

Encountering Jesus in Matthew

- As reader
- Through and with characters

1. Matthew 1-4 – discovering Jesus with Matthew

- Matthew 1

An account of the genesis of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Genealogy – descending Abraham to Jesus – numbers / events / women (1:1-17)

Annunciation to Joseph – where is the emphasis? (1:18-23)

- Matthew 2:1-23 -Magi, Egypt, Slaughter of the Innocents, Return)
- Matthew 3:1-12 -Ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-12); Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)
- Matthew 4:1-11 -The Temptation of Jesus

These chapters form the readers of Matthew to read the story of Jesus in particular ways:
– fulfilment of Scriptures, of history of Israel, of figures – Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon
– something new– strange contours of salvation – women, Gentiles, unmanly men
– cosmic conflict – Satan and his kingdoms are met by the kingdom of heaven and Jesus

2. Shapes of Matthew

Chronological Shape – Beginnings, ministry, passion, death, resurrection.

Geographical Shape – Jordan, Galilee, Journey, Jerusalem, Galilee

Seven mountains: Temptation (4:8), Sermon (Ch5-7), Prayer (14:23), Feeding (15:29),

Transfiguration (17:1-9), Mount of Olives (Ch21-25), Mission (28:16-20)

Narrative and 5 Discourses – 5 books of Law / Torah

3. Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9)

After six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Three Worlds of the Text:

World of the text – characters, settings, events, plot

Image – stained glass window – exploration within the text

World behind the text – history, OT background, social customs and values, etc.

Image – clear window – looking behind to discover how the text came to be.

World in front of the text – how does the text speak today of God, of me, and of the world?

Image – mirror – how does the text reflect in my life, my surroundings, my relationships?

4. Hearing Jesus through new lenses – ideological readings – suspicion and retrieval

4.1 Feminist readings – (Matt 9:20-22)

²⁰ Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well.

World of the text – characters, settings, events, framing context (healing of Jairus’ daughter)

World behind text – purity laws, cloaks and fringes, role of women & men

World in front of text – what does this episode reflect for you?

4.2 Childist readings – (Matt 21:12-17)

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a den of robbers.” The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and [heard] the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’” ¹⁷ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. (Matt 21:12-17)

- First, we must see what is invisible.
- Second: how might this episode relate to today?
- And lastly: What does it show us about living as Christians in the world?

Some Reflective Questions:

- What do healings of blind & lame signify (11:5) and what should be the response (15:30)?
- Which group fulfils the expected role of those who come to the Temple?
- How do different characters perceive the children’s words?
- What might this say about Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, and God?

4.3 Disability readings – (Matt 20:1-16)

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the labourers a denarius, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this

last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

- First, we must see what is invisible: why is this parable about people with disabilities?
- Second: how might this parable relate to today?
- And lastly: What does it show us about living as Christians in the world?

Some Reflective Questions:

- Why are the men standing around all day? Are they really idle?
- What happens to them eventually? What difference does it make?
- What is the impact of the complaint of the first workers?
- What might this say about the kingdom of heaven and about God?

Recommended introductory book on Gospel of Matthew:

Harrington, Wilfrid J. *Reading Matthew for the First Time*. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014.

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- Jones, Cyndi. “‘Because no one has hired us.’ The story of employment issues of people with disabilities.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 49/3 (2022), 25-28.
- Levine, A-J. “Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Haemorrhaging Woman” in *The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Critical Readings* (Edited by L. R. Huber, R. Graybill; London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 101-114.
- Mohn, K. A. *Real Men: Masculinities in the Gospel of Matthew*. Texas Christian University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018.