

Overview on the Book of Matthew, Session I

October 26, 2011

- Journey of Discipleship – What does it mean to be a disciple; what is a disciple, to whom are we a disciple and what does that relationship look like as a disciple of Jesus. We are really indebted to some resources that were shared with me. The book, *Follow Me – Discipleship According to St. Matthew* by – Martin H. Franzmann. He was a professor at one of our seminaries. He also wrote the book “*The Word of the Lord Grows*.” One of our members provided CD’s of Stuart Briscoe. He’s the founding pastor of Elmbrook Church. He is an Englishman and exceptional on this and I have begun listening to his lectures. He doesn’t come from a Lutheran theology tradition but he has lots of common agreement with our Lutheran theology and Lutheran theologians, especially on Matthew. There is also Dr. Jeff Gibbs. Much of today’s lecture comes out of a combination of all of these, but especially Dr. Gibbs.
- Today we’re going to be getting to know Matthew, not reading the Book, just discussing. A few things our group already knows are:
 - Matthew was a tax collector, so not a loved person.
 - Sermon on the Mount--one of the richest pieces of the Book of Matthew, and of course prominent within the Sermon on the Mount are the Beatitudes.
 - Matthew recording Jesus’ teaching about His name. There’s a lot about His name in Matthew, and about the presence of Christ.
 - How powerful Jesus is – he has control over the sea.
 - The whole notion that Matthew is a Jew and he assumes a tremendous amount of Hebrew understanding and culture. He expects his readers to just know it. Mark and Luke, in particular, have all kinds of little explanations about this is what that really means. Not in Matthew. Matthew keeps rolling right through it.
 - He renames him Peter and his confession is the rock on which he’ll build His church. Of the four Gospel writers, Matthew is the only one that uses the word “church”. Church holds a prominent place in Matthew in terms in some of the key teachings of Jesus and that’s one of those. “And upon this I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.”
 - Genealogy. The broad scope of the types of people in Jesus’ background. Matthew does not apologize – everybody’s there.
 - It’s a Gospel of fulfillment.

- More than any of the Gospels, it includes connection to the Old Testament and quotes Old Testament all over the place. Matthew does such a great job of reminding us that we're just not specks of dust. We're not just leaves floating through the air. We are here as part of God's story. We are here as part of His plan of salvation. There are so many competing theologies out there and we don't even pick up on them. Forest Gump is the perfect movie that says we are all feathers floating along. That is very understandable – we might get smacked up against the truck or just fly loosely. But Matthew would say absolutely not! God has a plan! You're a disciple and part of the plan!
- We can only speculate his age within a range. Scholars (one that we chose to follow) put Matthew's writings somewhere in the 50's-60's AD. Jesus would have been raised from the dead 25-ish years before that. Think about this. He had been ascended to heaven 25 years earlier. To put it in perspective, where were you in 1986? Married? Children? Were you a child? What were you doing? Does it seem like that long ago? Or does it seem like in many respects you think you have the exact amount of strength as you did then? In perspective, that's how long it would have been between Matthew's writing and walking with Jesus. As far as his age, scholarship tends to think the youngest of the disciples would have been John and his older brother, James. Matthew, already having been a tax collector, would have definitively been by the time he showed up with Jesus, likely in his twenties at least. If he's in his twenties and it's twenty five years later, he's in his fifties.
- Today and next week we're going to get to know the person and about the Book. I spent quite a bit of time with three completely different sources, Martin Franzmann, Stuart Briscoe and Jeff Gibbs. And it was fascinating in all three cases that they shared a common teaching, the prominence of Matthew. The preeminence of Matthew, meaning Matthew was to the early church, the most important Gospel. If asked, what's your favorite Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John? How many of us would say Matthew? I think not. How many would say John? Luke? Every time I ask that I always hear John or Luke. Why do you think that is? Maybe it's because of John 3:16 "And God so loved the world". Or maybe it's because of Luke "in those days Caesar Augustus sent out a decree." Matthew is a stronger, broader picture of Jesus and of God. In the Book of Luke we have the story of the prodigal son and all of us remember that and the story of the waiting father. You see this tremendous heart of God being shown. Arms are open. Luke is the only one that records that. Matthew is the only one that records the parable of the Master and the Unforgiving Servant. In Matthew 18:21 Peter asked the question about how many times should I forgive someone's sins? Jesus says, Peter, you're asking the wrong question. To forgive your sins is about your relationship with the Father. It's your job to forgive sins. All sins, every time. And Peter is like, aaaahhh. And Jesus says let me tell you a story.
- He tells the story of a servant whose indebtedness is that he should have been put in prison and would never have been able to pay off his indebtedness and the master chooses to forgive him. Forgive. See the connection? Forgive the debt, forgive the sin. And so what does the servant do? He goes out and finds a fellow servant who is in debt a wee bit. Does he forgive the debt or the sin? Instead he treats that fellow servant with contempt and judgment and ultimately has him thrown into prison.

- The other servants go to the master and say look what this servant, whom you have forgiven his debt, does. And what does the master do? It is a very powerful portrait. The master comes and he executes judgment on that servant who did not respond to his act of love. This is Matthew, only in Matthew! You have this portrayal here of God that is a little different than the God who has his arms wide open when the son who wants to be a servant comes home. Is one right and the other wrong? Oh, no. But they're very different and it's important that we understand that this picture of God is absolutely as accurate as the other and it speaks to something of a different feel for Matthew.
- In Luke we have the picture of Jesus' birth, if you will, in the romantic version. It's just beautiful. You've got the woman's view. She goes off to her cousin. It's just two women talking about what it's like to be pregnant for the first time. You've got the beautiful picture of the baby being born in the least of good conditions and yet it seems so idealistic.
- That's not Matthew. Matthew is the picture from the man's side. Matthew's account is the picture of where you have an unwed mother who should be stoned and God intervening into the ways of a man. You have a very different picture in Matthew. You have children being slaughtered in Matthew. And you have the baby who is like a sack of potatoes being picked up and carried away to Egypt. It's very different.
- Matthew is very different from Luke. And yet, what I want you to understand today is that for the early Christian church, Matthew was so important that even Stuart Briscoe, who doesn't come from a liturgical acting out church, a highly responsive liturgy, said this: Matthew: Scholarship tells us that the Book of Matthew was used as the liturgy of the people. You say, "What do you mean"? At the time of the early Christian church, people didn't just read the Book, they memorized it. These people would not only memorize the Book, they would speak it. This isn't about setting aside 10 minutes for devotion; this is about speaking it with one another. Leitourgia, the word liturgy, means the work of the people. It became their conversation. It became their talk. You can relate to this a little bit. If I were to say this: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. You would say: But if we confess our sins..... It's the liturgy, it's from not Matthew, it's from 1John. But can you imagine knowing the Book so well that you would say "Blessed are the meek It was that much a part of their life. This is how prominent the Book of Matthew was in the life of the early Christian; a disciple was one who was living out that relationship of walking with Jesus. And they were living it out by having it that ingrained in their thought; they would be articulating it with one another.
- Again, we live in a period where it's not a matter of whether you have a Bible or not but how many Bibles you have. Or whether or not you have a Study Bible. But at the time of Matthew, people wouldn't have had Bibles. It was all oral. It was all shared with people in their walk in ways with one another and Matthew was preeminent as a Gospel.

- There are some interesting things about Matthew that we're going to spend more time talking about next week but I want to start a little bit on them today. One of them being the whole structure of the Book of Matthew. Again Matthew, the tax collector, Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, somewhere in the 50's to 60 AD, pens this book. From where does he pen it? Scholars have been wrestling with that all the way back to the first few centuries. And there are probably two views. One view is that, according to Jeff Gibbs, he penned it in Palestine. Mark Franzmann, as well. The other is that he penned it from Syria, which became where the Gospel went to a little later. We talk about that in the Book of Acts. Whether it's Palestine or Syria, we're not sure. What we do know is that Matthew penned this book in a way that gives us some fascinating insights into this issue of history of structure.
- Up until recently most people would have divided the Book of Matthew into the Discourses of Jesus. If your Bible has red ink, look how much red there is. Does anybody know how many Discourses there are? How many sections of Jesus' teaching? Five. If you're a Hebrew and if you're from that Jewish culture, what does the number five mean to you and what does the number five in terms of Discourses bring to mind? For a Hebrew, five writings would have immediately brought to mind the Pentateuch's. It's the first five Books of the Bible penned by Moses. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five Books – cannot be overstated how important they are to a Hebrew, or to a Jew. What we construe as the Old Testament, Psalms, prophets, historical writings of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel and Kings, for the most part, (this is going to sound harsh), are non-important, to a Jew. In essence, a Jew is defined by those five Books. This is our identity, this is our history, this is what it means to be a disciple, a follower.
- The Book of Matthew includes Five Discourses of Jesus. These Five Discourses, at the very least, we have to acknowledge that there's clearly a play on the notion of the five books of the Old Testament, a defining what does it mean to be a disciple, whom are we following, what does our identity look like. If you want to know what it means to be a Christian, read the Five Discourses. If you're a person that likes kind of interesting divisions, open your Bible with me and I'll show you some of this. Chapter 5 to Chapter 7:27 – that's the first Discourse. Chapter 7:28 says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things"...Chapter 10 is a Discourse. We know what the transition is. Chapter 11:1, "After Jesus had finished instructing..." The words there in Chapter 11:1 are virtually identical in different versions. Chapter 13, specifically, the Third Discourse is in Chapters 11, 12 and 13. Verse 53, "When Jesus had finished these parables..."
- Chapter 19:1. Discourse is all of Chapter 18. Chapter 19:1 "When Jesus had finished saying..." Chapter 26:1 – Fifth Discourse is all the red ink behind it. Chapter 26:1 "When Jesus had finished saying all these things." In the Greek language it is so clear that each of these Discourses ends with this type of transition--"When Jesus was finished..." So each of these Discourses became, if you will, the foundational teachings, just like the Pentateuch. Just like Moses who was there to bring the law, Jesus was there to bring the law and the Gospel. "When He has finished this"--is always the bridge out of the Discords. The early church fathers had noticed right away that Jesus says a bunch of things according to Matthew, and then Matthew says "When he had finished saying this." Then there's some

activity, but then a lot more talking. “When Jesus had finished saying this”, then there’s some activity, then more talking and that’s the end of the Second Discourse. These Five Discourses are set up in such a way to instruct the people about discipleship.

- It’s probably important for us to note Matthew does not record the life of Jesus in the way most of us think. We think the recording of the life of Jesus is chronological. Like Luke. Matthew actually takes liberty to take events and push them together, move them around, and he does it to make sure we hear certain themes of Jesus. And it can be confounding. In fact, those who are critics would say this is a perfect example why the Bible is not the inherent Word of God. Because clearly Matthew and Luke were not on the same page. One has the order going this way, and one has the order going this way. That’s why some feel we have been wasting our time studying this book. But early on, the church fathers understood that this is a Gospel that is not intended to be a diary. It’s not intended to be a chronology that is written like you would a newspaper article. Rather it is to be an expression of good news
- John uses all kinds of symbolism. He uses all kinds of terms that would have been very commonplace, such as light and darkness, as well as ways of portraying the Gospel that are different from Matthew, Luke and Mark. Mark is a short Gospel because it hardly includes any teachings of Jesus. It’s the action Gospel. It’s the Gospel for men. Matthew is just full of Jesus talking. And we see Jesus the preacher, Jesus the leader.