesus the Messiah (1:1–2:23).
2. Jesus' baptism, temptation and the beginning of His Galilean ministry (3:1–4:25).
3. Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29).
4. Demonstration of Jesus' power over disease, the devil & nature (8:1–9:34).
5. Commissioning and sending of the Twelve Apostles (9:35–10:42).
6. Jesus' words of power: commending John the Baptist, issuing his gracious invitation to the burdened, claiming Lordship over the Sabbath day, arguing that He is not an instrument of evil & explaining the qualifications for membership in His new family (11:1–12:50).
7. Seven parables about the kingdom of heaven (13:1–52).
8. Rejection of Jesus in Nazareth & martyrdom of John the Baptist (13:53–14:12).
9. More miracles of Jesus, Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the transfiguration of Jesus before three disciples & His prediction of His coming death & resurrection (14:13–17:27).
10. Jesus' teaching on humility, proper conduct & forgiveness (18:1–35).
11. Traveling to Jerusalem, with stops for teaching on divorce, children, riches & the wickedness of God's people the Jews, & for the healing of two blind men at Jericho (19:1–20:34).

12. Triumphant entry into Jerusalem & demonstration of Jesus' power: cleansing of the Temple, cursing the fruitless fig-tree & contending with the chief priests & Pharisees (21:1–23:35).
13. Predicting the fall of Jerusalem and the second coming (24:1–51).
14. Three parables on judgment (25:1–46).
15. Betrayal, trial, Peter's denial, suffering, crucifixion & burial (26:1–27:66).
16. Resurrection (28:1–10).
17. Jesus' final instructions & commission (28:11–20).

Matthew was the former tax collector (a vocation that involved Roman-backed threats and extortion and so a group of men greatly despised by fellow Jews) who became a disciple of Jesus. His Gospel is characterized by a unique emphasis on Jesus' ethical teaching. In it we find the amazing "Sermon on the Mount" (chapter 5-7) where Jesus presents what many have called the greatest collection of ethical instructions ever offered. In addition Matthew also places special emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of God's word and work proclaimed by Israel's prophets. Jesus is uncompromising in affirming God's Law, and He goes further in assuming personal authority over this Law ("You have heard it said, but *I say to you...*") and in making the astounding claim that He Himself is the Law's fulfillment. Jesus Himself, and not the Law of God, is at the center of the Christian faith, and the Gospel of Matthew helps reveal this deep mystery.

Matthew also repeats many parables of Jesus. These are short stories told to help people understand the essential truths He was teaching and the life-giving work He was accomplishing. Many of these stories convey another one of this Gospel's themes: Repentance and judgment. Matthew especially makes sure to voice Jesus' call for people to turn away from evil and toward good, toward God, toward Him, and His warning that His return will bring with it the time of His ultimate judgment.

Finally, Matthew is known as the most "Jewish" of the Gospels (presenting Jesus in a more Jewish context), but it also moves clearly beyond the old boundaries in demonstrating that the Good News of Jesus is now, and the essential work of God has always been, for *all* people. At the beginning of Matthew Jesus is presented as "Emmanuel"—God with us (1:23) and as the "newborn King of the Jews" sought and found by Gentile "wise men" and lowly shepherds even as His own people ignore him or seek his demise. At the end this Jesus promises to be with his disciples to the end of time (18:20). This frames Matthew's keen presentation of the church as the new and universal Israel open to all who will trust in Him—Jews and Gentiles alike, God's universal assembly which comes into being because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the descendent of David and the Son of God. At the end, this Gospel, by the ultimate authority of Jesus Himself, gives this Church its marching orders from its inception to this very day: *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (18:19-20).

May your reading of the life of Jesus as presented by Matthew the tax-collector-turned-disciple-maker inspire you to do these very things.

- Pastor Jay