

Handout for Gospel Lessons – June 1, 8, 15, 22

June 1, Pentecost 3: Matthew 7:21-29

1. This section constitutes the closing section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew's Gospel consists of an introductory segment (chs. 1-4), then five blocks of discourse/narrative. The discourses are found in chs. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 24-25. They create the impression that Matthew has structured his Gospel as a New Pentateuch, a New Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy).
2. Jesus concludes His Sermon on the Mount by reminding His disciples that people do not belong to Him and the Kingdom of God merely because they address Him as “Lord.” Only those who do the will of His Father are citizens of God's Kingdom.
3. Although some may boast of having prophesied in Jesus' name, driven out demons in His Name, done mighty deeds in His name, their boasting will not gain them entry into God's Kingdom.
4. Worse yet, He will say to those who boast of such things, “I never knew you! Go away from Me, you evil-doers!” The spirit of true discipleship in Matthew's Gospel is seen most clearly in ch. 25:31-46. We, God's people, are to understand that there are really only two people on Planet Earth: me—and Jesus. And everyone else but me is Jesus—in disguise. He is the hungry one, the thirsty one, the lonely one, the naked one, the sick one, and the one in prison.
5. God's people are not to focus on doing the spectacular, that which draws attention to themselves. Everything that they do is to draw attention to Jesus—and no one else. Those who do things to be seen and applauded by those around them forfeit God's notice and applause. Worse, they are addressed as “evildoers.”
6. We build our “house of life” either on rock or sand. Those who take Jesus' message seriously and seek to demonstrate it build their “house of life” on a foundation of rock; it will withstand the storm winds of life. Those who build their “house of life” on their own whims and seek the applause of those around them build it on sand—and it will be destroyed.
7. Jesus calls us to understand the nature of His message and ministry and “get on board” with Him. Jesus' message does more than offer humanity dry-cleaning from sin. It calls them to radical servant-discipleship—full-time, in all that they think, say, and do.
8. The radical truth is that the cross presents a limited message. It focuses on God's promise of forgiveness—but says little about the servant life to which God's forgiven people are called. Above the entrance door to every worship center there should be a sign that says, “Servants' entrance.” Above every exit door there should be a sign that says, “Your mission field ahead.”
9. God's people are to understand their relationship with Jesus as not merely “the most important part of life.” They are to understand it as the sum total of life! Jesus does not call people to follow Him part-time. He calls them to follow Him full-time. His brothers and sisters are to seek to live the “heavenly life” already in this life. After all, they have been declared citizens of God's eternal, heavenly Kingdom. The call is, “Life *now* as you *will* then.”
10. How different life on Planet Earth would be if all people asked only, “How can I use life to serve God full-time by serving those around me full-time?”

June 8, Pentecost 4: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

1. After Jesus gives His Sermon on the Mount, He does a series of surprising things—things that would have disturbed many Jewish scholars and teachers.
 - * He touches an (outcast) leper prior to healing him, 8:1-4.
 - * He heals the servant of a Gentile, 8:5-13—and heals him from a distance, from “far off.” Jewish religious leaders spoke of Gentiles as those “far off.”
 - * He then heals Peter’s mother-in-law, and those possessed by demons, 8:14-17.
2. When a man declares that he will follow Jesus wherever He goes, Jesus reminds the man that He does not even have a bedroom. If what the man seeks is prominence and an affluent way of life, he should link up with the *foxes* (the Herodians, Luke 13:31,32) and the *birds* (Romans: the eagle was a symbol of the Roman Empire).
3. Next, Jesus calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee. In so doing, He did what the God of the Old Testament could do, Psalm 107:23-32. After disembarking on the SE shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus heals two demon-possessed Gentile pig-farmers who seem to know who He is, 8:28-34. Mark 5:1-20 states that only Jesus got out of the boat. The disciples would have been disturbed by the thought of walking on Gentile territory where pigs roamed!
4. When Jesus returns to the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, a paralytic is brought to Him, 9:1-7. Although the expectation would have been that Jesus first heal the man, He did not. He first declared Him forgiven—and only then healed Him. Note well! Authority to forgive now resides in the Person of Jesus—not in the Jerusalem Temple’s “salvation marketing system.”
5. Jesus then calls a (despised) tax collector, Matthew, to follow Him, 9:9-13. When later Jesus dines with Matthew in his house, many tax collectors and sinners come and sit with Jesus and the disciples. When the Pharisees see what is happening, they protest. Jesus responds by telling them that those who *know* they are sick seek the help of a physician. Although the Pharisees believe themselves to be spiritually healthy, they are really spiritually sick—but sadly do not understand this. They must learn to understand that what God wants is the practice of mercy to those in need—not the practice of outward rituals (Hosea 6:6).
6. A Jewish official then asks Jesus to restore to life a daughter who just died. On the way to the man’s house, Jesus heals a ritually unclean woman who had been suffering from a menstrual disorder for 12 years. Although the woman had touched a tassel on His cloak (and theoretically rendered Jesus ritually unclean), He addresses her as “daughter.” He then goes to the home in which the dead girl lies—and touches her by taking hold of her hand prior to restoring her to life.

The comments offered above refer to a bigger series of Jesus’ actions than those contained in Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26. The suggestion is that to refer to the series as a whole will help hearers understand more clearly the radical nature of Jesus’ ministry in relation to dealing with Jewish beliefs and practices regarding ritual purity.

It important that God’s people understand that they live in a “global village” where untold millions have to deal with huge challenges. Those who hear Jesus’ words, “Go in peace! Your sins are forgiven you!” are to go forth in peace to serve Jesus in His multitude of distressing disguises.

June 15, Pentecost 5: Matthew 9:35-10:8

1. Ch. 9:35-38 consists of the closing verses of chs. 8,9, the narrative section that follows the Sermon on the Mount. It describes Jesus visiting some of the towns and villages in Galilee and teaching in their synagogues. Note that Matthew says that Jesus *taught*. He did not *preach*. The Gospel writers make no reference to Jesus *preaching*—but many references to Him *teaching*. An important insight that we professional church workers need to ponder! Jesus not only taught. He healed many who were sick and diseased.
2. Ch. 9:36 reports Jesus grieving because the people were harassed and helpless—and did not know what to do. They were like sheep without a shepherd. The point is, most likely, that the people were being exploited by their political leaders, and what the religious leaders were teaching them was of little benefit. Jesus exhorts the disciples to ask *God* to provide leaders to cope with the enormous spiritual need that prevailed in the land.
3. In 10:1, Jesus Himself summons and sends the twelve disciples to go out among the people to deal with the demons possessing them, and to heal them of every disease and sickness. We might note that Matthew contains no story of Jesus calling the twelve disciples. Most likely there is a link between *twelve* tribes in the Old Testament, and *twelve* disciples.
4. In 10:5,6 we read that Jesus told the disciples not to work in any Gentile region or in Samaria. They are to minister only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Perhaps the idea is that Jewish hearers will understand more quickly and deeply the witness the disciples give—and will in turn bear witness to others in their communities. Interesting! The Gospels speak of Jesus Himself ministering to the Gentiles (Matthew 15:21-28), healing a Samaritan afflicted with leprosy (Luke 17:11-19), and speaking with a Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, John 4.
5. In 10:2, the disciples are referred to as *apostles*—“those sent forth.” In this context, Matthew makes no reference to Jesus commanding the disciples to *teach*. The command to teach is given only after Jesus rises from the dead (Matthew 28)—by which time the disciples understand more fully and clearly Jesus’ identity and message. After all, knowing that Jesus rose from the dead deepened their insights enormously.
6. In 10:7, the disciples are told to proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. When Matthew makes reference to the Kingdom of *Heaven*, he is referring to the Kingdom of *God*. Being a good Jew, he no doubt wants to avoid any misuse or mispronunciations of the name of God. But note well! The disciples are not to proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is on its way to Planet Earth. Rather, *it has come to Planet Earth* and Jesus is the King of that Kingdom and its first Citizen, so to say. And Jesus lives a life radically different from the lifestyle taught in the synagogues of Jesus’ day.
7. The disciples are to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons. The first three things referred to reflect Isaiah 35:5,6: when the Kingdom of God breaks in, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, and the dumb will speak. The disciples’ ministry will therefore declare: “The Messianic Age has broken in!” Jesus is the Messiah—but a Messiah very different from what the people were expecting! He washed feet and calls His followers to do the same. And the disciples who have received freely are to proclaim these truths freely, 10:8.
8. Finally, a quote from H.G. Wells: “This doctrine of the Kingdom God, which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought.”

June 22, Pentecost 6: Matthew 10:24-39

These verses are part of Jesus' second discourse in Matthew's Gospel—a discourse that focuses on Jesus teaching His disciples, and equipping them to carry out and perpetuate His mission.

1. In 10:24, Jesus tells the disciple that they are never to do anything to draw attention to themselves, or to flaunt themselves as having superior knowledge. Their one concern must be to proclaim (and live!) Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. An Anglican clergyman serving in Oxford, England once stated, "When the day comes that I want people to notice me rather than Jesus, I have invalidated my ministry." Food for thought in relation to all that God's people do!
2. In 10:25, Jesus tells the disciples to bear in mind that if some within Judaism equate His Person and ministry with the demonic, the disciples (those who belong to Jesus' household) can expect to be maligned in the same way. After all, what they are to proclaim will be completely out of step with what some people want to hear.
3. The disciples are to proclaim the concealed and secret coming of the Kingdom. Indeed, the true nature of God's Kingdom will come as a surprise and shock to many in Israel (and to many in today's world!). After all, who wants a King who performs the lowly tasks of a Gentile slave and calls His followers to do the same, John 13:1-15? What the disciples learn from Jesus (even if spoken softly and secretly within their inner circle), they are to proclaim publicly and loudly! The disciples are not to fear what might eventually overtake them as they carry out their mission—even death at the hands of their opponents. They are not to fear mere humans who have the power to kill; they are rather to bear in mind that they serve One who can condemn them to eternal death in they fail to make known and do His will! (If only their opponents understood that!)
4. Jesus then reminds the disciples of how precious they are in the sight of God. God knows full well when a tiny sparrow falls to the ground. He knows how many strands of hair there are in the head of each disciple—and of every person on Planet Earth. If God pays attention to such seemingly minute things, He certainly will provide the disciples with their true needs.
5. Jesus exhorts the disciples to remember at all times that He will acknowledge before His Father those who acknowledge Him before others. And those who deny Him among others He will deny before His Father. In all that God's people do, they are never to seek human applause, but only the smile and commendation of their Heavenly Brother.
6. In 10:34-36, Jesus teaches the disciples that the message they proclaim will not win universal applause. There will be many who find Jesus' message of the Kingdom too extreme and challenging. It will create division even within households and family circles. After all, still today, many define "being blessed" in terms of what they acquire, possess, and enjoy—in terms of their status within the community at large. Jesus defines being blessed only in terms of how much people devote life to serving God by serving those around them on Planet Earth—with no concern for borders, flags, or skin color.
7. Ch. 10:37-39 contains Matthew's reference to the cross. Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment used by the Romans for offenders who were not Roman citizens. And eventually Jesus experienced such a cross. However, to take up the cross is also to devote life to following Jesus in servant discipleship—and to walk through life totally out of step with the "world system." Jesus' brothers and sisters find life by giving it away. Jesus' Kingdom is certainly an upside-down, back-to-front Kingdom!