

"Narrative Structure and Discourse in Matthew"

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Matthew's Gospel has held a favored place in the history of the church because of its extended collection of Jesus' teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew has collected the most complete compilation of Jesus' teachings, exhortations, prophecies, and parables found anywhere in Scripture.

The concluding element of the Great Commission, in which Jesus states that new disciples are to be taught "to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:20), gives a hint to one overall purpose for this Gospel. Matthew records five of Jesus' major discourses, all of which are addressed primarily to Jesus' disciples (chs. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25), and signals the conclusion of each with the recurring identical formula: "When Jesus had finished..." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These discourses provide a wholistic presentation on the kind of discipleship that was to be taught to disciples as the basis for full-orbed obedience to Christ and became the basis for Christian instruction within the church. These discourses reveal that Jesus' disciples will be characterized by what they are taught to follow in these directives.

Kingdom-life disciples (chs. 5-7). The Kingdom-Life Proclamation, popularly called the Sermon on the Mount, develops what it means to be "kingdom-life disciples." Jesus expounds the reality of a radical everyday discipleship lived in the presence and power of the kingdom of God within the disciples' everyday world. This kind of discipleship involves an inside-out transformation into the righteousness of the kingdom (5:20). The ultimate example of this righteousness is Jesus himself, who has come to fulfill the Old Testament revelation of God's will for his people (5:17, 21-47), so that Jesus' disciples can pursue clearly the goal to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect (5:48). Kingdom life, therefore, addresses all aspects of what discipleship to Jesus means during this age, including ethical, religious, marital, emotional, and economic dimensions.

Mission-driven disciples (ch. 10). The Mission Mandate develops what it means to be "mission-driven disciples." Jesus commissions all his disciples to go out to share and live the gospel of the kingdom of God to an alien and often hostile world until his return. Mission in this age is a responsibility of all believers (10:24-25, 40-42), not just a special category of persons. It occurs in both public confession to the world (10:32-33) and in private commitments to one's family (10:34-39). Like Jesus, his disciples can expect opposition and persecution (10:24-25) from Jews and Gentiles, from the religious and political world, as well as from one's own closest family and companions (10:17-21). Yet they need not fear because the Spirit will provide power and guidance (10:19-20), and the Father will exercise sovereign care and control (10:28-33). The centrality of the presence of Jesus in the disciples' life is the most vital characteristic of the mission, so that the disciples increasingly grow to be like the Master (10:24).

Clandestine-kingdom disciples (ch. 13). The Parabolic Disclosure develops what it means to be "clandestine-kingdom disciples." Through his parables Jesus tests the hearts of the crowd to reveal whether the message of the kingdom of heaven has taken root and is producing fruit, or whether it has been unproductive (13:18-23). Through parables Jesus also reveals to his disciples the secrets of the kingdom of God, making known that, during this age, the kingdom will exist in a hidden form. It will be an undercover kingdom, not the overpowering political, militaristic, and dominant cultural manifestation of God's rule that many expected (13:31-33). So the Parabolic Discourse reveals what



it means for Jesus' disciples to live as kingdom subjects in a world that has not yet experienced the fully consummated kingdom of God. However, Jesus' disciples will act demonstrably different from others in this world through an inside-out transformation. Only at the end of this age will a final separation be made fully known between those who belong to the kingdom of heaven and those who do not (13:41-43, 49-50). The incongruity of its hiddenness and inconspicuousness causes many to overlook the kingdom of God; yet to those who discover its presence, it is the most precious reality of this age (13:44-46). Therefore, Jesus disciples are to give closest attention to the priority of the kingdom in their lives, so that they will continue to be the treasure of revelation to a watching world (13:51-52). The Parabolic Discourse clarifies what discipleship to Jesus is like in the inaugurated but not consummated kingdom of God.

Community-based disciples (ch. 18). In the Community Prescription, Jesus declares how kingdom life is to be expressed through the church that he will establish on earth through his disciples. This discourse clarifies how discipleship to Jesus is expressed through a church that is characterized by humility, responsibility, purity, accountability, discipline, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. This fourth discourse is addressed to insiders. The first and third discourses were primarily addressed to Jesus' disciples, but the crowds were included for other particular purposes (see comments on 5:1-2; 7:28-29; 13:1-2, 10-17), and the religious leaders were an implied object of rebuke (5:20; 6:1-18; 12:24-32, 46-50). But like the second and fifth discourses, the fourth is directed exclusively to Jesus' disciples.

The collection and organization of the Community Prescription is unique to Matthew's Gospel, as is much of the content. The uniqueness accentuates Jesus' urgency to prepare his disciples for the time that is soon coming when a new community of faith will replace Israel during this age as Jesus' body functioning as his witness to the reality of the kingdom's presence. The uniqueness of this passage also accentuates the way that the presence of the kingdom of heaven turns upside down the values of this world and how the new community, the church, will be a living witness to this overturn.

Expectant-sojourner disciples (chs. 24-25). In the Olivet Discourse (or Eschatological Forecast), Jesus looks down the long corridor of time and prophesies to his disciples of his return, the end of the age, and the establishment of his messianic throne. This discourse culminates Jesus' teaching on discipleship by describing how his disciples are to live each day in this age of the already-not yet consummation of the kingdom of God in expectant preparation for his return with power. They are to expect that Jesus could return at any time, yet responsibly plan as though he is not returning for an extended period of time.