

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 7

Matthew – Part Seven

Discourses in Matthew

I. INTRODUCTION

There are five prolonged discourses of Jesus set out in the Gospel of Matthew. In addition, there are a number of smaller discourses where Jesus sets out teaching narratives in response to certain questions or events.

Of the five prolonged discourses, we have already covered several over the last few lessons. The first discourse is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, which we covered in some detail several weeks ago. The second discourse covers the commissioning of the twelve apostles in chapter 10, which we will look at today. The third discourse is found in the parables of chapter 13, covered last week. The fourth discourse is intermingled with the parables in chapter 18 and was basically covered last week as well. Scholars call the fifth and final discourse “The Olivet Discourse” because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives. It is contained in chapters 24 and 25 and will also be subject to brief review today.

In addition to the two discourses we have yet to cover, we will also consider several smaller sections of Matthew where we find some important sayings of Jesus. We will look at the discourses first.

II. DISCOURSES

A. *The Commissioning Discourse*

In Matthew chapter 10, we have Jesus commissioning his 12 apostles for service. The first verse says, “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” This reference to twelve special disciples of Jesus is echoed in each of the gospels. Unlike elsewhere in his gospel, Matthew then calls the disciples “apostles” in verse 2 writing, “These are the names of the twelve **apostles**....” This is Matthew’s only reference to the twelve as apostles.

The Greek word for apostle is *apostolos*, which means a “messenger.” This is different from a disciple, which comes from the Greek *mathetes*. *Mathetes* means learner, pupil, or disciple. This word carries a much broader meaning than “apostle.” It

denotes a follower/student and is not limited to the twelve charged and commissioned in chapter ten.

The instructions for the twelve in chapter ten involve going into towns and villages preaching the kingdom of heaven as near, healing the sick, driving out demons, and doing various other acts of compassion. The apostles were not to take extra provision but were to rely on the hospitality and gratitude of those to whom they ministered. Ingratitude was to be anticipated. The charge to the twelve included instructions about persecutions that would come once the twelve resumed their apostolic work after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They were warned that times would be very difficult with arrests and betrayal in the offing.

The twelve were assured that they would not be alone. Even though Jesus would not be physically present, the twelve would not be alone nor would their work be in vain. Jesus calls the twelve in spite of those difficulties with the assurance that self-sacrifice was the path of life:

Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (10:38-39)

B. The Olivet Discourse

Chapters 24 and 25 contain the Olivet Discourse, so named because of 24:3, which notes that “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him” and asked him certain questions.

The material Jesus sets out in this discourse is somewhat difficult to understand. One key to gaining insight to Jesus’ statements comes from carefully understanding the questions the apostles ask. Again, in verse three, the questions are given: “Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Although the apostles may not have understood, these were not variations on one question; rather, they were multiple questions about multiple events that would take place in multiple time periods of history. Jesus’ answer contains information about the different time periods. Jesus tells of when the Temple would be destroyed in 70 A.D., as well as when Jesus would return in his second coming at the end of the age.

Jesus notes that the future will contain wars, rumors of wars, natural calamities, physical persecution of the church, a preaching of the gospel throughout the world, destruction of the temple as known at the time of Christ, and a triumphant return of Jesus in glory at an unexpected time. This discourse included the parables covered last week about the need to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus when the time of that coming is unknown (the parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins and the parable of the talents).

Jesus ends the discourse with an example of a shepherd separating sheep from goats as illustrative of God separating out those for eternal life from those for eternal death at the end of the age. Jesus does so with an emphasis on the compassion for the needy and underprivileged that Jesus expected from those who were truly his followers.

III. OTHER INTERCHANGES

In addition to the lengthy discourses, there are several interchanges between Jesus and others that are worthy of emphasis.

A. Clean and Unclean

In chapter 15, the Pharisees and certain rabbis came to Jesus asking why the disciples did not always wash their hands before evening, as taught by the traditions of the elders. Jesus takes the inquisitors to task, challenging certain aspects of their behavior. Jesus wants to know why the questioners failed to honor their parents by not providing for the parents in their old age. Jesus called the inquisitors “hypocrites” quoting Isaiah, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” (15:8-9).

Jesus then explained the significance of his point versus the questions of traditional hand washing. Jesus was concerned with the heart. Also, Jesus noted that what comes out of a man’s mouth is what made the man unclean, not what dirt from unwashed hands might make it into the man’s mouth. Any thing that made it into a man’s mouth would eventually make it out of the man. However, things that proceed forth from a man’s mouth started in the heart and included evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander, etc. (15:18-20).

B. *Peter and the Rock*

Chapter 16 of Matthew has Jesus coming to Caesarea Philippi where he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (16:13). The disciples reply that some were saying John the Baptist, others were saying Elijah, and others either Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?” (16:15). Peter answers Jesus with the famous proclamation, “You are the Messiah (Christ) the Son of the living God.”

In reply to Peter, Jesus blesses him noting “this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” Jesus then makes a pun off Peter’s Greek name saying, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom...”

Why is this a pun? “Peter” in Greek is *Petros*, which means a detached stone. The feminine word, *Petra*, means a bedrock. So, Jesus is saying that while Peter is “Peter” – a detached stone – Jesus will build his church on the bedrock proclaimed by Peter the stone, namely that Jesus is the Son of God. The keys are given to Peter because it is Peter who will unlock the doors of the church for admission by others. Indeed, we will see in Acts chapter 2 that it is Peter who first preaches and explains the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf, opening the doors of the church to all listeners.

C. *The Rich Young Man*

In Matthew 19:16-30, we have an exchange between Jesus and a rich young man followed by some commentary between Jesus and his disciples.

The rich fellow was evidently a self-righteous guy. He comes to Jesus and asks what he should “do” to get eternal life. Jesus responds in a way that illustrates the futility of the man’s own effort to work and attain his salvation through what he does. Jesus correctly tells the man that if the man wants to know what to “do,” then the man merely needs to keep the law – in other words, be perfect and never sin.

The fellow mistakenly believed he had successfully navigated the law and says, “All these I have kept. What still do I lack?” Jesus insightfully levels the man’s self-righteousness by challenging him to love his neighbor as himself. Jesus says, “Go sell your possessions and give to the poor.” This act the rich man won’t do. The rich guy leaves sad because he had “many possessions.”

Jesus tells his followers that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The disciples are stunned and asked, “Who then can be saved.” Jesus explains that absent God’s saving grace, no one.

D. The Seven Woes

In Matthew 23, Jesus delivers an absolutely scathing attack against the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These are called the “Seven Woes” because Jesus calls down a curse of woe on these Jewish hypocrites seven times. Jesus prefaces the woes by telling folks to do what the hypocrites say, but do NOT do what the hypocrites do. The actions betray the hypocrisy. These pseudo-religious types were not living to honor God, but to bring honor on themselves.

The first woe comes from the refusal of the leaders to see the kingdom of heaven open for themselves or others. The second woe is from the leaders’ hypocrisy shown even in their evangelistic efforts. The third woe is pronounced over the absurdity of the dishonesty in the leader’s oaths. The fourth woe comes from attitudes that “strain a gnat but swallow a camel.” These folks would tithe the smallest crop but would neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

The fifth woe is centered on the hypocrisy of washing cups for use when the heart of the drinker is full of greed and self-indulgence. The sixth woe cites the leaders as whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of rotting bones on the inside. The final woe covers the hypocritical leaders who build tombs for the prophets yet are prophet killers themselves.

IV. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Stop the hypocrisy. Be real.
2. Trust Jesus for eternal life.
3. Stand on Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Clean up the insides first.