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THE VIRTUES OF DISCIPLESHIP: FAITH AND MERCY AS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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James Benjamin Hussung
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APPROVAL SHEET

THE VIRTUES OF DISCIPLESHIP: FAITH AND MERCY AS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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For Soph, whose loving partnership in the gospel

guides me more than she could know

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1 En.	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)
1QH^{a}	Thanksgiving Hymns^{a}
1QM	War Scroll
1QS	Rule of the Community
Abraham	Philo, *On the Life of Abraham*
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AcT	*Acta Theologica*
Aem.	Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus*
Ag. Ap.	Josephus, *Against Apion*
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
Alex.	Plutarch, *Alexander*
Alleg. Interp.	Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*
Amat.	Plutarch, *Amatorius*
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
Ant.	Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*
Ant. rom.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae*
Arist.	Plutarch, *Aristides*
ASE	*Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BMSEC	Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
Cat. Min.	Plutarch, *Cato Minor*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
Cim.	Plutarch, *Cimon*
Clem.	Seneca, *De clementia*
Colloq	*Colloquium*
Comp. Dem. Cic.	Plutarch, *Comparatio Demosthenis et Ciceronis*
Comp. Thes. Rom.	Plutarch, *Comparatio Thesei et Romuli*
ConcC	Concordia Commentary
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
De or.	Cicero, *De oratore*
Demon.	Lucian, *Demonax*
Diatr.	Epictetus, *Diatribai* (*Dissertationes*)
DJG	*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013
DPL	*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters.* Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993
DPL	*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters.* Edited by Scot McKnight, Lynn H. Cohick, and Nijay K. Gupta. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2023

ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EDNT	*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993
Ench.	Epictetus, *Enchiridion*
Eth. nic.	Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
Evag.	Isocrates, *Evagoras* (*Or. 9*)
Fin.	Cicero, *De finibus*
FJTC	Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary
Flight	Philo, *On Flight and Finding*
Heir	Philo, *Who Is the Heir?*
Hist.	Herodotus, *Histories*
Hom. Socr.	Dio Chrysostom, *Homer and Socrates*
HvTSt	*Hervormde teologiese studies*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDS	*In die Skriflig*
Il.	Homer, *Iliad*
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JMT	*Journal of Moral Theology*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTI	*Journal of Theological Interpretation*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Jub.	Jubilees

J.W.	Josephus, *Jewish War*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Life	Josephus, *The Life*
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
Math.	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*
Mek.	Mekilta
Mem.	Xenophon, *Memorabilia*
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
Moses	Philo, *On the Life of Moses*
Nat. d.	Cicero, *De natura deorum*
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTTE	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by Moisés Silva. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVACS	NIV Application Commentary Series
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
Numen	*Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*
Panath.	Isocrates, *Panathenaicus* (*Or. 12*)
Per.	Plutarch, *Pericles*
Planting	Philo, *On Planting*

Pomp.	Plutarch, *Pompeius*
Posterity	Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain*
Prelim. Studies	Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies*
Prot.	Plato, *Protagoras*
Providence	Philo, *On Providence*
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
RB	*Revue biblique*
Res. gest. divi Aug.	Augustus, *Res gestae divi Augusti*
Resp.	Plato, *Republic*
Rhet.	Aristotle, *Rhetoric*
Sacrifices	Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel*
SBFA	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta
SGBC	The Story of God Bible Commentary
SHE	*Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
Spec. Laws	Philo, *On the Special Laws*
T. Ash.	Testament of Asher
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
T. Job	Testament of Job
T. Levi	Testament of Levi

TTNTCS	Teach the Text New Testament Commentary Series
Tusc.	Cicero, *Tusculanae disputations*
T. Zeb.	Testament of Zebulun
Virtues	Philo, *On the Virtues*
Vit. Apoll.	Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WD	*Word und Dienst*
Worse	Philo, *That the Worse Attacks the Better*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	*Word and World*
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

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PREFACE

This dissertation began with my interest in πίστις early in my doctoral coursework. After struggling to find the right angle from which to approach πίστις in Matthew as a dissertation topic, I zoomed the camera lens out and realized that the relationship between righteousness, faith, and mercy, and especially their relationship to discipleship in Matthew, proved a fruitful topic for study. My work in many ways flows from the inherited interests of my supervisor, Dr. Jonathan Pennington, and for his help, encouragement, and mentorship, I am incredibly grateful. I am also thankful for the generous time, support, and feedback given by my two other committee members—Drs. Tom Schreiner and Bill Cook—and my external reader—Dr. Jeff Dryden.

My academic pursuits largely began during my time studying religion at Western Kentucky University under Dr. Joseph Trafton. It was under his guidance that I first encountered narrative criticism, Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds, and most of all, a scholarly yet faithful reading of the New Testament. He ended every semester of New Testament survey (at a public, state university, that is) by encouraging his students to consider how their lives would be changed if everything they had been studying in his class were true. Countless lives were impacted by his academic ministry in a dark place, and I am more thankful for his early academic shepherding than he likely knows.

My interest in the study of Scripture, like many, began in my childhood at home and in church, listening to my father preach faithfully each Sunday and then live what he preached in between, and watching my mother devour the Word daily and encourage me and my brothers to do the same. Since then, countless discussions with my parents, brothers, and sisters-in-law have fueled my desire to love our Lord more deeply through Scripture. My family has done more to cement this scriptural foundation in my

life than any others.

Finally, all these interests and pursuits would be for nothing if not fired in the kiln of daily life. My wife, Sophie, and three sons, James, Henry, and Wendell, have endured many evenings and Saturdays without their husband and father. Sophie, in many ways, has contributed more to my research and writing than anyone else, and her humble, loving service to me means more than I can express. It is my hope that this dissertation will not only contribute to scholarship, but more importantly, to my own discipleship, and that in my family our love for one another and love for our Lord would grow all the more as a result.

Ben Hussung

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls his disciples to *make disciples* of others through baptism and teaching (28:18–20). Fundamental to becoming a disciple of Jesus, then, is *learning* what he has commanded. Representative of Matthew's larger interest in the concept of discipleship,[1] the Great Commission grounds discipleship in one's continued relationship with Jesus as authoritative representative of the Father. Earlier in Matthew's narrative, Jesus offers a call to *learn* from him: "Come to me, all who work and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn [μάθετε] from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (11:28–20).[2] Similar to the Great Commission, Jesus lays the foundation for this call in the authority given to him by the Father (11:27), yet he grounds his call in his own character as "gentle and humble in heart." This emphasis on Jesus's *character* implies that the disciple must learn both from Jesus's *teaching* and from his *way of life*.[3]

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[1] Matthew's emphatic use of μαθητὴς (72x), along with his use of μανθάνω (3x) and μαθητεύω (3x), points to a particular interest in the concept. Mark uses the term 46x and Luke 37x. Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, WUNT 414 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 216–20. Furthermore, Matthew's use of teaching language—διδάσκαλος (12x), διδαχή (3x), διδασκαλία (1x), διδάσκω (14x), and καθηγητής (2x)—similarly highlights his focus on discipleship. Interestingly, a recent Barna Group study concludes that the language of discipleship, nevertheless, has fallen out of vogue with most Christians, with less than one in five Christians selecting *discipleship* as a word that they use to describe "the process of growing spiritually." Among those who did not select discipleship, only one-fourth of them said that discipleship is still "very relevant." Barna Group, "New Research on the State of Discipleship," December 1, 2015, https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/; John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss, eds., *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 2–3.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Greek texts from the New Testament and LXX are my own.

[3] In yet another similar call, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' confusion at his eating with tax collectors and sinners by telling them to "go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice"

In the broader Greco-Roman world, the master-disciple relationship often centers around the disciple learning from and imitating his master—both his teaching and way of life—forming virtue within the life of the disciple,[4] and in Greco-Roman biography in particular, there is even at times an implicit master-discipleship relationship between the subject of the biography and the reader, as the author of the biography seeks virtue-formation for his reader through the reader learning from, and imitating, the subject of the biography.[5] If Matthew's Gospel emphasizes discipleship, therefore, and seeks virtue-formation for its readers as disciples of Jesus, the question of what it means *to be* a disciple of Jesus proves central to understanding Matthew's Gospel as a whole. As Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation in his readers, three distinctly moral concepts rise to the surface as consistent foci: righteousness, faith, and mercy. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches on each of these concepts, often relating them to one another and encouraging his disciples toward their embodiment. At the same time, Matthew sculpts his narrative with characters and stories that reinforce Jesus's teaching, providing a narrative world in which the reader may learn, grow, and ultimately evaluate his own embodiment of righteousness, faith, and mercy as a disciple of Jesus.[6]

(9:9–13; cf. Hos 6:6). Jesus invites the Pharisees to a way of learning that moves beyond merely *understanding* the Law toward truly *embodying* it.

[4] Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 125; Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 232–36.

[5] Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 3rd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 145–46, 181; Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 26; Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 134–35; Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 48–49.

[6] While I generally refer to "the reader" with masculine pronouns, I intend to refer to both men and women as readers of Matthew's Gospel.

Thesis

In my dissertation, therefore, I argue that Matthew portrays the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus as righteousness, which serves as his overall category of virtue, and is comprised of two primary virtues—faith and mercy.[7] Matthew's portrayal of the relationship between these three key concepts in his narrative—righteousness, faith, and mercy—clarifies for the reader what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. For Matthew, the disciple of Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor. As the reader encounters Matthew's narrative—Jesus's own direct teaching and lived example, along with characters who offer a wide range of positive, negative, and mixed examples—he is encouraged toward the formation of virtue that defines true discipleship.

I will present my argument in five steps. In chapter 2, I will argue that J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended in Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew's Gospel. In chapter 3, I will argue that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus. In chapter 4, I will argue that Matthew portrays righteousness as his overall moral category—virtue itself—and the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus. In chapter 5, I will argue that Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one's love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous.

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[7] By "narrative," I do not mean narrative exclusive of discourse. Rather, I intend to convey Matthew's entire narrative presentation in his Gospel, including both Jesus's teaching and more explicitly narrative sections. Furthermore, faith and mercy comprising righteousness does not indicate that mercy and faith *are the only virtues* that comprise righteousness but that they are *the most prominent* in Matthew's narrative. Throughout my study, other virtues, like humility and wisdom, will be mentioned, and these certainly also serve as part of what it means to be righteous for Matthew. Faith and mercy, however, hold prominence above these other virtues within Matthew's Gospel.

In chapter 6, I will argue that Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one's love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. As Matthew presents these two virtues—faith and mercy—both explicitly through teaching and implicitly through narrative—he invites his readers into the life of discipleship—following Jesus through the pursuit of righteousness.

Methodology

My thesis requires an eclectic methodology combining various aspects of narrative, historical, and ethical approaches. First, the primary methodology for my project is narrative criticism.[8] Narrative criticism refers to a particular subset of literary criticism that seeks to understand how an author uses plot, characters, setting, themes, and more to create a story with effect on the reader.[9] My project approaches Matthew's Gospel through narrative criticism (1) in its analysis of righteousness, faith, and mercy as narrative concepts within Matthew, and (2) in its focus on the narrative tools that Matthew's Gospel uses to pursue virtue-formation in its readers. In particular, I adopt J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, which includes the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader, the intensity and mode of identification with characters, and the shape of plots.[10]

---

[8] Largely rising as a response to the dominance of historical criticism in the mid-to-late twentieth century, works like Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie's *Mark as Story* paved the way for the prominence of narrative criticism, especially in Gospels studies. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981); David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012). For other pioneering works, see R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

[9] Or as Jeannine Brown explains, "Narrative criticism (NC) attends to the literary and storied qualities of a biblical narrative, like a Gospel." Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels as Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 11.

[10] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 116–19. I will discuss Dryden's method in detail in chap. 2.

Second, my thesis also requires a historical approach, meaning that in my analysis of both Matthew's virtue-formation and his presentation of concepts like righteousness, faith, and mercy, I analyze not only Matthew's understanding but also the broader historical context in Greco-Roman and Jewish thought. Thus, in chapter 2, I discuss scholarship on virtue-formation within Greco-Roman biography, seeking to understand how the genre more broadly pursues virtue-formation through narrative. In chapters 3–6, I survey the concepts of discipleship, virtue, righteousness, faith, and mercy in the ancient world in order to better understand the conceptual world in which Matthew lives and from which he writes.

Third, my thesis requires an ethical approach to Matthew's Gospel, with virtue ethics as its primary influence. Jean Porter defines a "virtue" as "a trait of character or intellect that is in some way praiseworthy, admirable or desirable," and the study of virtue ethics as "a process of systematic, critical reflection on the virtues and related topics."[11] William Mattison goes a step further to emphasize the centrality of *intention* and *habit* in virtue. Virtues are not simply good actions but interior and exterior qualities that exhibit themselves in intentional, habitual good action.[12] Daniel Harrington and James Keenan explain virtue ethics as answering three key questions, largely following Alasdair MacIntyre's work: (1) "Who are we?"; (2) "Who ought we to become?"; and (3) "How are we to get there?"[13] Applying these questions to my thesis, one may ask, (1) "Who are we as disciples?"; (2) "What type of disciples are we to become?"; and (3) "How are we to get there?" My thesis, then, will seek to understand both how Matthew

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[11] Jean Porter, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 87.

[12] William C. Mattison III, *Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 38–74.

[13] Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 3; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

seeks to form virtue within disciples and how Matthew presents concepts, like faith and mercy, as particular virtues, and righteousness as virtue itself. This ethical analysis will involve understanding Matthew's presentation of these concepts within their Greco-Roman and Jewish context, as well as seeking to understand virtue as a whole within Matthew's narrative.

Significance

The primary contribution of my project is clearly articulating the relationship between three fundamental concepts for Matthew—righteousness, faith, and mercy. Whereas many scholars have discussed each of these themes in Matthew, few have articulated a clear understanding of their relationship to one another. As I argue, understanding righteousness as Matthew's overall category of virtue and faith and mercy as the two individual virtues that comprise this righteousness shines light on Matthew's understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. These three themes are best understood within the context of virtue-formation, and understanding these concepts through the lens of virtue offers new insights that serve our understanding of Matthew's overall narrative.

A secondary contribution of my project is bridging the gap between the conversations surrounding discipleship and virtue in Matthew more broadly. As I will show, a virtue approach to discipleship in Matthew helpfully highlights the wholistic nature of Matthean righteousness and the virtues that comprise it—faith and mercy. At this point, I am not aware of any monograph-length work approaching the discipleship question in Matthew from a primarily virtue perspective. The recent ethical approaches to Matthew tend to focus primarily on the Sermon on the Mount.[14] This focus is certainly

[14] See, for example, Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999); Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision-Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); William C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology:*

understandable, as the Sermon serves as perhaps the clearest ethical discourse in Matthew's Gospel, and certainly the most studied throughout Matthew's interpretive history. By widening the camera angle, however, to include Matthew's larger narrative world, Matthew's more wholistic scheme of virtue-formation may come more fully into view, and by focusing particularly on virtues rather than contemporary ethical questions, the question shifts from, "How should a disciple *act*," to "What kind of person should a disciple *be*?" This shift facilitates a helpful progression in the conversation around ethics in Matthew's Gospel and further highlights the value of bridging together these two conversations in research.

Outline of Argument

In chapter 2, I argue that J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended in Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew's Gospel. First, I trace the theme of virtue-formation in research on Greco-Roman biography. Second, I discuss the value of narrative criticism in understanding virtue-formation in Greco-Roman biography and evaluate Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, ultimately adopting it as my method for understanding how Matthew's Gospel in particular seeks virtue-formation within its readers.

In chapter 3, I argue that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of

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A Virtue Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); George Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises: The Making of the Matthean Self*, NovTSup 178 (Boston: Brill, 2020). Richard Burridge's *Imitating Jesus* is relatively unique in seeking to understand how the Gospels promote the imitation of Jesus by their readers. While this sort of ethical approach certainly influences my approach at some level, the overall combination of virtue ethics and narrative criticism (i.e., seeking to understand how the entire narrative—including Jesus, other characters, plot, etc.—seeks to form virtue within readers) proves distinct from Burridge's approach, which focuses primarily on Jesus himself as example rather than the narrative as a whole. Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus. First, I provide a brief survey of research on Matthean discipleship, noting in particular recent narrative projects with interest in moral development (Michael Wilkins, Benjamin Cooper, and Jeannine Brown). Second, I discuss discipleship and moral development in the ancient world with examples of moral development within discipleship from Dio Chrysostom, Philo, and Josephus. Third, I provide an overview of moral development in Matthew's narrative. Fourth, I give a brief history of research on virtue ethics in New Testament and Matthean studies. Fifth, I define virtue-formation and show that the moral development that Matthew seeks in his readers is best described as virtue-formation.

In chapter 4, I argue that Matthew portrays righteousness as his overall moral category—virtue itself—and the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus. A close narrative analysis of righteousness—centered in the Sermon but broadened to include Matthew's entire narrative—results in a picture of Matthean righteousness as virtue itself. In other words, righteousness serves as Matthew's highest moral category, an umbrella category of morality under which individual virtues, like faith and mercy, may be situated.[15] First, I give an overview of the concept of righteousness in the ancient world. Second, I survey Matthew's presentation of righteousness throughout his narrative. Throughout the entirety of Matthew's narrative, he portrays righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law. He encourages his reader toward embodying righteousness through (1) offering Joseph (1:19), John (3:15; 23:32), and Jesus (3:15; 27:19) as examples of righteousness; (2) recounting Jesus's teaching on righteousness in the Sermon; and (3) reinforcing the disciples' identity as "the righteous" by identifying them with both the "the righteous" of

[15] Deirdre Good analyzes meekness and humility in Matthew's Gospel as virtues, understanding them through the lens of Greco-Roman and Jewish literature. While a smaller scale than my dissertation, her article is a helpful example of examining Matthew's narrative portrayal of a particular virtue. Deirdre Good, "Moral Dualism and Virtues in Matthew's Gospel," in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*, ed. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International, 1997), 101–23.

old and the eschatological “righteous” while contrasting them with the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Third, I briefly conclude by showing the importance of the double love command (22:34–40) as an interpretive lens for understanding faith and mercy as individual virtues falling under the umbrella of Matthean righteousness.

In chapter 5, I argue that Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one’s love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous. First, I give an overview of the concept of faith in the ancient world. Second, I survey Matthew’s presentation of faith throughout his narrative, showing the ways that he utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation in encouraging his readers to pursue the virtue of faith. Matthew presents faith as both trust in and faithfulness to Jesus as God’s authoritative representative. Centered in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount on trusting the Father for provision in every aspect of daily life (6:25–34), Matthew continues to portray Jesus teaching the disciples about the virtue of faith—requiring wholistic trust in God as a way of pursuing righteousness (17:14–21; 21:18–22; 24:45–51; 25:14–30). All the while, Matthew depicts characters who exhibit faith along a spectrum, from absolutely no faith (13:53–58; 17:14–21; 23:23–24), to exemplary faith (8:5–13; 9:1–8, 20–22, 27–31; 15:21–28; 18:1–9), to the in-between “little faith” of the disciples (8:23–27; 14:22–33; 16:1–12; 17:14–20). Most importantly, Jesus embodies perfect faith in, and faithfulness to, God the Father in his humble trust and obedience to the Father’s will in his death on the cross, shown by both his resolve in Gethsemane (26:36–46) and the Jewish leaders’ ironic mocking of his faith on the cross (27:41–43). Through this narrative presentation, Matthew encourages his readers to embody the virtue of faith, motivated by their love for God in pursuit of greater righteousness.

In chapter 6, I argue that Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one’s love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. First, I give an

overview of the concept of mercy in the ancient world. Second, I survey Matthew's portrayal of mercy throughout his narrative, showing the ways that he utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation in encouraging his readers to pursue the virtue of mercy. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, he portrays mercy as a compassionate feeling followed by merciful action, which is fundamental to the life of discipleship. Centered in Jesus's teaching on mercy throughout the Sermon on the Mount (5:7; 6:2–4), Matthew fills out his reader's understanding of mercy through both Joseph and Jesus's embodiments of mercy (1:19; 9:27–31, 35–38; 14:13–14; 15:21–28, 32–39; 17:14–21; 20:29–34), conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees (9:9–13; 12:1–8; 23:23–24), and continued calls for his disciples to embody mercy toward others in compassion, generosity, care, and forgiveness. Through this narrative presentation, Matthew encourages his readers to embody the virtue of mercy, motivated by their love for neighbor in pursuit of greater righteousness. In the concluding chapter, I provide a broad overview of my argument, discuss my thesis and its implications, and offer suggestions for further areas of research.

Conclusion

The relationship between righteousness, faith, and mercy lies central to what it means to be a disciple in Matthew's Gospel, with Matthew utilizing his narrative to encourage his reader toward the embodiment of each of these key concepts. Before discussing each of these terms and their relationship to one another in Matthew's narrative, however, it is necessary to lay the groundwork of understanding *how* to approach Matthew's Gospel and its utilization of narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation. In the following chapter, therefore, I will discuss the place of virtue-formation within Greco-Roman biography and outline a narrative method for understanding virtue-formation in Matthew's Gospel.

CHAPTER 2

VIRTUE-FORMATION AND NARRATIVE IN GRECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY

Helen Bond begins *The First Biography of Jesus* by noting the slowness of Gospels scholars to capitalize on the growing consensus of the Gospels as Greco-Roman biographies.[1] She offers three developments within Gospels scholarship as a whole that may have "diverted scholarly attention elsewhere."[2] The first development she notes is narrative criticism:

> First was the rise of narrative criticism, which broadly coincided with the debate over genre and similarly appealed to those who were interested in the text as a literary product. A curious tendency among biblical narrative critics, is to show virtually no interest in genre. Where the topic is raised, it is simply assumed that the gospels are (short) stories with little to separate them from their modern counterparts in terms of their plot, characters, settings, and so on. What might have been a fruitful opportunity to look at the literary art of a set of *ancient biographers*

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[1] Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 1–5. I will use the term *biography* to reference the genre that scholars refer to variously as biography, *bios*, and βίος. The Gospels as Greco-Roman biography remains the predominant view in Gospels scholarship today, primarily influenced by Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 3rd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018). For an overview of the debate over the genre of the Gospels, see Wes Olmstead, "The Genre of the Gospels," in *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Nijay K. Gupta (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 103–19. For an overview of Burridge's impact on scholarship, see Steve Walton, "What Are the Gospels? Richard Burridge's Impact on Scholarly Understanding of the Genre of the Gospels," *CurBR* 14, no. 1 (2015): 81–93. Burridge's thesis arose from several scholars who had already been questioning the *Kleinliteratur* consensus, like Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Philip L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 17–76. Burridge's argument has not gone without pushback. One of the most substantial critiques of Burridge is Adela Yarbro Collins, "Genre and the Gospels," *JR* 75, no. 2 (1995): 239–46. Several alternative proposals have also been proposed. Among them are Lawrence M. Wills, *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (London: Routledge, 1997); Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Michael E. Vines, *The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

[2] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 2.

(rather than *authors* more generally) was therefore lost, and the generic identification—at least for these scholars—became irrelevant.[3]

Bond's observation is important and serves as a helpful caution in utilizing narrative criticism in studying the Gospels. Narratives do not exist within a cultural vacuum, and while modern methods may be helpful, one cannot force them upon a piece of literature without considering closely their relationship to the work's original context.

Any method for analyzing the Gospels, therefore, must be firmly seated within the context of Greco-Roman biography.[4] Narrative criticism, when approached from an appropriate understanding of the nature of Greco-Roman biography, may prove helpful in studying the intended virtue-formation in the Gospels.[5] In this chapter, I argue that J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended in Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew's Gospel. First, I trace the theme of virtue-formation in research on Greco-Roman biography. Second, I discuss the value of narrative criticism in understanding virtue-formation in Greco-Roman

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[3] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 2–3. Bond notes the pioneering work of David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012). She also supports her point by observing that "'genre' as a topic is not even raised in the introductory works [of Mark Powell and James Resseguie]." See Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

[4] It is important to note at the outset, of course, that while the Gospels participate in the genre of Greco-Roman biography, they are, nevertheless, distinctly *Jewish* participations in this genre. As Sean Adams notes, the Gospels' deep interaction with Jewish scriptures and their unique presentation of the identity of Jesus and call to follow him as Son of God mark the Gospels as particularly *unique* biographies. He writes, "Although I think that the Gospel authors were influenced by Greco-Roman *bioi*, they did not eschew their sacred texts or features typical of Jewish composition, especially localized oral traditions regarding individuals. Rather, they brought them into contact with a Greek literary form to create distinctive, atypical biographies." Sean A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 275. Later he notes that the theological perspective of Jesus's divine sonship and the disciple's call to model him and spread the good news about him "is not found in other, contemporary Greco-Roman biographies, but is an element of a Jewish worldview that has been incorporated into the genre of the dominant culture." Adams's second point is similar to Pennington's understanding of the Gospels as "*bioi* plus" or "eschatological kerygmatic biblical historical biographies." Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 35.

[5] I use *virtue-formation* throughout this chapter to refer to the moral development intended by Greco-Roman biography and many narratives in general. I will offer a more thorough examination of virtue in antiquity and a definition of virtue-formation in the following chapter.

biography and evaluate Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, ultimately adopting it as my method for understanding how Matthew's Gospel, in particular, seeks virtue-formation within its readers.

Survey of Research: Virtue-Formation in Greco-Roman Biography

Central to understanding the value of the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography is their propensity for virtue-formation within the lives of their readers. While virtue-formation has not always been a primary point of discussion within this research, several scholars have considered this aspect of Greco-Roman biography in-depth. Below I survey several important works on Greco-Roman biography with particular attention to their discussions of virtue-formation, concluding with three observations of common threads among them that aid an understanding of virtue-formation in the Gospels.

Richard Burridge's *What Are the Gospels?* and *Imitating Jesus*

In *What Are the Gospels*, Richard Burridge provides one of the most thorough examinations of the genre of Greco-Roman biography.[6] He analyzes early and later examples of biography and notes common features in both sets of data.[7] Virtue-formation

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[6] While here I cite from Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 3rd ed., which was published in 2018, its discussions of virtue-formation in the genre do not differ substantially from the original discussions in the first edition published in 1992. The other work considered in this section is Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[7] Several earlier proponents of the Gospels as Greco-Roman biographies note the genre's interest in virtue-formation at varying levels. In *What Is a Gospel?*, Charles Talbert defines ancient biography as "prose narration about a person's life, presenting supposedly historical facts which are selected to reveal the character or essence of the individual, often with the purpose of affecting the behavior of the reader." Talbert, *What Is a Gospel?*, 17.While the moral purposes of ancient biography are central to Talbert's definition of biography, these purposes do not play a large role in his method of comparison throughout the rest of his work. Vernon Robbins, in his *Jesus the Teacher* and his later article "Writing as a Rhetorical Act in Plutarch and the Gospels," represents another early proponent for the Gospels' biographical genre, though he does not give particular focus to the moral aspects of biography outside of discussing texts which have clear ethical implications, especially regarding the teacher-disciple relationship. Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Robbins, "Writing as a Rhetorical Act in Plutarch and the Gospels," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1991), 142–83. In "Die Gattung Evangelium," Hubert Cancik shows

proves important at several points. In discussing the internal features, Burridge includes "Virtues" as one of the "Topics" that biographies often share. For most biographies, virtues are shown through the subject's deeds within the narrative while some biographies also include more direct analysis of the subject's virtue.[8]

Another internal feature of biography is authorial intention and purpose. While many biographies have a range of intentions and purposes, two in particular are relevant. First, many biographies have an exemplary purpose.[9] Burridge points to Plutarch as the clearest example of presenting his subject as a moral example: "Plutarch's stated aim is to portray moral character (*Cato Minor* 24.1; 37.5). . . . By imitating (μίμησις) the virtues and avoiding the vices described, the reader will improve his own character (see *Pericles* 1, *Aem. Paul*. 1)."[10] Another important purpose of biography for Burridge is didactic.[11] He writes on earlier biographies, "In philosophical or religious βίοι the desire to teach is

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through his comparison of modern and ancient biographies that ancient biographies often have pedagogical goals, working to effect virtue-formation through the living example of the subject. Hubert Cancik, "Die Gattung Evangelium: Das Evangelium des Markus im Rahmen der antiken Historiographie," in *Markus—Philologie. Historische, literargeschichtliche und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium*, ed. Hubert Cancik, WUNT 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 96. In a second article—"Bios and Logos"—in the same collection, he compares Mark with Lucian's *Demon*., and notes the importance of teaching and imitation in Lucian's biography. Hubert Cancik, "Bios und Logos: Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukians 'Demonax,'" in Cancik, *Markus*, 124. In both articles, therefore, pedagogy and virtue-formation through imitation serve as central aims of Greco-Roman biography. David Aune, in *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, also quite clearly highlights the intended virtue-formation of the genre:

> Greco-Roman biographies often have a teaching or didactic function, presenting the subject as a paradigm of virtue. . . . Author and audience were more interested in the subject as a moral example and personification of professionally appropriate virtues than in his historical particularity. There was an enduring tension in Greek historical and biographical writing between the historical and the paradigmatic depiction of individuals. Greco-Roman biographers assumed that actions revealed character (Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.1–3; *Pompey* 8.6), exemplifying virtue (*aretē*), vice (*kakia*) or a combination of both. (Aune, *New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, 36)

For Aune, biographies served a rhetorical function, ranging from political propaganda to moral reflection. But at the center of their moral function lies virtue, with protagonists often being examples of either virtue or vice. Bond's summary in *The First Biography of Jesus* pointed me toward several of the works discussed in this footnote and served as a helpful guide. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 30.

[8] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 142, 174.

[9] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 145–46, 181.

[10] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 181.

[11] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 147, 182.

natural, about both the subject himself and his teachings."[12] In discussing later biographies, Burridge affirms the same desire but also notes that at times the author himself uses the occasion to express his own views:

> Plutarch too has his didactic, semi-religious purposes, to portray his view of the universe. . . . Plutarch is concerned to show the workings of divine justice and retribution in human lives. He uses dreams, oracles and portents to point this out and has more sympathy for those characters who failed (in political terms) than those who were arrogantly successful.[13]

For Burridge, then, the way authors themselves portray characters or even discuss aspects of the narrative presents a form of teaching to readers.

Burridge's analysis of biographies allows him to compare the features of the Gospels with the features of these biographies. Like some biographies, the Gospels do not generally discuss Jesus's virtues directly but portray them through the general narrative.[14] Burridge does not discuss the exemplary purpose of John's Gospel, but he also affirms that the Synoptics, similarly to biographies, offer Jesus as an example to follow in faith, with Matthew's Gospel being the most obvious Gospel to do this.[15] On the didactic purpose of biographies, Burridge notes that all four Gospels seek to teach their readers about the faith.[16]

In *Imitating Jesus*, which builds off of his work in *What Are the Gospels?*, Burridge draws out the implications of the Gospels as biographies for New Testament ethics. He summarizes his understanding of the ethical purposes of biography in general, and the Gospels in particular:

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[12] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 147.

[13] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 182.

[14] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 202, 225.

[15] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 208.

[16] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 209, 230.

> While such ancient *bioi* were not primarily written simply for ethical purposes, nonetheless most of them included their relevant teachings or sayings with an ethical dimension to their narrative account of the person's life, often for the purposes of *mimesis*, imitation of a good example to follow, or a bad one to avoid. The gospels should therefore be interpreted accordingly, as similar biographical narratives which include ethics to help people follow and imitate Jesus.[17]

Throughout the rest of the book, Burridge discusses what this imitation may look like as he discusses the ways the New Testament as a whole and the four Gospels in particular portray and discuss Jesus.

David Capes's "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*"

Though only an article, David Capes's "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*" is an important work that expands the earlier work of Burridge and others on the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography, focusing on the implicit call to imitation in Greco-Roman biography and other literature, and by extension the Gospels themselves.[18] Capes surveys Greco-Roman and Jewish examples of literature, including biographies, in which authors put forward subjects for imitation, concluding, "Clearly then, a cultural and literary environment existed in the period in which the lives of virtuous and righteous individuals served as examples for imitation. Authors composed texts to keep alive the memory of these noble people and to encourage their readers and hearers to follow their examples."[19] While his survey includes literature beyond biographies, he helpfully notes the common authorial goal of the reader's imitation of the subject in many examples of Greco-Roman and Jewish literature.

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[17] Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 31.

[18] David B. Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*," *BBR* 13, no. 1 (2003): 1–19.

[19] Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*," 10.

Tomas Hägg's *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*

Thomas Hägg discusses different examples of ancient biography, including the Gospels, and he explains the ethical aims of biography most clearly in his section on Plutarch. He writes,

> [Plutarch's] object is not to save for future generations what he has been able to collect about his subjects from oral sources, nor can he point to himself as a living witness to their achievements. What he can try to do is distil from historical tradition the elements that have paradigmatic significance and reproduce them in the narrative framework of a persuasive Life. This is what makes it worth the effort to write again—and read again—about well-known figures from history. Both historiography and biography may have a didactic purpose, but while historians convey political lessons, the biographer professes to teach ethics.[20]

Hägg notes Plutarch's clearer statements on his ethical aim in writing (e.g., *Aem*. 1.1–3; *Per*. 1.3–4), and in particular highlights Plutarch's emphasis on the imitation of virtue in his subjects.[21] Both imitation *and avoidance* are important for Plutarch, however, as some of his *Lives* offer accounts of those who are not prime examples of virtue but of vice, like in *Comparatio Demetrii et Antonii*.[22]

The question remains, though, whether the virtue of these subjects is inextricably bound to their heightened place in history. Hägg writes,

> The reason why Plutarch chooses his examples among history's heroes is simply that great circumstances make the importance of virtue most conspicuous. The object is not imitation of the accidental details of the deeds, but of the *essence* of virtue (courage, justice, self-control, etc.) as exhibited in these historical situations. And to Plutarch the Platonist, this implies imitation of the idea of virtue itself (see *Dion* 10.2).[23]

For Plutarch, then, the great deeds of his subjects reveal their virtue, and while they may amount to virtuous acts themselves, the virtue that lies behind the deeds may be

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[20] Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 273.

[21] Hägg, *Art of Biography in Antiquity*, 272–74.

[22] Hägg, *Art of Biography in Antiquity*, 274–75.

[23] Hägg, *Art of Biography in Antiquity*, 276–77.

understood and imitated within the lives of Plutarch's readers. While Plutarch's biographies may not necessarily be representative of all ancient biographies, his clear ethical aim, for Hägg, highlights an often central aim for many ancient biographies.

Maarten De Pourcq and Geert Roskam's "Mirroring Virtues in Plutarch's Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi"

Another example of focus on Plutarch's *Lives* is Maarten De Pourcq and Geert Roskam's essay analyzing Plutarch's narratological method in three of his *Lives* and its implications for our understanding of his employment of *synkresis*, his overall moral program, and the question of fictionality and truth in his work.[24] Of most interest for the present project is their focus on virtue-formation in Plutarch. They summarize the "broad scholarly consensus" of the morality undergirding Plutarch's *Lives*:

> Plutarch's *Lives* should be interpreted against the background of his *moral philosophy*. Several important proems, but also the general selection, presentation, and evaluation of the relevant material show that Plutarch was especially interested in the *êthos* (ἦθος, character) of his heroes and the moral standards of their actions. This moral "programme", however, did not result in merely oversimplifying black-and-white characterization. Instead, the *Lives* usually present a problematizing account of the heroes' great achievements, thus favouring further reflection rather than giving apodictic answers. Furthermore, the principle of *êthos* not only underlies the programme of the *Lives*, it also governs the way in which these stories are told. It provides a template by which to structure the narrative, which means that it is one means of "fictionalizing" the historical narrative. The *Lives* are, so to speak, "*etho-structured*".[25]

Two observations from De Pourcq and Roskam's summary prove important. First, it is not Plutarch's clear statements in his proems alone that indicate his interest in character but his "general selection, presentation, and evaluation of the relevant material."[26]

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[24] Maarten De Pourcq and Geert Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues in Plutarch's Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi," in *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization*, ed. Koen De Temmerman and Kristoffel Demoen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 163–80.

[25] De Pourcq and Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues," 164–65.

[26] De Pourcq and Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues," 164.

Second, Plutarch's moral program does not result in "apodictic answers" where he clearly tells the reader how to live; instead, he offers an invitation to "further reflection."[27]

In their conclusion, De Pourcq and Roskam highlight both of these points again:

> In the end, then, Plutarch's *Lives* approach great historical events from a moral-philosophical perspective and as such also contain an invitation to moral reflection and self-fashioning. Minor fabrications, subtle shifts in emphasis, and even the reinterpretation of more important aspects of the heroes' careers, can contribute to this authorial project.[28]

Plutarch employs a complex yet fluid moral program in which he narrates the lives of famous men, utilizing various literary tools to invite moral reflection and eventually virtue-formation within his readers. De Pourcq and Roskam's analysis, then, moves beyond simply noting Plutarch's *aim* of virtue-formation in writing biography to analyzing his *method* for achieving virtue-formation within his reader. For De Pourcq and Roskam, Plutarch provides a clear example of an ancient biographer who intentionally crafts his narrative—through the use of literary tools like structure, emphasis, and reinterpretation—to initiate the process of moral reflection and hopefully effect real virtue-formation within his readers.

Lindsey Trozzo's *Exploring Johannine Ethics*

Lindsey Trozzo's work is primarily interested in implicit ethical formation due to her focus on John's Gospel. According to Trozzo, scholars have typically overlooked the Fourth Gospel's ethical value because of its lack of explicit ethical discourse compared to the Synoptics.[29] Trozzo does not claim that John "belongs exclusively" to

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[27] De Pourcq and Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues," 165.

[28] De Pourcq and Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues," 179–80.

[29] Lindsey M. Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics: A Rhetorical Approach to Moral Efficacy in the Fourth Gospel Narrative*, WUNT 449 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 1–15.

the genre of biography, instead opting for a more nuanced approach, seeing John as exhibiting "a significant degree of overlap with the *bios* genre."[30] This participation in the biography genre serves as a starting point for Trozzo's analysis of John's rhetorical purpose as it relates to ethics.

Trozzo then identifies Plutarch's *Lives* as similar examples of biography that serve as helpful conversation partners with John's Gospel in terms of ethical formation. For Trozzo, the "deliberative process" that Plutarch invites his readers into by presenting "an exemplary or cautionary main character" opens the door for types of ethical content beyond explicit ethical discourse; she observes, "Rather than allowing the modern reader to dismiss John as entirely void of ethical content, this contemporary analogue opens the possibility for finding ethics emerging in a different way than the modern reader might have originally expected."[31] Plutarch's ethical vision centers in imitation: "Plutarch presents the *Lives* of his subjects as paradigms for virtue and vice that one can either appropriate or avoid for moral growth."[32]

Imitation, however, is inherently an *implicit* type of ethical formation. Trozzo notes two primary implicit aspects of imitation as ethical formation. First, because the historical contexts of Plutarch's subjects are often different than those of his audience, the audience is responsible for translating the moral principles demonstrated by Plutarch's subjects into their own contexts.[33] Second, even Plutarch's own evaluation of the morality of his subjects is often presented implicitly throughout the narrative, so his readers must consider and assess for themselves what types of lessons might be learned

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[30] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 48–49.

[31] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 54.

[32] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 55.

[33] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 56.

and applied from the *Lives*.[34] Trozzo summarizes Plutarch's scheme of implicit ethical formation:

> Plutarch thus involves his readers in the deliberative ethical process rather than presenting an ethical system wholesale. The onus is on the reader to identify the moral categories being employed, to discern the degree to which those categories should extend into his or her situation, and to put the principles into practice appropriately. Plutarch's *Lives*, delivering complex and implicit moralism, engage the reader in ethical discourse rather than simply offering explicit advice about moral conduct. These narrative presentations engage the reader, demanding deliberation to connect the implicit ethics in the narrative to the contemporary situation.[35]

Trozzo's analysis highlights the importance of not only explicit moral exhortation in biographies but also of implicit virtue-formation through the deliberative process of negotiating narrative presentations of characters and then discerning how to either apply or avoid their examples in the reader's contemporary context.[36]

Craig Keener's *Christobiography*

While Craig Keener focuses mainly on the historical reliability of the Gospels in *Christobiography*, the breadth of his work inevitably touches on the moral aspects of Greco-Roman biography. He summarizes, "Like other kinds of historical writers, biographers frequently sought to teach moral lessons from their stories. Biographic information was meant to be used to instruct learners in virtue through the process of imitation."[37] While biographers often had particular interest in virtue-formation, this interest did not discount their "concern for historical verity."[38] Keener goes on to explain

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[34] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 56–57.

[35] Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 57–58.

[36] See also Trozzo's similar assessment of Plutarch's *Lives* in Lindsey M. Trozzo, "Genre, Rhetoric, and Moral Efficacy: Approaching Johannine Ethics in Light of Plutarch's Lives and Progymnasmata," in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 221–39.

[37] Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 132.

[38] Keener, *Christobiography*, 133.

that writing with particular perspectives on the author's subject does not necessarily make a work less historical itself.[39]

Imitation, for Keener, is central to the moral instruction offered by biographies. Authors, therefore, often emphasize their subjects' character: "Ancient biographers' emphasis on moral models is inseparable from their focus on their subjects' character. . . . Character was . . . a major or even the key focus."[40] Biographers often show a character's virtue through both their behavior and more direct commentary, and even the responses of other characters emphasize the subject's own character.[41] While characters do not often show clear signs of character development in the modern sense, some characters do change and show some development in ancient biographies.[42] So even if character development *per se* is not often emphasized by ancient biographers, the subject's character—his or her virtue or vice—remains central, and even if subjects are, as Keener notes, "rarely . . . pure embodiments of virtue or vice," they nevertheless provide examples for the reader to either imitate or avoid.[43]

Sookgoo Shin's *Ethics in the Gospel of John*

Sookgoo Shin approaches the Fourth Gospel from a similar perspective as Trozzo, noting the recent focus on ethics in John and the uniqueness of the endeavor in

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[39] Keener explains,

> Agendas are not intrinsically incompatible with historical information, as modern journalists and other authors recognize, a writer or editor may slant a story by how one tells it rather than by inventing information. . . . The influence of perspectives is inevitable at every stage of historical tradition. Human brains are hardwired to seek explanations for events, so identifying patterns and learning what to predict, avoid, and embrace. . . . Yet perspectives do not by themselves make a work fictitious. (Keener, *Christobiography*, 134)

[40] Keener, *Christobiography*, 134–35.

[41] Keener, *Christobiography*, 135–36.

[42] Keener, *Christobiography*, 136–37.

[43] Keener, *Christobiography*, 137.

light of John's lack of explicit ethical discourse.[44] One of Shin's first moves in his argument is to identify an ethical model for John's Gospel, for which he turns to ancient biography: "There has been a gradual transition in the early Roman empire from the theoretical understanding of ethics to biographical approaches to ethics, and biography is the most ideal form of literature that bridges the gulf between philosophical ethical theory and popular morality."[45] Shin, then, seeks to understand the ways that both ancient biography and John's Gospel "shape their readers' moral worldview."[46]

Like others, Shin turns to Plutarch's *Lives* as the most apt comparison partners with John's Gospel. He observes, "Plutarch never meant to give an abstract, theoretical account of ethics but rather he aimed at providing life examples through biographical narrative, which could provoke sincere desires among readers to imitate virtues modeled by Plutarch's heroes."[47] Once again, the practice of imitation proves central to Shin's understanding of the ethical model of Plutarch and influences the way he then understands John's own ethical model.

Maurice John-Patrick O'Connor's "The Moral Life According to Mark"

Maurice John-Patrick O'Connor's dissertation seeks to understand the moral life espoused by Mark's Gospel. In the process, he understands Mark's closest literary analogy in the first century to be Greco-Roman biography.[48] He notes, "Greco-Roman

[44] Sookgoo Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, BibInt 168 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 3–25.

[45] Shin, *Ethics in Gospel of John*, 35–36.

[46] Shin, *Ethics in Gospel of John*, 36.

[47] Shin, *Ethics in Gospel of John*, 37–38.

[48] Maurice John-Patrick O'Connor, "The Moral Life According to Mark" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2020), 62. O'Connor recently published a revised version of his dissertation: Maurice John-Patrick O'Connor, *The Moral Life According to Mark*, LNTS 667 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022).

biographies endorse character formation, often characterized by the imitation of a divine sage or politician. To be clear, this is not the *only* purpose of Greco-Roman biographies, but it is a frequent and pervasive one."[49] O'Connor then proceeds to highlight the "moral undercurrents" of a number of examples of ancient biographical material, including Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Philostratus's *Vita Apollonii*, Philo's *On the Life of Moses*, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, and Plutarch's *Lives*.[50] As a result of this analysis, O'Connor concludes that these authors intend "a moral thrust to their compositions" and that "the moral environment of Mark's Gospel belongs among these biographical compositions."[51] For O'Connor, the moral intentions of many ancient biographers are clear, and once again, at the center of this virtue-formation lies imitation of the biography's subject.

Helen Bond's *The First Biography of Jesus*

Bond provides one of the clearest discussions of morality in Greco-Roman biography in her monograph on Mark's Gospel.[52] She begins by situating biographies as longer sorts of *exempla*.[53] She cites Isocrates's *Evagoras* (*Or. 9*), Plutarch's *Lives*, Lucian's *Demonax*, Philo's *On the Life of Moses*, and Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* as examples interested in encouraging readers to follow the example of their subjects.[54] As Bond notes,

> The point was not that the audience should imitate the hero's specific deeds: they were not being called to found cities or to lead others into battle. Plutarch himself

[49] O'Connor, "Moral Life According to Mark," 62.

[50] O'Connor, "Moral Life According to Mark," 65–91.

[51] O'Connor, "Moral Life According to Mark," 92.

[52] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*.

[53] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 46–47.

[54] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 47–49.

> had only limited experience of (and often little sympathy with) the trials of public life. Rather, readers were to learn to emulate the *virtue* displayed in these historical situations—the hero's loyalty, piety, courage, self-control, moderation, and so on.[55]

The emphasis, therefore, was not on the subject's individual deeds, which readers may not have the opportunity to imitate exactly, but on the *virtues* that lie at the heart of their deeds found within the biographical narrative.[56]

Central to the moral role of biography, then, was the author's conception of *character* itself. As Bond notes, the ancient conception of character was often quite different from the modern conception.[57] While ancient biographers acknowledged external influences and the choices and habituation of characters, they did often assume that a person's character was innate, "predetermined by one's ancestors and breeding (*eugenia*)."[58] This assumption, of course, influenced the focus of biographies:

> The aim was not so much to provide a rounded portrait of a real person as to lay out the subject's way of life to scrutiny, to expose his virtues and vices, and to invite the audience to evaluate his actions and to learn from them. Thus biographical subjects tend to embody a range of ethical qualities—loyalty, courage, moderation, or their opposites.[59]

Furthermore, biographical authors were not simply *creating* fictional characters like a novelist with the sole intention of forming virtue within their readers. Authors of biography were molding characters based on what was already known about them through other historical, literary, and cultural traditions.[60] As a result, the readers

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[55] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 48–49.

[56] For Bond, the historical distance between reader and biographical subject was collapsed through the ethical medium of biography. Commenting on Philo's *Moses* and Josephus's *Ant.*, she writes, "Despite their encomiastic treatments of Moses, both writers are clear that the life of this great man could act as a moral example for their contemporaries. Nor did it matter that an exemplar was from the remote (even mythical) past: biography tended to collapse the distinction between past and present, so that examples of virtue (or of vice) were assumed to have a universal application." Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 51.

[57] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 51.

[58] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 51.

[59] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 52.

[60] Bond writes, "An ancient audience would generally have approached a biography with a set of presuppositions drawn from what was widely known about the subject. Thus biographical character

themselves must begin to meld their preconceived understanding of this subject with the new biographical presentation of the subject.[61] At this point, it is worth quoting Bond's summary of her understanding of character in biography at length:

> Character in biography, then, tended toward the stereotypical and "flat," often highlighting virtues (or vices) already acknowledged to belong to the subject, or at other times presenting a different set of attributes in an attempt to rehabilitate the subject (we might think here of Philo's attempt to counter those who would slander Moses; *Life of Moses* 1.2–3). It is true that ancient audiences may not have "identified" with these possessors of moral qualities in the same manner in which modern readers empathize with the protagonists of nineteenth-century novels, with their deep exploration of individuals' inner lives, feelings, and contradictions. Yet *bioi*, and indeed the whole *exempla* tradition, encouraged a certain level of "identification" with the subject and the situations in which he found himself, along with an ability to extract the moral qualities at the heart of events and to apply them to one's own life. Listeners were invited to compare themselves with these characters, and to gauge how well their own actions measured up to the virtues on display. To that extent, at least, biographical characterization promoted contemplation, self-reflection, and ultimately transformation.[62]

In this summary, Bond extends the process of imitation to include the deep, thoughtful interaction of the reader with the biography's presentation of its subject. For Bond, the moral aim of ancient biography is not completed simply through the author's successful presentation of a subject but through the reader's engagement, comparison, and ultimate imitation of the biography's subject.

Summary

This survey of research brings to bear three important observations concerning virtue-formation in Greco-Roman biography. First, the virtue-formation of Greco-Roman

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could never be 'complete' in the manner of characters found in ancient novels. Readers of biographies inevitably related what they heard of the subject's character to what they knew already." Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 54.

[61] Bond quotes Koen De Temmerman, who writes, "Their image of Aesop or Demonax at the end of the reading process depends not necessarily only on characterization in the text itself but possibly also on an interplay of wider, cultural, literary and historical actors implicating these characters from the moment they start reading the very first page." Koen De Temmerman, "Ancient Biography and Formalities of Fiction," in de Temmerman and Demoen, *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome*, 11, quoted in Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 54–55.

[62] Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 55–56.

biography is often centered in the author's statements concerning his or her aim. Many of the scholars surveyed focused on Plutarch because he offers several of the clearest statements in this regard. For example, he describes his aim positively at the beginning of *Pericles* (2.4):

> Virtue in action immediately takes such hold of a person that he no sooner admires a deed than he sets out to follow in the steps of the doer. Fortune we prize for the good things we may possess and enjoy from her, but virtue for the good deeds we can perform: the former we are content to receive at the hands of others, but the latter we desire others to experience from ourselves. Moral good, in a word, has a power to attract towards itself. . . . These, then, are the reasons which have impelled me to persevere in my biographical writings.[63]

Or for a negative example, Plutarch discusses the inclusion of examples of vice in *Demetrius* 1.4–6:

> And though I do not think that the perverting of some to secure the setting right of others is very humane, or a good civil policy, still, when men have led reckless lives, and have become conspicuous, in the exercise of power or in great undertakings, for badness, perhaps it will not be much amiss for me to introduce a pair or two of them into my biographies, though not that I may merely divert and amuse my readers by giving variety to my writing. . . . So, I think, we also shall be more eager to observe and imitate the better lives if we are not left without narratives of the blameworthy and the bad. (Perrin, LCL)

While not all ancient biographers make such clear statements regarding their aims of virtue-formation, Plutarch makes explicit in several of his works what can be observed explicitly in some and implicitly in the works of many others.[64]

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[63] Here I follow Dale Allison's translation: Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 153.

[64] For more examples of similar purpose statements in Plutarch's *Lives*, see *Alex.* 1.1–3; *Cim.* 2.3–5; *Comp. Dem. Cic.* 11.7; *Pomp.* 8.7. For an example outside of Plutarch's *Lives*, see Isocrates's *Evag.* 76–77:

> For these reasons especially I have undertaken to write this discourse because I believed that for you, for your children, and for all the other descendants of Evagoras, it would be by far the best incentive, if someone should assemble his achievements, give them verbal adornment, and submit them to you for your contemplation and study. For we exhort young men to the study of philosophy by praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits, but I appeal to you and yours, using as examples not aliens, but members of your own family, and I counsel you to devote your attention to this, that you may not be surpassed in either word or deed by any of the Hellenes. (Van Hook, LCL)

See also Lucian's *Demon.* 1–2:

> It is now fitting to tell of Demonax for two reasons—that he may be retained in memory by men of culture as far as I can bring it about, and that young men of good instincts who aspire to philosophy

Second, the virtue-formation of ancient biographers is often primarily concerned with the imitation of the subject.[65] This observation almost goes without saying, as it is tied inextricably to the nature of biography—an author recounting the life of a particular individual. The virtue-formation intended, therefore, often reflects the virtue or vice of the biography's subject.[66] Little attention, however, has been given to the role of secondary characters within the virtue-formation of Greco-Roman biography.

Third, virtue-formation in Greco-Roman biography moves beyond the intentions of the biographer and is completed by the reader's thoughtful engagement, reflection, and imitation of the subject.[67] Several of the scholars surveyed note the role of the reader in the virtue-formation intended by ancient biographers. Without the reader identifying with the subject, evaluating his own morality throughout the narrative, and wisely seeking virtue by applying what has been learned in one's own context, the virtue-formation of Greco-Roman biographies remains incomplete. These three observations—the author's aim, the characterization of the subject, and the reader's participation—lead

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> may not have to shape themselves by ancient precedents alone, but may be able to set themselves a pattern from our modern world and to copy that man, the best of all the philosophers whom I know about. (Harmon, LCL)

The above is discussed in Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 48–49; Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*," 4–7; and Keener, *Christobiography*, 70–71, 92–94. As Bond notes on Lucian's *Demon.*, "Interestingly, Demonax's philosophy is not so much contained within a body of teaching—he does not give public lectures or engage in philosophical dialogue—but in his *mode of life*, expressed most clearly in his freedom from ambition and boldness of speech (his *eleutheria* and *parrēsia*). Readers are to take note of Demonax's virtuous conduct and to emulate it in their own lives." Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 49.

[65] Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*," 10.

[66] Teresa Morgan notes the importance of the broader genre of exemplum in the Greco-Roman world and the centrality of storytelling for virtue-formation and imitation. She understands exemplum and biography to provide a nexus point between high philosophy and popular morality. Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122–59, 274–99.

[67] Morgan charts a trajectory of imitation in the New Testament, from the Gospels implicitly calling for the imitation of Christ to Paul more explicitly calling believers to imitate Christ (e.g., 1 Thess 1:6–7). Teresa Morgan, "Not the Whole Story? Moralizing Biography and *Imitatio Christi*," in *Fame and Infamy: Essays for Christopher Pelling on Characterization in Greek and Roman Biography and Historiography*, ed. Rhiannon Ash, Judith Mossman, and Frances B. Titchener (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 153–66.

naturally to consideration of a method that may be helpful in analyzing the virtue-formation of Greco-Roman biography: narrative criticism.

Virtue-Formation through Narrative

While it is essential to consider Greco-Roman biography on its own historical terms, the modern method of narrative criticism may nevertheless be helpful in understanding the ways that ancient biographers typically pursue virtue-formation in their writing. On this point, Dryden notes,

> Narrative criticism, at times in reaction to historical criticism, has often divorced itself from questions of historical reference in order to focus its energy on dynamics of the final form of the text. So there is a tendency for narrative criticism to suspend narratives in a self-referential space and ignore questions of history and, to a certain degree, theology as well. A hermeneutic of wisdom will, therefore, need to augment these approaches because, as we will see, the historical conditionality of the Gospel texts is constitutive of how they function as wisdom.[68]

The end of Dryden's assessment is key. While the method may have its flaws, if augmented by what Dryden terms "a hermeneutic of wisdom," which for Dryden holds close correlation with the Gospels' biographical genre, narrative criticism may provide helpful insights and fresh ways of thinking about ancient biography.

Dryden goes on, moreover, to address the question of whether a method developed to analyze modern fictional narratives may be helpfully appropriated to ancient biography. He acknowledges that it is necessary to "guard against collapsing the two genres or overlooking the importance of their differences," yet "there is considerable overlap in their narrative dynamics and respective functions."[69] The main difference between the two for Dryden lies "in their claims to a specific kind of referentiality (i.e., historical narratives make a claim to reference actual persons and events)."[70] Even this

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[68] J. de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 104–5.

[69] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 120.

[70] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 120.

distinction, however, is not as significant as it may seem upon first consideration. Dryden notes that fictional narratives, while presenting mostly fictional events and characters, must maintain some level of realistic referentiality "to the world of historically conditioned human experience" if they are to be "interesting and effective."[71] In other words, an author who does not evince a keen understanding of the real world and of real people—their desires, motivations, emotions, decisions, etc.—will not be able to write a convincing story that moves its readers in any substantial way.

Dryden summarizes, then, the clear similarities between the two types of writing despite their differences:

> Historians have an obligation to historical fidelity, to tie their accounts to historical events in a way that novelists do not, but they are also telling stories—utilizing characterization, point of view, irony, plot, and so on. Readers are responsible to recognize the historian's claims (implicit or explicit) to describe events that happened, but readers are also meant to engage with a narrative in the ways that it functions as a narrative, and those modes of engagement are substantially the same whether the narrative is historical or not.[72]

The narrative elements, therefore, of both ancient biography and modern novels are largely the same, and while it is necessary to be sure to firmly seat our understanding of ancient biography within the context of what we know about the aims and methods of ancient biographers, we may nevertheless helpfully appropriate narrative criticism in order to analyze the virtue-formation found in the Gospels. Indeed, Bond herself goes on to utilize aspects of narrative criticism as she analyzes Mark, though firmly seated within a clear understanding of its place within ancient biographical tradition and the tradition's conventions.[73] A *via media* approach may be most helpful, then, both understanding the

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[71] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 120.

[72] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 121.

[73] She writes,

> More specifically—and this is what sets the present study apart from more conventional "narrative" readings—I am to read Mark's work according to the literary conventions of ancient biographical literature. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, ancient biographies were very different to modern ones, with their own conventions in terms of how they display character, their (frequently) episodal structure, and their (commonly) ethical interest. It is only when we understand these literary

Gospels within the genre of Greco-Roman biography yet acknowledging their potential for transcending the genre in their narrative conventions.

Dryden's Narrative Method

Dryden looks to Martha Nussbaum's understanding of Aristotelian practical reasoning in order to evaluate the value of narrative at large for cultivating wisdom.[74] Nussbaum identifies three elements of Aristotle's understanding that Dryden then applies to the value of narrative.[75] The first element is plurality and noncommensurability.[76] At its simplest level, Nussbaum's incommensurable goods refer to the qualitive rather than quantitative nature of most decision-making.[77] A decision between two options is not solved by a black and white, purely objective sort of reasoning but requires evaluation of the relationship and value of both goods, resulting in, as Dryden would describe it, a decision requiring wisdom. This element finds particular importance in narratives because narratives present characters who are often confronted with these types of decisions, and the reader is carried along with them for the deliberative process.[78] This

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> conventions that we can come close to understanding Mark's work in its original setting. (Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus*, 6)

[74] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 111–15.

[75] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56–84.

[76] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 56–66.

[77] She writes,

> We have said that the Aristotelian agent scrutinizes each valuable alternative, seeking out its distinct nature. She is determined to acknowledge the precise sort of value or goodness present in each of the competing alternatives, seeing each value as, so to speak, a separate jewel in the crown, because the contingencies of the situation sever it from other goods and it loses out in an overall rational choice. This emphasis on the recognition of plural incommensurable goods leads directly and naturally to the perception of a possibility of irreconcilable contingent conflicts among them. For once we see that A and B have distinct intrinsically valuable goods to offer, we will also be prepared to see that a situation in which we are forced by contingencies beyond our control to choose between A and B is a situation in which we will be forced to forgo some genuine value. Where both A and B are types of virtuous action, the choice situation is one in which we will have to act in some respect deficiently; perhaps even to act unjustly or wrongly. (Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 63)

[78] Dryden describes the importance of this element in narrative:

idea not only applies to individual decisions but also, as Dryden notes, to "competing systems of value or moral spaces."[79] While readers are confronted with the individual deliberative processes of characters and their decisions, narratives also present throughout the entirety of a story a picture of characters confronted and discerning between competing wholistic worldviews and value systems. Once again, the reader is brought along for the journey and implicitly called to personally evaluate competing value systems. As such, narrative is a particularly helpful medium for learning this element of moral reasoning.

The second element highlighted by Nussbaum is the priority of particulars.[80] Flowing from the idea of incommensurable goods, practical reasoning is not as simple as applying a scientific system to particular situations. Instead, practical reasoning requires particular wisdom, involving informal reasoning, intuition, and learned experience applied to particular situations and decisions.[81] Rather than depending on an abstract system of norms, wisdom requires evaluation, value-judgments, and reasoning within particular situations, which is of course influenced by value systems but even more so by our learned experience, which develops over time our ability to apply reason to these situations.[82] Similar to Dryden's application to narrative on the first point, the priority of

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> Narratives swim in the tensions created by incommensurable goods. Much of the energy of narratives, especially those that incorporate real moral challenges for their characters, is derived from the tensions between competing goods or competing evaluations of the good life. . . . Narratives are an ideal medium for the sympathetic exploration of the competing pulls of incommensurable goods because they bring readers into the complex sphere of choice with attention to details that communicate psychological realism and the strengths of competing desires attached to competing goods, each promising an avenue to the good life particularly conceived. (Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 112–13)

[79] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 112–13.

[80] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 66–75.

[81] Nussbaum writes, "Aristotle's defense of the priority of 'perception,' together with his insistence that practical wisdom cannot be a systematic science concerned throughout with universal and general principles, is evidently a defense of the priority of concrete situational judgments of a more informal and intuitive kind to any such system." Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 66.

[82] Nussbaum describes the value of experience: "Experience is concrete and not exhaustively summarizable in a system of rules. Unlike mathematical wisdom it cannot be adequately encompassed in a

particulars finds helpful application within narratives. Because narratives do not normally offer explicit interpretations of characters or events, the reader is often required to understand particular situations that characters find themselves in and then personally evaluate moral reasoning. As Dryden writes,

> It is in [narratives'] power to place us in a particularized world that narratives give a context for our understanding of characters and participation with them in the choices that confront them. In this way narratives foster the skill of discernment (φρόνησις) tied to the perception of particulars. Narratives do not speak in generalities or principles. They operate through particulars that are arranged in the shape of a plot that puts characters in places of conflict, longing, and deliberation. While we could reduce narratives down to their "morals," this would strip the narratives of their proper function, which is not simply to teach us "principles" but to foster wisdom.[83]

As readers identify with characters, therefore, they in a sense begin to experience the particulars along with those characters and learn from their experience the sorts of virtues and moral reasoning required of them.

The third element of Aristotle's understanding is the central place of emotions within practical reasoning.[84] Nussbaum summarizes Aristotle's view at length:

> As for the emotions, Aristotle notoriously restores them to the central place in morality from which Plato had banished them. He holds that the truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses. Not only correct motivation and motivational feelings but also correct reactive or responsive feelings are constitutive of this person's virtue or goodness. If I do the just thing from the wrong motives or desires (not for its own sake but, say, for the sake of gain), that will not count as virtuous action. This much even Kant could grant. More striking, I must do the just thing without reluctance or inner emotional tension. If my right choices always require struggle, if I must all the time be overcoming powerful feelings that go against virtue, then I am less virtuous than the person whose emotions are in harmony with her actions. I am assessable for my passions as well as for my calculations; all are parts of practical rationality.[85]

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treatise. But it does offer guidance, and it does urge on us the recognition of repeated as well as unique features. Even if rules are not sufficient, they may be highly useful, frequently even necessary." Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 75.

[83] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 114.

[84] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 75–82.

[85] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 78.

For Aristotle, then, practical reasoning is wholistic, encompassing every part of the person. The centrality of emotion in a reader's response to narrative almost goes without saying. Dryden notes that narratives "engage readers emotionally in a story; in the development of attachments to particular characters, through some form of identification, readers are invited to enter into the space of their moral deliberations."[86] Readers not only learn to understand how to make value judgments and discern wisdom through particular situations among characters in narrative, but they learn even how to respond emotionally to these situations. As Dryden summarizes the Aristotelian understanding of practical reasoning, "So, discernment (φρόνησις) uses intellectual and affective perception of situational particulars to judge right actions among the claims of incommensurable goods."[87]

This understanding of narrative's particular value in presenting wisdom lays a foundation for *why* narrative serves as such a useful medium for virtue-formation, but the question remains *how* narratives practically seek virtue-formation within readers. For this question, Dryden provides a helpful taxonomy—three ways narratives communicate and instill morals or values within readers.[88] First, narratives seek virtue-formation through the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader.[89] The implied author is a textually derived construct that refers, according to Jeannine Brown, to "the author presupposed by the narrative itself."[90] Similarly, the implied reader is a textually derived construct that refers to the reader presupposed by the narrative itself.[91] Dryden describes

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[86] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 115.

[87] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 115.

[88] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 115–19.

[89] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 116–17.

[90] Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels as Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 14.

[91] Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 16.

the relationship between the two: "The real author creates the implied author, and the real readers relate to the story through the implied reader."[92] The real author, then, through a range of comments and literary devices, forms a relationship between the implied author and implied reader.

Dryden gives the examples of omniscience and irony. The implied author often is omniscient, knowing every aspect of the story and even understanding characters' inner motivations and desires. As the implied reader experiences this omniscience, they begin to trust the implied author more and more as the story progresses.[93] Irony similarly bolsters the relationship between the two as the omniscience of the implied author is shared with the implied reader while being withheld from the characters within the narrative. The author may use irony to draw connections between events in a narrative or to imply significance to events unknown to the story's characters. For example, in Matthew the implied author repeatedly comments on Jesus and events in his life fulfilling various Scripture. The omniscience of the implied author and the trust of the implied reader here fosters a relationship in which the implied reader is led to believe that Jesus actually *is* the fulfillment of these Scriptures. Dryden summarizes this relationship:

> The example of irony demonstrates how such devices form a bond between author and reader. The point of view of the author is normative for the reader, but this normativity is communicated in the context of relational trust and not as an act of coercion. In using irony the author creates a shared space for the author and reader to inhabit together. They share a secret knowledge unknown to the characters who live at the story level.[94]

This relationship of trust, then, allows the implied reader to come to trust the implied author's moral guidance as he communicates values through the narrative. The next two

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[92] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 116.

[93] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 116.

[94] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 117.

parts of Dryden’s taxonomy provide the two most prominent devices the implied author uses then to highlight and encourage virtue-formation.

The second part of Dryden’s taxonomy is that narratives seek virtue-formation through identification with characters within the narrative.[95] Character identification actually flows directly from the relationship between the implied author and implied reader because the implied author shapes the implied reader’s perception of certain characters, whether good, bad, or neutral.[96] As I have shown previously in this chapter, imitation of the main character is one of the central aims of many Greco-Roman biographies, so clearly the subject is the predominant character with which the reader will come to identify himself. As the reader observes the situations the main character finds himself in, the decisions with which he is confronted, and his interactions with other characters, he is forced to compare his own moral deliberation and thought processes with that of the main character. Marshall Gregory describes this process as “secondhand experience”: “Stories assist the human dilemma of making choices by allowing us to negotiate *vicariously* among different lines of action and thought—and to take a good

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[95] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 117–18.

[96] Dryden explains the progression from the relationship between the implied author and implied reader to character identification:

> If we change the ironic scene slightly, we can see another way in which the author directs the responses, experiences, and judgments of the reader. We can add to our ironic scene a single character who shares the same knowledge as the author and reader, and then all three together understand the scene as ironic. This character understands events unfolding before her to have a different significance from all the other characters in the story, but in a way shared with the author and reader. What this establishes is a connection, created by the author, between the reader and this character. This connection involves an act of sympathetic identification. The reader shares the experience of this solitary knowledgeable character and identifies with her position vis-à-vis the other characters in the narrative who do not recognize the ironic significance of what has taken place. This is an example of *identification*, a complex but automatic mode in which readers engage with narratives. (Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 117)

See also Allan Thomas Loder’s recent dissertation, in which he argues that Matthew uses characterization as a rhetorical device in order to persuade his readers toward a positive acceptance of Jesus. Allan Thomas Loder, “Responses to the Messianic Claim: Characterization as Rhetorical Device in the Gospel of Matthew” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023).

long look at possible concrete consequences—across a wider scope of possibilities than would even be possible on the basis of firsthand experience alone."[97]

While the focus of identification and imitation often falls on the main character in Greco-Roman biography, secondary characters, nevertheless, provide further opportunities for reflection and identification (and even at times imitation), providing reinforcement of the main character's virtues through both secondary characters' own corresponding virtues and contrasting vices.[98] Pushing against the typical taxonomy of characters in primitive stories as flat, static, and opaque,[99] Cornelis Bennema's method of characterization includes analysis, classification, and evaluation.[100] Building upon the work of Josef Ewen,[101] Bennema analyzes characters by three continua of characterization: complexity, development, and penetration into the inner life.[102] He then

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[97] Marshall W. Gregory, *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 62.

[98] See, for example, my discussion of Plutarch's *Cat. Min.* in chap. 5. See also Matheiu de Bakker's discussion of characterization in Herodotus's *Histories*, in which Herodotus characterizes both explicitly through authorial assessment and implicitly through narrative presentation of characters' words and deeds. Matheiu de Bakker, "Herodotus on Being 'Good': Characterization and Explanation," in Ash, Mossman, and Titchener, *Fame and Infamy*, 54–57.

[99] For example, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 164.

[100] Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). Before arriving at the model for characterization, Bennema begins his theory by understanding the text and context where the characters exist. This includes two tasks: (1) clarifying the nature of the narrative material and the implications for this approach to character; and (2) determining the kind of reader assumed and the sources to which the assumed reader had access. The first task Bennema concludes with his *historical narrative criticism*, which "takes a text-centered approach but examines aspects of the world outside or 'behind' the text if the text invites us to do so" (67). For his second task, Bennema argues for a *plausible historically informed modern reader*, who has "a good (but not exhaustive) knowledge of the first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman world" and "whose knowledge of a particular character comes primarily from the narrative he is reading but possibly also from other sources" (68–69).

[101] Josef Ewen, "The Theory of Character in Narrative Fiction," *Hasifrut* 2 (1971): 1–30; Ewen, *Character in Narrative* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1980).

[102] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 46. Complexity refers to a character's ability to exhibit a range of traits, including cognitive, behavioral, and emotional qualities. A character may exhibit one or multiple traits, and the character's complexity falls within a continuum compared with other characters within the narrative. Development refers to the progress or change that occurs within a character during a narrative and ranges from no development (what many would call a "flat" character) to some development to dramatic development (what many would call a "round" character). Penetration refers to the reader's ability to glimpse the innerworkings of a character's mind or heart. A character may range from being completely opaque to being fully open through narration or discourse about their inner emotions and

uses these three continua to plot the resulting character on "*an aggregate continuum of degree of characterization* as (i) an agent, actant, or walk-on; (ii) a type, stock, or flat character; (iii) a character with personality; or (iv) an individual or person."[103] Finally, he evaluates this characterization in relation to point of view and plot and then seeks to understand the character's representative value for today.[104]

In a later article, Bennema more explicitly uses the language of virtue ethics to describe John's moral development: "John models virtue ethics through the characters in his narrative, where various Johannine characters exemplify aspects of virtuous thinking and behavior for John's audience to emulate."[105] Bennema's model of characterization—actively acknowledging the complexity and development of characters while situating them within their narrative arc—allows for a more wholistic relationship between the reader and virtue-formation. More typical models of characterization promote a simplistic character identification, in which the narrative either encourages or discourages identification with and thus emulation of a certain character. In this more nuanced model, the reader is not simply confronted with characters whom he may identify with and emulate or distance himself from and not emulate. Instead, through the narrative and its characters, the reader begins to perceive a world of moral possibility in which characters' decisions, complexity, development, and inner thoughts create a tapestry of possibility which serves as a narrative framework for moral decision-making.

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thoughts. For each of these three categories, Bennema describes characters as having none (0), little (-), some (+), or much (++) of them relative to other characters. Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 73–78.

[103] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 86.

[104] Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 90.

[105] Cornelis Bennema, "Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writing," in Brown and Skinner, *Johannine Ethics*, 275. See also Cornelis Bennema, "Virtue Ethics in the Gospel of John: The Johannine Characters as Moral Agents," in *Rediscovering John: Essays on the Fourth Gospel in Honor of Frédéric Manns*, ed. L. Daniel Chrupcala, SBFA 80 (Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2013), 167–81.

The whole process of identification, furthermore, is directed by the author. As Dryden explains,

> This whole process is guided by the author, who directs the reader's evaluation of and identification with particular characters. The author creates both the identification with as well as the distance between the reader and the character, because both are necessary for an engaged process that results in self-awareness and realigning of the convictions and attachments of the reader.[106]

Guided by the author, the reader experiences secondhand the moral deliberations and decisions of the main character, supported by the matching virtue or contrasting vice of secondary characters throughout. Through this secondhand experience, then, the reader evaluates and identifies with certain characters, developing a sense of virtue that should be pursued based on what they have learned from the characters in the narrative.[107]

The third part of Dryden's taxonomy is that narratives seek virtue-formation through the ways they shape their plots.[108] Closely related to character identification, plot broadens the scope of ethical reflection as the reader not only experiences the situations and choices of the characters but sees how they fit into the overall trajectory of the narrative whole. As Gregory writes, "The plot shows how people in stories became the persons they turn out to be, and our participation in that movement from point A to point B and beyond involves us in assuming beliefs, having feelings, and making judgments that, once we have made them, exert pressure on the ethical trajectory of our lives."[109] This "ethical trajectory" Dryden describes in terms of a narrative's "teleology," the conclusion toward which the narrative is constantly moving.[110] This wholistic view of a

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[106] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 118.

[107] This process of identification can at times, of course, run outside the bounds of the author's intention. Some readers may identify, for example, with characters who exemplify vice rather than virtue. The goal, however, of the author's characterization and *intended* identification for the reader is virtue-formation.

[108] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 118–19.

[109] Gregory, *Shaped by Stories*, 99.

[110] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 118.

character's experience within a narrative helps readers zoom out in their own lives and consider choices with a similarly wholistic view, even though they cannot see the entire story laid out.

As Dryden explains further,

> Narrative plots provide a normative shape to ethical deliberation, adding a degree of teleological narrative unity to the unpredictability of our experience of life. This renders actions intelligible, not only as isolated incidents but as connected events that give an ethical trajectory within which moral choices can be understood and evaluated. This gives a narrative context that not only measures individual actions according to principles of conformity to rules or laws but conformity to a characteristic shape of a life directed at a goal. In this way, narratives have a power to inform and contextualize both identity and considered moral action.[111]

The teleological nature of narrative, then, moves beyond simply providing wisdom in moral deliberation and helps a reader to contextualize and form moral identity. In other words, as the reader encounters the characters' experience in the narrative and the trajectory of their story, the reader is pushed to consider his own identity within his own story. As the reader does this, the question he may have been asking of a particular scene (how did this character respond or how did he or she come to this decision?) grows into a question he may ask of the entire story (who has this character become?). The reader then begins to ask this question of his own life, creating more room for reflection and virtue-formation. Rather than simply learning *how to act*, the reader learns *what type of person to become*.

Narratives, then, provide a unique opportunity for readers to pursue virtue-formation. Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values serves as a helpful starting point in understanding the ways that the narrative of Matthew's Gospel seeks to form virtue within its readers. The relationship between the implied author and implied reader, character identification, and plot all work together to communicate a story by which the reader begins to evaluate his own life and pursue

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[111] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 119.

greater virtue. As Gregory writes, “When we assent to a story’s demands—when we feel as it asks us to feel, when we believe as it asks us to believe, and when we judge as it asks us to judge—what happens to us is that we take another step in becoming the persons that we turn out to be.”[112] Dryden’s taxonomy, therefore, will serve as the lens through which I consider Matthew’s narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Dryden’s three-part taxonomy of narrative’s communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended by Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew’s Gospel. First, I traced the theme of virtue-formation in research on the genre of Greco-Roman biography. Second, I discussed the value of narrative criticism in understanding virtue-formation in Greco-Roman biography and evaluated Dryden’s three-part taxonomy of narrative’s communication of values, ultimately adopting it as my method for understanding how Matthew’s Gospel in particular seeks virtue-formation within its readers. In the following chapter, I will narrow in more specifically on Matthew’s Gospel, showing that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of its readers as disciples of Jesus.

[112] Gregory, *Shaped by Stories*, 67. Similarly, Richard Eldridge writes, “We can attain moral consciousness only as we see our personhood and its demands reflected to us in the lives of others that are recounted to us in narrative art, while our collective responses themselves determine narrative art’s relevant and proper exemplars.” Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism, and Self-Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 60.

CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLESHIP AND VIRTUE-FORMATION IN MATTHEW

Matthew's narrative at large portrays particular interest both in discipleship in general, and more narrowly, in the formation of its readers as disciples.[1] Matthew's emphatic use of μαθητὴς (72x), along with his use of μανθάνω (3x) and μαθητεύω (3x), points to a particular interest in the concept.[2] Robert Kinney, building upon Michael Wilkins's analysis of Matthew's redaction of his sources, shows that Matthew also bolsters this emphasis on discipleship through editorial work, regularly inserting the concept or clarifying its ambiguous uses in sources in order to further emphasize discipleship.[3] Furthermore, Matthew's use of teaching language—διδάσκαλος (12x), διδαχή (3x), διδασκαλία (1x), διδάσκω (14x), and καθηγητής (2x)—similarly highlights his focus on discipleship. Despite Matthew's understanding of teaching being perhaps less clear than that of discipleship, his use of the vocabulary, mostly to refer to Jesus and his

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[1] Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciples and Discipleship," in *DJG*, 208.

[2] Mark uses the term 46x and Luke 37x. Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, WUNT 414 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 216–20.

[3] Kinney concludes,

> To summarize, Matthew's use of μαθητὴς and other discipleship vocabulary is characterized by two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, he wants to include the term frequently. He adopts it from his Markan and Q sources about twice as often as he omits it. He also inserts the term into his source materials frequently. His uses include both routine clarifications where he apparently felt his sources were ambiguous, as well as more sophisticated editing in order to reshape or revise his sources with the aim of emphasizing the concept of discipleship and highlighting the disciples' understanding. On the other hand, Matthew appears to be a somewhat parsimonious editor, frequently summarizing or removing significant amounts of his source material. The vast majority of his comparatively few omissions of μαθητὴς may be categorized as insignificant omissions within the context of a simple economizing of his sources. That is, from a redaction critical perspective, Matthew has systematically adapted his sources to focus on discipleship while clearing the ground of ambiguous or superfluous references that may have only served to dilute his focus. (Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 236–37)

own teaching, further highlights Matthew's interest in the master-discipleship relationship.[4] While the practice of teaching is not necessarily exclusive to a master-disciple relationship in the ancient world, the two concepts do often go hand-in-hand.[5]

Yet Matthew's interest in discipleship moves beyond the goal of simply *portraying* discipleship to the goal of *forming* disciples. Wilkins understands Jesus's teaching on discipleship, the disciples' frequent role as audience to Jesus's teaching, the pedagogical structure of the Gospel, and the call of the Great Commission all to point toward Matthew's interest in not only *portraying* discipleship, but of actually *forming* disciples.[6] Several scholars similarly see Matthew's Gospel serving as a call to and guide for discipleship in some sense. Ulrich Luz understands the readers themselves to be disciples of Jesus: "'Disciple' (μαθητής), in contrast to 'apostle' (ἀποστολος), is a term that permits the readers to identify with them. The readers are also disciples. . . . It is not

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[4] Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 237–41. Kinney concludes,

> To summarize, Matthew's use of διδάσκω and other teaching vocabulary is largely less peculiar than his use of discipleship vocabulary, though there are particular terms—such as διδάσκαλος and καθηγητής—which imply a particular emphasis. Nevertheless, beyond Matthew's apparent focus on *teaching* vocabulary, the context of this concept is, again, somewhat less clear than that of discipleship. While the spectrum and frequency of this vocabulary is relatively similar between Jewish and Greco-Roman sources, where the two diverge, Matthew's use of the terminology points to the Greco-Roman side of the spectrum. (Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 250)

See also John Yueh-Han Yieh's *One Teacher*, which highlights Matthew's portrayal of Jesus's distinct role as teacher and its similarities with and differences from the Teacher of Righteousness of the Qumran community and Epictetus. John Yueh-Han Yieh, *One Teacher: Jesus' Teaching Role in Matthew's Gospel*, BZNW 124 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

[5] For example, in Xenophon's *Mem.* I.2.3, he writes, "To be sure he never professed to teach this [διδάσκαλος εἶναι τούτου], but by letting his own light shine, he led his disciples [τοὺς συνδιατρίβοντας] to hope that through imitation [μιμουμένους] of him they would develop likewise" (Marchant and Todd, LCL). While Xenophon refers to the young people as συνδιατρίβοντας rather than μαθητὰς, the concept of a master-disciple relationship remains quite similar despite certain distinctions between the two concepts.

[6] Wilkins describes four ways that Matthew's Gospel proves itself to be in some sense a manual on discipleship: "(1) the major discourses are directed at least in part to the disciples (Mt 5:1–2; 10:1–2; 13:10; 18:1; 23:1–3); (2) most of the sayings directed to the disciples are in fact teaching on discipleship; (3) the disciples are portrayed primarily in a positive yet realistic light; and (4) the disciples are called, trained and commissioned to carry out their climactic mandate to 'make disciples' (Mt 28:19)." Wilkins, "Disciples and Discipleship," 208. Wilkins's understanding the Matthean portrayal of the disciples as "positive yet realistic" is in contrast to Brown, who understands Matthew's portrayal as "fairly consistent and negative," primarily in terms of their misunderstanding of Jesus's identity and mission and their "little faith." Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, AcBib 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 119–20. I agree more with Wilkins's assessment, as will become clear in my analysis in the following chapters.

only the earlier disciples who follow Jesus but also the readers of the Gospel."[7] Terence Donaldson also writes, "So by telling the story of the disciples in their experience with Jesus, Matthew is, in fact, also guiding his readers to an understanding of what discipleship will mean for them."[8]

In chapters 4–6, I analyze the type of virtue-formation that Matthew seeks for his readers, but in this chapter, I argue at a more foundational level that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus. First, I provide a brief survey of research on Matthean discipleship. Second, I discuss discipleship and moral development in the ancient world with examples of moral development within discipleship from Dio Chrysostom, Philo, and Josephus. Third, I provide an overview of moral development in Matthew's narrative. Fourth, I give a brief history of research on virtue ethics in New Testament and Matthean studies. Fifth, I define virtue-formation and show that the moral development that Matthew seeks in its readers is best described as virtue-formation.

Discipleship and Matthew's Gospel

A Brief Survey of Research on Matthean Discipleship

The conversation surrounding discipleship in the New Testament was prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially with the advent of redaction criticism and Günther Bornkamm's essay "The Stilling of the Storm in

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[7] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 1:162.

[8] Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Reader—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker, MNTS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 30. Similarly, Brown writes first in a commentary and later quoting herself in an article, "Matthew's Gospel envisions and shapes its reader toward faith and obedience; they are to be true follows of Jesus and his teachings." Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew*, TTNTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 1; Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel," in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 10.

Matthew" in the mid-twentieth century.[9] Since then, there has been a steady flow of studies on discipleship in Matthew.[10] These studies often revolve around either the function of the disciples within Matthew, their function in relation to the Matthean community, or their function in relation to the concept of discipleship itself.[11] My survey will focus primarily on the latter because my thesis centers upon Matthew's portrayal of discipleship as a whole.[12]

One of the most significant works on discipleship within Matthew in the past forty years is Wilkins's *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*.[13] Wilkins provides the most thorough survey of the concept of discipleship (μαθητής) within the Greco-Roman and Jewish world, concluding that by the time of Jesus, μαθητής progressed from indicating "learners" to "adherents," with the exact nature of the adherence defined by each individual master-disciple relationship.[14] In Matthew, Wilkins finds the adherence indicated by discipleship to be centered upon Jesus's own teaching, and the disciples themselves function as a combination of positive, negative, and mixed

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[9] Günther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, trans. Scott Percy, NTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 52–57.

[10] For Brown's thorough survey up to 2002, on which I rely, see Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 13–29.

[11] Brown categorizes these works according to Kari Syreeni's three-tiered conceptual model: those focused on the textual world (the disciples' function within Matthew), the concrete world (the disciples' function in relation to the Matthean community), and the symbolic world (the disciples' function in relation to the concept of discipleship itself). Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 13; Kari Syreeni, "Separation and Identity: Aspects of the Symbolic World of Matt 6:1–18," *NTS* 40 (1994): 523.

[12] Luz, for example, understands the disciples' own hearing and understanding of Jesus's teaching to be "the presupposition for the definition of discipleship at Matt 12:50 as doing the will of God." Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 123. Similarly, Mark Sheridan finds the understanding of the disciples to be an example for Christians (i.e., an example of discipleship). Mark Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke," *BTB* 3, no. 3 (1973): 255.

[13] Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

[14] Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 217.

examples for the church, of discipleship and disciple-making.[15] More recently, Kinney builds upon Wilkins's work to analyze both discipleship and teaching language in the ancient world and in Matthew's Gospel.[16]

Ben Cooper argues in *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew* that Matthew provokes in its readers a kind of theocentric commitment that he describes as incorporated servanthood, and he sees this incorporated servanthood as describing Matthean discipleship.[17] He summarizes, "To be committed to God is to be a disciple of Jesus, incorporated into the divine Servant program for the world."[18] The response to which Matthew calls his readers is comprised of three stages or levels: (1) "to *believe* the state of affairs claimed in the message of the Gospel (a propositional belief)," (2) to humbly trust Jesus with "a childlike, Christocentric dependency," and (3) "to be incorporated into the Servant program for the nations, participating in it actively."[19] Key to Cooper's understanding is the framework of God's "Servant program." God has sent Jesus with a "particular mandate as Servant of the Lord" (cf. Isa 40:2; 53:5, 11–12), and Matthew's readers are called to follow Jesus "in

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[15] Wilkins writes,

> With both the moment of the historical disciples and the moment of the church before the reader, one is able to see that Matthew's portrait of the disciples both passes on the tradition about the Twelve, and at the same time presents an example of discipleship for his church. The disciples are a positive example of what Matthew expects from his church, a negative example of warning, and a mixed group who are able to overcome their lack through the teaching of Jesus. The historical disciples become a means of encouragement, warning, and instruction as examples. (Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 171–72)

[16] See Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*.

[17] Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew*, LNTS 490 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). Henry Pattarumadathil and Vaitusi Nofoaiga also offer valuable majority world perspectives on discipleship in Matthew's Gospel. Pattarumadathil argues that Matthean discipleship refers to a process of becoming children of God. Henry Pattarumadathil, *Your Father in Heaven: Discipleship in Matthew as a Process of Becoming Children of God*, AnBib 172 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2007). Most recently, Nofoaiga seeks to understand Matthean discipleship through the lens of his Samoan context, arguing that Matthean discipleship should be understood and applied through local methods. Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, IVBS 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017).

[18] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 252.

[19] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 252–53.

a pattern that is derivative of Jesus' own Servant ministry."[20] He goes on, "This is both following what he prescribes in terms of conduct that brings light to the nations and following the pattern of his kingdom proclamation."[21] Clearly, there is much affinity between Cooper's understanding of discipleship and my own. The concepts of righteousness, faith, and mercy prove central in both of our works, with righteousness for Cooper describing "active participation in the Servant program of the Lord."[22] My thesis, however, focuses on moral development and virtue-formation more specifically as central to discipleship, whereas Cooper focuses more on the reader's overall response to Matthew's Gospel in discipleship. As such, Cooper offers helpful insight that has informed my own work and understanding of Matthean discipleship.

Jeannine Brown's works on discipleship provide a clear narrative approach to discipleship in Matthew. The first is *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, in which she argues that the disciples generally misunderstand Jesus's mission and message of the kingdom.[23] Because of this negative characterization, Brown argues that the disciples do not reflect the Matthean community, nor do they provide "the index of Matthean discipleship."[24] Instead, they should be understood as "one part of the larger composite of Matthean discipleship."[25]

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[20] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 250, 253.

[21] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 253.

[22] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 253.

[23] She writes, "Although they confess Jesus to be Messiah and understand certain aspects of his teaching, the disciples in Matthew consistently *misunderstand* Jesus' mission (and therefore their own as well) and his message of the kingdom (and consequently their place in it)." Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 36.

[24] Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 37.

[25] She writes, "The portrayal of the disciples (in both their positive and negative qualities) functions as just one part of the larger composite of Matthean discipleship, which includes Matthew's use of other characters as examples of discipleship and Jesus himself as a model for it." Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 37. Brown builds off the work of Jack Kingsbury and David Howell, who both similarly find Matthew's portrayal of the disciples as part of his larger presentation of discipleship. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 13–17; David B. Howell,

More recently, Brown's article "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel" provides a narrative-critical approach to the concept of discipleship as a whole within Matthew.[26] For Brown, discipleship is ultimately a covenantal relationship that the reader learns to pursue by seeing characters within Matthew as either examples or foils and through metaphors, images, and values expressed.[27] Discipleship functions both vertically—between Jesus and disciples—and horizontally—between disciples and others, and at the center of the disciple's relationship to others are the three Torah values—justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt 23:23).[28]

Like Cooper, there are many similarities between Brown's work and my own. We both understand Matthean discipleship primarily through the lens of narrative criticism, emphasizing the ways Matthew utilizes his narrative in order to form his reader. We both also focus on righteousness, faith, and mercy as central to Matthean discipleship. My work distinguishes itself from Brown's in several ways, however. First, while Brown mentions "virtues" in passing, Brown does not articulate the moral development that Matthew intends for his reader as virtue-formation in particular, whereas I understand virtue as the primary lens for understanding Matthean moral development.[29] Second, Brown and I have fairly distinct understandings of several of the Matthean concepts that comprise discipleship.[30] Brown's work represents one of the most

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Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel, JSNTSup 42 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1990), 233–34.

[26] Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty." Brown's article builds off much of her work in her recent commentary: Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

[27] Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 25–26.

[28] Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 14–25.

[29] Brown writes, "To frame this final set of reflections on Matthean discipleship, we will focus on the cluster of values or virtues addressed in Matthew 23:23, which Jesus refers to as the 'weightier matters of the law' and delineates as 'justice and mercy and loyalty' (κρίσις, ἔλεος, and πίστις)." Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 22.

[30] See in particular my discussions of righteousness (chap. 4) and faith (chap. 5) below.

wholistic explorations of the concept of discipleship within Matthew from a narrative-critical perspective, and much of my own work builds off of her foundation.

Moral Development in Discipleship in the Ancient World

Before analyzing Matthean discipleship, I will first give a brief overview of discipleship in the ancient world and its relationship to moral development. While μαθητὴς is common in the Gospels, it does not occur in the epistles or Revelation.[31] Neither is the term itself or its Hebrew equivalent תַּלְמִיד common in the Septuagint, Pseudepigrapha, or the Dead Sea Scrolls.[32] Despite this infrequent usage in Jewish literature,[33] Wilkins nevertheless sees the *concept* of discipleship as present across several examples of Jewish literature.[34] Kinney, on the other hand, understands this

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[31] It occurs 46x in Mark, 37x in Luke, and 72x in Matthew. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 231.

[32] Kinney largely follows Wilkins's research on this point. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 232; Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 43–125.

[33] Μαθητὴς does occur in Philo and Josephus each around fifteen times, but their usage mostly parallels Hellenistic usage. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 232n54.

[34] In the Hebrew Bible, there is not an abundance of disciple terminology. While Wilkins shows that there are a handful of occurrences where the disciple concept is expressed by תַּלְמִיד or לִמּוּד (1 Chr 25:8; Isa 8:16; 50:4; 54:13), the master-disciple relationship is primarily shown in the Hebrew Bible implicitly rather than through technical language. Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 89–90. For example, the prophets and scribes demonstrate various characteristics of master-disciple relationships. Groups of prophets seem to organize themselves around Samuel as a sort of "mentor" over them (1 Sam 10:5–10; 19:20–24), and there is a similar relationship between the "sons of the prophets" and Elisha (1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1). Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 53–56. Wilkins also notes the importance of the wisdom tradition:

> "Wisdom" requires master-disciple relationships for its acquisition and use, but the types of relationship vary in form and function. Master-disciple relationships behind the perpetuation and dissemination of the wisdom tradition would be found in informal father-son relationships, in training of elders for making judicial decisions in the city gate, in the wisdom orientation of advisers in the court, and within certain groups who specialized in wisdom and were involved with the recording of wisdom sayings. Those specializing in wisdom (e.g., elders and court advisers) would help regulate and finetune the wisdom which was originally disseminated throughout the cultural milieu by means of family/clan education and contextualization. (Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 91)

Despite a lack of technical master-disciple terminology in the Hebrew Bible, then, these relationships existed in both certain prophetic schools and more broadly in the wisdom tradition in general. During the Second Temple period, μαθητής and תַּלְמִיד become nearly equivalent terms, according to Wilkins. Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 125. Philo, for example, uses μαθητής to refer generally to a "learner" (e.g., *Spec. Laws* II 227.4, IV 140.3; *Worse* 134.7) but also to one who is a disciple of God (e.g., *Sacrifices* 7.4; *Posterity* 132.2; 147.1). Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 100–102. Josephus, writing around the same time as much of the New Testament, uses μαθητής mostly in its general sense, as a follower within a

infrequent usage as justification for "the Classical Greek and Hellenistic literature [providing] a much richer backdrop to Matthew's use of μαθητὴς."[35] While I largely agree with Wilkins's assessment of the evidence for the *concept* of discipleship being present across examples of Jewish literature, I also agree with Kinney that it is perhaps most enriching to understand Matthew's use of μαθητὴς within its Classical and Hellenistic context.[36]

Building upon the work of both Wilkins's monograph and Karl Heinrich Rengstorf's *TDNT* entry, Kinney understands three primary categories of usage for μαθητὴς: the general use of "learner"; the technical use of "student/pupil"; and the broad use of "adherent."[37] Wilkins himself concludes that by the time of Jesus discipleship evoked a kind of adherency to a teacher or movement most clearly defined by that individual teacher or movement.[38] Because of the flexible nature of his definition of

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master-disciple relationship, with the particular nuances of "following" determined by the master (e.g., *Ant.* 1.200; 6.84; 17.337; *Ag. Ap.* 2.295). See Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 112–14.

[35] Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 232.

[36] Dean Wenthe analyzes the rabbi-discipleship relationship in Jewish literature and helpfully notes the correspondence between this Jewish relational dynamic and Jesus's own relationship with his disciples: "The view that the Rabbi or teacher was to embody his teaching, and then be imitated by his disciples, also informs our understanding of Jesus and the disciples in their social milieu and setting." Dean O. Wenthe, "The Social Configuration of the Rabbi-Disciple Relationship: Evidence and Implications for First Century Palestine," in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. Peter W. Flint, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam, VTSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 173.

[37] Kinney outlines these three categories:

> In the article Rengstorf surveys Classical and Hellenistic literature and finds varying degrees of generality. As such, we may begin to consider three somewhat open categories: 1) the most general sense of the terms in which they are frequently used to describe someone who is learning; 2) a more technical sense of the terms in which they are used to describe a student of a particular person . . . and 3) a broad sense of the term in which the student is substantially removed in time or relationship from the *master*, and so the discipleship relationship is characterized by mimesis. Also important across these categories is the increasingly widespread use of the vocabulary in specifically philosophical and educational situations (during the Classical and Hellenistic periods), as well as the varying degrees to which the vocabulary is used to connote religious education and adherence. (Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 232–36; K. H. Rengstorf, "μανθάνω, καταμανθάνω, μαθητής, συμμαθητής, μαθήτρια, μαθητεύω," in *TDNT*, 4:390–461)

[38] As Wilkins concludes more thoroughly:

> They [μαθητής and תַּלְמִיד] were popular terms at the time of Jesus to designate a follower who was vitally committed to a teacher/leader and/or movement. The terms themselves did not determine the type of discipleship; the type of discipleship was determined by the type of leader or movement or teaching to which the disciple was committed. The types of discipleship covered the spectrum from

discipleship, he tends not to focus on common individual components of discipleship. For Wilkins, these components of discipleship are generally defined by the master within each master-disciple relationship. Despite my overall agreement with Wilkins's conclusion, moral development, as one aspect of discipleship, appears at times within examples of discipleship across a wide range of contexts in the ancient world, which are relevant as background to Matthew's Gospel.[39] A handful of examples supports this observation.[40]

First, Dio Chrysostom's discourse recorded in *Hom. Socr.* 4.5 portrays Dio trying to convince a skeptical student that Socrates was, indeed, a μαθητὴς of Homer, despite never having met him.[41] Despite Dio's clear desire to showcase his cleverness in the discourse, the conversation nevertheless provides a helpful discussion of the nature of imitation within discipleship:

> *Interlocutor*. Since you make it evident that on general grounds you are an admirer of Socrates and also that you are filled with wonder at the man as revealed in his words, you can tell me of which among the sages he was a pupil [μαθητὴς]. . . . But while we have heard that Socrates as a boy studied the calling of his father, be so good as to tell us clearly who was his teacher in the wisdom which has proved so helpful and noble.

> philosophical (Philo) to technical (scribes) to sectarian (Pharisees) to revolutionary (Zealots and Menahem) to eschatological (John the Baptist). The terms were general enough to be used for all of the above. (Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 125)

Wilkins later summarizes his research and analyzes all four Gospels in Wilkins, "Disciples and Discipleship." Paul Trebilco largely follows Wilkins's understanding in his chapter on μαθητής in Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[39] I am not arguing here that the following texts provide a representative sample of the author's overall view of discipleship and virtue-formation. Rather, I am simply showing that virtue-formation, at times, *does appear* in literature as one aspect of the master-disciple relationship.

[40] The following examples come from Wilkins's in-depth analysis, in which he does not comment extensively on virtue-formation. Further examples also from Wilkins, but not discussed here, include Plato, *Prot.* 323.D–324.A; 325.C–327.D; Xenophon, *Mem.* I.2.1–3; I.2.17–27; and Josephus, *Ant.* 1.200; 17.337; *Ag. Ap.* 2.295.

[41] For an introduction to Dio Chrysostom, also known as Dio of Prusa, see M. B. Trapp, "Dio of Prusa," in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 2nd ed., Oxford Companions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 236–40. David Capes briefly discusses this text with similar implications for Gospels studies. David B. Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and the Gospel Genre*," *BBR* 13, no. 1 (2003): 4.

> *Dio*. Why, this is plain, I imagine, to many people, provided they are familiar with both men, namely, that Socrates is in truth a pupil [μαθητὴς] of Homer, and not of Archelaüs, as some say.
>
> *Int.* And how can it possibly be said that the man who neither met Homer nor ever saw him, but lived so many years later, was a pupil [μαθητήν] of Homer?
>
> *Dio*. What of it? Supposing a man lived in Homer's day but had heard none of the poetry of Homer, or, if he had heard, had given none of it his attention, shall we be able to say he was a pupil [μαθητήν] of Homer?
>
> *Int.* By no means.
>
> *Dio*. Then it is not absurd that the man who neither met nor saw Homer and yet understood his poetry and became familiar with all his thought should be called a pupil [μαθητήν] of Homer; or will you go so far as to maintain that no one can be a zealous follower of anyone with whom he has never been associated?
>
> *Int.* Not I.
>
> *Dio*. Then, if a follower, he would also be a pupil [μαθητὴς]. For whoever really follows any one surely knows what that person was like, and by imitating his acts and words he tries as best he can to make himself like him. But that is precisely, it seems, what the pupil [μαθητὴς] does—by imitating his teacher and paying heed to him he tries to acquire his art. On the other hand, seeing people and associating with them has nothing to do with the process of learning. For instance, many persons not only see pipers but associate with and hear them every day, and yet they could not even blow on the pipes unless they associate with the pipers for professional ends and pay strict heed. However, if you shrink from calling Socrates a pupil [μαθητήν] of Homer, but would prefer to call him just a follower, it will make no difference to me. (Dio Chrysostom, *Hom. Socr.* 4.5 [Crosby, LCL])

This last paragraph is key to understanding Dio's point regarding what it means to be a μαθητὴς. The μαθητὴς learns through imitating his teacher, not simply by associating with him. For Dio, then, as long as the teacher has left some written record of his thought or practice, someone could become his μαθητὴς by learning to imitate him through his writings, just as he took Socrates to have done with Homer.[42]

As the discourse progresses, the student takes issue with the difference between the vocations of the two men—Homer as poet and Socrates as philosopher. Dio responds by outlining similarities between the two despite their different roles. The first of these similarities is their character:

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[42] As Kinney observes, "Importantly, the thing that connects the master and the disciple in these non-proximate relationships is mimesis." Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*, 236.

> *Dio*. First and foremost, [Socrates] resembles [Homer] in his character [τὸ ἦθος]; for neither of the two was boastful or brazen, as the most ignorant of the sophists are. For instance, Homer did not even deign to tell whence he came, or who were his parents, or what he himself was called. On the contrary, so far as he was concerned we should not even know the name of the man who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. As for Socrates, while he could not make a secret of his fatherland because of its greatness and because Athens was exceedingly famous and dominated the Greeks at that period, yet he never said anything boastful about himself or laid claim to any wisdom, and yet Apollo had solemnly declared that he was wisest among all Greeks and barbarians. And finally, Socrates did not even put his words into writing and himself bequeath them to posterity, and in this he outdid Homer. For just as we know the name of Homer by hearing it from others, so too we know the words of Socrates because others have left them to us. Thus both were exceedingly self-restrained and modest.
>
> Again, both Socrates and Homer alike scorned the acquisition of wealth. Besides, they both were devoted to the same ends and spoke about the same things, the one through the medium of his verse, the other in prose—human virtue and vice, actions wrong and actions right, truth and deceit, and how the masses have only opinions, while the wise have true knowledge. (Dio Chrysostom, *Hom. Socr.* 4.7–9 [Crosby, LCL])

For Dio, then, the distinction in vocation between Socrates and Homer makes no difference because their character is so similar. Socrates learned his humility, his repudiation of wealth, and even his interest in ethical discourse all from Homer. Socrates, despite never having met Homer, became his μαθητὴς by imitating Homer's character and practice by way of his literary works. At the core of his argument lies the assumption that if Socrates proves similar enough to Homer in character and thought, he may be proven to be Homer's μαθητὴς. Moral development, then, serves as one aspect of discipleship for Dio.

Second, Philo, in *On the Posterity of Cain*, discusses the meaning of the name of Cain and Abel's younger brother Seth (according to Philo, it means "watering [ποτισμός]") and its relationship to virtue.[43] Within this discussion he mentions Rebecca: "Rebecca is discovered watering her pupil [μαθητὴν] not with gradual progress, like Hagar, but with perfection [τελειότητι]" (Philo, *Posterity* 132 [Colson and Whitaker,

[43] For an introduction to Philo of Alexandria, see Torrey Seland, "Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction," in *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria*, ed. Torrey Seland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 12–18.

LCL]). At this point, Rebecca is the teacher and the servant is the μαθητὴς, but as Philo continues, Rebecca shifts into the role of μαθητὴς, the source of her learning becoming clear:

> Rebecca, it says, went down to the spring to fill her pitcher, and came up again. For whence is it likely that a mind thirsting for sound sense should be filled save from the wisdom of God, that never-failing spring, its descent to which is an ascent in accordance with some innate characteristic of a true learner [σπουδαίου μαθητοῦ]? For the teaching of virtue [ὁ ἀρετῆς ἐκδεξάμενος] awaits those who come down from empty self-conceit, and taking them in its arms carries them to the heights with fair fame. . . . All she needs is just a pitcher, which is a figure of a vessel containing the ruling faculty as it pours forth like water its copious streams. Whether this faculty be brain or heart, we will leave experts in these matters to discuss. The keen scholar on seeing that from wisdom, that Divine spring, she has drawn knowledge in its various forms, runs towards her, and, when he meets her, beseeches her to satisfy his thirst for instruction. (Philo, *Posterity* 136–38 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

As teacher of the servant, Rebecca receives her wisdom directly from God. She has become the μαθητὴς of God himself. By emptying herself of any kind of "self-conceit," she is able to receive the teaching of virtue, which she then passes on to the servant.

Shortly after, Philo continues to discuss Rebecca's role as teacher of virtue:

> Rebecca is therefore to be commended for following the ordinances of the Father (of all) and letting down from a higher position the vessel which contains wisdom, called the pitcher, on to her arm, and for holding out to the learner [τῷ μαθητῇ] the teaching which he is able to receive. . . . When she saw how readily receptive of virtue [ἀρετῆς] the servant's nature was, she emptied all the contents of her pitcher into the drinking-trough, that is to say, she poured all the teacher's knowledge into the soul of the learner [τοῦ μανθάνοντος]. For, whereas sophists, impelled at once by mercenary motives and by a grudging spirit, stunt the natures of their pupils by withholding much that they ought to tell them, carefully reserving for themselves against another day the opportunity of making money; virtue [ἀρετὴ] is an ungrudging thing, fond of making gifts, never hesitating to do good, as the saying is, with hand and foot and all her might. Well, after pouring forth all that she knew into her pupil's understanding as into a receptacle, she comes again to the well to draw, to the ever-flowing wisdom of God, that her pupil may, by means of memory, fix firmly what he has learned, and drink in draughts of knowledge of yet other fresh subjects; for the wealth of the wisdom of God is unbounded and puts forth new shoots after the old ones, so as never to leave off renewing its youth and reaching its prime. (Philo, *Posterity* 146–51 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

In this particular passage for Philo, then, Rebecca represents the nexus of virtuous learning.[44] As a μαθητὴς of God himself, she draws upon the wisdom of God, yet as a teacher, she imparts this wisdom to her own μαθητὴς in order that he might learn true virtue.[45] In contrast to the sophists, who leave their teaching of virtue incomplete so that they can keep grifting money from their students, the ideal master, like Rebecca, teaches his or her students the fullness of virtue, wisdom drawn directly from the fount—God himself. Moral development, therefore, serves as one aspect of the master-disciple relationship in this instance, and in his particular Jewish perspective, the master even channels God's own wisdom as he teaches virtue to his disciples.

Third, three examples in Josephus's works similarly illustrate moral development as one aspect of discipleship. In his discussion of Lot's treatment of the people in Sodom in *Jewish Antiquities*, he writes, "He was very kindly to strangers and had learnt the lesson of Abraham's liberality [λίαν γὰρ ἦν περὶ τοῦς ξένους φιλάνθρωπος καὶ μαθητὴς τῆς Ἀβράμου χρηστότητος]" (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.200 [Thackeray, LCL]). While here Josephus describes Lot's positive discipleship of Abraham's goodness, he later describes the more negative discipleship of a young Jewish man who tries to deceive Caesar by impersonating the late Alexander, son of Herod. He was helped by a Jewish man who knew the court of the Emperor well and became the Alexander impersonator's "mentor in such wicked arts [τοιαύτης κακίας διδάσκαλον]" (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.326 [Marcus and Wikgren, LCL]).

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[44] One should not overread this correlation as Philo's sole representation of virtue, as several characters throughout his works allegorize virtue at various times (e.g., Sarah in *Prelim. Studies* 11–12). Ellen Birnbaum, "Philo's Relevance for the Study of Jews and Judaism in Antiquity," in Seland, *Reading Philo*, 117–18. Peder Borgen describes this exegetical practice of Philo's: "In ways other than by etymologies, specific persons can be seen as embodiments of general virtues and vices or of other properties." Peder Borgen, "Philo—An Interpreter of the Laws of Moses," in Seland, *Reading Philo*, 52.

[45] Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 100–104.

Later, Josephus comments on Caesar's awareness of the deception—that he "observed the conspiracy of master and pupil [διδασκάλου καὶ μαθητοῦ]" (*Ant.* 17.334 [Marcus and Wikgren, LCL]). As Wilkins notes, "In essence, the older man is the leader, because Josephus says he pushed the young man into the scheme, and was then put to death for it (*Ant.* 17:337). The younger man was the disciple who was being led on the way toward a common goal."[46] In both examples, a young man learns virtue or vice from a teacher. Lot learns goodness from Abraham and imitates it. Alexander's impersonator learns deceit from the older man and imitates it. Discipleship, therefore, provides the relational context in which moral development takes place, whether for good or for ill.

At the end of *Ag. Ap.*, Josephus extols the goodness of the Jewish law for society:

> Upon the laws it was unnecessary to expatiate. A glance at them showed that they teach not impiety, but the most genuine piety; that they invite men not to hate their fellows, but to share their possessions; that they are the foes of injustice and scrupulous for justice, banish sloth and extravagance, and teach men to be self-dependent and to work with a will; that they deter them from war for the sake of conquest, but render them valiant defenders of the laws themselves; inexorable in punishment, not to be duped by studied words, always supported by actions. . . . I would therefore boldly maintain that we have introduced to the rest of the world a very large number of very beautiful ideas. What greater beauty than inviolable piety? What higher justice than obedience to the laws? . . . Had these precepts been either committed to writing or more consistently observed by others before us, we should have owed them a debt of gratitude as their disciples [μαθηταὶ]. If, however, it is seen that no one observes them better than ourselves, and if we have shown that we were the first to discover them, then the Apions and Molons and all who delight in lies and abuse may be left to their own confusion. (*Ag. Ap.* 2.291–95 [Thackeray, LCL])[47]

In this last sentence, Josephus explains that if anyone other than the Jews had written down the Law or lived it out consistently before them, the Jews would have been their

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[46] Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 112.

[47] For an overview of Josephus's *Ag. Ap.*, see John M. G. Barclay, "*Against Apion*," in *A Companion to Josephus*, ed. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers, BCAW (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 75–85.

μαθηταὶ.[48] For Josephus, then, disciples live out in their own societies the same virtues of the Law that he just listed. Moral development, at times, therefore, serves as one aspect of discipleship for Josephus. Furthermore, like Dio Chrysostom's argument that Socrates is a disciple of Homer despite chronological separation, this last comment of Josephus reinforces the idea that disciples could learn virtue from their masters, even if they only learn through reading or distant observation.[49]

While these three examples do not constitute an exhaustive survey of discipleship in Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts, they do provide examples of moral development proving important within the context of discipleship. While simple, this observation is key in showing that moral development *does* occur within master-disciple relationships. As I turn to Matthew's own portrayal of discipleship, moral development—and more specifically virtue-formation—will prove central to his understanding of the disciple's identity in relationship to his master, Jesus.

Moral Development within Matthean Discipleship

Like many examples of Greco-Roman biography discussed in chapter 2, Matthew's Gospel also has as one of its primary goals the moral development of its readers, particularly as disciples of Jesus. While Matthew does not make an explicit

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[48] Of course, Josephus's point here is not the *actual* possibility of some group other than the Jews being the source of the Law. As Barclay observes,

> This claim to "first invention" (πρώτη εὕρεσις) is the ultimate answer to the charge of 2.148, that Judeans had contributed no invention (εὕρημα) of value for the rest of humanity (cf. 2.135). Although, for the sake of argument, Josephus can turn this alleged deficiency into a virtue (2.182–83: Judeans eschew "novelty"), this conclusion indicates that at a deeper level he wishes to present Judeans as the inventors of piety and morals. In this regard, the emphasis on Judean antiquity that occupied most of book 1 (1.6–218) is the *foundation* for this historical and cultural claim to Judean priority. Within the more immediate context, Moses' antiquity (2.152–56, 168, 257, 279, 290) is an essential element in this climactic assertion that the best in human culture is essentially derivative from the Judean tradition. (John M. G. Barclay, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary*, FJTC 10 [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 333)

[49] As Wilkins writes, "[Josephus's comment] reflects a sense of intellectual fellowship and adherence, even though the disciple is separated by time and distance from the master." Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 113.

statement of this goal, like Plutarch often does (e.g., *Per.* 2.4; *Alex.* 1.1–3; *Cim.* 2.3–5; *Comp. Dem. Cic.* 11.7; *Pomp.* 8.7), he does nevertheless present his narrative in a way that seeks both explicit and implicit moral development within his readers.[50]

Explicitly, Matthew, of the Synoptics, provides the most extensive record of Jesus's teaching, and much of it deals explicitly with moral issues. While scholars have presented varying opinions on the exact structure of Matthew, the one unifying thread through most of them is Matthew's distinct narrative-discourse or discourse-narrative structure.[51] However one takes Matthew's overall structure, his five clear teaching, or discourse, blocks highlight Matthew's interest in Jesus's own teaching. The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29), the mission discourse (10:1–42), the parables discourse (13:1–52), the community discourse (18:1–35), and the eschatological discourse (23:1–25:46) provide clear examples of Jesus's own teaching, and several other "minor discourses" provide further evidence of Jesus's own teaching (e.g., 11:7–19, 21–30; 12:25–37, 38–45; 19:28–20:16; 23:2–39).[52] The Sermon is essential to Jesus's teaching in Matthew, especially in terms of moral development, focusing primarily on how disciples should live in the world, but the community discourse also provides clear moral instruction for the disciple within community.

The Great Commission, furthermore, provides an exclamation point at the end of Matthew's Gospel, reinforcing the importance of Jesus's moral instruction throughout:

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[50] Capes makes a similar observation, focusing on Mark in particular but extending implications for all four Gospels. He concludes,

> Early Christians composed and used the Gospels in an environment where it was commonplace to read biographies of remarkable lives and to seek to imitate their virtues. This literary ethos would have prepared them to expect the admonition to imitation whenever the Gospels were read. . . . In other words, the second Gospel—and by extension the other canonical Gospels as well—provided early Christians with the narrative definition necessary for fleshing out the *imitatio Christi*. (Capes, "Imitatio Christi *and Gospel Genre*," 19)

[51] For a thorough overview, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 36–38.

[52] Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 1:4.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching [διδάσκοντες] them to observe *everything I have commanded you*. And look, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18–20).[53] As Matthias Konradt notes on these verses, “In the task of making disciples of Jesus, it is fundamentally important to teach them to do what Jesus has commanded. Accordingly, the Gospel gives much space to ethical instruction.”[54] Within the Great Commission, Matthew also presents a reaffirmation of Jesus’s role as authoritative teacher: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18; cf. Matt 7:28–29). Richard Hays understands Jesus’s Christological role as authoritative teacher a key part of Matthew’s ethical value: “Thus, while Matthew retains the Markan material that speaks of following Jesus’ example by taking up the cross, Jesus’ distinctive role in Matthew is more didactic: he becomes the ‘one teacher’ who supplants all other rabbis (23:8). The Messiah expounds Torah in a new and authoritative way.”[55]

While much of Jesus’s authoritative teaching throughout Matthew provides explicit examples of moral development for Matthew’s readers, Matthew’s narrative provides a more expansive form of moral development. Matthew’s structure certainly shows his interest in providing large portions of Jesus’s moral teaching for his readers, yet it also highlights the necessity of both explicit and implicit moral development. As Walter Wilson notes,

> The fact that these speeches alternate in the narrative with nondiscursive material is also important for understanding how this figured world is communicated to the reader, especially when consideration is given to the exigencies of subject

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[53] Emphasis added.

[54] Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2020), 15.

[55] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 95.

> formation. Specifically, the five discourses can be interpreted as identifying the ideals of discipleship, while the intervening stories expose the challenge of meeting these ideals, a challenge that the reader is implicitly invited to take up.[56]

As discussed in chapter 2, Dryden's three-part taxonomy provides a framework through which to understand this implicit moral development through narrative. Matthew, like other narratives, seeks to form its reader morally through the relationship between the implied author and reader, character identification, and plot structure.

I spend the bulk of this dissertation (chapters 4–6) analyzing Matthew's narrative through this framework, but for now, suffice it to say that Matthew utilizes each of these narrative tools to form his readers morally as disciples of Jesus. In Matthew, the relationship of trust between the implied author and reader moves the reader to slowly understand Jesus's identity as the Messiah through Matthew's fulfillment quotations. By forming the reader's understanding of Jesus's own identity, then, Matthew is able to encourage the reader to imitate him, which leads to the second tool—character identification. Jesus clearly holds the most value in terms of imitation (corresponding with the aim of many other Greco-Roman biographers to encourage imitation of their subjects), but Matthew also provides a wide swath of secondary characters whose experiences inform the reader's own moral development.

On the positive end, Matthew provides several relatively minor characters as examples for his readers—the centurion, the Canaanite woman, the magi, etc. On the negative end, he provides other minor characters as examples—the Jewish leaders, those in Jesus's hometown, Herod, Pilate, etc. Particularly important to Matthew is the role of the disciples in this regard. The disciples bear a somewhat medial importance in terms of character identification, encompassing the complex middle of the moral spectrum of characters in Matthew. Their roles in the narrative are more consistent than most minor characters, and range from positive to negative examples and often somewhere in-

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[56] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:5–6.

between. As Wilkins concludes, "The disciples are a positive example of what Matthew expects from his church, a negative example of warning, and a mixed group who are able to overcome their lackings through the teaching of Jesus. The historical disciples become a means of encouragement, warning, and instruction as examples."[57]

While taking an admittedly more negative view of Matthew's disciples, Brown makes a similar observation:

> On the discourse level of Matthew's textual world, the disciples' positive and negative qualities impact the implied reader (i.e., the reader implied by the text itself). Their positive qualities (e.g., leaving all to follow Jesus, worshiping Jesus, confessing Jesus' identity as Messiah) cause the implied reader to identify with the disciples (especially in the earlier parts of the gospel). But the negative characterization of the disciples tends to distance the implied reader from them. This distance, in turn, encourages an evaluation of the disciples in light the [*sic*] author's and Jesus' point of view, drawing the reader to embrace the values idealized by Matthew.[58]

Going a bit further than Wilkins's and Brown's observations, readers should not only see the positive and negative examples of the disciples as separate means of moral development for the reader (i.e., one as positive encouragement to imitation and the other negative discouragement from imitation) but as a unified yet complicated presentation of these characters that actually *endears* them to the reader as more realistic and thus relatable. In other words, because the disciples show both positive and negative aspects of their character, the reader, who likewise in his own life shows similar variety in character, may relate to the disciples in a way that is more difficult with Jesus, who is portrayed in a consistently positive light, or even more minor characters who simply show one aspect of character. And because the disciples are a consistent thread throughout the entirety of the narrative, the reader is able to follow along their journey, relating to them for its duration.

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[57] Wilkins, *Discipleship in Ancient World*, 222.

[58] Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 149.

Finally, Matthew's plot also serves to move his reader toward moral development. Matthew's presentation of Jesus and his disciples on a journey, as well as Jesus's foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection, pushes Matthew's reader to look forward to the climax of the narrative—Jesus's death and resurrection. At the same time, Jesus's teaching on eschatology broadens the narrative context for the reader so that the story is no longer simply about Jesus's own life but about the coming judgment of all creation. This broadening of Matthew's plot inherently promotes moral development. As Hays observes, "In Matthew, eschatology becomes a powerful *warrant* for moral behavior. The motivation for obedience to God is repeatedly grounded in the rewards and punishments that await everyone at the final judgment."[59] Indeed, these eschatological teachings often re-enforce consistent moral teaching given throughout the rest of the story (e.g., the parable of the sheep and the goats re-enforcing the various calls to mercy).[60]

At the same time, this eschatological trajectory in Matthew is subtly nuanced by Jesus's repeated emphasis on his presence with the disciples (e.g., 1:22–23; 18:20; 28:16–20).[61] Hays notes that this emphasis "allows Matthew to settle more patiently into the present age," as opposed to Mark who "depicts the present as a time of absence and grim waiting for the Parousia."[62] Jesus's own presence with his disciples, then, serves as part of the grounds for their own continued moral development. Jesus, the source of the teaching they themselves are to take to the nations and the example of living they are to follow, is *with* them. Therefore, they may confidently take this teaching to the nations while continuing to follow Jesus's own example in both message and practice.

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[59] Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 106.

[60] Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 107.

[61] Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 104–6.

[62] Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 104–5.

Matthew, then, seeks the moral development of his readers as disciples through both explicit means—Matthew's many examples of Jesus's moral teaching—and implicit means—Matthew's presentation of the relationship between the implied author and reader, character identification, and plot trajectory. What *type* of moral development, however, does Matthew employ? In the next sections, I will show that *virtue-formation* best describes the nature of the moral development that Matthew pursues for his readers.

Virtue-Formation and Matthew's Gospel

A Brief Survey of Research on Virtue Ethics in New Testament Studies and Matthew

By the mid-twentieth century, theologians from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds began to rediscover virtue ethics.[63] Alasdair MacIntyre provided perhaps the most influential inroad into virtue ethics in the twentieth century with *After Virtue*.[64] MacIntyre argues that contemporary ethics are disordered and thus depersonalized, focused on action rather than being.[65] MacIntyre harkens back to the ethics of Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas, and their focus on individual character and virtuous ways

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[63] For a more thorough overview of contemporary theological virtue ethics, on which I rely, see Jean Porter, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 97–99. One early rediscovery comes from Bernard Häring, who builds upon Aquinas's understanding of the theological virtues as the means by which grace becomes active in order to move beyond what some perceived as Catholic moral theology's legalistic reliance on natural law. Bernhard Häring, *Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, trans. Edwin Kaiser, 3 vols. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959); Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 97–98. Cloutier and Mattison also offer a helpful overview of this resurgence in David Cloutier and William C. Mattison III, "The Resurgence of Virtue in Recent Moral Theology," *JMT* 3, no. 1 (2014): 228–59.

[64] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). MacIntyre's work builds upon several pioneering works: Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Methuen, 1970); Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

[65] He writes, "What we possess . . . are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, or [*sic*] morality." MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

of being in the world. As James Keenan writes, "Instead of asking whether an action is right, MacIntyre re-personalized ethics and proposed that we start discussing not only what we are now doing, but more importantly, who we are now becoming?"[66]

Since *After Virtue*, there have been several trajectories of Christian virtue ethics,[67] but those scholars making inroads between virtue ethics and biblical studies are of most interest to my research. The broadest inroads have been made by Daniel Harrington and James Keenan in *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* and *Paul and Virtue Ethics*.[68] In these two works, Harrington and Keenan, two Catholic scholars in New Testament and moral theology respectively, approach virtue ethics across the New Testament. Each chapter begins with Harrington analyzing a passage of the New Testament and then Keenan discussing it from a moral theological perspective. While not strictly a work of New Testament scholarship, William Spohn's *Go and Do Likewise*, just a couple years before *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, offers a clear example of approaching the Gospels from a

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[66] Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 24.

[67] Porter outlines two main strands of Christian virtue ethics since MacIntyre: those interested in Aquinas's moral theology and the trajectory of Hauerwas's understanding of the Christian life through virtue ethics. Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 98–102. For those following Aquinas, see Giuseppe Abba, *Lex et virtus: Studi sull'evoluzione della dotrina morale di san Tommaso d'Aquino* (Rome: Liberia Ateneo Salesiano, 1983); Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990); James F. Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Theologiae"* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992); Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and Its Implications for Modern Ethics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Martin Rhonheimer, *Vernunft und Vernünftigkeit der Praxis* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994); Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomist Theory of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); J. Budziszewski, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For Hauerwas's work, see Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Blackwell Companions to Religion (New York: Blackwell, 2004).

[68] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*; Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2010).

virtue ethics perspective.[69] He argues that any Christian ethical system must flow from a clear understanding of who Christians are specifically as disciples of Jesus. In other words, Christians must look to Jesus's own example of perception, disposition, emotion, discernment, and identity in order to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.[70]

More recently, two works have focused on virtue ethics in the Sermon on the Mount in particular: William Mattison's *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective*, and Jonathan Pennington's *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*.[71] Mattison's work attempts to fill the current gap in virtue approaches to the Sermon on the Mount. His Thomistic moral theology of virtue serves as the lens through which he reads the Sermon, concluding, "The Sermon on the Mount specifies and illuminates a virtue-centered approach to morality."[72] While Mattison approaches the text as a moral theologian, Pennington approaches the Sermon as a New Testament scholar, while conversant with moral theology and virtue ethics. Pennington's work argues that the Sermon on the Mount provides a vision for human-flourishing centered in "communion with the Father God through his revealed Son, Jesus, as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit."[73] Central to this vision for human-flourishing

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[69] William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[70] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 3.

[71] William C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). Before Mattison and Pennington, several works made inroads into the relationship between virtue ethics and the Sermon: Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999); Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision-Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). While not explicitly a *virtue* reading of the Sermon, George Branch-Trevathan's recent *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises* also has many affinities to both my work and Mattison and Pennington's. His study focuses on the gnomic literary form of the Sermon and how the spiritual exercises facilitated through it influence Matthean ethical formation. George Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises: The Making of the Matthean Self*, NovTSup 178 (Boston: Brill, 2020).

[72] Mattison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 2.

[73] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 14.

is the idea of wholeness—an alignment of heart, mind, and action in line with God's will. Undergirding Pennington's understanding of the Sermon is his idea of a "revelatory virtue ethic," or as he explains, "a virtue ethic that is rooted in, shaped by, and encircled by divine revelation."[74] While broadening the focus to Matthew's entire Gospel narrative, my dissertation follows this trajectory set by Mattison and Pennington, understanding virtue as the lens through which we may best understand Matthew's moral value.

A Brief Background on Virtue-Formation in the Ancient World

Virtue, or ἀρετή, defined simply as moral excellence, proved central to many ancient schools of Greco-Roman philosophy.[75] Julia Annas's expansive discussion of virtue serves as a helpful starting point in considering virtue-formation. Put most simply for Annas, "A virtue is some kind of state of a person in respect of which she is, for example, brave, generous or just."[76] While variation certainly existed within the different philosophical schools,[77] three aspects of virtue became particularly important:

> 1. Virtues are dispositional. 2. Virtues have an *affective* aspect: they involve our feelings, especially our feelings of pleasure and pain, and developing a virtue involves habituating our feelings in certain ways. 3. Virtues have an *intellectual* aspect: they involve reasoning about, and grasp of, the right thing to do, and developed virtue implies good practical reasoning or practical intelligence.[78]

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[74] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 300.

[75] Similarly, Porter, discussing a modern perspective, defines *virtue* as "a trait of character or intellect that is in some way praiseworthy, admirable or desirable." Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 87.

[76] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 48.

[77] Max Lee provides a helpful discussion of many of the distinctions between Middle Platonism and Stoicism in particular. Max J. Lee, *Moral Transformation in Greco-Roman Philosophy of Mind: Mapping the Moral Milieu of the Apostle Paul and His Diaspora Jewish Contemporaries*, WUNT 515 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 461–82. For example, "In contrast to the Platonists who sought to moderate the passions and harness their psychic movements as motivating forces for right conduct (i.e., μετριοπάθεια), the Stoics sought to eliminate or extirpate the passions completely (i.e., ἀπάθεια)." Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 471.

[78] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 48–49.

Annas goes on to unpack each of these three aspects more fully, but one thread related to my present purpose ties each of these three points together: the necessity for a person, in some sense, to *learn* virtue.[79]

Virtue as a stable *disposition* shows that one must learn through experience and the forming of habits in order to form true virtue. As Annas writes,

> The ancient thought that virtue is a stable disposition . . . reminds us that every action has both a past and a future. It has a past: it resulted from a pattern of reasoning that had developed in the agent as a result of past decisions, and from a pattern of response that had developed in the agent as a result of living with past decisions. And the action has a future: as a result of doing it the agent's disposition will have been reinforced or weakened.[80]

Virtue, then, is a disposition toward reacting and deciding in certain ways, reflective of that person's own character, and virtue is formed as this person learns how to reason in particular situations in a sort of compounding way over time. Max Lee describes this cycle in Middle Platonism in particular: "The actions of a person forge who he or she becomes, and what a person has become directs his or her actions."[81] Middle Stoics and Neostoics similarly understood moral formation to be a progression, often involving habituation through practice and training.[82]

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[79] Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that some schools understood moral transformation and *learning* virtue only to be possible for those with the right nature and upbringing. Lee notes,

> In contrast to the Stoics and Epicureans who believed every person could become virtuous and wise, the Middle Platonists and Peripatetics held an elitist position on the attainment of virtue. The Platonists maintained that there are limits to what education (παιδεία) and training can accomplish . . . . The wrong-natured person does not benefit from philosophical teaching nor practice. However, if a person possesses the right kind of nature, one that is inclined toward maturity and growth, then education can indeed help a trainee experience moral progress. Education and training can nurture virtuous character. Moral transformation is only possible, then, if the person has the right nature and right upbringing. (Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 469–70)

[80] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 52.

[81] Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 463.

[82] Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 477. Lee writes, "Moral progress contributes to the formation of self by helping a human being grow beyond the developmental stage of selecting actions appropriate to one's immediate circumstances to a stage where the person chooses virtue consistently in every situation." Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 480.

Learning virtue, however, does not simply rely on one's own experience and habituation but also relationship with others. For Middle Platonists, friends may provide correction and encouragement toward virtue, and mentors may provide the same, as well as a moral model to imitate.[83] Similarly, Stoics understood the role of the mentor to be key as well—providing instruction in doctrine and precept, correction of behavior, and a model of virtue for imitation.[84] In this sense, learning virtue requires a community and a mentor or teacher, the goal being that the student may come to the point where they not only possess the knowledge required to pursue virtue but have become the kind of person who actually pursues virtue consistently (i.e., a virtuous person). Annas describes this cyclical process between communal and personal virtue-formation:

> The learner, paradigmatically the young learner, begins by picking up what to do in particular cases; he copies his elders or follows their advice. But if he is intelligent he does not remain stuck at the stage of depending on models for each new case or memorizing a list of cases and dealing with each new one by comparing it with past ones. Rather, he develops a sense of the *point* of doing these specific things, and when he grasps this he has a sense of the basis of these previous judgements, which will enable him to go on to fresh cases without mechanically referring back. Like the person who has acquired an expertise in a skill, the learner has acquired understanding of what he is doing, an understanding that can be represented as a unified grasp of the principles that underlie his actions and decisions.[85]

Here one sees the necessity of learning virtue through imitating and listening to teachers, but it does not stop there. One must learn to apply that teaching and imitate teachers in a way that builds his or her own ability to live virtuously, reasoning and reacting properly in a multitude of different situations until the learner personally becomes virtuous. Following the analysis of both Annas and Lee, therefore, I define virtue-formation as the development of particular dispositions and actions based on the model and teaching of a master. In the context of Matthew, it becomes clear that the discipleship relationship with

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[83] Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 464.

[84] Lee, *Moral Transformation*, 478.

[85] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 67.

Jesus envisioned by Matthew's Gospel extends to the reader himself and provides the setting for the type of relational learning required for virtue-formation.

Moral Development as Virtue-Formation within Matthean Discipleship

While I have already shown Matthew's interest in moral development broadly-speaking, I will now show why that moral development may best be described as virtue-formation. In other words, in this section I will show the ways in which virtue-formation *in particular* best captures the ways that Matthew seeks to develop his readers morally. Three aspects of Matthew's narrative undergird this point.

First, Jesus's call to his disciples to *learn* from him encompasses both his teaching and his practice, both understood in relation to him as master. Jesus's well-known call in Matthew 11:28–30 serves as a helpful starting point: "Come to me, all who work and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn [μάθετε] from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The foundation for Jesus's call is in his own identity as the sole entryway to the Father: "All things have been handed to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him" (Matt 11:27).[86] He describes his "yoke" as "easy" and his "burden [τὸ φορτίον]" "light," in contrast to the Pharisees who "bind up heavy burdens [φορτία βαρέα]" on people (Matt 23:4).[87]

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[86] As Konradt notes,

> In the Matthean context the invitation of Jesus in vv. 28–30 is issued on the basis of the exclusive role and significance of Jesus, whose Christological unpacking the preceding revelatory saying in v. 27 had led to a provisional high point: the Father is only known by the Son and by the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. Jesus' exhortation to come to him thus stands under the horizon of the view that knowledge of God, of his activity and will, is accessible in an exclusive way through him. (Matthias Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Wayne Coppins, BMSEC [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022], 162)

[87] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 166.

Jesus's own character serves as the basis for his call: "Because I am gentle and humble in heart [ὅτι πραΰς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ]" (Matt 11:29). Konradt centers this description of Jesus's character as indicative of his role as royal messiah (cf. Zech 9:9; Matt 21:5).[88] His rule will be characterized by his own gentleness and humility and will therefore be easier and less burdensome than that placed on them by the Pharisees. Yet this emphasis on his own character also provides justification for his disciples to "learn" from him. Like the Platonist or Stoic mentor discussed earlier, Jesus's own character matches his teaching. In this sense, he himself is a sort of sage, possessing the wisdom required to discern various situations and act virtuously when confronted with them. His own personal character is necessary for this learning relationship.

Jesus's call for his disciples to *learn* from him also pushes beyond a mere call to learn his own interpretation of the Torah toward a call to learn his way of living. In 9:9–13, the Pharisees take issue with Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, and Jesus responds by telling them to "go and learn" what is meant by Hosea 6:6, which reads, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." In doing so, Jesus invites them to a way of learning that moves beyond merely *understanding* the Torah toward *living* in line with it.[89] Jesus indicts them for taking issue with his fellowship with tax collectors and sinners on the basis of their own misguided understanding of the Torah, and Jesus's own fellowship with tax collectors and sinners expresses the very mercy desired by God in Hosea 6:6.[90]

In the same way in 11:28–30, Jesus's call is not simply to learn from him *how to understand* the Law but *how to live it*. Konradt observes,

> For, first, Jesus' instruction is not only Torah-related teaching, and second, the behavioral orientation that is to be learned from Jesus—and this is of fundamental

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[88] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 174–75.

[89] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 179.

[90] See also Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 99–101.

> significance for the Christological dimension of Matthean ethics—also includes his life practice. To be sure, the latter also includes, in turn, the fact that Jesus embodies the fulfillment of the Torah and the Prophets. . . . Furthermore, we can see that the compositional placement of ethically relevant passages in the Matthean narrative is by no means irrelevant. Rather, it becomes evident that the successive unfolding of ethically relevant aspects is very purposefully interwoven into the narrative development and correlated with thematic shifts in the narrative. From a macro-compositional perspective, Jesus' exhortation to come to him, take his yoke upon oneself, and learn from him in 11.28–30 is an important building block in this narrative dynamic.[91]

The latter part of Konradt's observation—the narrative significance of Jesus's own "life practice"—resonates with much of my discussion of character identification and virtue-formation from chapter 2. Furthermore, while Jesus's own teaching in Matthew may not explicitly call for forming right habits in the pursuit of virtue, his own life—consistently showing mercy toward others and trust in the Father—represents an example of forming consistent habits of virtue.[92] It is now possible to narrow in a bit more and describe this identification with and learning from Jesus—both his teaching and his living—as virtue-formation. As the reader witnesses Jesus's teaching and living, holistically in line with one another, the narrative as a whole calls him to imitate Jesus's own virtue.

Second, Jesus's own explicit teaching represents a clear understanding of *wholistic* virtue-formation. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the inroads made into Matthew as a result of the recent interest in virtue ethics in New Testament studies have

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[91] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 179.

[92] Scot McKnight, in pushing against virtue ethics as the primary ethical model for Jesus's teaching, writes,

> The question I will ask below and in this commentary is this: Was Jesus a virtue ethicist? Or, is virtue ethics the best or a sufficient way of thinking of how Jesus (did) ethics? I will argue that virtue ethics push us to the rim of the inner circle but do not completely come to terms with Jesus in his Jewish world. The fundamental problem with virtue ethics is that Jesus does not overtly talk like this; he does not teach the importance of habits as the way to form character. (Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, SGBC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013], 5)

While there may be reason to take issue with McKnight's claim that Jesus does not emphasize habits in his teaching in the Sermon, the problem with his claim exists in the foundational assumption—that Jesus's explicit teaching as recorded in Matthew should serve as the all-encompassing data for understanding his ethical model. Jesus's "life practice," as Konradt describes it, must also be taken into account, and when one sees Jesus's teaching in conjunction with the narrative record of his life, it is clear that emulating Jesus and his habituation of virtue throughout Matthew's narrative is a key aspect of discipleship. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 179.

primarily centered on Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, as evinced by the works of Mattison and Pennington in particular.[93] While I will analyze the Sermon more thoroughly in the following chapters, focusing more broadly on Matthew's narrative as a whole, the Sermon, as representative of Jesus's teaching in general, provides a clear picture of the virtue-formative bent of Jesus's teaching.[94] As Pennington describes it, "The Sermon is offering Jesus's answer to the great question of human flourishing, the topic at the core of both the Jewish wisdom literature and that of the Greco-Roman virtue perspective, while presenting Jesus as the true Philosopher-King."[95]

Pennington outlines two "conceptual rails" that form the foundation for understanding the Sermon from a virtue perspective: *μακάριος* and *τέλειος*.[96] Pennington navigates the confusion surrounding *μακάριος* and how to understand the concept in the Beatitudes, charting three major strands of understanding: "blessing" as God's favor, eschatological reversal blessings, and wisdom or virtue-ethics readings.[97] Pennington argues for a "fourth way," incorporating the most helpful aspects of especially the second and third strands. He describes the aim of the Beatitudes: "Jesus is offering a vision for a way of being in the world that will result in true flourishing, precisely in the context of

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[93] Mattison, *The Sermon on the Mount*; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

[94] Charles Nathan Ridlehoover attempts to nuance Mattison and Pennington's virtue approach to the Sermon by adopting a more eclectic model, which he describes as "a deontological virtue ethic of response." While I appreciate Ridlehoover's attempt to clarify some of the ways a virtue approach may seem to clash with the revelatory and situational aspects of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon, he largely agrees with Mattison and Pennington's understanding, and his model, while intended to provide clarity, unnecessarily complicates a virtue understanding of the Sermon. Charles Nathan Ridlehoover, "The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Deontological Virtue Ethic of Response Approach," *JETS* 63, no. 2 (2020): 267–80.

[95] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 36.

[96] Pennington writes, "Not only are these ideas (*makarios* and *teleios*) both foundational to the vision of human flourishing, they are, it turns out, also deeply integrated ideas. That is, these are not separate notions that both happen to support a virtue/flourishing reading, but rather they prove to be together at the core of the ancient vision for human flourishing." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 69.

[97] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 58–62.

forward-looking faith in God eventually setting the world to rights."[98] This idea of human flourishing flows directly from the nexus of two cultural contexts, Second Temple Jewish wisdom tradition and Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. The Beatitudes, then, serve as the introduction to Jesus's larger teaching throughout the Sermon, developing a vision for this type of flourishing.

Integral to the Sermon's goal of human flourishing is Pennington's second "conceptual rail," τέλειος. Pennington analyzes the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions surrounding this idea—the Jewish understanding of whole-hearted and wholistic dedication to God's own will and the Greco-Roman understanding of the wholistic pursuit of virtue.[99] In the Sermon, this nexus is uniquely expressed by Jesus himself. Jesus's provocative allusion to Old Testament calls to imitate God's own holiness (e.g., Lev 19:2; 20:26; Deut 18:13) holds prominent place in the Sermon and influences the way the reader understands Jesus's commands to follow. Jesus says, "Be whole [τέλειοι] as your heavenly Father is whole [τέλειός]" (Matt 5:48). Understanding τέλειος as wholistic devotion rather than moral perfection shifts the moral understanding of Jesus's commands from command-based (i.e., "What should we do?") toward identity-based (i.e., "What type of person should we become?"). This focus on the *whole* person rather than simple obedience reflects virtue tradition—that how we act influences who we are and vice versa. Not to mention this understanding of τέλειος actually makes sense of much of Jesus's teaching throughout the rest of the Sermon: the Beatitudes focus on the inner person—"the poor in spirit," "those who mourn," "the meek," "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," "the merciful," "the pure in heart," "the peacemakers" (Matt 5:3–9)—Jesus's focus on the alignment of inner desire and motivation with outward

[98] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 63–64.

[99] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 71–77.

action in contrast to hypocrisy (6:1–21),[100] the importance of singular devotion and trust in the Father (6:19–34), the Father's own wholeness and consistency in the way disciples treat others (7:1–12), and the dualism of good and bad fruit along with wisdom and folly (7:13–27).[101] George Branch-Trevathan describes this focus as "proper interiority," which defines "someone who has particular intellectual, affective, and volitional characteristics that manifest themselves in, make possible, or accompany right responses to God and treatment of others."[102] And not only the Sermon alone, but Matthew's narrative as a whole—particularly his treatment of the concepts of righteousness, faith, and mercy (the focus of my remaining chapters)—continues to elevate wholistic devotion to God's will with the goal of human flourishing.

Furthermore, the Sermon itself, as Branch-Trevathan convincingly argues, calls for its own implementation (to "do" its teaching; 7:24–27), requiring two particular spiritual exercises for implementation.[103] First, one must learn to discern the importance of its sayings and apply them to various situations in life, a practice which is helped by their short and memorable nature.[104] Second, he writes, "Implementing [the sayings] has the effect of purifying one's dispositions and intentions so that one's deeds are good fruit and forging the inner stability and the perspective on worldly goods that enable one to persist in doing good deeds."[105] In other words, the very structure of the Sermon—short,

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[100] Reflecting on Jesus's commands about practicing righteousness with proper inner motivation and not for public show (6:1–21), Thomas Ogletree writes, "Matthew is expressing the language of law and commandment what might more appropriately be stated in the language of virtues. Matthew's Jesus is concerned less with action-guiding principles as such than with the elemental attitudes and orientations of persons." Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 111. Similarly, Hays observes, "Despite his emphasis on the church's commission to teach obedience to Jesus' commandments, Matthew sees such teaching as instrumental to a deeper goal: the transformation of character and of the heart." Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 98.

[101] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 80–82.

[102] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 202.

[103] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 254–55.

[104] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 254.

[105] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 254–55.

pithy sayings, organized in consistent patterns and themes—enables its reader to memorize the sayings, facilitating reflection, discernment, and application across different situations. This type of reflection and application, in a sense, leads to a more wholistic formation as Jesus's disciple as one's dispositions, intentions, desires, and actions all begin to align (for Branch-Trevathan, "proper interiority"). And as every part of a person aligns in this wholistic way, he not only follows Jesus's own teaching in action but becomes a virtuous disciple of Jesus with the type of virtue he requires. The disciple acts virtuously and thus becomes virtuous, and the virtuous disciple continues to act virtuously. Again, this focus on interiority, wholistic being, and habituation is representative of the relational learning and practice evident in virtue-formation.

Third, Jesus centers the call to moral obedience in one's *identity* as his disciple. As I have discussed previously, an understanding of virtue shifts the question of moral development from "How should I act?" to "Who should I become?" For Matthew, Jesus's call to virtue is first a call to *discipleship*. One cannot properly pursue virtue without first following and learning from the one to whom the Father has revealed himself (11:27). In his commission at the end of Matthew to his disciples, Jesus says,

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching [διδάσκοντες] them to observe everything I have commanded you. And look, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18–20).

Disciples are made through baptism and learning, thus their learning to obey Jesus's commands in a sense helps to form them as his disciples. Yet this final command to make disciples also brings to the fore the tension that exists in the cyclical nature of virtue-formation. As Hays writes,

> While rules and commandments provide an orderly structure for the moral life, Matthew also thinks of actions as growing organically out of character. False prophets, for instance, may be recognized "by their fruits," for "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (7:15–20). . . . Action flows from character, but character is not so much a matter of innate disposition as of training in the ways of righteousness. Those who respond to Jesus' preaching and submit to his

> instruction will find themselves formed in a new way so that their actions will, as it were, "naturally" be wise and righteous. They will learn the skills and discernments requisite to living faithfully.[106]

Thus the relationship between master and disciple proves foundational to the virtue-formation offered by Matthew—especially given Jesus grounding this commission in (1) his authority from the Father, and (2) the promise of his continued presence with them. It is Jesus's continued authoritative presence with his disciples that allows them to fulfill their commission, both making new disciples and also learning daily to obey his commandments more holistically. Matthew's narrative seeks the virtue-formation of its readers, therefore, by inviting its readers (1) to *learn* from Jesus in both word and practice, (2) to consider what it means to *holistically* devote themselves to God's will, and (3) to enter into a discipleship relationship with Jesus himself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus. First, I provided a brief survey of research on Matthean discipleship. Second, I discussed discipleship and moral development in the ancient world with examples of moral development within discipleship from Dio Chrysostom, Philo, and Josephus. Third, I provided an overview of moral development in Matthew's narrative. Fourth, I gave a brief history of research on virtue ethics in New Testament and Matthean studies. Fifth, I defined virtue-formation and showed that the moral development that Matthew seeks in its readers is best described as virtue-formation. As Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus, he develops and emphasizes certain concepts and themes throughout his story. Three of them—righteousness, faith, and mercy—are particularly central both to Matthew's narrative as a whole and to what it means for Matthew to be a disciple of Jesus.

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[106] Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 98–99.

CHAPTER 4

RIGHTEOUSNESS AS VIRTUE IN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE

As Matthew utilizes narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within his readers, he highlights a number of prominent themes within both Jesus's teaching and the narrative at large: righteousness, love, faith, mercy, humility, among others. The most central among these to Matthew's conception of discipleship is righteousness. Matthew's heightened focus on the δικαι- word group attests to its prominence: δίκαιος occurs seventeen times, δικαιοσύνη seven times, and δικαιόω twice.[1] While Matthew's concept of righteousness finds its center within the Sermon, it proves a key thematic element throughout the rest of Matthew's narrative. John Kampen argues that the Matthean community both defines their way of life as "righteous" and views themselves as "the righteous."[2] Donald Hagner similarly defines Matthean discipleship as "a calling to fulfill the righteousness of the Torah but in a new way."[3]

The debate surrounding δικαιοσύνη in Matthew for some time centered upon the question of whether δικαιοσύνη refers to the moral demand of the disciple or grace

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[1] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 88. It is also important to note that Matthew's emphasis of the term δικαιοσύνη lies in stark contrast to the relative lack of interest in the other Gospels: John uses it twice, Luke once, and Mark does not use it at all. There are three occurrences of δικαι-language that I will not discuss in this chapter because of their relatively common uses: δικαιόω as being "justified" or "vindicated" (11:19; 12:37) and δίκαιος as "right" payment (20:4). These three uses do not make significant contributions to Matthew's overall understanding of righteousness as a narrative concept.

[2] John Kampen, "'Righteousness' in Matthew and the Legal Texts from Qumran," in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge 1995*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 486–87.

[3] Donald A. Hagner, "Law, Righteousness, and Discipleship in Matthew," *WW* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 369.

from God.[4] Currently, most scholars have followed the work of Benno Przyblyski and understand at least the primary meaning of δικαιοσύνη throughout Matthew to be the moral demand of Jesus for the disciple.[5] The debate has now shifted to a related conversation surrounding the relationship between δικαιοσύνη as moral demand of the disciples and God's δικαιοσύνη, in the sense of his redemptive plan for his people. Like the former question, it is difficult to discern two clear dichotomous views; instead, most scholars fall somewhere along a spectrum between seeing no reference to God's own redemptive plan in the term to those who see it in some places to refer primarily to God's own redemptive plan.[6]

Key to arriving at an understanding of righteousness in Matthew is taking the entirety of Matthew's Gospel into account, understanding how δικαι- language as a whole functions throughout his narrative.[7] A close narrative analysis of righteousness, therefore—centered in the Sermon but broadened to include Matthew's entire narrative—

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[4] For an overview of the debate views, see Donald A. Hagner, "Righteousness in Matthew's Theology," in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige, JSNTSup 87 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1992), 107–10.

[5] Benno Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, SNTSMS 41 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Robert Olender, however, critiques Przyblyski on several fronts: (1) an inconsistent redaction-critical method, (2) the assumption of Matthew's consistency in his use of δικαιοσύνη, and (3) a harsh distinction between following the will of God as Matthew's descriptor of the disciples and pursuing righteousness. Robert G. Olender, "Righteousness in Matthew with Implications for the Declaration of Joseph's Righteousness and the Matthean Exception Clauses" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 30–36. Despite my general agreement with Olender's critique (see especially my mediating position on 3:15 and 21:32, as well as the centrality of God's will to my definition of righteousness in Matthew), the core of Przyblyski's thesis—that δικαιοσύνη most generally refers to the morality of the disciples—remains.

[6] In my below survey of each instance throughout Matthew, I will interact with and highlight the various views in each occurrence of δικαιοσύνη.

[7] In commenting on the Greco-Roman understanding of δικαιοσύνη, Charles Irons highlights the need to consider the entirety of the δικαι- word group:

> The first thing we need to observe is a simple grammatical point, namely, that the term δικαιοσύνη is merely the abstract noun built from the adjective δίκαιος. . . . As Westerholm argues, δικαιοσύνη simply means "dikaios-ness." . . . This means it is unlikely that we will find any radically new meanings for δικαιοσύνη that are not rooted in the word δίκαιος. (Charles Lee Irons, *The Righteousness of God: A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation*, WUNT 386 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015], 104)

Irons quotes Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 262–73.

results in a picture of Matthean righteousness as virtue itself.[8] In other words, righteousness serves as Matthew's highest moral category, an umbrella category of morality under which individual virtues, like faith and mercy, may be situated. Understanding righteousness in this way serves to define more clearly the kind of virtue-formation that Matthew intends for readers. In this chapter, therefore, I argue that Matthew portrays righteousness as his overall moral category—virtue itself—and the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus. First, I give an overview of the concept of righteousness in the ancient world. Second, I survey Matthew's presentation of righteousness throughout his narrative. Third, I briefly conclude by showing the importance of the double love command (22:34–40) as an interpretive lens for understanding faith and mercy (to be discussed in chapters 5 and 6) as individual virtues falling under the umbrella of Matthean righteousness.

Righteousness in the Ancient World

Righteousness, or δικαιοσύνη, as a concept holds prominent place in both Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts. In Greco-Roman context, δικαιοσύνη likely emerges from judicial procedure but comes to refer to moral behavior in social contexts more

[8] Similarly, Stowers argues, "The righteousness of which Matthew speaks [in 5:20] is to be understood qualitatively and in a way similar to virtue or wisdom in Stoicism. The scribes and the Pharisees can do everything that the law requires yet not be righteous. They merely seem righteous. Righteousness is a particular qualitative state of the soul." Stanley K. Stowers, "Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 64. And again,

> For Matthew, I suspect that righteousness involves a character that is constituted by total commitment and obedience to God and his law in a way that is similar to the Stoic conception. Perhaps even closer to Stoic formulation, Matthew holds that righteousness, like virtue, is the consistent expertise in discerning and obeying God's will amidst the details of everyday life. Righteousness is the only good for humans, and Jesus is the only one in the Gospel to display that quality of character. (68)

While the extent of Stoic influence on Matthew's Gospel may be debated, I agree in general with Stowers, understanding these similarities as explained by a general influence of Stoicism on Hellenistic philosophical thought and Judaism. My understanding of righteousness in Matthew's narrative does go beyond Stowers's observations, however, in at least one way. While Jesus is the only character to *perfectly* display righteousness, Matthew clearly offers others as both positive and negative examples of righteousness and unrighteousness (see discussion of Matthew's narrative below).

broadly.[9] For example, Herodotus in the fifth century BC describes a Median named Dioces who, wanting to come into power during a time of particular lawlessness, "began to profess and practice justice [δικαιοσύνην] more constantly and zealously than ever" (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.96 [Godley, LCL]).[10] Dioces begins acting as a judge and becomes known as "honest and just [δίκαοις]," and eventually becomes ruler of the Median kingdom (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.96 [Godley, LCL]). Here δικαιοσύνη quite clearly refers, as Irons puts it, to "the quality of justice on the part of a judge."[11]

In social contexts more broadly, δικαιοσύνη could also refer to moral behavior beyond the justice portrayed by judges. For example, Plutarch in the first century AD uses δικαιοσύνη to describe not only virtuous character but also particular moral actions. He describes the "honour, love and righteous [δικαιοσύνῃ] treatment given" by Romulus to the eight hundred Sabine women he took as wives for Roman men (Plutarch, *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 6.2 [Perrin, LCL]).[12] Δικαιοσύνη, therefore, can expand beyond the judicial context to moral behavior in many different social situations.

Δικαιοσύνη could also at times refer more broadly to virtue, or ἀρετὴ, itself. Perhaps reacting in some sense to Plato's discussion of δικαιοσύνη in his *Republic* as the virtue that properly arranges and orders the other virtues, Aristotle, in *Nicomachean*

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[9] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 104–6. The following examples also come from Irons. For examples of its judicial context, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.96; 7.164; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 2.74.1; 4.9.9; 10.57.2; Plutarch, *Arist.* 6.1. For examples of its social context, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.86α; Plato, *Resp.* 331c, 360b–c, 362c, 443a; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1131a1–9; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 2.26.1; Plutarch, *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 6.2. For an example of its relationship to a formalizing contract, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 2.75.1.

[10] Irons discusses this example at more length. Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 87.

[11] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 87. Irons cites Havelock, who understands δικαιοσύνη to have its original context within the judicial realm. Eric A. Havelock, "DIKAIOSUNE: An Essay in Greek Intellectual History," *Phoenix* 23 (1969): 62.

[12] Irons discusses this text in Plutarch. Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 101.

Ethics, desires to discuss the more particular sense of δικαιοσύνη as equity or justice.[13] He begins by acknowledging this broader sense of δικαιοσύνη:

> Justice [ἡ δικαιοσύνη] then in this sense is perfect Virtue [ἀρετὴ . . . τελεία], though with a qualification, namely that it is displayed towards others [πρὸς ἕτερον]. . . . And Justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree, because its possessor can practice his virtue towards others and not merely by himself; for there are many who can practice virtue in their own private affairs but cannot do so in their relations with another. (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 5.1129b26–34 [Rackham, LCL])

For Aristotle, then, δικαιοσύνη in its broadest sense is, as J. C. Thom describes it, "the social virtue *par excellence*."[14] In this same passage, Aristotle quotes Theognis: "In Justice is all Virtue found in sum [ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνῃ συλλήβδην πᾶσ᾽ἀρετὴ ᾽νί]" (*Eth. nic.* 5.1129b30 [Rackham, LCL]).[15] A little later, Aristotle writes, "Justice in this sense then is not a part of Virtue, but the whole of Virtue [αὕτη μὲν οὖν ἡ δικαιοσύνη οὐ μέρος ἀρετῆς ἀλλ᾽ ὅλη ἀρετή]" (*Eth. nic.* 5.1130a9–10 [Rackham, LCL]).[16] In addition to referring to moral behavior toward others generally, δικαιοσύνη, therefore, may express the moral excellence that is virtue itself. In other words, in acting righteously toward others, one embodies not just a part of virtue but the whole of virtue itself. While Aristotle is more interested in discussing the particular sense of δικαιοσύνη as equity or justice, he

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[13] As Michael Pakaluk notes, Aristotle acknowledges this broader sense in order to make it clear that he prefers to discuss the more particular sense: "His first step, then (in 5.1), is to mark out some other, broad sense of the term 'justice,' roughly corresponding to Plato's understanding of the virtue, and to explain that he is *not* going to be discussing that." Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185–86.

[14] Johan C. Thom, "Justice in the Sermon on the Mount: An Aristotelian Reading," *NovT* 51 (2009): 320. Similarly, Cicero describes *iustitia* as "the queen of all the virtues [*una excellentissima virtus*]." Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.3 (Rackham, LCL).

[15] The full text of Theognis is as follows: "Prefer to live righteously [εὐσεβέων] with a few possessions than to become rich by the unjust [ἀδίκως] acquisition of money. For in justice [δικαιοσύνῃ] there is the sum total of every excellence [ἀρετή], and every man who is just [δίκαιος], Cyrnus, is noble [ἀγαθος]." Theognis 145–48 (Gerber, LCL).

[16] Cf. Isocrates, *Panath.* §§124, 204; Epictetus, *Diatr*. 2.23–25. These examples come from Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 107.

nevertheless acknowledges this broader sense, even if he thinks it in some sense confuses the two senses.[17]

Important to note here is the potential, despite Aristotle's lack of interest in this broader sense, for *δικαιοσύνη* to serve as an overall moral category, similar to virtue itself, under which individual virtues may be categorized. Irons, for example, argues that "faithfulness or loyalty (*πιστότης*) comes to be regarded as a species of *δικαιοσύνη*. . . . As noted above, however, while faithfulness can be identified as *δικαιοσύνη*, *δικαιοσύνη* cannot be identified as faithfulness."[18] Irons comments on a passage where Herodotus portrays Xerxes as describing the Ionians as having given proof of "justice and faithfulness [*δικαιοσύνην καὶ πιστότητα*]" (7.52 [Godley, LCL]):

> *Δικαιοσύνη* itself does not mean "faithfulness/loyalty," or Herodotus would not have needed to add *πιστότης*. Yet there is a close relationship between the two nouns, and I would argue that that relationship is genus and species. They showed righteousness; specifically, they showed a particular variety of righteousness, namely, faithfulness or loyalty.[19]

Δικαιοσύνη, then, may serve as a sort of umbrella category of virtue, under which individual virtues, like faithfulness, may exist. In other words, as someone pursues faithfulness among other virtues, that person pursues righteousness itself.

Δικαιοσύνη may also refer, however, in its more particular sense to equity or justice, meaning the proper distribution of honor, wealth, and security.[20] This more particular sense of *δικαιοσύνη* may be more appropriately understood by the term justice

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[17] As Pakaluk writes, "One can see how, from Aristotle's point of view, the *Republic* might seem to involve a systematic confusion between justice as a particular virtue and justice as somehow encapsulating the entirety of virtue." Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 186.

[18] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 106. Irons notes that Seifrid makes a similar observation regarding Hebrew usage: "All 'covenant-keeping' is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is 'covenant-keeping.'" Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 424.

[19] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 89.

[20] This more particular sense is the sense that Aristotle prefers to discuss at length in *Eth. nic.* Thom, "Justice in Sermon on Mount," 320.

rather than righteousness. As Jeannine Brown distinguishes between the two, δικαιοσύνη may refer to righteousness as behavioral norm or to justice as equity.[21]

There is at times a tendency to force a harsh distinction between the concept in Greco-Roman and Jewish consciousnesses. For example, K. L. Onesti and M. T. Brauch describe the progression of the term: "The Hellenistic idea of righteousness as a virtue, a meeting of the norm, was replaced with the idea of meeting God's claim in this covenant relationship. . . . Thus the semantic range for *dikaios* in LXX Greek was enlarged due to the influence of the Hebrew background."[22] As Irons shows, however, the social aspects of δικαιοσύνη are clear quite early in Greco-Roman understanding, and even the idea of δικαιοσύνη being expressed in formal agreements like covenants is present.[23] In seeking to understand the concept within Jewish thought, therefore, one may assume a level of continuity between Greco-Roman and Jewish understandings while also acknowledging the unique contexts in which the term is often used in Jewish texts.

Perhaps representative of the overlap between Greco-Roman and Jewish thought here are Josephus and Philo, whose uses of δικαιοσύνη are similar to some that have been observed in Greco-Roman thought.[24] Josephus, for example, typically mentions δικαιοσύνη in relation to the moral conduct of men (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 9.182, 14.176; *Life* 7), and he often lists εὐσέβεια and δικαιοσύνη side by side as the primary virtues toward God and others respectively (e.g., *Ant.* 6.265; 8.121; 18.121). Δικαιοσύνη also seems, for Josephus, to be at least one of the central virtues (*Ant.* 4.223). For Philo, δικαιοσύνη is also a key virtue, often expressed toward others socially (Philo, *Abraham*

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[21] Jeannine K. Brown, "Justice, Righteousness," in *DJG*, 463.

[22] K. L. Onesti and M. T. Brauch, "Righteousness, Righteousness of God," in *DPL*, 1st ed., 830, cited in Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 6.

[23] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 104–6.

[24] My discussion of Josephus and Philo here relies on the observations of Gottlob Schrenk, "δίκη, δίκαιος, δικαιοσύνη, δικαιόω, δικαίωμα, δικαίωσις, δικαιοκρισία," in *TDNT*, 2:193–94.

27, 56, 208; *Prelim. Studies* 31; *Alleg. Interp.* 1.63). It can refer to the harmony experienced when the soul is unified (Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 1.72), and he also lists it alongside wisdom and even virtue itself (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.150). This understanding of δικαιοσύνη, therefore, as the fundamental social virtue aligns well with what I have observed in Greco-Roman thought. Turning to the Septuagint, then, it is important to remember that the language of righteousness expressed broad moral meaning in the Greco-Roman world. In Jewish literature, then, readers should expect to see some level of resemblance to that of the broader culture while nevertheless recognizing its particular nuances within distinctly Jewish contexts.

In the Septuagint, δικαι- language is prominent—δίκαιος c. 430x, δικαιοσύνη c. 320x, δικαιόω c. 45x, and δικαίωμα c. 140x, and most often translates the צדק word group (with δικαίωμα translating mostly חק or מִשְׁפָּת).[25] In its most basic sense, righteousness, in both the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature, often refers to varying instances of God's judicial and/or ethical activity (e.g., Lev 19:15; Job 29:14; Ps 72:1–4 [Pss 71:1–4 LXX]; 96:13 [Ps 95:13]; Isa 45:21; 46:12–13; 59:17 1QS I.21; XI.3; 1QH[a] VI.16; Philo, *Providence* 2.2; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.323).[26] In Psalm 95:13 LXX, for example, David writes, "For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness [δικαιοσύνῃ] and the people in his truth." As characters other than God exhibit righteousness, the concept often takes on a similar judicial or ethical sense of right living in accordance with God's Law (e.g., Gen 6:9–7:1; 18:23–26; Deut 16:18–19; 2 Sam 4:11; Ps 1:5; Prov 17:15; Ezek 33:12–18; Mal 3:18; Tob 1:3; 2:14; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.63; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.289). In Tobit 1:3, for example, Tobit writes, "I Tobit walked all the days of my life in the ways of truth and righteousness [δικαιοσύνης], and I gave many

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[25] Moisés Silva, "δικαιοσύνη, δίκαιος, δικαιόω, δικαίωμα, δικαίως, δικαίωσις, δικαιοκρισία, ἔνδικος," in *NIDNTTE*, 1:724–30.

[26] For Irons's thorough survey, see Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 108–269.

alms [ἐλεημοσήνας] to my brothers and my nation, who came with me into the land of the Assyrians, to Nineveh." Important to note in this instance is the fact that giving alms, from the same root as ἔλεος, seems to function as an example of walking in "the ways of truth and righteousness." As in Greco-Roman examples referenced above, righteousness may serve as an overarching moral category of virtue, under which mercy falls.

Both God and other characters' righteousness most often expresses itself within the context of God's own covenant with his people. God's own covenant faithfulness to Israel (e.g., Deut 32:4; Ps 51:4 [Ps 50:16 LXX]) and God's people's covenant faithfulness to God (e.g., Ps 7:8 [Ps 7:9 LXX]) both express forms of righteousness.[27] In Psalm 7:9–12 LXX, David writes,

> The Lord will judge the nations. Judge me, Lord, according to my righteousness [τὴν δικαιοσύνην] and according to my innocence within me. Let the wickedness of sinners come to an end, and you will direct the righteous [δίκαιον], God, who searches hearts and minds. My help is righteous [δικαία], from God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous [δίκαιος], strong, and patient judge, not inflicting wrath every day.

This text highlights the often reciprocal nature of δικαιοσύνη—David trusts God, as the righteous judge, to judge David in his own righteousness. Thus God's own judicial righteousness and David's own moral righteousness function within the context of their covenant relationship. Furthermore, God's own saving, redemptive action on behalf of his people, perhaps most clearly expressed in Isaiah (e.g., Isa 51:5; 59:9; 63:1), evinces his own covenant faithfulness and therefore his own righteousness.[28] In Isaiah 51:1–5 LXX, Isaiah writes, "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness [δίκαιον] and seek the Lord. Look to the solid rock, which you cut, and into the hole of the pit, which you dug. . . . My righteousness [ἡ δικαιοσύνη μου] quickly comes near, and my salvation will come out like a light. And in my arm the nations will hope. The islands will wait for me

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[27] Brown, "Justice, Righteousness," 463.

[28] Brown, "Justice, Righteousness," 463.

and hope in my arm." And this righteous saving activity, closely related to the vindication of Israel and the judgment of its enemies, is also related to the broader concept of justice itself. As צְדָקָה/צֶדֶק and מִשְׁפָּת occur at times together in a hendiadys (e.g., Gen 18:19; 2 Sam 8:15; Ps 97:2; Isa 9:6; Jer 22:15) or even in structural parallelism (e.g., Amos 5:24; cf. Isa 1:21; 5:7; 28:17; Amos 6:12), the concepts' close relationship and at times almost synonymous nature becomes clear.[29]

Approaching the first century, then, *δικαιοσύνη* in Jewish thought reflects similarities with both the broad and particular senses found in broader Greco-Roman thought—both the comprehensive social virtue or even virtue itself and the more particular justice or equity—while remaining firmly planted in the Jewish concept of God's covenant with his people. Righteousness, therefore, refers both to God's own righteous actions toward his people and the world more broadly, and to humans' own actions toward God and others that align with God's Law.

Righteousness in Matthew's Narrative

Matthew utilizes his narrative presentation of righteousness in several different ways for the purpose of virtue-formation within his readers. First, he highlights Joseph (1:19), John (3:15; 21:32), and Jesus (3:15; 27:19), as clear examples of embodying righteousness, with Jesus standing at the forefront as the ultimate example of Matthean righteousness. Second, he presents Jesus's emphatic portrayal of righteousness for his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, defining it as wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed in Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law.[30] Third, he reinforces

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[29] Brown, "Justice, Righteousness," 463–64.

[30] My definition builds on Pennington's, while simplifying it and emphasizing Jesus's relationship to righteousness. He defines it as "*whole-person behavior that accords with God's nature, will, and coming kingdom*." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 91. Przybylski oddly makes a harsh distinction between righteousness in Matthew and the terms disciple and will of God, understanding the latter to be much more "crucial" to Matthew's overall message. He writes,

> It is clear that the ideas expressed by the conceptual terms "righteous/righteousness" are not as crucial to the overall message expressed by the Gospel of Matthew as are the ideas expressed by the

Jesus's teaching by identifying the disciples with both the "the righteous" of old and the eschatological "righteous" while contrasting them with the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Through all of these narrative means, Matthew portrays righteousness for his readers as an umbrella category of virtue, under which other virtues, like faith and mercy, may be understood.[31] Through this portrayal, he encourages his readers to identify themselves with the disciples and "the righteous" and to follow the examples of Joseph, John, and Jesus, pursuing righteousness themselves.

Righteousness in the Introduction

1:19. The first encounter with righteousness in Matthew's Gospel comes in the birth narrative. Mary and Joseph are betrothed but not yet living together when Mary is found to be pregnant.[32] While the reader understands the nature of this pregnancy "from

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> terms "disciple/will of God". In non-polemical contexts dealing exclusively with those who are properly religious in a Christian sense, that is, with those who are members of the church, the concept of righteousness is not used. The concept of righteousness does not pervade Matthaean theology. For example, it plays no crucial role in the Matthaean view of the nature of salvation. Matthew's religious self-understanding is that of a *disciple* doing the *will of God* as distinct from that of a righteous person doing righteousness. (Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 115)

In what follows, I will make it clear that I understand these three concepts—righteousness, disciple, and the will of God—to be inextricably linked. Whether discussions of righteousness come in polemical or non-polemical contexts should make no difference to the importance of righteousness in Matthew's overall theology, as polemical contexts are often necessary for building an identity for any cohesive group. Furthermore, the Sermon itself offers the most fertile ground for understanding righteousness in Matthew, and its context is clearly Jesus giving this speech to his own disciples primarily. The reader, thus, implicitly sits in the seat of the disciples as Jesus calls him to greater righteousness (5:20), and as I discuss further below, righteousness may be defined generally as the disciple's own alignment with God's will. There is no compelling reason within Matthew's own theological understanding to take the two concepts of righteousness and doing God's will as opposed to one another or holding significant distinctions.

[31] Olender analyzes righteousness throughout all of Matthew's narrative as well, understanding *δικαιοσύνη* to "be organized in a chiastic-like arrangement which identifies the elements of righteousness most emphasized by Matthew: activity, motivation, and results." Olender, "Righteousness in Matthew," 94. There is quite a bit of similarity between Olender's understanding of righteousness and my own. We both highlight Matthew's use of examples throughout his narrative, and his identification of these three elements—activity, motivation, and results—is also compatible with my conception of righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will, encompassing the disciple's desires, motivations, and actions. Olender's understanding of righteousness also seems to include concepts such as compassion and mercy falling under it as localized ways of demonstrating righteousness itself (94–96). The most significant point of departure is my understanding of righteousness as Matthew's overall category of virtue, with faith and mercy operating as individual virtues underneath its umbrella. This conceptual lens of virtue offers a clearer pathway for understanding the virtue-formation that Matthew intends for his readers.

[32] While certainly not the case universally, a gap of time between betrothal and cohabitation seems to have been a relatively common practice in Judea at the time. See Philip F. Esler, "The

the Holy Spirit" (1:18), Joseph clearly does not. To the best of his knowledge, Mary has been unfaithful. Yet Matthew describes Joseph's reaction: "But Joseph, her husband, being righteous [δίκαιος] and not wanting to shame her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly" (1:19). Two key questions drive any understanding of this verse: (1) what precisely *is* Joseph's righteousness, and (2) what is the relationship between his righteousness and his desire not to shame Mary publicly? Some commentators take δίκαιος to refer exclusively to Joseph's obedience to the Law in pursuing legal action against Mary (c.f. Deut 22:23–24).[33] In this reading, the participle "ὢν" in the first clause is often taken as concessive or the conjunction "καὶ" connecting the two clauses as adversative: "although he was righteous" or "and *yet* not wanting to shame her publicly."[34] Joseph's desire to obey the Law is at odds with his desire not to shame her publicly.

While this understanding of δίκαιος certainly seems to flow from my previous discussion of Jewish understandings of righteousness at the time, Philip Esler takes issue with this portrayal of Joseph's righteousness:

> These critics convey the idea that by describing Joseph as δίκαιος Matthew characterized him as someone who normally acted strictly in accordance with the law of Moses. Yet this would align Joseph's righteousness with that of the scribes and Pharisees, whose righteousness the Matthean Jesus later tells his followers they must exceed in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (5.20). How likely is it that Matthew would thus represent Joseph as failing to embody the righteousness his own stepson would later advocate? A more likely hypothesis is that Joseph, the first person mentioned in this Gospel as righteous, acts towards Mary in a way that is

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Righteousness of Joseph: Interpreting Matt 1.18–25 in Light of Judean Legal Papyri," *NTS* 68 (2022): 332–33.

[33] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:203; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 51; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC 33 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1:18; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 34. Nolland takes a similar yet more mediating approach, finding "righteousness" to refer to Joseph's obedience to the law in divorcing Mary, but he understands this righteousness to be "a much wider concept" that may include Joseph's "subsequent behavior." John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 94–95.

[34] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:203–4; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:18.

> prototypical of the righteousness that Jesus valorises (e.g. Matt 5.20; 6.33; 21.32;25.37, 46).[35]

Esler outlines what I think is an understanding of righteousness that fits more closely with the rest of Matthew's narrative. Joseph's action at this point—mercifully considering Mary's own honor above his own—serves as a clear picture of the righteousness that Jesus teaches and himself embodies throughout the rest of Matthew.[36] The simplest explanation, therefore, is that Joseph is "righteous" not *in spite* of his desire to show mercy to Mary but *because* of it.[37]

There is no necessary conflict, therefore, between Joseph's righteous obedience to the Law and his righteous mercy toward Mary. As Walter Wilson notes,

> With the status of Mary established, we now hear of Joseph (1:19), who shows himself to be upright or "righteous" (δίκαιος) both in observing the law (cf. Deut 22:13–27), her apparent infidelity effectively severing the tie between them (cf. 5:31–32 and 19:9, both also with ἀπολύω), and in the merciful manner in which he does so, dissolving the betrothal "privately" (λάθρᾳ), that is, without subjecting Mary to a public trial for adultery.[38]

As the reader continues along the narrative, Matthew's conception of righteousness expands so that it is "greater than the Scribes' and the Pharisees'" (5:20), encompassing

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[35] Esler goes on to outline the three options available to Joseph in his response to Mary's supposed infidelity: (1) public action resulting in her death, (2) private action in secretly divorcing her, or (3) taking no action. Esler, "The Righteousness of Joseph," 337.

[36] Similarly, Olender concludes,

> Matthew's statement concerning Joseph's righteousness is consistent with Matthew's concept of righteousness. Matthew's depiction of Joseph is found to be consistent with other righteous characters identified in the Gospel. The condition of Joseph's heart is faithful to God; his form of righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees in the context of divorce. He fits into Matthew's model of applied righteousness; that is, he obeys the Law with regard to divorce, fulfills God's greater righteousness through demonstrating mercy, follows God, and possesses an ability to discern God's will. Matthew highly esteems "the righteous" in his Gospel. Through the adjective δίκαιος, he elevates Joseph in a manner similar to Abel and Jesus. As a blameless man, Joseph's life serves as a model of Matthean righteousness. (Olender, "Righteousness in Matthew," 153–54)

[37] See also R. Alan Culpepper, *Matthew: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 36; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 92–93; Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2020), 34; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 1:95.

[38] Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 1:43. See also Luz, *Matthew*, 1:95.

not just obedience to the Mosaic Law but obedience to God's will (i.e., the Law) as interpreted and expressed by Jesus himself. Even in this first story of Matthew's Gospel, then, the reader finds himself confronted with his own expectation of what righteousness is, yet Matthew draws together the reader's expectation of what righteousness is and Joseph's actions as portrayed, as he begins to redefine righteousness through the lens of Jesus himself.[39]

As Jonathan Pennington writes, "*Jesus is redefining righteousness as mercy, kindness, compassion, and love*. Joseph serves as the first example of this newly defined righteousness that is intended to re-orient the moral theology of the Christian community in Matthew's day and throughout the history of the church."[40] While righteousness encompasses more than mercy alone, the pursuit of mercy *is* the pursuit of righteousness. A minor resonance in Joseph's righteousness may also be his faith in God, though the explicit language of faith is not present. The righteousness Joseph exemplifies here requires not only the virtue of mercy but also of faith because by "divorcing [Mary] secretly," Joseph's own honor is tarnished. He must trust God amidst the shame he may experience from others who may assume that he is the one who got Mary pregnant before the wedding.[41] Joseph, therefore, embodies Matthean righteousness through his mercy

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[39] Megan Warner makes an intriguing argument that the five women in chap. 1 whom God uses to bring Jesus into the world, despite their seemingly shameful sexual histories, actually embody the same righteousness as Joseph and Jesus. She concludes,

> The five women included in the genealogy turn this concept on its head; tarnished and suspect on the outside they look valueless and shameful to others, yet inside, in the parts that God sees, they possess a rare beauty. It is this inner beauty of will, converted into action marked by love, justice, mercy and faith, which is the essence of the Matthean "greater righteousness". Who better to model it than Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Uriah the Hittite, Joseph and Mary, of whom Jesus was born? (Megan Warner, "Uncertain Women: Sexual Irregularity and the Greater Righteousness in Matthew 1," *Pacifica* 18 [February 2005]: 32)

While there is no doubt significance to Matthew's mentioning of each of the four women in the genealogy, the absence of description of any of the women makes Warner's argument difficult to sustain.

[40] Jonathan T. Pennington, "Joseph the Just and Matthew's Matrix of Mercy: The Redefinition of Righteousness," *Journal of Moral Theology* 10, no. 1 (2021): 49.

[41] As Keener notes,

> When God reveals the truth to Joseph, he immediately believes and obeys God's will, unbelievable as the truth would seem without a deep trust in God's power. . . . Because Joseph alone received this

toward Mary and his faith in God, which of course culminates in his willing acceptance and embrace of Mary once the angel reveals her pregnancy's true origin.[42] Joseph's righteousness, then—as Matthew's overall category of virtue—expresses itself here in Joseph's embodiment of the individual virtues of mercy and faith.

Furthermore, Greco-Roman biographies sometimes begin by outlining the upright family background of the subject.[43] This background not only solidifies the purity of the subject in the minds of the reader but may also highlight the subject's character. Especially in light of Matthew's consistent presentation of Jesus as the perfect embodiment of righteousness throughout the rest of his narrative, Joseph's righteousness, in addition to being an example for the reader in and of itself, serves to foreshadow and emphasize Jesus's own righteousness. This foreshadowing is further emphasized by the fact that Joseph (1:19) and Jesus (27:19) bookend Matthew's narrative as two complementary examples of being δίκαιος.

3:15. Shortly after the infancy narrative, Jesus's ministry begins with his encounter with John the Baptist, and it is here that we find Matthew's first use of δικαιοσύνη. After recounting John's message of repentance and baptism (3:1–6), he confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees with a message of judgment, ending with a

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> revelation, outsiders in the story world would still think that he had gotten Mary pregnant before the wedding. He would remain an object of shame in a society dominated by the value of honor. Joseph's obedience to God cost him the right to value his own reputation. (Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 94–95)

[42] While Esler makes a compelling argument that Joseph was already considering taking Mary as his wife despite her infidelity before the angel appears to him in a dream, there is little in the text itself to prove his point outside of the angel's encouragement to Joseph "not to fear to take Mary as [his] wife" (1:20). While Esler argues that this encouragement not to fear addresses fear Joseph was currently feeling because he was already considering taking her as his wife, it is just as easy an explanation to think that the angel told Joseph not to fear taking her as his wife because the angel was encouraging him to take her as his wife despite Joseph's decision to divorce her secretly. Esler, "The Righteousness of Joseph," 341–43.

[43] As Keener writes, "Biographies sometimes opened with the protagonist's parents or noble family background (e.g., Corn. Nep. 2 [Themistocles], 1.2; 7 [Alcibiades], 1.2); although such background did not always shape how a child turned out (Sall. *Catil.* 5.1; cf. 2 Chron 28:1; 29:2; 33:3; 34:2; 36:5), one's background could help define a hero's character (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 20.215–41)." Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 87–88.

prophecy of the judgment that the Messiah would bring (3:7–12). As if on cue, Jesus enters the scene with the goal of being baptized by John, and despite John's resistance he consents after Jesus says, "Allow it for now, because in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness [δικαιοσύνην]" (3:15). There is understandably a great deal of disagreement on what Jesus means by this phrase. As Luz notes, "Every word in Jesus' short pronouncement is controversial."[44] While Davies and Allison outline seven main ways of understanding Jesus's pronouncement,[45] a spectrum of views dominates the discourse today. On one side of the spectrum you have those who emphasize "righteousness" here as moral conduct in line with God's will,[46] and on the other side those who emphasize "righteousness" as God's overall saving action.[47] In between, many emphasize both themes working in tandem at various levels.[48]

Several points guide our interpretation. First, πληρόω occurs sixteen times throughout Matthew, most often with the sense of fulfilling prophecy (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4:26:54, 56; 27:9; cf. 13:14).[49] It is likely, therefore, that whatever Jesus means by fulfilling all righteousness has some connection to the ways in which he fulfills prophecy throughout the rest of the narrative.[50] Jesus has fulfilled prophecy through Matthew in the sense that he is the prophesied Messiah ushering in

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[44] Luz, *Matthew*, 1:142. Matthias Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Wayne Coppins, BMSEC (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022), 59.

[45] For an overview of the seven main views, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:325–27.

[46] For the strongest emphasis in this regard, see Luz, *Matthew*, 1:141–43.

[47] See Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 43; Culpepper, *Matthew*, 65; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVACS (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2004), 139–40.

[48] See Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:325–27; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 119–21; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:56–57; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 132; Konradt, *Matthew*, 51; Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 59–74; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 153–55; Turner, *Matthew*, 118–19; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:92–93.

[49] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:326.

[50] See for example John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt 5:17–48*, AnBib 71 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 79–80.

God's kingdom. While there is no explicit prophecy referenced here from the Hebrew Bible, one may assume that a similar trajectory of prophetic fulfillment is intended here by Matthew as is elsewhere.

Second, δικαιοσύνη here actually accords with Matthew's portrayal elsewhere in his narrative, despite being presented in the slightly different context of Jesus and John's own role in God's redemptive plan. Joseph's "righteous" character in 1:19 seems to be primarily a virtuous alignment with God's own will, as expressed through his mercy toward Mary, and even looking forward to the Sermon, δικαιοσύνη refers to the ways that disciples are to live holistically aligned with God's will as expressed through Jesus. The sense of morality or virtue does not seem at first clear in this context, and the Father's subsequent approval of Jesus brings Jesus's own mission to the forefront of the reader's mind. Later in 6:33, Jesus encourages his disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness [δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ]." With these two concepts joined in 6:33, it would make sense for the "righteousness" being fulfilled in 3:15 to be similarly connected to Jesus's own mission, soon to be described by Matthew as "the gospel of the kingdom" (4:23), which required repentance in an extension of John's own mission (3:2, 11).

Jesus and John, therefore, "fulfill all righteousness" in the sense that his baptism at the hands of John serves both as the handing off of this ministry from John to Jesus and as Jesus's way of identifying with Israel as their representative Messiah.[51] Brown sees δικαιοσύνη both here and in 6:33 as expressing "God's promised redemption," or in other words, his "covenant loyalty."[52] She writes,

> While Matthew does use the term *dikaiosynē* to express righteous behavior in line with covenant loyalty (e.g., 5:17; 6:1), such usage here makes little sense. There is

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[51] For a full discussion of this view, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 120–21.

[52] Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 43; Jeannine K. Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel," in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 15.

> no Torah requirement that would obligate a Jew to be baptized, and the use of the adjective “all” seems to move beyond a sense of Jesus’s individual “righteousness” in any event.[53]

Similarly, Hagner describes this righteousness as “the will of God in the sense of God’s saving activity.”[54] In light of usage in the Hebrew Bible, δικαιοσύνη can certainly lean in this direction of God’s redemptive activity toward his covenant people, yet as France notes, there is no reason to pit these two most likely senses of δικαιοσύνη against one another here.[55] As Davies and Allison note,

> This interpretation leaves one free to interpret “righteousness” in more than one way. It is possible, on the one hand, to think of moral effort or obedience to God’s will: by fulfilling Scripture, John and Jesus are acting rightly, they are exhibiting “righteousness”. Meier, on the other hand, interprets the word as signifying the saving activity of God. A choice between these two options is problematic. Yet because, with the possible exception of 5.6, δικαιοσύνη seems in Matthew to be uniform in meaning—moral conduct in accord with God’s will (cf. Dupont, *Béatitudes* 3, pp. 211–384; Strecker, *Weg*, pp. 149–58; Przybylski, passim)—, we are inclined to define the “righteousness” of 3.15 as moral conduct: Jesus, knowing the messianic prophecies of the OT, obediently fulfils them and thereby fulfils all righteousness. Because prophecy declares God’s will, to fulfil prophecy is to fulfil righteousness.[56]

Understanding righteousness as virtuous alignment with God’s will does not limit righteousness to moral conduct in a strictly Law-keeping sense. For Joseph, righteousness refers to his alignment with God’s will in his expression of mercy toward Mary (1:19). Here, Jesus and John “fulfill all righteousness” through the completion of Jesus’s baptism

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[53] Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 43.

[54] Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:56.

[55] France notes,

> The same point [as Meier] is rightly argued by Hagner, 1:56, though it is a pity that he feels it necessary to do so by denying that δικαιοσύνη here means “moral goodness.” It is surely “morally good” to do what God requires of one in a given situation. His objection that baptism as such “cannot be thought of as fulfilling *all* righteousness” misses the point of Jesus’ saying in its dialogue context, which is not that “the act is positively described as the fulfilling of all righteousness” but rather that if we are to fulfill all that God requires, then even this (apparently inappropriate) act must also be included. To recognize the salvation-historical focus of this saying does not therefore demand that we exempt this use of δικαιοσύνη from the general Matthean sense established by Przybylski. (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 120)

France cites Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 79–80; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:56.

[56] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:326–27.

in order to begin his ministry of announcing the kingdom as the prophesied Messiah. They are not simply fulfilling God's own righteousness defined as his saving activity. *They themselves are righteous* because they are carrying out the roles given to them in God's redemptive plan for the world.[57]

Furthermore, the connection between Jesus's own fulfillment of righteousness and that righteousness to which disciples are called in Matthew is not as unclear as one might think. If one defines righteousness in Matthew fairly generally as wholistic alignment with God's will, one's alignment with God's will may take different forms depending on one's role in God's redemptive plan. For Jesus, his role as messianic Son takes priority as he fulfills all righteousness by identifying with Israel through baptism and accepting his role in God's plan.[58] For disciples, their role as followers of Jesus—seeking to learn from his teaching and to model their own lives after his example—provides their opportunity to pursue greater righteousness (5:20).[59] As Konradt observes, "[A Christological emphasis in 3:15] does not lead to the denial of a common denominator between the fulfillment of δικαιοσύνη through Jesus and—borrowing language from 6.1—the *ποιεῖν* δικαιοσύνην that is demanded from the disciples. In both cases the concern is with acting in accordance with the respective relationship to God."[60]

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[57] Here I go slightly beyond Przbylski's understanding, which does not explicitly link their δικαιοσύνη here with God's saving activity: "It is thus possible to conclude that in 3:15 righteousness does not refer to the gift of God but to God's demand upon man. John and Jesus are to carry out the total will of God. . . . Righteousness is the norm for the conduct of John the Baptist and Jesus." Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 94.

[58] As Brandon Crowe argues at length, Jesus's righteousness here is inextricably linked to his *obedience* as Son of God. Brandon D. Crowe, *The Obedient Son: Deuteronomy and Christology in the Gospel of Matthew*, BZNW 188 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 181–200. This understanding is similar to my own in the sense that Jesus's righteousness here is essentially his alignment with God's will, obediently carrying out the role he has been given in God's redemptive plan on behalf of his people.

[59] Viljoen similarly writes, "Righteousness as demonstrated by Jesus and John is the goal for Jesus' disciples to pursue. Doing the will of God is what Matthew regards as the distinguishing mark of the disciple community. . . . Such righteousness forms part of the definition of the identity of the Matthean community." Francis P. Viljoen, "The Righteousness of Jesus and John the Baptist as Depicted by Matthew," *IDS* 47, no. 1 (2013): 7.

[60] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 74.

The connection between Jesus's righteousness in 3:15 and the disciples' righteousness in the Sermon does not stop there, however. Nolland draws parallels between Jesus's baptism and the Great Commission—baptism, the presence of the Trinity, and righteous obedience to God's will.[61] As Jesus himself is baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness," so he commands his disciples to baptize others and teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:20).[62] Both Jesus's teaching on righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will in the Sermon on the Mount and his consistent personal alignment with God's will in his humble acceptance of his role as the divine Son typified in 3:15 point toward Jesus as the ultimate model of Matthean righteousness. In 3:15, therefore, the reader both begins to understand Jesus's messianic role and is called himself to imitate Jesus and his pursuit of righteousness, to which he is explicitly called shortly afterward in the Sermon, to which I now turn.

Righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount

Righteousness serves, for many scholars, as one of the two main ideas of the Sermon (along with the kingdom of God and often presented hand-in-hand with it).[63] Beginning with the two occurrences in the Beatitudes and then what many perceive as the

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[61] John Nolland, "'In Such a Manner It Is Fitting for Us to Fulfil All Righteousness': Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSup 171 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 63–80.

[62] As Evans notes, "Indeed, the words of Jesus 'to fulfill all righteousness,' in reference to baptism, may anticipate the command in the Great Commision [*sic*] (Matt 28:18–20) to baptize converts and thus begin instruction in the way of righteousness as Jesus taught his disciples." Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77.

[63] E.g., Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 88–89; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:177; Glen H. Stassen, "The Beatitudes as Eschatological Peacemaking Virtues," in *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 251; Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); Thom, "Justice in Sermon on Mount," 315; Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, WUNT 414 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 198; George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 50–51.

main proposition of the Sermon in 5:17–20, righteousness continues to permeate Jesus's teaching throughout. Jesus portrays in the Sermon a righteousness that is wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus himself, calling his disciples (and implicitly readers themselves) to pursue righteousness motivated both by love for God and love for neighbor, expressed in trust in God and mercy toward others.[64]

5:3–16. The structure of the Beatitudes has been contested throughout history, with the question of whether or not 5:11–12 constitutes a ninth Beatitude, proving to be the most contested issue.[65] The beginning of each of the nine verses with μακάριοι, however, points to nine total Beatitudes.[66] Once the presence of nine Beatitudes is established, their structure becomes the next question. Some see the first eight split into two pairs of four, with the ninth serving as a kind of conclusion or expansion.[67] Others see three sets of three Beatitudes.[68] Whichever structure one prefers (and there are appealing arguments on either side), the centrality of δικαιοσύνη is indisputable. In the two-part structure, δικαιοσύνη is the main theme in the last Beatitude in each set of four.

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[64] Viljoen provides a compelling argument that righteousness, commitment to Jesus, and doing God's will comprise the core of the discipleship identity that Matthew intends for his community. Francois P. Viljoen, "Righteousness and Identity Formation in the Sermon on the Mount," *HvTSt* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1–10. Thom provides a unique comparison between Aristotelian conceptions of justice and the righteousness found in the Sermon on the Mount. While there are many similarities, he nevertheless concludes by highlighting the uniqueness of Jesus's righteousness as portrayed in the Sermon:

> Instead of conventional justice, we find in the SM the notion of an open-ended δικαιοσύνη that exceeds what is expected (cf. 5:20, 47), a δικαιοσύνη that always has to be attained, that is, to be sought and desired (cf. 5:6; 6:33; also 7:7–11, 14). It cannot be captured in a definition or in legal principles, but requires a new way of thinking, a moral imagination (7:12) that orients itself on God's perfect righteousness (cf. 5:45, 48; 6:26, 30, 32; 7:11). (Thom, "Justice in Sermon on Mount," 338)

[65] For an overview of the debate, see Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 115–19; Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 42–47.

[66] For a more thorough argument for nine Beatitudes, see Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 174–80. As Pennington notes, "[Seeing eight rather than nine Beatitudes] is to confuse the number of Beatitudes with how they are structured together." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 117.

[67] See for example Mark Allan Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 119–40; David Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 54.

[68] Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 38.

In the three-part structure, δικαιοσύνη begins the second set of three and lies at the center of the final set. In both schemes, the eighth Beatitude repeats the outcome of the first—"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:1; 5:10)—forming an *inclusio*. Δικαιοσύνη, therefore—especially anticipating its prominence shortly afterward in 5:20 (not to mention in both the Sermon and Matthew as a whole)—proves to be perhaps the most significant theme of the Beatitudes.

In the fourth Beatitude, Jesus says, "Flourishing are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [δικαιοσύνην], for they will be satisfied" (5:6), and then in the eighth, "Flourishing are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake [δικαιοσύνης], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:10). It is important to note that the Beatitudes are not simply pronouncements of earthly or heavenly blessing but invitations to human flourishing.[69] As Pennington notes, their surprising genius lies in their presentation of "*true human flourishing as entailing suffering as Jesus's disciples await God's coming kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating*."[70] At the center of this paradoxical presentation of human flourishing is the idea of δικαιοσύνη.

In the fourth Beatitude, those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness [οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην] . . . will be satisfied [χορτασθήσονται]" (5:6).[71] Desire and motivation are a key part of the disciple's pursuit of righteousness, and those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness will receive it. This sustenance metaphor exists elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature. Three examples highlight this metaphor from the Septuagint, the latter two from the perspective of the personified "Wisdom":

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[69] For a full argument in favor of this understanding, see Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 41–67.

[70] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 153.

[71] For a discussion of the interpretive history of the fourth Beatitude, see Eklund, *Beatitudes through the Ages*, 149–70.

> Hungry and thirsty [πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες], their sole fainted within them. . . . For [God] satisfies [ἐχόρτασεν] the empty soul and fills the hungry soul [ψυχὴν πεινῶσαν] with good things. (Ps 106:5, 9 LXX)

> Come, eat [φάγετε] of my bread, and drink [πίετε] wine which I have mixed for you. Leave folly and you will live, and seek wisdom, in order that you might live, and establish understanding in knowledge. (Prov 9:5–6 LXX)

> Those who eat me will yet be hungry [πεινάσουσιν], and those who drink me will yet be thirsty [διψήσουσιν]. The one who obeys me will not be ashamed, and the one who works by me will not sin. (Sir 24:21–22 LXX)[72]

While not speaking from the perspective of Wisdom, Philo, in discussing the differences between Seth and his older brothers in Genesis, mentions a "thirst for virtue [δίψα . . . ἀρετῆς]" (Philo, *Posterity* 172).[73] Matthew builds upon this metaphor and applies it to this central theme in the Sermon.

Like the debate over the meaning of δικαιοσύνη in 3:15, scholars fall on a spectrum between those who understand δικαιοσύνη to refer to right conduct[74] and others who understand it to refer to God's justice or saving action,[75] with some scholars falling somewhere in between.[76] While 5:6 alone cannot decide this question, the rest of the Sermon will fill out an understanding of δικαιοσύνη that centers upon wholistic alignment with God's will (as some describe it, "moral conduct"), but as in 3:15, this understanding does not preclude δικαιοσύνη as including God's redemptive plan for the world. The disciple's own wholistic alignment with God's will includes pursuing δικαιοσύνη in a way that joins in God's redemptive plan for the world.

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[72] See also Isa 49:9–10; Prov 25:21. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 129; Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 62–63; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:141.

[73] See also Philo, *Flight* 139; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 129; Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 62.

[74] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:451–54; France, *Matthew*, 167–68; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:195–96.

[75] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 202–3; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:141–42.

[76] Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:93; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 167–68; Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 62–63; Turner, *Matthew*, 151–52.

Furthermore, Matthew's heightened focus on, to use Branch-Trevathan's term,[77] "proper interiority" in the Beatitudes as a whole (e.g., "the poor in spirit," "those who mourn," "the meek," etc.) is representative of his understanding of how a disciple is to pursue life in the kingdom.[78] It is not one's own δικαιοσύνη that results in flourishing. Instead, their *longing* for it results in their flourishing in the form of being satisfied with δικαιοσύνη itself. Here one sees the intellectual and volitional aspects of δικαιοσύνη for Matthew and in some way begins to understand the circular nature of virtue in Matthew. As the disciple longs for righteousness, he will actually become more righteous. This "hunger" and "thirst" for righteousness brings to mind the motivation that lies beneath acting in line with God's will, and it is to this proper motivation that the Sermon soon turns (chapter 6). "Proper interiority" is also what separates the disciple from the hypocrite. As Davies and Allison write,

> It is worth observing that 5.6 does not congratulate those who are as a matter of fact righteous; instead it lifts up those who are hungering and thirsting for conformity to the will of God. The distinction is a matter of some remark. Righteousness, it is implied, must be ever sought, must always be a goal which lies ahead: it is never in the grasp. . . . Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are blessed, not those who think they have attained it.[79]

This combination, then, of the "proper interiority" required in the Beatitudes and the learning process required to long for and pursue righteousness recalls my previous discussion of virtue in chapter 3. The disciples are learning from Jesus that their pursuit of righteousness is a process that includes both the ways they act in line with God's will and the ways in which they align their hearts with his will and long for greater righteousness.

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[77] George Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises: The Making of the Matthean Self*, NovTSup 178 (Boston: Brill, 2020), 202.

[78] As Stanley Stowers notes, "[Matthew] has shifted the blessing's meaning from referring [in Luke] to a class of people to a quality of character." Stowers, "Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics," 66.

[79] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:453.

The eighth Beatitude, as mentioned previously, forms an *inclusio* with the first, both resulting in disciples possessing "the kingdom of heaven" (5:10).[80] This *inclusio* both marks off the first eight Beatitudes from the ninth and implies that these eight are, as Davies and Allison put it, "different ways of saying the same thing, namely, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"[81] This focus on the "kingdom of heaven" also reinforces the divine aspects of righteousness mentioned earlier. By aligning oneself holistically with God's will, the disciples come to possess the kingdom of heaven, which is fully immersed in God's own righteousness.

By demarcating the first eight Beatitudes, the ninth is also in a sense highlighted. The ninth Beatitude extends the focus on persecution and implicitly on the righteousness that leads to it, but it does so by zeroing in personally on Jesus and his disciples. In 5:3–10, Jesus speaks of disciples in the third person, and God is the only other person mentioned. In 5:11–12, Jesus turns directly to the disciples in the second person—"Flourishing are you when others revile you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you"—and himself in the first—"falsely on my account." The paradoxical nature of the flourishing envisioned in the Beatitudes continues as Jesus encourages the disciples to "rejoice" over their "reward" in heaven that comes as a result of their righteousness. Indeed, the righteousness that the disciples will display in their own lives in following Jesus's interpretation of the Law sets them in stark contrast to the Pharisees and will result in their own persecution.[82] Jesus, of course, as Matthew's narrative comes to its climax, becomes the clearest fulfillment of this last Beatitude.[83] The Jewish leaders arrest him, falsely accuse him, and condemn him to death, despite his

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[80] For a discussion of the interpretive history of the eighth and ninth Beatitudes, see Eklund, *Beatitudes through the Ages*, 258–86.

[81] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:460.

[82] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 63.

[83] For a similar observation, see Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 64.

being “a righteous man [τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ]” (27:19). Thus both Jesus himself and his disciples after him continue in the line of God’s righteous people persecuted by their enemies (5:12; 23:34–35).

5:17–48. As Jesus progresses in his teaching, the nature of righteousness becomes clearer. After declaring that he has not come to abolish but to fulfill the Law (5:17), and pronouncing the kingdom-importance of both doing and teaching the commandments of the Law (5:19), Jesus concludes, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness [ἡ δικαιοσύνη] is greater than the scribes’ and Pharisees’, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). Righteousness, then, for Jesus flows directly from the disciples’ practice of doing and teaching the Law and should be better in some sense than the way the scribes and Pharisees do it. This verse is highlighted by Matthew’s turn from third-person to second-person, similar to the shift in 5:11, and this emphatic statement on greater righteousness serves as a transition between the beginning of the Sermon and the six following exegeses of the Law.[84]

While Matthew has foreshadowed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in John’s rebuke of them at the Jordan (3:7–10), he will fill out the reader’s understanding of the Pharisees as the narrative unfolds. For now, Jesus begins to unpack what it means to have this greater righteousness, and in the next section, Jesus lays out six exegeses of the Law in which he portrays righteousness as both defined by him as the true interpreter of the Law and as comprising not simply the actions of a disciple, but also the heart and

[84] As Pennington describes it, “The final declaration (5:20) of this super-condensed paragraph both concludes the argument being made and provides the thesis statement for the rest of the central section of the Sermon, through 7:12. The key word here is ‘righteousness,’ and as with the interpretation of ‘fulfillment,’ there is an essential Matthean context preceding the Sermon that makes sense of what is being said.” Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 177.

motivations of the disciple.[85] Each exegesis flows from Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law.[86] As Branch-Trevathan shows, at least four or five of the exegeses expound the Decalogue, and the sixth likely flows from Jesus's understanding of Leviticus 19:18.[87] All six are also socially orientated. Branch-Trevathan summarizes their importance:

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[85] Davies and Allison similarly note, "The meaning of 'righteousness' in 5.20 is determined by the paragraphs that follow. 'Righteousness' is therefore Christian character and conduct in accordance with the demands of Jesus—right intention, right word, right deed." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:499.

[86] While I appreciate Roland Deines's focus on the relationship between righteousness and Jesus's messianic status in Matthew here, I think his emphasis perhaps dulls Jesus's focus on the wholistic nature of righteousness by focusing so much on the centrality of Jesus's messianic role and its importance for righteousness. For example, he writes,

> In the end, the question is where the foundation for the righteousness that is valid in the kingdom of God lies: in the Torah or in the work and word of the Messiah. Because of that, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees misses the goal from now on, for they do not acknowledge Jesus as the one who fulfills the scriptures and who makes the eschatological righteousness that is demanded now, available through his messianic status. (Roland Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew—an Ongoing Debate," in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 81)

Similarly, Irons writes, citing Deines's article, "Yet it is a righteousness that rests upon the redemptive-historical and eschatological reality of the coming of the kingdom in the person of Jesus. This is what makes it the higher righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. In the words of Deines, it is 'Jesus-righteousness.'" Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 266. While the focus on the eschatological implications for righteousness and Jesus's messianic role is appropriate, along with the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus's status, this focus nevertheless implicitly minimizes Matthew's clear focus on the *nature* of righteousness as wholistic and the scribes and Pharisees' *hypocrisy* as central to Jesus's own critique of them (cf. 6:5–6; 23:1–36). Slightly more nuanced is Don Garlington, "The 'Better Righteousness': Matthew 5:20," *BBR* 20, no. 4 (2010): 479–502. He concludes,

> Matthew 5:20 itself insists that there must be a righteousness superior to that of the scribes and Pharisees. This "better righteousness" is qualitative in nature, with the stress on the upright lifestyle of the members of the kingdom of heaven. Such δικαιοσύνη is the *sine qua non* of entrance into the finalized manifestation of this kingdom. It is the ensuing antitheses of Matt 5:21–48 that clarify the precise quality of this righteousness. In a nutshell, each of the antitheses is an instance of "perfect" love (5:48) and corresponds to the Golden Rule (7:12), both of which are the summation of the law and the prophets (22:34–40). None of this would have come as a particular surprise to Jesus' hearers. What must have been stunning, however, was his boldness in setting his teaching in contrast to what was received by the people of old—"but *I* say to you." The reference is to both the law of Moses and the traditions that had sprung up between Moses and himself. In both cases, his law supersedes all that has gone before. Somewhat crudely stated, the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven is "better" that [*sic*] of the scribes and Pharisees because Jesus says it is; and he says it is because the age of fulfillment has arrived in him. (Garlington, "The 'Better Righteousness,'" 501–2)

See also Brian C. Dennert, "Constructing Righteousness: The <<Better Righteousness>> of Matthew as Part of the Development of a Christian Identity," *ASE* 28, no. 2 (2011): 57–80; Craig A. Evans, "Fulfilling the Law and Seeking Righteousness in Matthew and in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Graham N. Stanton*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Joel Willitts, and Richard A. Burridge, LNTS 435 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 102–14.

[87] For Branch-Trevathan's full argument, see Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 213–25.

> As a representation of one's moral responsibilities to others, the six antitheses then are synecdoches of righteousness in personal relationships. They do not name everything such righteousness requires but rather present six illustrative cases and argue repeatedly that merely refraining from offensive deeds does not constitute the righteousness necessary for entrance into the kingdom of heaven (5:20). One must combine right actions with right emotions, appetites, motives, and dispositions, with what Matt 5:8 calls "purity of heart." From these cases and the logic expressed thereby, the reader may extrapolate to gain a panoramic understanding of righteousness in human relationships.[88]

The final exegesis—to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"—brings this focus on interiority to a head and forms a fitting end to this section by highlighting "love" as central to Jesus's application of the Law in relationships, alluding clearly to Leviticus 19:18. It also forms an *inclusio* with the first exegesis, which calls disciples not only to avoid murder but not even to be angry (ὀργίζω) with his own brother (5:21–26).[89] In the last exegesis, the stakes are raised even higher. It is understandable perhaps to call someone to avoid being angry with his own brother, but to call one to love (ἀγαπάω) rather than hate (μισέω) his enemy (5:43–47) offers a positive corollary to the warning against anger that extends love toward neighbor in a radical direction. This love command extends, then, not only to other disciples and neighbors who return our love but even to those who do not love us back (5:46–47). This kind of love reflects the love of the Father, who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and causes his rain to fall on the righteous [δικαίους] and the unrighteous [ἀδίκους]" (5:45). This final call to extend love may be understood, therefore, as the driving force behind each of the prior exegeses—love for brothers, love for spouses, love for God, and love for enemies—and

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[88] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 225. See also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 205.

[89] For similarities between 5:21–26 and Stoic philosophy, see Erin Roberts, "Anger, Emotion, and Desire in the Gospel of Matthew" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2010); Stowers, "Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics," 69–70. Marcus Reiser argues that Jesus was the first to interpret Lev 19:18 in this way. Marius Reiser, "Love of Enemies in the Context of Antiquity," *NTS* 47, no. 4 (2001): 411–27. For an overview of the reception history of Lev 19:18 in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Book of Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament, see Kengo Akiyama, *The Love of Neighbour in Ancient Judaism: The Reception of Leviticus 19:18 in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Book of Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament*, AJEC 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

foreshadows the vertical and horizontal double love command that Jesus teaches as the greatest and most foundational commandment in the Law (22:34–40).[90]

Jesus's final statement at the end of this section extends the *inclusio* further, as his call to greater love than the Gentiles (5:47) and then call to wholeness (5:48) echoes the call to greater righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees in the transition passage to the exegeses (5:20). The structure of this section, therefore, may be portrayed as follows:

A – Call to righteousness greater than the scribes and Pharisees (5:20)

B – Warning against anger against your brother (5:21–26)

B' – Call to love your enemies (5:43–46)

A' – Call to love greater than the Gentiles (5:47)

Jesus's final statement in this section, like 5:20, serves as a transition between the exegeses and the following examples of proper piety: "You therefore must be whole [τέλειοι], as your heavenly Father is whole [τέλειος]" (5:48).[91]

The concept of τέλειος bears particular importance by its prominent place in the Sermon and in the way it qualifies Matthew's understanding of δικαιοσύνη. The Jewish background underlying τέλειος flows from both the concepts of שׁלם and תמם.[92] While τέλειος is not always used to translate either of these terms in the Septuagint, there

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[90] Similarly, Konradt writes, "In 5:17–20, Matthew presents the basic contours of his understanding of the Law. According to Matthew, in both his teaching and example Jesus opened up the full revelation of God's will in the Torah and the Prophets from its center determined by the love command and the call for compassion." Konradt, *Matthew*, 76.

[91] Luke's version reads, "Be merciful [οἰκτίρμονες] as your Father is merciful [οἰκτίρμων]" (6:36). If Luke and Matthew are using a common source or tradition, their different language here may further underscore Matthew's interest in mercy as a way of being whole. Especially with Matthew's call to wholeness flowing from his discussion of love for enemies, one way of expressing this wholistic devotion to God is acting mercifully toward others. The Matthean and Lukan versions, therefore, are similar, while Luke focuses in on mercy itself. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:192.

[92] My discussion of the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts of τέλειος follows Pennington's thorough overview in Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 69–77. See also Paul Johannes du Plessis, *ΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 36–121; Patrick Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 17–32.

is a significant amount of conceptual overlap. שׁלם often refers to peace, wholeness, or harmony in many different aspects of life or in a more overarching sense (e.g., Gen 26:29; 34:21; Ps 122:6; Zech 6:13).[93] תמם communicates a similar sense of wholeness but also often leans in a more personal sense of perfection or blamelessness in relation to the Law, often in cultic contexts as well as in discussing one's own personal devotion to God (e.g., Gen 20:5–6; Deut 18:13; Josh 24:14; 1 Kgs 9:4; Ps 78:72; Prov 2:21).[94] In the Septuagint, τέλειος often takes a similar meaning of whole or undivided. In 1 Kings, for example, Solomon calls the people at the temple dedication to "let [their] hearts be whole [τέλειαι] toward the Lord our God and to walk in a holy way in his commandments and to keep his laws, as on this day" (1 Kgs 8:61). Later in Solomon's life, the author of 1 Kings recounts that "his heart was not whole [τελεία] with the Lord his God, even as was his father David's heart" (1 Kgs 11:4).[95] In Greco-Roman thought, τέλειος often refers to the wholeness required in conforming oneself to the good, as in Plato, or the wholistic pursuit of virtue resulting in human flourishing.[96]

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus alludes to the calls to be holy as God is holy in Leviticus 19:2 and 20:26, while replacing the concept of "holiness" with "wholeness" from Deuteronomy 18:13—"You will be whole [τέλειος] before the Lord your God."[97] This switch from "holiness" to "wholeness" is likely pointed against the scribes and Pharisees mentioned in 5:20, whom the reader later discovers throughout the narrative to be hypocrites, teaching one thing but acting in a different way, emphasizing the external

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[93] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 72.

[94] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 73.

[95] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 75.

[96] Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 20–21; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 76–77.

[97] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 78.

keeping of the Law to the neglect of the heart.[98] Disciples, however, are to imitate God in their wholeness. As Stowers describes it, "What God requires for righteousness is not simply the performance of actions that in themselves are generally accepted as morally good, but rather that such actions be done with the right moral disposition that is the equivalent of doing God's will."[99] This kind of wholeness, then, aligns the disciple with God the Father and juxtaposes him with the scribes and Pharisees.

In the parallel between 5:20 and 5:48, therefore, Jesus more particularly defines the quality of righteousness required of disciples. He is not simply calling them to follow God's Law outwardly as the scribes and Pharisees do, but to orient themselves in a way that they actually *become* whole like the Father—aligning both their inner motivations and their outer actions with the will of God himself as interpreted by Jesus. This section (5:17–48), therefore, highlights three particular aspects of this kind of wholistic righteousness. First, wholeness requires the disciple to follow the entirety of the Law as interpreted by Jesus (5:17–20). Second, wholeness requires the disciple both to follow all the commandments of the Law *and* to teach them (5:19). Third, wholeness requires the disciple to focus holistically on both their inner life and outward action,[100] particularly centering their motivating affections on love for *everyone*, not just their neighbor.[101] Love serves as the central motivating affection in the disciple's pursuit of

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[98] As Pennington notes,

> Using a clever and provocative intertextual twist on the great holiness command from Leviticus, Jesus has restated Lev. 19:2 and 20:26 in terms of *teleios*-ity because "holiness" in the Pharisees' world had come to mean primarily external matters of purity and behavior. . . . Instead, as in 5:17–47, Jesus is giving a reappropriated, clear exposition of the true intent of the law, emphasizing the matter of the heart, the whole inner person who must match the outward behavior or it is not truly righteousness or virtue. (Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 78–79)

[99] Stowers, "Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics," 63.

[100] As Pennington describes, "To say that disciples must be *teleios* as God is *teleios* is to say that they must be whole or virtuous—singular in who they are—not one thing on the outside but another on the inside." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 204.

[101] Paul Duk-Joong Kim understands τέλειος here to refer to "the practice of the love of one's enemies." Paul Duk-Joong Kim, "The Idea of Perfection in Matthew's Gospel against Its Jewish Background" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2003), 220. While there is certainly a tight connection

righteousness, and the virtues of discipleship—faith and mercy—flow respectively from love for God and love for neighbor (22:34–40).[102] The following section of the Sermon (6:1–34) focuses on various forms of piety that flow from love for neighbor (6:1–4) and love for God (6:5–34).

6:1–21. Just after this statement, Jesus gives three examples of piety that continue to portray this wholistic righteousness: giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. In this section, Matthew provides some of the clearest and tightest structure in the entire Sermon—as Pennington describes this unit, "the apex of Matthew's literary skills."[103] The parallels between 6:1–18 and 5:17–48 are striking. Both begin with a thematic statement centered upon δικαιοσύνη and then offer a series of examples introduced by repeated formulas, including Jesus's emphatic introductory statement—"I say to you" (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6: 2, 5, 16).[104] The only significant difference is that the prior section offers six examples while this section offers only three.[105] This significant structural parallel highlights the thematic similarities between the two sections. Most

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between wholeness and love in this passage, wholeness should not *be defined* by love itself. Love is the *motivating affection* that drives the disciple to pursue righteousness in the form of faith in God and mercy toward others. Wholeness, therefore, is the quality of this righteousness. The disciple's righteousness should be whole in the sense that their inner and outer life are unified in alignment with God's will.

[102] Similarly, Betz observes, "Indeed, the SM corresponds remarkably well also to the double commandment of love of God and love of neighbor, or what is called in philosophy the 'Canon of the Two Virtues.' Love toward God is not a major concern in the SM, but it is certainly stated explicitly in the saying about God and Mammon (6:24), and it is implied elsewhere as well." Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 325. Stowers also similarly understands love to be Matthew's "master virtue." While I do not refer to "love" as a virtue for Matthew, I think the core of Stower's thought is correct. For Matthew, love cannot be true love unless it is completed, or perfected, as Stowers puts it, by action. As he comments on the love command in 19:16–22, "The addition of the love command [in 19:16–22] makes it clear that giving to the poor, if done lovingly, would entail the perfection of the young man's appropriate acts/keeping of the commandments. Then he would be a follower of Jesus." Stowers, "Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics," 66. Love, then, is the motivation behind both faith and mercy—the combination of which results in righteousness. Love is the proper inner motivation that lies behind the wholistic expression of faith and mercy. I will discuss 19:16–22 in more detail in chap. 6. On love as emotion or affection in Matthew, see Tanja Dannenmann, *Emotion, Narration, und Ethik*, WUNT 498 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 244–45.

[103] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 122.

[104] For the following parallels, see Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 185–87.

[105] Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 185.

importantly, both sections explain in more detail the greater righteousness required of Jesus's disciples. As Branch-Trevathan describes, "Just as the first section presents Jesus' understanding of interpersonal righteousness, the second presents his vision of righteousness in religious practice."[106]

Jesus begins the section by warning them "not to practice your righteousness [τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν] in front of others to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward with your Father in heaven" (6:1).[107] In each of the three examples, then, Jesus sets the outward focus of hypocrites in contrast with the wholistic righteousness required of disciples. The hypocrites are motivated by their desire for praise from other people—sounding a trumpet as they give to the poor, praying elaborately, and making sure that they *really look like* they are fasting. According to Jesus, though, if someone does these things in order to receive the applause of other people, his or her piety ceases to be an act of righteousness. Righteousness is wholistic alignment with God's will—both inward heart motivation and outward action.[108] Therefore, doing these things motivated by the applause of people creates a divide between the disciple's heart and action. The hypocrites are characterized by this division between motivation and action: right action motivated by wrong desires. The righteous disciple, though, must be holistically righteous: right action motivated by right desires.[109]

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[106] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 226.

[107] On the theme of heavenly rewards, see Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Nathan Eubank, "Storing Up Treasure with God in the Heavens: Celestial Investments in Matthew 6:1–21," *CBQ* 76, no. 1 (2014): 77–92; Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, BZNW 196 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Tzvi Novick, "Wages from God: The Dynamics of a Biblical Metaphor," *CBQ* 73, no. 4 (2011): 708–22.

[108] Similarly, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:575–77; Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 232; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 234; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 210–12.

[109] As William Mattison writes,

> Intentionality is also a central topic for a virtue ethics approach to moral theology. An intention is the goal or purpose of an action which renders that action intelligible or meaningful. Though intentionality may be spoken of in the broader sense of simply goal-directed behavior, for human persons intentional action is a reflection of human rationality. With the intellect a human person

This section fills out Matthew's understanding of δικαιοσύνη in two key ways. First, the clear call to right motive in this section rounds out Matthew's qualification of δικαιοσύνη as τέλειος. Righteousness must not simply be outward, as it is for the hypocrites. It must be the *whole* person—both inner and outer. Furthermore, even though the six examples in the previous section and the three examples here cover a limited number of circumstances, they nevertheless may be understood as synecdochally representative of all acts of devotion before God, which must all be performed with both right motive and right action.[110] Here we may also observe the virtue-formation intended within the Sermon. As discussed in chapter 3, the formation of virtue requires both relational learning and practice under the teaching of a master. Here the disciples are receiving teaching from their master together, as they are called to *consider* their own motivations, desires, and intentions and *practice* mercy toward others (6:1–4). As Mattison notes,

> People who give alms to be seen by others do not possess the same habit as those who give alms for their heavenly Father. Both consistently do acts that look the same from an observer's perspective, and even have the same immediate finality. But habits reside in persons not acts, and persons can consistently choose immediate acts for different further ends. Hence, the difference in further goal not only informs the meaning of the immediate acts but also the habits that are developed by the persons performing such acts. Some people giving alms become generous. Others become hypocrites. . . . How we see things not only drives how we act and the habits we develop, but it is also shaped by how we act and the habits we develop. . . . This cyclical relationship between the sorts of persons we are and how we see things is the basis for the ancient claim that the virtues are connected, or

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> apprehends or grasps a goal and with the will or rational appetite the person responds accordingly to that goal (e.g., pursues it). . . . Furthermore . . . intentionality not only enables us to understand and evaluate particular actions, but it is also the lynchpin in the formation of habits such as virtues. (William C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017], 123)

[110] Similarly, Branch-Trevathan writes,

> By focusing on three fundamental practices in Jewish and early Christian piety and by presenting them as illustrative examples of acting righteously, the SM portrays its teachings on these three acts of devotion as synecdochal. The instructions for performing them properly are instructions for performing all pious acts properly. One must do such acts but one must do them with the pure and proper motive in order to earn God's eschatological recompense. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 232)

> unified. While prudence is needed for the exercise of the moral virtues, the moral virtues are needed in order to see things and make decisions prudently.[111]

Virtue-formation, then, is cyclical in the sense that one can only become virtuous by practicing acting virtuously, and one can only act virtuously by becoming more virtuous. Jesus's focus on right desires, motivation, intentionality, and action throughout the Sermon, but especially here in chapter 6, reflects this cycle. The only way to pursue greater righteousness is to trust God and act mercifully toward one's neighbor, but the only way to do things righteously is to become a person who is holistically righteous, aligning oneself with God's own will as expressed through Jesus himself.

Second, the double love command (22:34–40) once again informs the focus of this section. While one may see the previous section focusing on righteousness as love for neighbor (5:17–48) and the current section focusing on righteousness as love for God (6:1–21), even within 6:1–21, the horizontal and vertical nature of righteousness is clear and flows directly from the command to love all at the end of the previous section. The first example (6:2–4) on giving to the poor is an expression of mercy toward others (i.e., love for neighbor) while the second (6:5–15) and third (6:16–18) are expressions of trust in God through prayer and fasting (i.e., love for God).[112] While I will focus more on mercy and faith as individual virtues that encompass the disciple's overall righteousness in the following chapters, 6:1–21 gives a glimpse of these three concepts interacting clearly. Righteousness serves as Matthew's overall category of virtue, and by pursuing the individual virtues of mercy and faith, the disciple pursues righteousness itself.

While scholars often end the previous section at 6:18,[113] Pennington makes a convincing argument that 6:19–21 serves as a hinge passage, concluding 6:1–18 and

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[111] Mattison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 146–47.

[112] I will discuss Jesus's encouragement toward right motivation in "giving alms [ποιῇς ἐλεημοσύνην]" (6:2–4) much more thoroughly as an encouragement toward mercy in chap. 6.

[113] Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 187; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 423–29; Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:625–28; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:214–17.

introducing 6:22–7:12.[114] Pennington notes the repetition of ἀφανίζω in 6:16 and 6:19–20 and the way that 6:21 so effectively summarizes the focus of 6:1–18 on righteousness as both inner motivation and outward action.[115] Nathan Eubank also notes the parallel between "reward with your Father in heaven" (6:1) and "treasures in heaven" (6:20).[116] This passage transitions the emphasis, then, from the disciple's relationship with God as it relates to piety, to the disciple's relationship with God as it relates to earthly possessions.

6:19–7:27. The first part of this section—6:19–34—focuses on the disciple's relationship to God and material possessions.[117] Whatever a disciple values betrays the desires of his heart (6:19–21). In the same way, the disciple's "eye" portrays the reality of his whole person (6:22–23). If the "eye" is "whole and generous," the whole person will prove to be that way, and if the "eye" is "evil and greedy," the whole person will prove to be that way.[118] Both of these sayings, of course, further Matthew's understanding of

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[114] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 126, 231–33. France and Konradt also note the parallels between 6:1–18 and 6:19–21, while situating the latter with the following section. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 257; Konradt, *Matthew*, 109.

[115] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 231–33.

[116] Eubank, "Storing Up Treasure with God," 88–91.

[117] For a helpful treatment of this section's coherency with the rest of the Sermon, especially in relation to righteousness, while also situating it within both its Greco-Roman philosophical and Jewish wisdom tradition contexts, see Walter T. Wilson, "A Third Form of Righteousness: The Theme and Contribution of Matthew 6.19–7.12 in the Sermon on the Mount," *NTS* 53, no. 3 (2007): 303–24.

[118] I follow here Pennington's translation, which allows each phrase "to communicate the double meaning and play on words that *haplous* would easily communicate to Matthew's hearers." Italics are Pennington's own. He goes on, "Matthew's word choice is a brilliant play that works well in the Sermon, tying in to the broader theme of wholeness and the more specific discussion of money. It does not map easily onto today's Western cultural encyclopedia, making it difficult to translate and certainly losing the pleasure of the poetic play." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 242. Pennington's comments allude to the difficulty in translating ἁπλοῦς and πονηρὸς here. Branch-Trevathan offers an extensive discussion of the emphasis on generosity and greediness here as it relates to the disciple's relationship to possessions. Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 233–35. He quotes John Elliott, who notes that many ancients believed that the eye "expressed the innermost dispositions, feelings, and desires of the heart." John H. Elliott, "The Evil Eye and the Sermon on the Mount: Contours of a Pervasive Belief in Social Scientific Perspective," *BibInt* 2 (1994): 54. Branch-Trevathan also gives several primary source examples of the eye as revealing interiority: Cicero, *De or.* 3.216–223; *Tusc.* 1.20.46; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.130. For these primary source citations, see also Antón Alvar Nuño, "Ocular Pathologies and the Evil Eye in the Early Roman Principate," *Numen* 59 (2012): 295–321.

righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will. The outer life of a person expresses their inner life, and for a disciple to be *whole*, his inner and outer lives must match. Once again, this is the language of virtue—that a person's desires, motivations, and actions must align with one another for a person to be whole.

The next saying (6:24), which recalls the call to love one's enemies in 5:43–47, reads, "No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Chapter 5, verses 17–48, focuses primarily on righteousness within interpersonal relationships, while 6:1–18 largely focuses on righteousness in piety toward God. The centrality of love of God in 6:24 opposed to love of money, understood through the lens of the double love of God and neighbor, calls back to the love of God expressed in faith in God through prayer and fasting particularly (6:5–18). It also calls further back to the love of enemies commanded in 5:43–47, foreshadowing within the Sermon itself Jesus's upholding of the double love command as the greatest commandment (22:34–40).

Just after this call to love God, Jesus encourages the disciples not to be anxious over food or clothes because God will ultimately care for them. He admonishes them as "you of little faith [ὀλιγόπιστοι]" (6:30). As Pennington writes,

> Consistent with the sustained argument throughout the Sermon, anxiety is an example of double-souledness; it is the opposite of the singleness that marks the whole-person virtue of the follower of Christ. . . . The person who lives in anxiety about providing for himself or herself reveals and perpetuates a double-heartedness, a splitting of the soul between the now (where the heavenly Father meets us) and an imagined (dreaded) future of need. This normal human experience is ultimately a lack of faith and therefore in need of instruction and reproof.[119]

This encouragement towards faith in God comes to climax when Jesus says, "But seek [ζητεῖτε] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (6:33). While the Gentiles "seek [ἐπιζητοῦσιν]" food and clothes (6:32), the disciple of Jesus should "seek [ζητεῖτε] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"

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[119] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 251.

(6:33). In this context, therefore, trusting the Father for everything the disciple needs is the localized way that he is to seek righteousness. Once again, the inner reality of faith is expressed outwardly in daily living.

This combination of the kingdom and righteousness recalls John's and Jesus's righteousness related to their roles in the proclamation of God's kingdom in 3:15, and certainly the disciple's possession of the kingdom as a result of their persecution for righteousness's sake (5:10). The call to "seek first" resonates with the fourth Beatitude—those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6)—and is in many ways synonymous with it.[120] Once again, the disciple is not the one who has achieved his own righteousness but the one who hungers and thirsts for it, seeking it above all else. That disciple is the one who "will be satisfied" (5:6)—for whom God will "add all these things" (6:33). While the immediate context requires the simplest explanation of what "all these things" may be—the necessities of life that may become a source of anxiety for Jesus's disciples—there may be an allusion that parallels with 5:6. In 5:6, the disciples who hunger and thirst for righteousness are satisfied with it, and in 6:33, the disciples who seek God's kingdom and his righteousness have "all of these things"—both the necessities of life and wholistic righteousness—added to them as they seek it out through faith in God and mercy toward others.[121] Jesus's teaching here then is not simply wisdom teaching on living as a disciple but is intricately connected to his work in ushering in God's kingdom.[122]

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[120] Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 265; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 249.

[121] Similarly, Walter Wilson observes, "Presumably, 'all these things' (6:33; cf. 6:32) that will be 'added to' (6:33) the faithful by God include not only the sort of mundane needs mentioned in 6:31 but also the abundance of divine grace represented by the kingdom itself, that is, the same things symbolized by the petition for 'bread' in the Lord's Prayer (6:11)." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:227.

[122] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 249–50; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:345.

Brown understands δικαιοσύνη, as in 3:15, to refer to God's "promised redemption." She writes,

> The emphasis of 6:33 on *God's* kingdom (and with the personal pronoun governing both nouns) suggests that the second noun—δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*, 'covenant loyalty,' traditionally, 'righteousness')—be understood as closely coordinated with the first, so denoting God's covenant loyalty to promises made to Israel rather than God's moral character more abstractly (cf. 3:15; 21:32).[123]

Despite its clear connection with the kingdom in 6:33, Matthew's use of δικαι- language throughout his Gospel centers upon the moral conduct of the disciple, and here God's righteousness, as Davies and Allison point out, serves as "the norm for human righteousness."[124] There is no need to shift the meaning of δικαιοσύνη here to include the concept of the coming kingdom because understanding it as wholistic alignment with God's will *already includes* God's will in his "promised redemption." Thus, the disciple's own pursuit of righteousness is a way in which disciples are called to join in ushering in God's kingdom. Their righteousness reflects God's own righteousness in his plan for his people. As Davies and Allison note,

> To seek God's righteousness and God's kingdom amounts to the same thing. Righteousness is the law of the realm, the law of God's kingdom; and to participate even now in God's eschatological rule one must strive for the better righteousness of 5.20. Righteousness is the narrow gate that leads to the life of God's kingdom. Thus to seek the kingdom is to seek righteousness and to seek righteousness is to seek the kingdom.[125]

Despite this emphasis on the kingdom, then, one cannot deny Matthew's clear emphasis on the disciple's own personal moral virtue throughout the Sermon—a righteousness that

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[123] Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 72–74.

[124] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:661. Przybylski also takes δικαιοσύνη to refer primarily to the disciple's moral conduct here, linking it clearly with 5:20 and 6:1:

> It was shown above that 5:48 and 6:33 perform similar functions as far as their roles in the structure of their respective chapters are concerned. It should also be noted that this parallelism even extends to a similarity of meaning. In both verses the disciples are urged to imitate God. Seeking God's righteousness (6:33) is essentially the same as being perfect as God is perfect (5:48). Consequently, just as in 5:20, 48, and 6:1 righteousness/perfection was not thought of as the gift of God, so in 6:33 it is not viewed in this way. (Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 90)

[125] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:661.

is wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus's own interpretation of the Law. Ultimately, the teaching in this section and this climactic statement on seeking righteousness continue to emphasize the disciple's wholeness compared to the hypocrite's division.

Of particular importance in this passage is the intersection of the disciples' faith in God and mercy toward others as a way of seeking righteousness. This section (6:19–33) focuses on the disciple's relationship to God and possessions. The first, third, and last passages (6:19–21, 24, 25–34) focus on the disciple's inner disposition and love for God versus money and earthly possessions, but the second recalls the call to properly wholistic giving to those in need in 6:2–4 (i.e., generosity vs. greediness). The parallels between 6:1–21 and 6:19–33 in this regard are clear. Faith as an expression of love for God (6:5–21, 24–34) and mercy as an expression of love for neighbor (6:1–3, 22–23) provide the framework for these two sections, and this final call to seek righteousness details further the relationship between the two.

As Branch-Trevathan observes, "As anxiety about the future leads many to amass treasures, the audience is exhorted to cultivate the imperturbable trust—the opposite of 'little faith' (ὀλιγόπιστοι)—in God's care that leads to amassing righteousness by sharing possessions (see also 6:11–12)."[126] Anxiety prevents the disciple from truly trusting God for his circumstances and physical well-being. This anxiety then prevents the disciple from being able to be generous with his neighbor. Instead, he becomes greedy and begins to seek after and store up earthly treasures rather than heavenly. The disciple, though, should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (6:33). Through trusting in God as an expression of the disciple's love for him rather than

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[126] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 237. Konradt also writes, "Verse 33 attaches to the course of action of v. 20 and portrays the fundamental orientation of the person who serves God. In 19:15–22, Matthew will make clear that the charitable use of one's possessions is the realization of the requirements of the love command. On the other hand, the warning against anxiety extends the admonition in v. 19 not to heap up treasures on earth (in this connection, see Sir 31:1–3)." Konradt, *Matthew*, 114.

money, the disciple is able consequently to express love for his neighbor through merciful generosity, and by pursuing both faith in God and mercy toward others, the disciple seeks righteousness itself. Righteousness, then, represents the umbrella category of virtue for Matthew, while faith and mercy are individual virtues, through the pursuit of which, the disciple pursues righteousness itself.

In the final section, Jesus draws all of these themes—primarily those of righteousness and the kingdom—closer together as his teaching takes on an eschatological trajectory. False prophets are distinguished from true prophets (7:15–20). Those who reject the Father's will are separated from those who embrace it (7:21–23). And those who foolishly build their lives upon a false foundation are juxtaposed with those who wisely plant their lives in Jesus's own revelation of God's will (7:24–27). Matthew's first explicit use of the language of wisdom here (the "wise man [ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ]" in 7:24) describes more clearly one aspect of the virtue that undergirds Jesus's vision of discipleship laid out in the Sermon. Wisdom in ancient philosophical tradition often refers to moral discernment or prudence.[127] In the Sermon, this concept describes well the internal discernment necessary for applying the principles Jesus teaches to individual circumstances in everyday life.[128] Righteousness, therefore, as Matthew's overall moral category of virtue for discipleship requires both love as motivating affection and wisdom as the moral discernment required to *practice* righteousness in real situations in everyday life. Jesus continues to encourage his disciples toward wisdom

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[127] Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 73; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 562n35; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 280; Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 244.

[128] As Branch-Trevathan describes in detail,

> The SM does not enumerate everything that righteousness entails and so does not provide a finite list of what one must "do" to survive the eschatological storm. To "do" Jesus' words in 7:24–27 therefore cannot mean simply to enact the actions and attitudes specified in the Sermon as opposed to ignoring them. In light of these features of the SM, to "do" its sayings requires first discerning their relevance to and proper application in specific situations, which requires reflecting on the meaning of particular sayings in order to extrapolate from them to the whole they represent and then entails imagining the congruity between that wholistic account of righteousness and a particular circumstance. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 243)

both in direct teaching (10:16—"Be wise [φρόνιμοι] like serpents") and in parables (24:45—"the faithful and wise [φρόνιμος] servant"; 25:1–13—the "wise [φρόνιμοι]" virgins). In each instance, he encourages his disciples to develop this kind of moral discernment so that they can pursue righteousness, learning to apply these principles faithfully in every situation they encounter.

Jesus brings the Sermon to a close, then, by clearly demarcating the ultimate ends of those who are righteous and those who are not. His disciples are to be whole as the Father is whole. Their internal desire to follow God's will as expressed through Jesus produces the wholistic righteousness described throughout the Sermon. Hypocrites, on the other hand, will continue to live divided lives—their desires twisted inward toward themselves and their own exaltation in the eyes of others—and despite the *appearance of fruit* in their lives, they do not inherit the kingdom but instead reap the judgment of its king. All the while, Matthew's readers—through their own reading of the Sermon—have been sitting in the seats of Jesus's own disciples, experiencing for themselves Jesus's call to pursue wholistic righteousness motivated by love for God and love for neighbor and to eschew the division and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. They are called to do this by wisely aligning their desires, motivations, and actions with God's own will as expressed through Jesus and by pursuing this kind of virtue daily—in social interactions, piety toward God, and every aspect of life.

The Righteous and the Unrighteous

Continuing this trajectory at the end of the Sermon, outside of John the Baptist and Jesus (to whom I will return shortly), there are three strands dealing with righteousness running through the remaining narrative: (1) further encouragement to the disciples, (2) pictures of eschatological separation between the righteous and the unrighteous, and (3) the contrasting hypocritical example of the Jewish leaders. All three of these strands serve the same purpose: to clearly delineate the righteous from the

unrighteous in order to solidify the disciples' identity as the righteous and to call them to continue in that righteousness while avoiding the hypocrisy of the unrighteous. Matthew utilizes this portrayal for the purpose of virtue-formation within his reader as he himself is implicitly called to see his own identity as a righteous disciple against the hypocrisy of the unrighteous.

Further encouragement to the disciples. Jesus mentions "righteous" people in two further encouragements to his disciples (10:41; 13:17), reinforcing their call to pursue greater righteousness (5:20) and their consequent identity as the righteous. The first comes at the end of his commission in chapter 10. Jesus begins his speech by telling them the message they are to preach and the merciful acts they are to perform for others (10:7–8), and then he spends the rest of his speech encouraging them to have faith in God amidst the difficulties and persecution they will encounter (10:9–42). He ends his speech by commenting on the reward for those who receive them: "Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous [δίκαιον] person because he is a righteous [δικαίου] person will receive a righteous [δικαίου] person's reward" (10:41). This statement recalls 5:10–12, when Jesus compares the disciples' coming persecution "for righteousness' sake" with the persecution of "the prophets who were before you."[129] It is important to note that this call to merciful action (10:7–8) and faith in God amidst uncertainty and persecution (10:9–42) recalls the pervasive themes of mercy and faith, previously discussed as virtues encompassing the righteousness called for in the Sermon. In fact, just before this commission in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew gives several examples both of Jesus showing mercy to others and of people exhibiting faith in Jesus himself.[130] In the middle of Jesus's

[129] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:376.

[130] See my discussion in chaps. 5 and 6 regarding each of these examples.

commission, he even mentions the centrality of loving *him* above even family (10:37), echoing the love of God above money in the Sermon (6:24). At the end of this commission, therefore, he reinforces the disciples' identity as his messengers, following in a long line of those pursuing righteousness.[131]

Later, Jesus parallels prophets and righteous people in his explanation to the disciples on why he uses parables: "But flourishing are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you that many prophets and righteous [δίκαιοι] people longed to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (13:16–17).[132] In both instances, Jesus parallels his disciples with the prophets and righteous people of the past. In chapter 10, he does so promising reward to those who welcome the disciples as they would a prophet or righteous person, and in chapter 13, he does so in order to show the disciples that their unique relationship to Jesus allows them opportunities that the prophets and righteous people of old only dreamed of. In both instances, Jesus's disciples are cast in the same light as the prophets and righteous people throughout Israel's history, reinforcing their own understanding of righteousness as their calling as disciples. This identification is also forward-looking, foreshadowing Jesus's eschatological prophecies of the separation of the righteous and unrighteous (see below), and Jesus's own persecution as a righteous person (27:19).

Pictures of eschatological separation between the righteous and the unrighteous. Jesus provides a number of vivid portraits of eschatological separation

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[131] As Konradt writes, "As people who subordinate themselves to God's will and allow themselves to be called into service by accepting Jesus' call to mission, they are righteous." Konradt, *Matthew*, 169.

[132] Compare with Pss. Sol. 17:44—"Flourishing are those who will see in those days the good fortune of Israel, which God will accomplish in the gathering of the tribes"—and Pss. Sol. 18:7—"Flourishing are those who will see in those days the goodness of the Lord, which he will accomplish in the coming generation." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:394.

between the righteous and the unrighteous (13:43, 49; 25:31–46). In Jesus's explanation of the parable of the wheat and weeds, he concludes,

> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those who practice lawlessness. And they will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous [δίκαιοι] will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone who has ears hear. (13:41–43)

While Jesus says little to describe "the righteous" in this passage, he does describe their antitheses—"all who cause sin and those who practice lawlessness." This comparison reinforces Matthew's understanding of "the righteous" as those who holistically align themselves with God's will by embodying Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law as expressed in the Sermon.

Shortly after in the parable of the net, Jesus concludes similarly, "It will be this way at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the evil from the righteous [τῶν δικαίων]. And they will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (13:49–50). Finally, Jesus again pits the righteous against the unrighteous in his discussion of the sheep and goats, in which the righteous care for the "least of these" and the others do not. He concludes concerning those who did not care for the "least of these": "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous [οἱ δίκαιοι] into eternal life" (25:46).

Two observations inform our understanding of righteousness from these texts. First, Jesus's repeated identification of his followers with "the righteous" at the end of time serves to reinforce their identity and further encourage their pursuit of the greater righteousness called for in the Sermon (5:20). Kampen, in his comparison of Qumran literature and Matthew, has observed that the descriptor "righteous" in Matthew served as a community identifier for those who came to follow Jesus.[133] "Righteousness" would

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[133] Kampen, "'Righteousness' in Matthew."

have been an assumed necessity for God's people, but the particular way of life that defines this righteousness would have delineated groups from one another. For Matthew, righteousness as portrayed by Jesus in the Sermon—wholistic alignment with God's will—served, therefore, to identify and define the life of discipleship.[134] In other words, Jesus's portrayals of eschatological separation into the righteous and the unrighteous served to reinforce Matthew's reader's own perception of himself as a righteous disciple of Jesus. Second, the parable of the sheep and the goats further clarifies that mercy toward others—regardless of one's understanding of who "the least of these" refers to[135]—fulfills the righteousness required of Jesus's disciples, as those who showed mercy through physical support of those in need are welcomed into the kingdom as "the righteous" (25:37).[136]

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[134] Kampen writes,

> If the literary legacy of first and second century Judaism is a reliable indicator of viewpoints held within the Jewish community, an assumption shared by all residents would have been that it was the righteousness of God which made Israel a chosen nation and created a chosen people. The issues which would have divided that community would have included perspectives on eschatology and the proper Jewish way of life. Within that literary composition attributed to Matthew δικαιοσύνη and δίκαιος were used to designate the particular perspective of the followers of Jesus on these issues. They were the "righteous" Jews who practiced a way of life based on their understanding of "righteousness." (Kampen, "'Righteousness' in Matthew," 486–87)

[135] For an overview of the different views related to the identity of "the least of these," see Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2018), 3:1342–47.

[136] I will discuss the relationship between mercy and righteousness in this parable more fully in chap. 6. Christopher McMahon makes a convincing argument that the parable of the sheep and the goats along with the subsequent anointing at Bethany centers the disciples' worship of Jesus in their righteous mercy toward others: "Matthew marries the anointing scene with the parable of *The Sheep and the Goats* by highlighting the utter centrality of the surpassing righteousness of aiding the poor and vulnerable as constitutive of the disciples' worship of Jesus, 'God with us', and constitutive of God's work in Christ for the salvation of the world." Christopher McMahon, "Christology, the Poor, and Surpassing Righteousness: Reading Matthew 25,31–46 with 26, 6–13," *RB* 123, no. 4 (October 2016): 566. George Njeri makes an intriguing comparison between this passage and the Book of the Watchers. In contrast to the account in the Book of the Watchers, Matthew portrays both the righteous and the unrighteous as being unaware of their status in judgment before the judgment is pronounced. Both groups are surprised by the king's judgment. One possible implication of Njeri's observation is that the unassuming, humble ignorance of the righteous people *of their own righteousness* is set in stark contrast with the Jewish leaders who seem to have boasted *in their own supposed righteousness*, further distancing Matthew's portrayal of the two groups from one another. George Njeri, "Surprise on the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25:31–46 and the Book of the Watchers," *Neot* 54, no. 1 (2020): 87–104.

The contrasting hypocritical example of the Jewish leaders. Matthew continues to cast the Jewish leaders as a contrasting hypocritical example of righteousness (9:13; 12:7; 12:37; 23:28; 23:29; 23:35). The first of these encounters happens when the Pharisees confront Jesus's disciples after they see Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus overhears them and says, "The well do not need a doctor, but the sick do. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call righteous people [δικαίους] but sinners" (9:12–13). In a similar encounter, the Pharisees confront Jesus for allowing his disciples to pick grain to eat on the Sabbath. In the climax of Jesus's response to them, he says, "And if you had known what this means—'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'—you would not have condemned [κατεδικάσατε] the innocent. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (12:7–8).

While "righteousness" only occurs in the first passage, Matthew's use of Hosea 6:6 bears essentially the same meaning. The Pharisees are focusing on the outward appearance of righteousness or religiosity while ignoring the more wholistic understanding—love, compassion, and mercy toward others.[137] It may *seem righteous* to avoid association with sinners and to follow a rigid interpretation of the Law, but God himself desires mercy and not those outward expressions of righteousness at the expense of mercy. As France writes,

> Righteousness is not of course in itself a bad thing; indeed properly understood it is the goal of discipleship (5:6, 10, 20; 6:33). But the sort of "righteousness" which puts sacrifice before mercy is not the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (see on 5:20), and those who rely on such correctness of behavior are not likely to find their way through the narrow gate. It is hard for the "righteous" in that sense to recognize their need for a Messiah whose role is to "save his people from their sins" (1:21). . . . The point of "calling sinners," of course, is not that they should remain sinners but that they may find a true righteousness.[138]

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[137] I will discuss both of these passages more fully in chap. 6 on mercy. See also Mary Hinkle Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means: Hosea 6:6 and the Ethic of Mercy in Matthew's Gospel," *WW* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 355–63.

[138] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 371.

In other words, anyone who is *truly righteous* in Jesus's estimation understands themselves first to be a sinner in need of Jesus. As discussed previously, the promise of satisfaction for those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6) implies that the only way to achieve righteousness is to understand that righteousness is a constant aim of learning and development rather than a box to be checked. The Pharisees, on the other hand, understand themselves *to be righteous* because of their outward actions and distance from the sin of sinners, yet their hearts are far from what God truly desires. This division of person between heart and action—their hypocrisy—is the exact opposite of the wholistic righteousness to which Jesus calls his disciples.

Matthew's contrasting portrayal of the Jewish leaders reaches its climax in Jesus's woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:1–36). These woes serve as a sort of parallel to the Sermon's Beatitudes and fill out more clearly the narrative picture of the Jewish leaders that Matthew has been painting throughout the narrative.[139] The hypocrites' focus on an outward show in giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting (6:1–18); the Pharisees' focus on outward righteousness at the expense of mercy (9:13; 12:7); and the contrast between their seemingly good works and their bad inner person (7:15–23; 12:33–37) serve to foreshadow the woes, several of which center upon righteousness. In the fourth woe, Jesus critiques the scribes and Pharisees for their neglect of the most important aspects of the Law (23:23–24):

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe mint and dill and cumin yet have neglected the more important matters of the Law—justice [τὴν κρίσιν], mercy [τὸ ἔλεος], and faithfulness [τὴν πίστιν]. These you should have done [ποιῆσαι] without neglecting the others. Blind guides, straining out a gnat yet swallowing a camel!

[139] For a defense of the woes as corresponding to the Beatitudes, see Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 55; K. C. Hanson, "How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew's Makarisms and Reproach," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 102.

This admonition is at the core of Jesus's woes—that the Pharisees have followed their understanding of the ritual aspects of the Law while neglecting the central social aspects of the Law.[140]

While there is no clear prophetic citation in this passage, several scholars see Micah 6:8b LXX as its primary influence: "And what does the Lord require from you but to do justice [ποιεῖν κρίμα] and love mercy [ἀγαπᾶν ἔλεον] and to be ready to walk with the Lord your God."[141] Hosea 2:21–22 LXX may offer an additional correspondence, however, that explicitly includes all three of Matthew's "more important matters of the Law": "And I will betroth you to myself in righteousness [δικαιοσύνῃ] and in justice [κρίματι]and in mercy [ἐλέει]and in compassion [οἰκτιρμοῖς]. And I will betroth you to myself in faithfulness [πίστει], and you will know the Lord."[142] Matthew does not use any variation of οἰκτίρω but generally opts for σπλαγχνίζομαι, the semantic ranges between σπλαγχνίζομαι and ἐλεέω often overlapping, with the former expressing the emotion of compassion and the latter the action of mercy. It is conceivable, therefore, that Matthew would collapse these two concepts together from Hosea 2:21.

Of most interest in the present discussion of righteousness is the fact that Hosea 2:21–22 includes the same three virtues listed by Matthew—justice, mercy, and faithfulness—yet begins with another—righteousness. Righteousness happens to be a major theme for Matthew and the very antithetical virtue to the scribes' and Pharisees' hypocrisy. He may exclude righteousness from the "more important matters of the Law" here because he understands δικαιοσύνη to sit on a higher plane than ἔλεος and πίστις. As I

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[140] Konradt, *Matthew*, 347–48.

[141] Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 211; Culpepper, *Matthew*, 451; Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:294; Evans, *Matthew*, 394; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 873; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:670; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 551; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 937–38. Gibbs, on the other hand, discusses Mic 6:8b, but decides that there is no direct allusion here. Gibbs, *Matthew*, 3:1, 207n2.

[142] For others who see correspondence with Hos 2:21–22, see Luz, *Matthew*, 3:124; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:254.

have shown in the Sermon, δικαιοσύνη represents wholistic alignment with God's will as understood through Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law. For Matthew, then, "the more important matters of the Law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness" (23:23) collectively describe righteousness itself.[143] Righteousness, therefore, serves as the overarching category of virtue, and these virtues fall underneath its umbrella.

Jesus goes on to use the metaphors of cleaning the outside of cups and dishes (23:25–26) and whitewashed tombs (23:27–28):

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, clean first the inside of the cup and the plate, so that its outside might also be clean.
>
> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful but inwardly are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. In this way, outwardly you also appear righteous [δίκαιοι] to others, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

As in the Sermon (6:2–18), hypocrisy is the opposite of the wholistic righteousness to which the disciples are called. These two woes explicate the fourth woe by showing more ways in which they neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They focus on ritual purity while harboring greed and self-indulgence within their hearts (23:25–26). They try to appear righteous by their actions but inwardly their motivations are twisted (23:27–28). Not only that, but they actively persecute the righteous (23:29–36). The scribes and

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[143] Brown seems to conflate Matthew's concept of righteousness with justice. She uses 23:23 to frame Matthew's "portrait of the ideal disciple," understanding justice, mercy, and loyalty in 23:23 to be "values or virtues" essential to discipleship. As such, my instincts are quite similar to hers in the value of identifying central virtues of discipleship, but she seems to understand righteousness and justice to be at some level synonymous. In her discussion of the first of the three values of discipleship from 23:23, she references mostly examples of δικαι- language without acknowledging any significant distinctions between them and his use of other language. For example, she writes,

> The importance of justice for discipleship begins with its centrality for Christology: pursuit of justice characterizes Jesus's ministry across the Gospel. Jesus expresses his deep concern for those on the underside of justice from his earliest teachings in Matthew; the fourth beatitude pronounces (unexpected) blessing on those who are hungry and thirsty for justice (5:6; δικαιοσύνη). . . . Matthew's perspective of Jesus as the bringer of justice is clarified further in 12:18–21, in his application of Isaiah 42:1–4 to Jesus's Galilean ministry. Justice is highlighted in this passage and contributes to the portrait of Jesus as a messiah whose ministry will result in "justice [κρίσις] [being made] victorious" at the end (12:20). (Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 22–23)

There is certainly overlap here, but as I have shown throughout, Matthew's portrayal of righteousness includes justice but may not be exclusively defined by it.

Pharisees, then, are the ones who will persecute the disciples, linking them with the persecuted prophets of old (5:10–11). In an ironic twist, the scribes and Pharisees, who understand and project themselves to be righteous, by persecuting Jesus's own disciples for their true righteousness, provide the very means by which Jesus has told his disciples they will possess the kingdom of heaven and receive heavenly reward—"being persecuted for righteousness' sake" (5:10–11). Jesus has made it clearer, then, that this greater righteousness he calls his disciples to is an entirely different righteousness than its counterfeit parallel exhibited by the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. They are those who *will not* receive a righteous person's reward for welcoming a righteous person (10:41). They, in fact, do the opposite by shedding righteous blood and thus once again betray the fact that their righteousness is only surface deep.

Righteousness in Jerusalem

21:32. Just after Jesus enters Jerusalem and cleanses the temple, the chief priests and elders question his authority. After his initial response, he tells the parable of the two sons and concludes by condemning them for refusing to believe John's message when even tax collectors and prostitutes believed it. He says, "For John came to you in the way of righteousness [ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης], and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. But even though you say it, you did not even change your minds afterward and believe him" (21:32). "The way of righteousness" is fairly common in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature, particularly prominent in wisdom literature (e.g., Job 24:13; Ps 23:3; Prov 2:20; 8:20; 12:28; 16:7, 31; 21:16, 21; Tob 1:3; 1 En. 82:4; 92:3; 94:1; 99:10; Jub. 1:20; 23:36; 25:15; 1QS 4:2; CD 1:16; 1QH^{a} 7:14).[144] In these contexts, it most often refers primarily to a moral way of life, and Matthew likely primarily pulls from these traditions in the phrase here.

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[144] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:170n43.

Matthew, however, previously describes John as fulfilling “all righteousness” along with Jesus in his baptism in 3:15, and there, as I have discussed previously, it refers to John and Jesus’s moral righteousness in fulfilling their roles in God’s redemptive plan for his people (i.e., God’s own righteousness). Here it seems likely that Matthew is describing much of the same form of righteousness. It is unlikely to refer to John’s own righteousness in the sense of moral living or good deeds alone, as some take it,[145] because Jesus condemns them for not *believing* John despite his coming in this way. It seems most likely then that “the way of righteousness” refers at least at some level to include the message that John preached and the role he fulfilled in preaching it. Therefore, Matthew refers to the same sense of “righteousness” as 3:15: John’s righteousness in fulfilling his role as preacher of the kingdom. John aligned himself with God’s will through fulfilling the role God had given him in his own redemptive activity.[146] Thus John once again serves as an example of righteousness for Matthew’s reader.

27:19. The final piece of Matthew’s portrayal of righteousness comes as the story approaches its climax. As Jesus stands trial before Pilate, Pilate’s wife comes to her husband and says, “Have nothing to do with this righteous [τῷ δικαίῳ] man. For I have suffered much because of him in a dream today” (27:19). While most commentators

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[145] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:200; Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 94–96. Przyblyski understands δικαιοσύνη too rigidly here, seeing a distinction between John’s preaching and living. While he understands them to be linked and corresponding, he nevertheless seems to deny the possibility that John’s preaching *alone* could represent his own δικαιοσύνη rather than simply his moral living. He writes,

> The fact that Mt 21:32 states, “you did not believe him” indicates that John the Baptist presented a message which was refused. This would support the premise that ὁδός refers to the subject of John’s preaching. One must not forget, however, that Mt 5:19 stressed that teaching and doing must not be separated. Accordingly, it is possible that not only the idea of John’s message but also that of his conduct is connoted in 21:32. John practiced what he preached. (Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 96)

Przyblyski is certainly right to acknowledge the importance of understanding John’s preaching and conduct as inextricably linked, but an easier explanation to the meaning of δικαιοσύνη here simply includes John’s preaching—in other words, his fulfilling of his role in God’s redemptive plan—as an aspect of his own personal δικαιοσύνη.

[146] Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:614; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:31.

either understand δικαίος here to refer to Jesus's innocence or simply do not comment on its meaning at length,[147] in Matthew's larger narrative scheme, there is more going on. Certainly, at the surface level, Pilate's wife likely refers to Jesus's innocence in the immediate context of his trial.[148] But Matthew's reader has read Matthew's entire Gospel at this point and has been witness to his careful portrayal of righteousness throughout the entire story. He has seen Joseph as the first example of the kind of merciful righteousness and faithful trust and obedience required of disciples. And then John and Jesus, following God's redemptive plan for his people and fulfilling their roles as key parts of it. He has listened to Jesus's teaching in the Sermon, centering righteousness in the Father's will and the call to *holistically* align with it, both in heart and action. And he has come to understand the community of disciples as righteous in contrast with the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.

At the same time all of these narrative moments were developing, the reader witnessed Jesus repeatedly show mercy toward sinners, the blind, the lame, and the sick. He has also seen Jesus portrayed as the clearest example of both trust in God the Father and faithfulness toward him, especially in his stalwart march toward the cross, even amidst struggle. And now, as the reader hears Pilate's wife pronounce Jesus as "righteous," the yet unspoken center of Matthew's understanding of righteousness is revealed.[149] Through the ironic pronouncement of Pilate's wife, Matthew shows Jesus to

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[147] For example, see Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 102–3; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:498; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:823; Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 250; Gibbs, *Matthew*, 3:1528–29; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:393–94.

[148] As Gibbs notes, "Since this is the only time in Matthew where the adjective refers to Jesus, it is unlikely that Pilate's wife intended significant Christological meaning in her statement." Gibbs, *Matthew*, 3:1529n67.

[149] Przyblyski, however, would seemingly disagree strongly with this sentiment, "Interpretations of 27:19 to the effect that 'Jesus is for Matthew *the* exemplary Just One!' [G. Barth] or that this verse shows that the passion of Jesus should be viewed from the perspective of the suffering righteous one read a significance into this verse which in no way harmonizes with the general usage of the term *dikaios* in the Gospel of Matthew." Przyblyski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 102–3. Przyblyski quotes Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, trans. Scott Percy, NTL (Philadelphia:

be the ultimate example of Matthean righteousness. Jesus has called his own disciples to pursue righteousness despite persecution because it is the path to true flourishing in God's kingdom (5:10–11), and he has warned them of the time soon coming when they will be killed and crucified, adding to the "righteous blood" shed (23:34–35).[150]

Here in 27:19, Pilate's wife pronounces Jesus "righteous," and just verses later, the crowd presses Pilate to crucify Jesus by saying, "His blood be on us and on our children" (27:25). Jesus himself, therefore, becomes the focal point of his own prophecy of judgment upon the scribes and Pharisees, as he goes before his own disciples as the "righteous" one whose "blood" is shed (23:34–35; cf. 5:10–11). Jesus has shown himself to be holistically aligned with God's will, both in heart and in action—in his embodiment of his role in God's redemptive plan for his people, in his merciful acts of compassion toward others, and in his trust in the Father and faithful obedience toward him.

Conclusion

Throughout the entirety of the narrative, therefore, Matthew has portrayed righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law. He has done this through (1) offering Joseph (1:19), John (3:15; 23:32), and Jesus (3:15; 27:19) as examples of righteousness; (2) recounting Jesus's teaching on righteousness in the Sermon; and (3) reinforcing the disciples' identity as "the righteous" by identifying them with both the "the righteous" of old and the eschatological "righteous," while contrasting them with the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. This close narrative analysis of righteousness—centered in the Sermon but broadened to include Matthew's entire narrative—results in a picture of

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Westminster, 1963), 144n5. Davies and Allison quote Przyblyski in agreement: Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:587n33. Similarly, Luz sees "no messianic connotations" in Matthew's use of δικαίος here. Luz, *Matthew*, 3:498n56.

[150] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1172; Gibbs, *Matthew*, 3:1518; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:394.

Matthean righteousness as virtue itself. Righteousness serves as Matthew's highest moral category, an umbrella category of morality under which individual virtues, like faith and mercy, may be situated. In this chapter, I have shown, therefore, that Matthew portrays righteousness as his overall moral category—virtue itself—and the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus.

Love, furthermore, serves as the *central motivating affection* that undergirds Matthean righteousness. While not a frequent theme throughout Matthew as a whole, its prominence at key points in Matthew's narrative highlights love as central to the way that Matthew understands discipleship. The command to love one's neighbor occurs three times (5:43; 19:19; 22:39), and the double love command provides Jesus's understanding of the greatest of all God's commandments (22:34–40) and Jesus's own interpretive lens for the Law. Jesus's conception of greater righteousness (5:20) and his understanding of the greatest commandment of the Law are thus inextricably linked. As Akiyama writes, "The two-fold love command is not seen merely as the most prominent among many, but the principle that undergirds the Law and *the* hermeneutical key through which all or every commandment ought to be interpreted."[151] For Jesus, if pursuing righteousness is the goal of discipleship, love is the affection that motivates the disciple to pursue that righteousness. And if faith and mercy are the primary virtues of discipleship in Matthew,

[151] Akiyama, *Love of Neighbour in Ancient Judaism*, 190. Victor Furnish makes a similar comment: "[Matthew] regards the love command as the hermeneutical key to the law, the essence of 'the law and the prophets,' and that which most distinguishes Jesus' teaching from the Pharisaic tradition." Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 74. See also Birger Gerhardsson, "The Hermeneutic Program in Matthew 22:37–40," in *Jews, Greeks and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies*, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs, SJLA 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 129–50; Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives*, SNTSMS 48 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 100; Carol J. Dempsey, "Love: The Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets," in *Biblical Ethics: Tensions between Justice and Mercy, Law and Love*, ed. Markus Zehnder and Peter Wick, Gorgias Biblical Studies 70 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2019), 77–78; Amy Barker, "The Double Love Command: Matthew's Hermeneutical Key," in *Take This Word to Heart: The Shema in Torah and Gospel*, ed. Perry B. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2005), 100–133.

love is the righteous affection motivating them as well.[152] Figure 1 below visually represents the relationship between these concepts in Matthew:

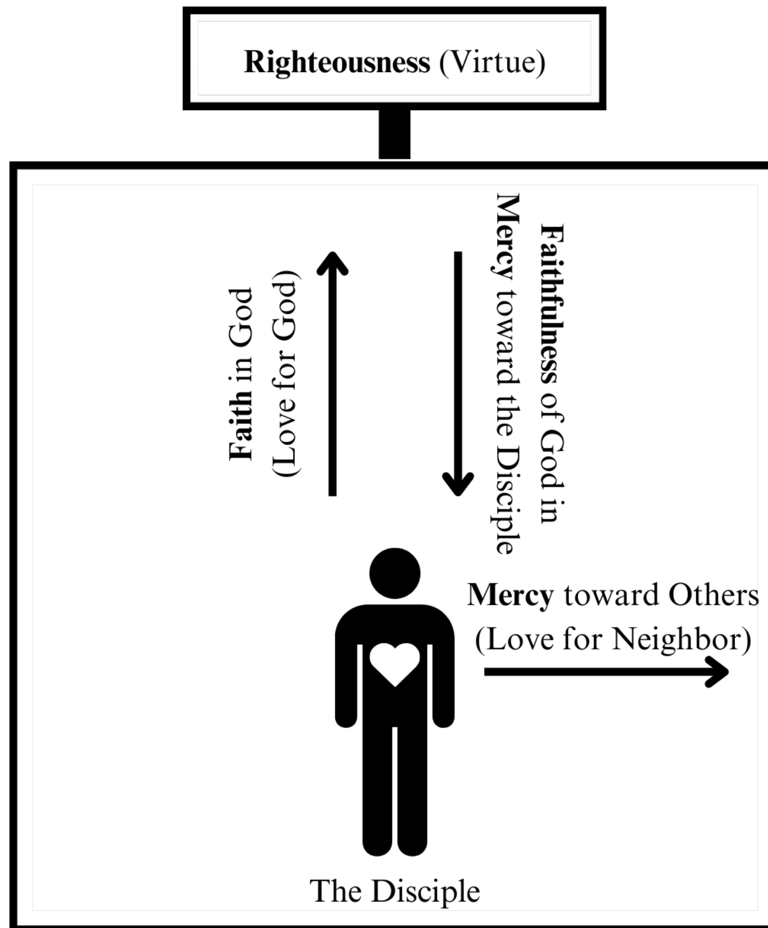

Figure 1. Righteousness as virtue

Note: The box surrounding the disciple indicates that righteousness—as Matthew's highest moral category of virtue—encapsulates what it means to be a disciple, including the disciple's faith in God, motivated by love for God, and his mercy toward others, motivated by love for neighbor. This pursuit of righteousness is founded in God's faithfulness toward the disciple, often expressed in his mercy toward the disciple through Jesus.

[152] Similarly, Furnish comments on the parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31–46): "The Christian disciple is summoned to a higher righteousness which consists in his obedience to the commandment to love God and the neighbor. This righteousness is actualized in concrete ministries of mercy to those in need." Furnish, *Love Command in New Testament*, 83.

Faith, therefore, is an expression of the righteous love of God, and mercy an expression of the righteous love of neighbor, both in response to God's own faithfulness in mercy toward the disciple. As the disciple pursues the individual virtues of faith in God and mercy toward others, properly motivated by love for God and love for neighbor, he pursues the greater righteousness to which Jesus calls him (5:20). It is to these two primary virtues of discipleship—faith and mercy—I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH IN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE

While many scholars agree that faith is a central concept in Matthew's Gospel[1] and Matthew's use of the πίστις word group attests to its prominence,[2] Douglas O'Donnell points out, few spend significant time discussing it in-depth.[3] In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in the concept of faith, while focusing primarily on the concept within Pauline literature.[4] Several scholars, however, have undertaken substantial

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[1] Gerhard Barth, "πίστις," in *EDNT*, 3:92; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC 33 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1:205; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 292; Maureen W. Yeung, "Faith," in *DJG*, 259.

[2] Matthew uses πιστεύω 11x, πίστις 8x, πιστός 5x, ὀλιγόπιστος/ὀλιγοπιστία 5x, and ἄπιστος/ἀπιστία 2x. Two of Matthew's uses of πιστεύω (24:23, 26) refer simply to propositional belief in Jesus's eschatological discourse when he discusses *not believing* those who say the Christ has come. Since these two occurrences add little to Matthew's understanding of *faith* as a concept, I will not address these two occurrences.

[3] See O'Donnell's thorough history of research in Douglas S. O'Donnell, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!": Faith in the Gospel of Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 47–77. See also Matthias Konradt, "Die Rede vom Glauben in Heilungsgeschichten und die Messianität Jesu im Matthäusevangelium," in *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, ed. Jörg Frey, Benjamin Schliesser, and Nadine Ueberschaer, WUNT 373 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 423.

[4] For example, see Matthew W. Bates, "The External-Relational Shift in Faith (Pistis) in New Testament Research: Romans I as Gospel-Allegiance Test Case," *CurBR* 18, no. 2 (2020): 176–202; Nijay Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Peter Oakes, "Pistis as Relational Way of Life in Galatians," *JSNT* 40, no. 3 (March 2018): 255–75; Mark A. Seifrid, "Roman Faith and Christian Faith," *NTS* 64, no. 2 (April 2018): 247–55; Francis Watson, "Roman Faith and Christian Faith," *NTS* 64, no. 2 (April 2018): 243–47; Teresa Morgan, "Roman Faith and Christian Faith," *NTS* 64, no. 2 (April 2018): 255–61; Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017); Frey, Schliesser, and Ueberschaer, *Glaube*; Nijay Gupta, "The Spirituality of Faith in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Matthew and Mark across Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Stephen C. Barton and William R. Telford*, ed. Kristian A. Bendoraitis and Nijay Gupta, LNTS 538 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 108–24; Benjamin Schliesser, "'Christ-Faith' as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23–26): A 'Third View' on Πίστις Χριστοῦ," *JSNT* 38, no. 3 (March 2016): 277–300; Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); John M. G. Barclay, review of *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*, by Teresa Morgan, *JTS* 67, no. 2 (2016): 752–54; F. G. Downing, "Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith," *NTS* 56, no. 1 (2010): 139–62; Karl Friedrich Ulrichs, *Christusglaube: Studien zum Syntagma pistis Christou und zum paulinischen Verständnis von Glaube und Rechtfertigung*, WUNT 227 (Tübingen: Mohr

studies of faith in recent years that include or focus exclusively on Matthew. Teresa Morgan discusses πίστις within Matthew in a short section in her chapter on the Synoptics and Acts in *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*.[5] Matthias Konradt discusses Matthew's portrayal of πίστις in "Die Rede vom Glauben in Heilungsgeschichten und die Messianität Jesu im Matthäusevangelium."[6] Nijay Gupta includes a section on πίστις within Matthew in his recent *Paul and the Language of Faith*, which stems from his earlier article, "The Spirituality of Faith in the Gospel of Matthew."[7] And O'Donnell focuses on πίστις within Matthew in his recently published doctoral dissertation, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!": Faith in the Gospel of Matthew*.[8]

This renewed interest highlights faith's importance to Matthew's narrative, along with the need for more attention to the ways that Matthew's narrative encourages

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Siebeck, 2007); Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, BZNW 130 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Maureen W. Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul: A Comparison with Special Reference to "Faith That Can Remove Mountains" and "Your Faith Has Healed/Saved You,"* WUNT 147 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

[5] For Morgan, πίστις within Matthew largely follows Mark and Q. In Mark, Jesus challenges people to have πίστις, commends people for their πίστις, and criticizes people for their lack of πίστις. In Q, πίστις is not only a saving quality but a quality that must continue until the Son of Man comes. While Matthew uses πίστις in several innovative ways—his use of ὀλιγοπιστία, his linking of πίστις and δικαιοσύνη, his sharpened contrast between faithful gentiles and unfaithful Jews, and his linking of πίστις and the title κύριος—for Morgan, the relational aspect of πίστις remains at the center. For Morgan, then, the unifying thread for the concept of πίστις within Matthew is its relational quality as characters exhibit either trust or a lack of trust toward Jesus. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 369–74.

[6] Konradt analyzes Matthew's portrayal of faith, primarily focusing on healing stories. Three points of emphasis for Konradt are (1) the "personal relationship of faith [des personalen Bezugs des Glaubens]" in the sense that faith *is in Jesus* and not in some abstract miraculous power, (2) Matthew's redaction of his sources to emphasize the centrality of faith, and (3) the importance of understanding Jesus's identity and mission to Matthean faith. Konradt, "Die Rede vom Glauben," 445–50.

[7] Gupta builds upon Morgan's relational assessment and provides three categories for πίστις language within Matthew: seeking faith, trusting faith, and loyal faith. Seeking faith refers to the πίστις of "those who seek out Jesus—those who know virtually nothing about Jesus except that he is special, and yet they have reached the end of their rope and they cling to hope that Jesus can bring healing and help in their desperate hour of need." Trusting faith refers to that of "those who need to trust God" and primarily comes from the disciples. Loyal faith refers to "faithfulness"—namely, what the religious leaders lack and what Jesus's followers must live out. Gupta's categories do a good job of representing Matthew's varied use of πίστις while maintaining the relational focus of Morgan's understanding. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 60–71. See also Gupta, "Spirituality of Faith in Matthew."

[8] O'Donnell argues that the "great faith" of the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) lies at the center of Matthew's understanding of faith, which for Matthew includes a proper understanding of Jesus's mission and messianic identity and "trust in action." Readers compare and contrast her "great faith" with the "little faith" of the disciples and "no faith" of others and are led to the conclusion that she embodies Matthew's theological vision of faith. O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 11.

its reader toward faith. In this chapter, I argue that Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one's love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous. First, I give an overview of the concept of faith in the ancient world. Second, I survey Matthew's presentation of faith throughout his narrative, showing the ways that he utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation in encouraging his readers to pursue the virtue of faith. Matthew presents faith as an individual virtue of discipleship that falls under his overall moral category of virtue itself—righteousness. Faith exists on a spectrum in Matthew's narrative, including some characters who show no faith, some who show great faith, and the disciples who show "little faith." Through this unique spectrum of faith, Matthew encourages his reader to identify with some characters, distance himself from others, and ultimately pursue greater faith in Jesus as his disciple.

Faith in the Ancient World

The meaning of πίστις in the ancient world can span a wide range of nuances, from "trust," "trustworthiness," or "pledge" to "belief" or "opinion." At its core, πίστις most often refers to some kind of relational trust or fidelity.[9] In Greco-Roman literature, πίστις language finds most prominence in interpersonal and political contexts, with attention in religious contexts as well.[10] As Schliesser summarizes,

> In the Greco-Roman world, πίστις and *fides* play a most prominent role in all areas of human life and thinking, in rhetorical, philosophical, political, juridical, and socio-cultural contexts, and not least in the religious sphere. The concept of *fides* is at the heart of the Roman state system and emotional economy, it is virtually

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[9] As Gupta describes it, "The vast majority of its uses . . . in pagan and Jewish literature, relates to relational fidelity." Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 39.

[10] The following brief survey of πίστις in the Greco-Roman world relies on Gupta, Morgan, and Schliesser's extensive work in Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 40–46; Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 36–175; Benjamin Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity: An Encyclopedic and Bibliographical Outline," in Frey, Schliesser, and Ueberschaer, *Glaube*, 11–16. See also the wide-ranging study in Rudolf Bultmann, "πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστόω, ἄπιστος, ἀπιστία, ὀλιγόπιστος, ὀλιγοπιστία," in *TDNT*, 6:174–228.

> omnipresent and characterizes almost all sorts of interpersonal and interstate relationships, as well as those to the gods.[11]

In interpersonal relationships, this relational trust is often centered around family and friendship. Epictetus, for example, understands "good faith [τὸν πιστόν]" as central to what it means to be a good friend, son, or father (Epictetus, *Diatr*. 2.22.18–20 [Oldfather, LCL]).[12] Plutarch notes the centrality of "respect and kindness and mutual affection and loyalty [πίστις]" that go beyond "pleasure" in a marriage relationship (Plutarch, *Amat.* 769A [Helmbold, LCL]).[13] He later extolls "successful unions . . . distinguished from beginning to end by every sort of fidelity and zealous loyalty [πάσης πίστεως κοινωνίαν πιστῶς ἅμα καὶ προθύμως]" (*Amat.* 770C [Helmbold, LCL]).[14]

Friendships, similarly, often reflect a distinct πίστις that is almost universally recognized as a moral good.[15] Cicero describes friendship as "the most trustworthy preserver [*fautrices fidelissimae*] and also creator of pleasure alike for our friends and for ourselves" (Cicero, *Fin.* 1.65–67 [Rackham, LCL]).[16] In Plutarch's *Cato Minor*, Cato's own "exactness" hinders some of his friendships because his suspicions prevent him from trusting others. In one account, Cato is tasked with selling the treasure of Ptolemy of Cyprus, who had recently killed himself. He sends his nephew Brutus first because "he did not altogether trust [πιστεύων] Canidius," one of his friends (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 36.1 [Perrin, LCL]). After Cato himself arrives, the story continues:

> So Cato, wishing to treat everything with the greatest exactness, and to force everything up to a high price, and to attend to everything himself, and to use the utmost calculation, would not trust [ἐπίστευσεν] even those who were accustomed to the market, but, suspecting all alike, assistants, criers, buyers, and friends . . . he

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[11] Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 11.

[12] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 45.

[13] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 43.

[14] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 43.

[15] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 55.

[16] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 55n89.

> thus succeeded in selling most of the merchandize. For this reason, he gave offence to most of his friends, who thought that he distrusted [ἀπιστῶν] them. (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 36.1–3 [Perrin, LCL])

Trust, therefore, proved central to many friendships, yet for this very reason, friendships can often be fraught with conflict and suspicion. Because they are built on trust, they are fragile, and in the case of Cato, his own distrust of others affected his friendships negatively.

Πίστις is particularly prominent in political contexts as well. Plutarch's portrayal of Cato once again exemplifies this kind of trust particularly within political relationships. Over half of *Cato Minor*'s πίστις language occurs in direct relationship to Cato himself—either his own trustworthiness or his trust in others. For example, Plutarch discusses that Cato

> was held in high repute, so that an orator, at a trial where the testimony of a single witness was introduced, told the jurors that it was not right to give heed to a single witness, not even if he were Cato; and many already, when speaking of matters that were unbelievable [ἀπίστων] and incredible, would say, as though using a proverb, "This is not to be believed [πιθανόν] even though Cato says it." (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 19.4–5 [Perrin, LCL])

Plutarch's point here is clear: some things are so wildly unbelievable that they would remain unbelievable even if someone as trustworthy as Cato says them. In another account, Cato himself responds to Pompey's quite political offer to marry his niece or daughter:

> Go, Munatius, go, and tell Pompey that Cato is not to be captured by way of the women's apartments, although he highly prizes Pompey's good will, and if Pompey does justice will grant him a friendship more trustworthy [πιστοτέραν] than any marriage connection; but he will not give hostages for the glory of Pompey to the detriment of his country. (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 30.4 [Perrin, LCL])[17]

In other instances, Plutarch highlights others trusting in Cato (*Cat. Min.* 21.4–6; 55.1), Cato trusting or distrusting others (*Cat. Min.* 36.1–3), and others either reflecting Cato's

[17] Interestingly, Plutarch presents Cato here as virtuous for denying Pompey this connection, but he later explains that Cato's refusal led Pompey to turn to Caesar for a marriage connection, which solidified Pompey and Caesar's relationship and eventually led to civil war (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 30.6).

πίστις (*Cat. Min.* 38.3–4; 56.2; 59.2–3; 73.4) or providing a negative contrast to it (*Cat. Min.* 12.3–4; 16.3–4; 43.6; 49.1; 54.6; 62.1; 64.1–2).

The most pertinent of these examples comes at the very end of the narrative when Plutarch recounts the virtue of those Cato leaves behind after his suicide: "Statyllius, too, who declared that he would follow Cato's example, was prevented at the time by the philosophers from destroying himself, as he wished to do, but afterwards gave most faithful [πιστότατον] and efficient service to Brutus and died at Philippi" (Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 73.4 [Perrin, LCL]). While πίστις takes on a variety of tones in these texts, from trustworthiness to loyalty to faithfulness, in most cases the πίστις of these secondary characters reflects Cato's own πίστις, and especially in the case of Statyllius, it actively reflects Cato's own virtue.

While the language of πίστις is not as prominent in religious life as in interpersonal and political relationships, the concept nevertheless plays a role in Greco-Roman religious life. As Morgan comments, "Divine-human *pistis*/*fides* does seem to affect people's behaviour, and it is notable that these are all 'non-fiction' contexts (handbooks, letters, treatises, or inscriptions) in which writers are affirming that they practice *pistis*/*fides*, or listeners or readers are being exhorted to practice it."[18] Cicero, for example, in *De natura deorum*, describes the essential connection between the existence of piety toward the gods and human virtue itself:

> Piety however, like the rest of the virtues, cannot exist in mere outward show and pretence; and, with piety, reverence and religion must likewise disappear. And when these are gone, life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion; and in all probability the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty [*fides*] and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of all the virtues. (Cicerco, *Nat. d.* 1.3 [Rackham, LCL])[19]

While he does not describe human-divine *fides per se*, the importance of *fides* within the

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[18] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 174.

[19] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 166.

context of religion as the natural outworking of piety toward the gods is clear.

Plutarch provides an exception to the lack of πίστις terminology explicitly used in religious contexts.[20] He discusses the passing down of faith in *Amatorius*:

> Our ancient traditional faith [πίστις] is good enough. It is impossible to assert or discover evidence more palpable than this faith, Whatever subtle twist's invented by keen wit. This faith is a basis, as it were, a common foundation, of religion; if confidence and settled usage are disturbed or shaken at a single point, the whole edifice is enfeebled and discredited. (Plutarch, *Amat.* 756B [Perrin, LCL])[21]

As Schliesser comments on Plutarch's use here, "Attending to paternal faith goes hand in hand with a firm confidence that trusts in God's favorable affection and assistance."[22] While there is not a wealth of examples of πίστις terminology explicitly used in religious contexts, the concept nevertheless exists in the religious milieu of the day.

The concept of πίστις, therefore, pervades many different sectors of Greco-Roman society, and while it is not typically listed in canonical philosophical virtue lists, it is often mentioned as a virtue itself or as a character trait describing someone who is virtuous (e.g., Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.3; Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 38.3–4; 59.2–3; 73.4).[23] As a virtue, then, πίστις at times expresses cognitive, emotional, and active nuances, and these nuances are often difficult to distinguish between one another.[24] Πίστις often expresses a

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[20] Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 14.

[21] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 41–42; Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 14–15.

[22] Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 15; see also Françoise Frazier, "Returning to 'Religious' Πίστις: Platonism and Piety in Plutarch and Neoplatonism," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought*, ed. Gert-Jan van der Heiden, George van Kooten, and Antonio Cimino (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 189–207.

[23] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 458; see also Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, "The Metahistory of Δίκη and Πίστις: A Greco-Roman Reading of Paul's 'Justification by Faith' Axiom," in van der Heiden, van Kooten, and Cimino, *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 218–19.

[24] As Morgan writes,

> We have seen *pistis* and *fides* and their cognates described as virtues, acts of cognition, and emotions, and we have seen that the virtuous, cognitive, and emotional aspects of the lexica are not always easy to distinguish in individual passages. We can conclude that, alongside their ubiquitous relationality, *pistis* and *fides* have a complex and significant interiority. The relationship between different aspects of that interiority, regrettably, remains all but impossible to map for the great majority of passages. We can, though, say that there is no indication that it is typically dominated by

kind of faith, trust, or loyalty that requires both someone's inner being and outward action. This kind of faith, furthermore, forms the building block for many relationships and is, therefore, essential for most communities. As Morgan writes,

> *Pistis* and *fides*, in Greek and Roman thinking, are understood as powerfully functional. When I am loyal to my master or commander, his aims are mine. I trust my friend to support me in my activities and interests as I support him. When I express confidence in a trustworthy deity, I hope that she will favour my city or me. This does not mean that Graeco-Roman views of *pistis*/*fides* are shallow or manipulative. It means that they acknowledge *pistis*/*fides* as profoundly transformative: as making possible new relationships and communities, new forms of action and social structures. *Pistis*/*fides* is rarely, if ever, an end in itself: it is almost always a beginning.[25]

As a central component of individual relationships, therefore, πίστις proves to be an essential virtue that contributes in key ways to almost every aspect of Greco-Roman society.

In Jewish thought, πίστις expresses a similarly wide range of nuanced meanings while centering most frequently on God's covenant with his people. The πίστ- word group generally corresponds with the אמן word group in the Septuagint.[26] In the Hebrew Bible, the אמן word group can express a range of derivatives related to faith: faithfulness, faith, trust, agreement, confidence, trustworthiness, etc. (e.g., Num 12:7; Deut 7:9; 1 Kgs 8:26; 1 Chr 17:23; Isa 1:26).[27] Similar to אמן, the verb בטח also expresses some sense of trust or reliance on someone or something, although it is normally translated with the verbs πείθω or ἐλπίζω (e.g., Deut 28:52; Judg 20:36; 2 Kgs

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> emotion; in many passages little or no emotional resonance is detectable. (Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 460–61)

[25] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 174–75. Gupta similarly writes, "The notion was probably widespread in the Greco-Roman world . . . that society itself could not function without the virtue of πίστις." Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 45–46.

[26] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 46; Dennis R. Lindsay, "The Roots and Development of the Πίστ- Word Group as Faith Terminology," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 113; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 21–22; Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 5.

[27] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 18n5; Moisés Silva, "πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστόω, ἄπιστος, ἀπιστία, ὀλιγόπιστος, ὀλιγοπιστία," in *NIDNTTE*, 3:761–62.

18:5; Isa 50:10; Jer 5:17). In the Septuagint, *πιστός* occurs c. 70x (trustworthy or faithful), *πίστις* c. 60x (faithfulness, generally human), *πιστεύω* c. 85x (to trust or believe in someone or something), *ἐμπιστεύω* c. 24x (similar to *πιστεύω*), and *πιστόω* c. 16x (to confirm or establish).[28] Throughout the Septuagint, faith centers itself within God's covenant with his people, as God is faithful to them (e.g., Deut 7:9; Pss 32:4; 144:13; Isa 49:7) and they are expected both to trust him (e.g., Exod 14:31; Isa 43:10) and be faithful to him (e.g., Deut 32:20; 1 Sam 22:14; 26:23; Jer 5:1).[29]

Genesis 15:6, of course, proves important for understanding the relationship between faith and righteousness: "And Abram trusted [*ἐπίστευσεν*] God, and it was counted to him as righteousness [*δικαιοσύνην*]" (Gen 15:6 LXX). Abram's trust in God to give him a son was the appropriate covenantal response to God's own promise, and God declared him to be righteous as a result.[30] In this sense, Abram's faith is inherently relational, as it is his primary way of relating to the faithful God he worships. The interplay between belief, trust, and faithfulness is evident in Exodus 4, for example. God is convincing Moses from the burning bush to return to the Israelites and lead them out of Egypt, but Moses is nervous that the Israelites will not believe him.[31] Moses says, "If they neither believe me [*πιστεύσωσίν μοι*] nor listen to my voice—for they will say, 'God has not appeared to you'—what will I say to them?" (Exod 4:1 LXX). God then shows Moses several signs he can give to them to prove to them that God has actually sent him. After the first sign—turning his staff into a serpent and back—God says that the purpose of the sign is "so that they might believe you [*πιστεύσωσίν σοι*]: that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent you"

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[28] Silva, "*πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστόω*," 3:761–62.

[29] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 23.

[30] Silva, "*πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστόω*," 3:763.

[31] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 184–86.

(Exod 4:5 LXX).

This particular text represents well the intertwined nature of trust and belief within the πίστις word group. Propositional belief is clearly present in Moses's fear that the Israelites will not believe *that* God has sent him, yet relational trust is also present implicitly when God appeals to his established covenant with the fathers of Israel as an appeal for the Israelites' trust. They will trust Moses because the signs prove that he really has been sent by the God who has been faithful to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Faith, then, proves essentially relational here: the relationship between the Israelites and God via Moses built on trust. This relationship of trust culminates later as the Israelites cross the parted Red Sea and the Egyptians are drowned. Once they reach the other side safely, "Israel saw the great hand that the Lord used against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord and trusted God and Moses [ἐπίστευσαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ Μωυσῇ], his servant" (Exod 14:31 LXX). In this text, the emphasis lies on the relationship of trust between the Israelites, God, and Moses, with πιστεύω here primarily referring to the active trust that forms the basis for this three-party relationship.[32]

In Deuteronomy, the faithfulness of God is set in stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of his people. God is "a faithful God [πιστός], who keeps covenant and mercy [ἔλεος] toward those who love him" (Deut 7:9 LXX; cf. 32:4), yet his people have not trusted in him (Deut 1:32 LXX, "you did not trust [ἐνεπιστεύσατε] in the Lord our God"; cf. 9:23; 32:20). In the Psalms, a similar relationship exists between God who is faithful to his people (Pss 19:7 [18:8 LXX]; 111:7 [110:7 LXX]; 145:13 [144:13 LXX]) and his people who should trust in him (Pss 33:4 [32:4 LXX]; 78:22, 32 [77:22, 32 LXX]; 119:66 [118:66 LXX] and be faithful to him [78:8, 37 [77:8, 37 LXX]; 89:29 [88:29 LXX].

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[32] Morgan surveys the relationality present in several other occurrences of πίστις language in the Septuagint: to list a few, Gen 15–17; Exod 4:1–5; 14:31; 19:9; Job 4:18; 9:15–16; 15:14–16; 39:9–12; Isa 7:1–9. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 178–210.

Psalm 78 [77 LXX] provides a vivid picture of this relational dynamic between God and his people. The psalmist recounts God's faithful works toward his people in generations past in hopes that the coming generations would pass them down and avoid the unfaithfulness of prior generations. Despite God's faithful care and mercy shown to his people, the prior generation's "spirit was not faithful [ἐπιστώθη] with God (78:8 [77:7 LXX]), they "did not trust [ἐπίστευσαν] in God" [78:22 [77:22 LXX]) or "in his miracles" (78:32 [77:32 LXX]), and they "were not faithful [ἐπιστώθησαν] to his covenant" (78:37 [77:37]). In Isaiah, there is a similar call to trust in God's chosen cornerstone: "The one who trusts in him will not be ashamed" (Isa 28:16 LXX).[33] God's faithfulness is clear as Isaiah offers earlier calls to trust in God himself (e.g., 8:14, 17), yet the groundwork is laid in 28:16 for faith in God's *chosen representative* to be considered faith in God himself as well.

Similar themes can be seen in Second Temple literature, as God's faithfulness to his covenant people (e.g., 1QS 1:19; Sir 2:10–12; T. Ash. 7.7) and especially his people's trust in and faithfulness toward him (e.g., 1QS 8:1–4; 4 Macc 15:24; 16:22; Sir 1:27; 15:15; 44:20; T. Levi 8.2) continue to be prevalent.[34] Even a more general sense of faith within interpersonal relationships, often political, is present at times. For example, in Sirach 22:23, Ben Sira gives neighborly wisdom: "Gain the trust [πίστιν] of your neighbor in his poverty, so that you may rejoice with him in his prosperity. Stand by him in his time of distress, so that you may share with him in his inheritance." The relationship evoked in this passage represents the reciprocal nature of πίστις well. The "trust" gained is the neighbor's trust in the person who then is to "stand by him." Here is a relationship centered upon "trust," in which one person trusts in another who then

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[33] Silva, "πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστόω," 3:762–63.

[34] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 47–50; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 23–27.

exhibits trustworthiness toward him.

Similarly, in 1 Maccabees, Demetrius writes to the Judaeans and urges them to remain faithful to their alliance—"to keep faith toward us [συντηρῆσαι πρὸς ἡμᾶς πίστιν]" (1 Macc 10:27).[35] Trust in God, and faithfulness to him, through suffering becomes especially prominent in 4 Maccabees, as the mother of the seven martyrs shows courage and fortitude amidst suffering and torture "through faith in God [διὰ τὴν πρὸς θεὸν πίστιν]" (4 Macc 15:24; 17:2), and encourages her sons to have "the same faith in God [τὴν αὐτὴν πίστιν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν]" (4 Macc 16:22).[36] Given the context, it is likely that πίστις here refers both to her trust in God and his providence amidst suffering and her faithfulness to remain steadfast through it. The relational dynamic of faith is clear: reciprocal trust and faithfulness is required in a relationship built around faith.

For Josephus and Philo, God's covenant with his people once again lies at the center of their use of πίστις language. Josephus's use is fairly in line with other Greco-Roman and Jewish uses of πίστις language, ranging from trust, faith, and belief to loyalty, trustworthiness, and faithfulness (e.g., Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.42–43, 163; *Ant.* 15.87).[37] Interestingly, Josephus at times prefers πίστις to διαθήκη (*Ant.* 7.24; 10.63), perhaps because διαθήκη in the broader Greco-Roman world often refers to a "will" rather than

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[35] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 47; Oakes, "Pistis as Relational Way in Galatians," 259.

[36] As Gupta notes,

> One might equate πίστις here with some notion of belief, but given how πίστις is used in 4 Maccabees overall (cf. 16:22; 17:2), it apparently has more to do with a clash of cultures, and the mother's loyalty to Ἰουδαϊσμός (the Jewish way), which demonstrates piety, rather than a particular set of beliefs per se. Here the crux is not whether Yahweh is real or any given doctrine is true, but whether one is willing to die in allegiance to his god or forsake this deity in view of another. (Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 48)

[37] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 52–53; Dennis R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 27; Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity," 8–9. Gupta observes, "Not unlike Plutarch and Philo, Josephus could alternate rather comfortably between social-relational uses of πίστις and more cognitive ones." Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 53.

the more Jewish concept of "covenant."[38] This usage only underscores the fact that πίστις for Jewish writers often centers itself within the covenant relationship between God and his people.[39]

For Philo, faith similarly often refers to God's own trustworthiness and the people's faith in God himself (*Sacrifices* 93), sometimes emphasizing the more intellectual or cognitive aspects of faith (e.g., *Abraham* 268–69; *Alleg. Interp*. 3.164) and often referring to it as a virtue (e.g., *Planting* 101; *Abraham* 270; *Heir* 91).[40] In *On the Life of Abraham* 262–73, Philo assesses Abraham's trust in God from Genesis 15:

> It is stated that he "trusted in God [ἐπίστευσε τῷ θεῷ]." Now that is a little thing if measured in words, but a very great thing if made good by action. For in what else should one trust [πιστευτέον]? In high offices or fame and honours or abundance of wealth and noble birth or health and efficacy of the senses or strength and beauty of body? . . . Faith in God [ἡ πρὸς θεὸν πίστις], then, is the one sure and infallible good . . . which is firmly stayed on Him Who is the cause of all things and can do all things yet only wills the best. . . . That God marveling at Abraham's faith in Him [τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν πίστεως] repaid him with faithfulness [πίστιν] by confirming with an oath the gifts which He had promised, and here He no longer talked with him as God with man but as a friend with a familiar. (Philo, *Abraham* [Colson, LCL])[41]

There are two relevant observations from this passage. First, Abraham's trust in God is highly relational. The relationship of trust formed between Abraham and God results in God speaking with Abraham not "as God with man but as a friend with a familiar."

Second, both πιστεύω and πίστις exhibit a high level of multivalence. Abraham's trusting in God is only "a very great thing if made good by action." Abraham's faith in God, then, is comprised at some level of both trust and faithfulness. This trust, however, is also "firmly stayed on Him Who is the cause of all things and can

[38] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 54–56.

[39] As Gupta writes, "Josephus felt comfortable using πίστεις in relation to covenant or covenantlike language in the Old Testament. This was not an arbitrary decision, but guided by a desire to communicate clearly and convincingly to a Hellenistic audience using familiar language of concord and obligation." Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 56.

[40] Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, 50–51.

[41] Downing, "Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith," 157.

do all things yet only wills the best." Abraham's faith in God depends upon God's own trustworthiness. God then sees Abraham's "faith in Him [τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν πίστεως]" and repays him "with faithfulness [πίστιν] by confirming with an oath the gifts which He had promised." In this last instance, πίστις clearly portrays its reciprocal nature: the one trusting receives faithfulness from the one trusted, which in turn forms a close relationship of trust.[42]

In this survey, the wide-ranging nature of πίστις language is clear. As Morgan describes the concept, πίστις and *fides* are "fundamentally relational concepts and practices, centring on trust, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and good faith."[43] The ways that its meanings permeate as it is embodied and applied across different types of relationships, then, depends first on its context and those involved. In this way, πίστις is absolutely essential to communities and to society as a whole. It is often the cornerstone of any relationship and lies at the center of what it means to be a good friend, father, mother, son, daughter, leader, or countryman. In Jewish thought, the relational dynamics

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[42] See also Philo, *Heir* 90–98, where he discusses Abraham trusting God in Gen 15:

> The words "Abraham believed [ἐπίστευσεν] God" (Gen. xv. 6) are a necessary addition to speak the praise due to him who has believed [τοῦ πεπιστευκότος]. Yet, perhaps it may be asked, do you consider this worthy of praise? When it is God who speaks and promises, who would not pay heed, even though he were the most unjust and impious of mankind? To such a questioner we will answer, "Good sir, do not without due scrutiny rob the Sage of his fitting tribute, or aver that the unworthy possess the most perfect of virtues, faith [τὴν τελειοτάτην ἀρετῶν πίστιν], or censure our claim to knowledge of this matter. For if you should be willing to search more deeply and not confine yourself to the mere surface, you will clearly understand that to trust [πιστεῦσαι] in God alone and join no other with Him is no easy matter, by reason of our kinship with our yokefellow, mortality, which works upon us to keep our trust placed [πεπιστευκέναι] in riches and repute and office and friends and health and strength and many other things. To purge away each of these, to distrust [ἀπιστῆσαι] created being, which in itself is wholly unworthy of trust [ἀπίστῳ], to trust in God [πιστεῦσαι θεῷ], and in Him alone, even as He alone is truly worthy of trust [πιστῷ]—this is a task for a great and celestial understanding which has ceased to be ensnared by aught of the things that surround us." (Colson and Whitaker, LCL)

Morgan also discusses this text in Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 153. Philo notes that it is surely easy for even "the most unjust" to trust God, but he then turns to discuss the actual difficulty in trusting God. For Philo, "To trust [πιστεῦσαι] in God alone" is not an easy matter. A key aspect of trusting God instead of worldly things for Philo, however, is that God himself "alone is truly worthy of trust [πιστῷ]." Philo goes on in the next section to reflect on God's trustworthiness in fulfilling promises to Abraham, as he brought him out of the land of the Chaldaeans to give him a land to inherit. Trusting God, then, depends upon God's own trustworthiness. This passage demonstrates Morgan's point that the πίστις word group (here πιστεύω and πιστός) is often multivalent: multiple levels of the trusting relationship are required in πίστις. Essential for a human to trust in God is his understanding of God's own trustworthiness.

[43] Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 503.

of faith are often centered within the covenantal relationship between God and his people, and as we approach Matthew's understanding of the concept, it is important to emphasize his Gospel as firmly planted within this wider world of Hellenistic Judaism, where πίστις spans a wide range of relational nuance yet often bears particular prominence in most communities.

Faith in Matthew's Narrative

Matthew utilizes his narrative to present faith as both trust in and faithfulness to Jesus as God's authoritative representative. Centered in Jesus's call in the Sermon to trust the Father for provision in daily life (6:25–34), Matthew continues to portray Jesus teaching the disciples about the virtue of faith—requiring wholistic trust in God as a way of pursuing righteousness. All the while, Matthew depicts characters who exhibit faith along a spectrum, from absolutely no faith to great faith, to the in between "little faith" of the disciples. Through this narrative presentation, Matthew encourages his readers to pursue the virtue of faith, motivated by their love for God in pursuit of greater righteousness.[44]

Faith in the Introduction

1:19–25. As discussed in chapter 4, Matthew presents Joseph as embodying righteousness through his implicit expression of both mercy toward Mary and faith in

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[44] Clifton Black makes a similar argument:

> Informing and governing the varying depth of Matthew's characters is a salient theological principle: the reader should render obedient faithfulness to God, whose own fidelity has been decisively manifested in Jesus Christ. Whereas a modern novel might track the psychological evolution or devolution of a central character, Matthew takes another, most interesting tack: its narrative portrays the constancy and instability of trust, the waxing and waning of faith, through many different characters. (C. Clifton Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts*, 2nd ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013], 40)

The point of this narrative presentation for Black is "to form his readers in steadfast righteousness" (40). While I largely agree with Black, my thesis distinguishes itself from his in situating faith as a virtue in relationship to discipleship, underscoring more clearly its wholistic nature and thus its relationship to righteousness in the life of the disciple.

God. It is important to note once again here, however, in this discussion of faith in Matthew's narrative, that Joseph serves as the first example of faith in the Gospel, despite the lack of explicit πίστις language. Though it is a minor resonance in this story, Joseph must, nevertheless, trust God amidst the potential shame he may experience at the expense of those who assume that he is the father of this child born out of wedlock.[45] Joseph, therefore, trusts God despite the potential for his own shame and willingly embraces Mary once the angel reveals her pregnancy's origin.[46]

His faith continues beyond this story even, into the following narratives in which he once again obeys God's commands through two additional angelic dreams—to flee to Egypt (2:13–16) and then to return to Israel (2:19–23). As O'Donnell summarizes,

> Matthew wants his audience to see Joseph's faith as exceptional. Joseph moves from fear (ἐφοβήθη, Matt 2:22; cf. the angels μὴ φοβηθῇς, 1:20) to a faith that is obedience in action: he rose up (1:24; 2:14, 20), took (v. 24; 2:14, 21), called (1:25), departed (1:14; 2:22), entered (vv. 21, 23), according to God's word and (unwittingly) in order to fulfill it, "he did as commanded of him" (1:24).[47]

Joseph's faith here is, then, representative of his righteousness—actively trusting in God's plan for him, Mary, and Jesus, despite the uncertainties surrounding it from his own perspective and faithfully obeying God's direction. In this way, Joseph's own faith, at the outset of the Gospel, foreshadows that of his own son Jesus, who will later trust the Father wholly and remain faithful to him amidst great difficulty and persecution.

Faith in the Sermon on the Mount

Despite the language of faith only existing explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount at one point (6:30), Matthew, nevertheless, weaves the theme throughout. As I

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[45] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 94–95.

[46] As Konradt writes, "When Joseph awakens, he faithfully carries out the angel's commands." Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2020), 38.

[47] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 203.

discussed in chapter 4, the double love command (22:34–40) informs especially 6:1–21, flowing from the command to love one's enemies in 5:43–48. In 6:1, Jesus warns the disciples of "practicing [their] righteousness before other people to be seen by them," encouraging the disciples to consider their whole being—desires, motivations, *and* actions—as they pursue righteousness. The three examples of piety that Jesus then gives fall along the lines of the two virtues of discipleship that flow directly from the love of God and neighbor. First, the disciple expresses love for neighbor through proper, wholistic *mercy* (6:2–4). Second, the disciple expresses love for God through proper, wholistic *faith* in the form of prayer (6:5–15) and fasting (6:16–18).[48] The theme of loving God continues as Jesus encourages the disciples to love God and his reward rather than money and possessions on earth (6:19–24), which is even connected to mercy in the sense that generosity is only possible for those who truly love and trust God wholly (6:22–23).

6:25–34. Matthew's first use of πίστις language comes toward the end of this section as Jesus continues his focus on the disciple's relationship to the world. Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (6:25). He then offers two examples of common worries for a first-century Jew, weaving together both leading questions and explicit exhortations, and as he discusses clothing, he describes the disciples as ὀλιγόπιστοι (6:30). Each example contains a positive example, a lesser-to-greater argument, and an admonishment.

In the first example, Jesus tells his disciples to direct their gaze away from themselves and instead up to the birds in the sky. Even though birds do not work like

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[48] As O'Donnell writes, "In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches the necessary balance between trusting in God for provision and longing for God's priorities to become realities. Disciples who pray this prayer, or others modeled on it, demonstrate their heartfelt desire for God's rule, along with their utter dependence on his providence, protection, and power." O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 183.

farmers to provide food for themselves, God still feeds them. Next comes Jesus's lesser-to-greater argument: if God feeds the birds, which are much less valuable to him than humans, of course he will also feed humans.[49] Furthermore, worrying about these things does not actually help the worrier—"who among you can add even an hour to his life by worrying?" Jesus's second example follows in much the same way. He directs their attention to flowers, which God clothes beautifully despite their inherent impermanence. Again following the lesser-to-greater argument, Jesus wants his disciples to understand that (1) God clothes temporary flowers beautifully, (2) God cares for humans more than flowers, and (3) therefore, God will clothe humans. Most important to this project, Jesus references their "little faith": "But if God clothes the grass of the field like this, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith [ὀλιγόπιστοι]?" (6:28–29).

The adjective ὀλιγόπιστος occurs four times in Matthew (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) and the noun ὀλιγοπιστία once (17:20).[50] "Little faith" is not a complete lack of faith, like that of those in Jesus's hometown (13:58), the present generation (17:17), or the Jewish leaders (21:32). Neither is it perfectly adequate trust, like that which moves mountains (17:20; 21:21) or that of the many whom Jesus commends for coming to him for physical healing (8:5–13; 9:1–8, 20–22, 27–31; 15:21–28). "Little faith" falls between these two points on Matthew's spectrum of πίστις, and its application to the disciples appropriately parallels the disciples' wavering understanding and loyalty to Jesus

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[49] This type of argument is common both in rabbinic tradition (קַל וָחוֹמֶר) and in Roman rhetoric (*a minori ad maius*). David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 199; Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 246.

[50] While ὀλιγόπιστοι occurs in a parallel passage to 6:30 in Luke 12:28, it is likely that Luke's usage either comes from Matthew or similar tradition. In close parallel to Jesus's teaching in Matt 6, in some Jewish tradition, like Mek. on Exod 16:4, or Tg. Ps.-J. on Num 11:32, the Israelite who gathers manna and quail on the Sabbath in contradiction to God's direction has deficient trust. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 343n49; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 248.

himself. In Matthew 6, therefore, "little faith" may be defined as imperfect yet developing trust in Jesus as God's trustworthy and authoritative representative.[51] As O'Donnell notes, this "little faith" is "a negative word used to motivate positive results."[52] Jesus is clearly trying to move his disciples beyond their "little faith."[53]

As Jesus gives the specific command to consider birds and flowers, faith, therefore, serves as the implicit relational alternative to worry. Worry divides the disciple between trusting God and fearing the future.[54] Considering God's care for creatures of lesser value to God than humans shows that God's care for his own people is of course inevitable. This cognitive reorientation then forms within the disciple a greater trust in God as opposed to himself, and as the disciple reorients his understanding of God's care and trusts him more fully, the worry that divides the disciple transforms into trust, making the disciple more whole.

Jesus's teaching here in the Sermon provides three key insights into Matthew's understanding of the virtue of faith. First, true faith is *wholistic* faith, in that it requires the disciple to trust God both inwardly and outwardly. The disciple must cognitively understand his value as an image bearer of God, and more importantly, the Father's own love and provision for his people. Then the disciple must act in accordance with this

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[51] With this definition, my understanding is slightly more optimistic than Jeanine Brown's. She defines ὀλιγοπιστία as "an inadequate faith in the *extent of Jesus' authority*." Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, AcBib 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 106.

[52] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 184.

[53] Seglenieks similarly explains that Matthew uses this term "to encourage wholehearted trust as the ideal response for the Gospel audience." Christopher Seglenieks, "The Rhetoric of Matthean 'Small Faith,'" *ZNW* 113, no. 1 (2022): 68. Or as Marco Cairoli describes them, these five texts serve as "bright points of perspective [luminosi punti prospettici]," that develop Matthew's portrait of discipleship. Marco Cairoli, *La "poce fede" nel vangelo di Matteo: Uno studio esegetico-teologico*, AnBib 156 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2005), 10.

[54] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 251. Similarly, Davies and Allison write, "The mental voice of anxiety is to be exorcized at all costs. The mind is not to be bicameral, subject sometimes to faith, at other times to anxiety. The truth about God should cast out all fear." W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:663.

knowledge and eschew any anxiety or fear that may creep in.[55] As Branch-Trevathan writes at length,

> [This passage] urges listeners to develop the inner conditions, the lack of anxiety, necessary to store treasures in heaven and not on earth, and to serve only God (διὰ τοῦτο, v. 25). These verses repeatedly focus on anxiety about one's earthly future—note the future verbs in vv. 25 and 31 and the redactional conclusion not to worry about tomorrow (εἰς τὴν αὔριον, v. 36; cf. Luke 12:31)—and stress that not only is such anxiety futile, as the heading declared it (v. 19b), since the future eludes human control (vv. 27, 34), but it characterizes "the Gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη), those who, by striving for wealth (ἐπιζητοῦσιν, v. 32), serve Mammon. As anxiety about the future leads many to amass treasures, the audience is exhorted to cultivate the imperturbable trust—the opposite of "little faith" (ὀλιγόπιστοι, v. 30)—in God's care that leads to amassing righteousness by sharing possessions (see also 6:11–12).[56]

True faith requires the disciple to come to understand God's care for him in a way that removes any anxiety from his life. As such, faith, requires the whole of one's being, including cognition, emotion, and action.

Second, Jesus's way of teaching his disciples to trust in God's care in this passage shows that faith itself is a virtue to be *practiced*. Jesus chooses the examples of food and clothing because these are anxieties and fears essential to life and faced every single day.[57] Jesus's command to "look" and his incisive questions do not simply call the disciple to a particular type of action but to a particular *way of being*. In other words, the disciple must reorient his own self-perception (i.e., his worth to the Father) and his own emotional reaction to risk or lack (peace and trust rather than fear and anxiety). In giving the disciples these tools to transform their way of reacting to need, Jesus is seeking to form virtue within the disciples, and he has taught them in a way that they can practice every single day so that they can habitually develop the virtue of faith in their lives. Faith,

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[55] Wilson understands Jesus's teaching here to depict "somatic anxiety principally as the antithesis of faith, and thus an encumbrance to discipleship." Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 1:228.

[56] George Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises: The Making of the Matthean Self*, NovTSup 178 (Boston: Brill, 2020), 236–37.

[57] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 247.

in this sense, is a virtue requiring the disciple's whole-person reorientation around his relationship to the Father.[58] One may, furthermore, understand the inherently relational nature of faith—that as the disciple trusts in the Father's good care, he is actively acknowledging and trusting that the Father himself is trustworthy.

Third, Jesus's penultimate command here—"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (6:33)—helps to define the relationship between righteousness and faith. In 6:25–34, Jesus commands the disciples not to be anxious three times (6:25, 31, 34), and despite his implicit command to trust in God in his appellation of the disciples as "you of little faith," here in 6:33, Jesus's positive command juxtaposed with the command not to be anxious is to seek his kingdom and righteousness. The disciple's priority should not be to focus on his own worries and anxieties but to look upward to God—his kingdom and righteousness. If one focuses on God himself—his trustworthy character and care—the disciple's anxiety and worry will be transformed to trust. As the disciple more actively puts his faith in the Father, therefore, he pursues righteousness more holistically. Pursuing more active trust in the Father *is the way* for the disciple to seek righteousness.[59] Faith, in this sense, may be understood as an individual virtue of discipleship for Matthew that falls under the larger moral category of righteousness, or virtue itself. As the disciple loves God by trusting him for daily provision, he becomes more righteous.

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[58] As Wilson notes, "Trust in divine providence . . . is liberating, since it enables individuals to recognize their proper relationship with God. Such trust is necessary because one must be willing to give up everything, indeed all sources of security and status, for the sake of the kingdom (13:44–46; 19:27–29)." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:228.

[59] I understand the relationship between faith and righteousness a bit differently than Konradt here, who understands faith in the Father to allow the disciples to "concentrate on their mission by striving after justice/righteousness." Konradt, *Matthew*, 113. I do not necessarily disagree with his assessment. Trusting the Father certainly does allow the disciple to concentrate more fully on seeking righteousness. Trusting the Father, however, for Matthew is *one key way* in and of itself that the disciple seeks righteousness. In other words, the disciple seeks righteousness *in that* he trusts the Father.

Faith Taught and Embodied by Jesus and Others

Throughout the rest of the narrative, Matthew portrays faith on a wide spectrum, with characters exhibiting varying qualities of faith. Some, like the centurion or Canaanite woman have unique or great faith. Others, like those in Jesus's hometown or the Jewish leaders have no faith and are indeed antagonistic toward Jesus and his ministry. And the disciples have "little faith," frequently riddled with fear, doubt, and deficient understanding. Perhaps most importantly, Matthew presents Jesus as the ideal embodiment of both faith in and faithfulness toward the Father. Through his narrative presentation of each of these characters, Matthew provides for his reader a spectrum of faith on which the reader can place himself, identifying with some characters, distancing himself from others, and seeking to grow ultimately to imitate Jesus's own exemplary faith.

Jesus as primary example of faith. Despite Matthew's lack of explicit description of Jesus with πίστις language, Jesus clearly exhibits πίστις, both through his implied trustworthiness as characters trust in him and through his own trust in and faithfulness to the Father. Matthew repeatedly places Jesus on the receiving end of trust. While I will discuss these accounts more thoroughly in the following section, it is important to note at this point that when characters trust in Jesus, his own trustworthiness is implied. One may notice, however, that most of these accounts—the disciples (6:25–34; 8:23–27; 14:22–33; 16:5–12; 17:14–21; 21:20–22), the centurion (8:5–13), the friends of the paralyzed man (9:1–8), the blind men (9:27–31), and the Canaanite woman (15:21–28)—do not explicitly mention that anyone has trusted *in Jesus*. Only the little ones of 18:5–6 "trust in [him] [πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ]." There are several reasons, though, to think that even when not explicit in Matthew, characters are putting their trust *in Jesus himself*.

First, Jesus himself is almost always the one who fulfills their trust. Jesus heals

the centurion's servant, the paralyzed man, the blind men, and the Canaanite's daughter. He calms the storm and empowers Peter to walk on water. Even when Jesus does not directly fulfill their trust, like in the Sermon on the Mount where God is the one in whom they trust, the narrative itself, in which characters come to Jesus trusting that he can help them shows that the disciples are to trust in God *by* trusting in Jesus. Second, even if we understand these characters to have propositional belief *that something will happen* rather than simply trust in a person, the line between the two is very thin, and Jesus remains the person whom they believe or trust will do something. For example, when Jesus heals the two blind men, he asks them, "Do you believe [πιστεύετε] that I am able to do this?" (9:28). When they answer in the affirmative, he says, "According to your faith [πίστιν] be it done to you" (9:29). Even though Matthew does not explicitly say that their trust is in Jesus, Jesus is clearly the center of their propositional belief, and by believing *that* he is able to help them, they are in effect trusting in him relationally as the one who is able to save them.[60]

If all of these characters are trusting in Jesus, then, why does their trust necessarily imply his own trustworthiness? While discussing πίστις in Paul, F. G. Downing notes, "Trust in someone was itself founded in, and displayed and presupposed belief in their trustworthiness (as well as, most likely, their willingness to trust you): faith in Jesus would necessarily imply (unless explicitly denied) at the least a trust in his faithfulness."[61] Indeed, as these characters come to Jesus in trust, they in some way believe in his own trustworthiness, and Jesus's own fulfillment of their requests shows

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[60] Konradt similarly observes the relational nature of faith:

> Believers should not place their trust in an abstract miraculous power or the ability of some miracle worker but rather in the person of Jesus, and trust placed in Jesus goes hand in hand with and is supported by the belief that Jesus acts on the basis of the authority *given by God* to him [die Glaubenden ihr Vertrauen nicht auf eine abstrakte Wundermacht oder die Fähigkeit irgendeines Wunderheilers, sondern eben auf die Person Jesu richten und dabei das auf Jesus gerichtete Vertrauen mit dem Glauben einhergeht und von ihm getragen wird, dass Jesus au seiner ihm *von Gott verliehenen* Vollmacht heraus handelt. (Konradt, "Die Rede vom Glauben," 446)

[61] Downing, "Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith," 160.

his own faithfulness toward them. The virtue of πίστις, therefore, is often a two-way street, in which both parties show trust, trustworthiness, and faithfulness to varying degrees.

Matthew not only presents Jesus as trustworthy in relation to characters who come to him in need, but he also shows that he himself is faithful to the Father. As Jesus hangs on the cross, the Jewish leaders deride him: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will trust in him [πιστεύσομεν ἐπ᾽αὐτόν]. He has trusted in God [πέποιθεν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν]; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (27:41–42).[62] In their ironic quotation of Psalm 21:8 LXX, the Jewish leaders actually affirm what the reader has been learning throughout Matthew's Gospel—that Jesus has been trusting in God this entire time and that he has remained faithful to the end.[63] In Psalm 21:8 LXX, the faithful one is mocked and despised just like Jesus, even though both he and his forefathers hoped in the Lord. By the end of the Psalm, though, a tone of salvation and worship overpowers the hopelessness, just as the death of Jesus in Matthew quickly turns to the hope of the resurrection.[64]

Indeed, Matthew has portrayed Jesus as remaining faithful to the Father,

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[62] While πείθω can have different resonances than πιστεύω, here their semantic ranges actually overlap quite a bit, as can be seen by the parallel between the Jewish leaders saying that they will trust in Jesus and them saying that Jesus has trusted in God. Mark's version of this same dialogue at the cross does not include this allusion to Ps 21:8 LXX.

[63] Bruner similarly observes, "If we remove the sarcastic exclamation mark implied by the taunt ['He trusted in God!'], we have *exactly* what animated Jesus' whole life: he trusted in God." Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 2:740; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 44. Here there may also be an allusion to Wis 2:17–18: "Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will be his end. For if the righteous one [ὁ δίκαιος] is God's son [υἱὸς θεοῦ], he will help him and deliver [ῥύσεται] him from the hand of his enemies." If Matthew alludes to this text as well, Jesus's status as the ultimate example of righteousness in Matthew is underscored, and his faithfulness as evidence of his righteousness is made even clearer. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1071–72; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:410–11.

[64] As Wilson writes, "In this case, the evocation of biblical language shows how the authorities with their own words unwittingly attest to the truth of the gospel, reminding the reader of both Jesus's trust in God (cf. 26:39, 42) and God's love for Jesus (cf. 3:17; 17:5)." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:410.

trusting his will, throughout the entire Gospel. Two main examples of Jesus's trust in and faithfulness to the Father bookend his ministry.[65] Shortly after his baptism, in which the Father affirms Jesus as "my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17), after he and John have fulfilled "all righteousness" (3:15) in aligning themselves with God's will in their individual roles in his redemptive plan, Jesus is led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he is tempted three times by the devil (4:1–11).[66] In each temptation, the devil questions Jesus's relationship with the Father, yet Jesus repeatedly withstands the temptation and remains faithful to God. Even when the devil offers Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" if he will bow down and worship him (4:8), Jesus remains faithful to God and rebukes Satan. As France notes, it is likely significant that the section in Deuteronomy from which Jesus draws three of his responses to Satan begins with the Shema, which Jesus later quotes in his double love command as the "great and first commandment": "You shall love the Lord your God will all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (22:37–38; cf. Deut 6:5).[67]

Furthermore, Jesus here foreshadows the kind of wholistic alignment with God's will that he later commands of his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Just as his disciples are to love God and not money (6:24)—to eschew the treasures of the world in order to gain the treasures of heaven (6:19–21)—so Jesus remains faithfully committed to his love for the Father despite temptations to forsake him in order to gain power and status. In this sense, Jesus here shows himself not only to be faithful but to be *righteous*. Jesus's wholistic love for God lies at the center of his radical trust in and faithfulness to

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[65] O'Donnell discusses these two passages as well. See O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 43–45.

[66] Brandon D. Crowe, *The Obedient Son: Deuteronomy and Christology in the Gospel of Matthew*, BZNW 188 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 181–200.

[67] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 128. Crowe understands the temptation narrative as the climax of Matthew's introduction, drawing on Deuteronomy in particular to highlight "Jesus' obedient *sonship* in contrast to Israel." Crowe, *The Obedient Son*, 166.

him. This story, therefore, presents Jesus—in conjunction with his baptism—at the outset of his ministry, as qualified, tested through the fires of temptation, to remain faithful to the messianic role the Father has given him.[68]

Intimately connected to the wilderness temptation, at the end of his ministry in Gethsemane, Jesus asks the Father to "let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (26:39).[69] A second time, he asks, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (26:42). Finally a third time, Jesus repeats the prayer (26:44). In the first prayer, Jesus pleads for the Father to let Jesus's mission pass from him, yet accepts the Father's will over his own. In the second, Jesus does not ask, but resigns himself fully to the Father's will. Jesus here embodies the faith that he sought to encourage in his disciples when he taught them the Lord's Prayer (6:9–13): praying to the Father for his will to be done despite the incredible difficulties they may encounter.[70] Furthermore, Jesus's prayers here clarify the relationship between trust and faithfulness. Jesus fully submits himself to the Father's will, trusting that the Father's will is absolutely trustworthy, and by trusting in the Father, Jesus himself remains faithful to the Father and his will. As the events of the crucifixion unfold, then, Jesus remains faithful, trusting in the Father to the end, and as Yeung notes, through his death, Matthew presents

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[68] Konradt writes similarly,

> Matthew 4:1–11 stands near the end of the Prologue and thus at the threshold of Matthew's portrayal of the public ministry of Jesus. With its focus on the obedience of Jesus as the Son of God, this text, in view of the Gospel's composition as a whole, functions as presenting Jesus as qualified for the mission before which he stands. . . . When Jesus is tested by these temptations, God himself demonstrates in advance that Jesus will faithfully carry out his mission. As the one who has not been seduced by the offer of all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (4:8), Jesus will now emerge on the public stage to proclaim the kingdom of heaven. (Konradt, *Matthew*, 56)

[69] Konradt notes several intratextual connections between the temptation in chap. 4 and the passion at the end of the Gospel. Perhaps the strongest inversion is the third temptation in which Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in return for worshiping him rather than the Father (4:8–9). As Konradt observes, "The way of the Son of God is not the direct route into glory. His way leads first to the cross. However, the Son of God who is obedient even to death on the cross is ultimately exalted, and his authority goes far beyond what the devil could offer him: the Risen One has all authority *in heaven* and on earth (28:18)." Konradt, *Matthew*, 55–56.

[70] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1004; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:396.

Jesus as "the ultimate exemplar of faith."[71] As the reader, then, witnesses Jesus trusting in God amidst temptations and trials, he is to pursue this same virtue of trust in and faithfulness to both Jesus and the Father.[72]

Positive examples of faith. While Matthew mostly implies Jesus's faith, he explicitly links the virtue to secondary characters, both positively and negatively, and a high concentration of Matthew's focus on faith is in chapters 8 and 9. Almost all of the characters that exhibit faith do so by trusting in Jesus for some kind of physical healing. The first character to approach Jesus after the Sermon, while not explicitly said to have "faith," clearly trusts in Jesus's ability to heal him of leprosy: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (8:2b). The first character to whom Matthew explicitly ascribes faith is the centurion, who comes to Jesus seeking healing for his paralyzed servant. When the centurion tells Jesus that he is not worthy to have Jesus come into his house but simply to say the word and his servant would be healed, Jesus responds, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith [πίστιν]. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (8:10b–12). The

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[71] Yeung, "Faith," 261; O'Donnell, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!"*, 45. Similarly, O'Donnell writes,

> Mathew's [*sic*] informed audience . . . would have understood, or were supposed to understand in due time, that in Jesus's faithfulness to God unto death he showcases that he has succeeded where Israel has fallen short. Indeed, as the true or ultimate Israel, Jesus in his life was a successful recapitulation of Israel's experience and in his death a fulfillment of the promises of salvation offered to all who would believe in him. (O'Donnell, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!"*, 67)

[72] Crowe similarly concludes,

> Once one comes to grips with the reality that *sonship* necessitated *obedience* for God's people, the need to articulate Jesus' *obedience* as *Son* of God becomes clear for Matthew. The covenantal obedience required of God's people was a standard to which they never attained in the OT storyline. Matthew recognizes this and thus articulates the story of Jesus in contrast to Israel, using *Son of God* as a primary means for conveying this asymmetrical correspondence. It was thus necessary for Matthew to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills God's design for Israel, and in so doing is able to mediate his sonship to his disciples and enable their own obedience. Hence Jesus, as the obedient Son of God, is able to grant the privilege of sonship also to his disciples, who are therefore called to follow in his path of filial obedience. The obedience of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's requirements for Israel thereby enables those who are unable themselves to "fulfill all righteousness" to be part of God's family through the Son who has proven obedient on their behalf. (Crowe, *The Obedient Son*, 229–30)

centurion's *πίστις* here seems to be a combination of personal trust in Jesus and his authority to heal with only his words and a firm belief that Jesus is able to do it. Jesus commends the centurion's trust by placing it above that of even God's own people, Israel.

This story informs Matthew's understanding of faith in two main ways. First, the centurion, as the first example of Gentile faith, foreshadows both the faith of the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) and the Great Commission (28:19–20), in which the disciples' mission is finally broken open to include all people, even Gentiles. As France writes, "We are to think of a reconstitution of the true people of God which is no longer on the basis of racial ancestry, but, as symbolized by the Gentile centurion, on the basis of faith in Jesus."[73] Second, the centurion's faith is *active*. O'Donnell defines faith in Matthew as "trust in action," and Matthew always presents those who come to Jesus and are commended for their faith as *actively* pursuing his mercy.[74] The centurion, a man who both himself holds authority and is under the authority of others, comes to Jesus humbly in order to ask for help. This combination of humility, trust, and action all contribute to the centurion's faith and is namely why Jesus commends it above any that he has seen in Israel.

In another account soon after, some friends bring their paralytic friend to Jesus for healing (9:1–8). When Jesus sees their "faith [πίστιν]," he forgives the man of his sins and then heals him.[75] While not as singular as the centurion's faith, their faith is once again a combination of personal trust in Jesus as one who can heal and a belief in his power to do so. This trust leads to action, once again, as they carry their friend

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[73] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319. See also O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 121–22; Osborne, *Matthew*, 292.

[74] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 190–91.

[75] Whether "their faith" refers to the friends alone or to the friends and the paralyzed man makes no difference to the nature of their "faith." Nevertheless, I agree with many others, who see "their faith" as referring to the faith of both the friends and the paralyzed man. See also Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:88; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:232; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 288.

themselves to Jesus. While this story adds little to Matthew's understanding of faith other than further evidence of an *active* faith, it does highlight the frequent narrative relationship between faith and mercy for Matthew. While Matthew does not explicitly mention ἔλεος here, both Jesus's forgiveness of the man's sins and his healing of his paralysis are examples of mercy. Faith, therefore, serves as a prerequisite for mercy, and as people humble themselves before him, trusting in Jesus's merciful character and in his authority as Messiah, Jesus shows them mercy.

Soon after, Matthew juxtaposes two characters who exhibit faith—one implicitly and the other explicitly. A ruler approaches Jesus and asks him to come and lay a hand on his dead daughter so that she might live (9:18). The ruler's humble faith—trusting that only a touch of Jesus's hand would heal his daughter—is clear. After Jesus follows after him, Matthew interrupts the story as a woman with a blood discharge comes to Jesus, speaking to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be saved" (9:21). Jesus, of course, sees her and responds, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has saved you [ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε]" (9:22). This woman's faith goes beyond simply believing that Jesus could heal her. She comes to Jesus, actively trusting that even touching his clothes would heal her. In this sense, Matthew presents her faith as heightened compared to the ruler, as she does not even need to touch Jesus himself but simply his clothes.

Jesus's pronouncement, furthermore, highlights both the woman's faith and echoes the parallel between physical healing and eschatological salvation.[76] Matthew's use of σώζω here—while immediately referring to her physical healing—also alludes to the greater reality of eschatological salvation from sins, a pervasive theme for Matthew

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[76] As Davies and Allison note, "Lest his readers misunderstand what has transpired, the evangelist plainly indicates that it was not the woman's grasp which effected her cure but faith: 'your faith has saved you.'" Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:130; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 197.

(e.g., 1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 19:25; 24:13, 22).[77] Especially after Jesus has just paralleled the sick's need for a doctor and sinners' need for Jesus (9:12–13), Matthew highlights in Jesus's response the virtue of faith as prerequisite both for physical healing and for forgiveness of sins and thus eschatological salvation. Matthew then returns to the story of the ruler, as Jesus comes to his house and raises his daughter from the dead. His faith is once again implied as his trust in Jesus to heal his dead daughter is juxtaposed with the crowd's evident lack of faith in laughing at the possibility of Jesus healing the girl (9:23–24).[78] These stories presented together highlight the transformative power of faith in Jesus. Two daughters—both isolated from society through death and impurity—are healed by Jesus through faith.[79] Each of them, furthermore, in their respective conditions and salvation by Jesus, foreshadows a different aspect of Jesus's ultimate mission to his people—the woman with a bleeding body who is saved by faith looks forward to Jesus's bleeding body on the cross to effect the salvation of his people, and the daughter who is raised from the dead to Jesus's resurrection from the dead, offering eschatological hope to his people.[80]

Shortly afterward, two blind men approach Jesus and implore, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (9:27–31). Jesus asks them, "Do you believe [πιστεύετε] that I am able

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[77] Salvation holds a wide range of meaning in Matthew, from eschatological salvation (1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 19:25; 24:13, 22) to physical healing (9:21; 14:36) to salvation from imminent danger (8:25; 14:30; 27:40, 42, 49). For more on the semantic range of σῴζω and its potential mix of both physical and eschatological connotations, see Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul*, 116–69. As Yeung argues, "The second feature [of Jesus's teaching on faith here] is *Jesus' offer of a salvation that grants purity to the ritually impure and membership in the Kingdom of God to the nonelect on account of their faith in him.* . . . Jesus promised ritual purity and restoration into the worshipping community to the woman who was alienated from the people of God owing to her bleeding disease." Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul*, 194. Thus the restoration to the community of God's people that comes from the woman's healing foreshadows her entrance into God's kingdom itself. See also O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 197n173.

[78] At this point in Mark and Luke's versions of the story, the ruler's faith is made explicit as Jesus exhorts him: "Do not fear. Only trust [πίστευε/πίστευσον]" (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50).

[79] O'Donnell, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!"*, 192–98. As Konradt comments on the woman with the blood discharge, "Healing means for the woman not only physical health; at the same time her social isolation has been overcome." Konradt, *Matthew*, 149.

[80] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:328.

to do this?" (9:28). After they answer positively, Jesus says, "According to your faith [πίστιν] be it done to you" (9:29). Their πίστις is a combination of trust in Jesus and belief that he is able to heal them, yet the combination of their request for mercy and their reference to Jesus as "Son of David" alludes to their faith including some level of understanding of Jesus's messianic role. Their request for mercy echoes cries to God for mercy in the Septuagint (e.g., Deut 30:2–3; Pss 6:3; 9:14; 40:5; 50:3),[81] and "Son of David" both recalls Jesus's Davidic lineage (chapter 1) and Jesus's own discussions of his messianic status (12:23; 21:9, 15).[82] Their faith, therefore, while simple in its humble request for physical healing, goes beyond that of the Jewish leaders and even the disciples, as the two blind men understand Jesus's mission in a way that the Jewish leaders do not and that the disciples struggle to comprehend.

The most positive commendation of someone's faith in Matthew's Gospel comes when a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus asking for healing for her daughter (15:21–28).[83] Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman in Tyre and Sidon who cries out to him, "Have mercy [ἐλέησόν] on me, Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon" (15:22). Jesus ignores her, but after the disciples beg him to send her away, Jesus replies, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). She persists, once again asking Jesus for help, and after Jesus responds—"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (15:26)—she turns his metaphor

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[81] Matthias Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Wayne Coppins, BMSEC (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022), 143n40; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:313–14. For a more thorough discussion of Jesus's "mercy" in this passage, see chap. 6 of this dissertation.

[82] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 366. For a thorough overview of Matthew's use of the title "Son of David" and its possible background, see Luz, *Matthew*, 1:47–48. For a discussion of the possibility of an allusion to Solomon's healing ministry as Son of David, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:136–37.

[83] For an overview of the reception history of Matt 15:21–28, see Nancy Klancher, "Constructing Christian Identities, One Canaanite Woman at a Time: Studies in the Reception of Matthew 15:21–28" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

around, answering, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (15:27). Jesus is impressed by her “great” faith and heals her daughter instantly (15:28).[84]

O’Donnell argues that “the Canaanite woman, of all the characters, most fully embodies Matthew’s theological vision of faith.”[85] Janice Capel Anderson understands the Canaanite woman to lie at the center of a chiastic pattern related to responses to Jesus’s ministry in Matthew:

A – Two blind men [“Son of David”] (9:27–31)
B – Sign of Jonah (12:28–42)
C – Feeding of the 5,000 (14:13–21)
D – Canaanite Woman [“Son of David”] (15:22–28)
C’ – Feeding of the 4,000 (15:30–38)
B’ – Sign of Jonah (16:1–4)
A’ – Two blind men [“Son of David”] (20:29–34)[86]

Regardless of whether this chiasm is intentionally presented by Matthew or simply a way for the reader to make sense of Matthean themes, as O’Donnell concludes, this structure helps the reader more clearly to visualize the correct “theological emphases” in these stories.[87] The main theological emphasis here is the faith of the Canaanite woman and four blind men juxtaposed with the antagonism of the Jewish leaders and the lack of understanding of the disciples. As Anderson observes, “It is [the Canaanite woman and the four blind men] who exhibit the most faith, not the Pharisees who would reject contact with them both, nor the disciples whose faith and understanding waivers.”[88]

[84] Mark’s version of this story does not mention the woman’s “faith” (7:24–30). Whether the two Gospels share a common source or Matthew relied on Mark, Matthew clearly emphasizes her “faith” in his version of the story.

[85] O’Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 214.

[86] Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSup 91 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1994), 179.

[87] O’Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 161.

[88] Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 180. Similarly, O’Donnell writes,

For O'Donnell, three aspects of the woman's faith embody Matthew's understanding of true faith.[89] First, she understands the scope of Jesus's mission as extending to the Gentiles, evinced by her persistence in asking for healing for her daughter based on her confidence that "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (15:27).[90] While her argument makes more explicit her understanding of this extension to the Gentiles, she joins the centurion of chapter 8 as a Gentile who approaches Jesus in faith and is commended and rewarded. As such, the commendation of both Gentile characters' faith underscores the truth that *faith* rather than *ethnic identity* results in mercy from Jesus.[91]

Second, she understands Jesus's messianic role as "Son of David" and "Lord" (15:22), joining the four blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–34) who petition Jesus as "Son of David," acknowledging his role as messianic embodiment of God's own mercy toward his people. Third, her faith is inherently *active* as she approaches Jesus, kneels before him, persists in her cries amidst the opposition of the disciples, and finally presses Jesus to heal her daughter by appealing to his messianic mission not only to Israel but to the

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> Regarding the reception and rejection that Jesus receives in 9:27–20:34, the Canaanite woman's "great faith" confessions stand at center stage (15:21–28). In faith, she calls Jesus both "Son of David" (15:22) and "Lord" (vv. 2, 25, 27). Then, joining her along both the structural edges of the chiasm and the societal edges of their world, are the four blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–34). Their voices blend together. They affirm her Christological affirmations (see 9:27, 28, 20:30, 31, 33). (O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 161)

[89] O'Donnell, *"O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!"*, 213–15.

[90] Konradt similarly observes,

> To reduce this depth of faith only to her persistence in appealing to Jesus fails to grasp the heart of the matter, for in v. 26 she was still rejected despite her already persistent and ceaseless pleas. The decisive factor is rather—again analogously to the case of the centurion—that she recognizes in Jesus not only the Messiah of Israel, but as the one who *as Israel's Messiah* is also the one who brings salvation to the Gentiles. She thus anticipates the universality of the gift of salvation which Jesus himself will announce after his resurrection and exaltation as Lord of the world, and conveys this in her argument along with the understanding of the salvation-historical status quo in which the absolute difference between Israel and the Gentiles is *still* valid. (Konradt, *Matthew*, 241–42)

[91] As Davies and Allison write, "Given Matthew's understanding of salvation-history, he cannot let these exceptional episodes go by without making it perfectly clear that when Gentiles are granted salvation it is solely on the basis of their faith: they are not expected to become Jews." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:559. See also Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:443.

Gentiles as well. This combination of understanding, desire, and action, once again, highlights faith as a virtue, requiring the whole of one's being to embody. The woman, therefore, typifies these three aspects of faith that reverberate in similar ways across other positive examples throughout Matthew, yet Jesus's declaration of her faith as "great" sets her apart as the most central example of faith for the reader, aside from Jesus himself.

In 18:5–6, Jesus responds to the disciples' question of who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven by pointing out the importance of becoming humble like children, and then he goes on to warn them of causing "one of these little ones who trusts in me [πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ] to sin" (18:6). While there is little to glean from this short mention of faith here, it is important to note that the *humility* of children seems to be the reason Jesus upholds children here. Their humility is inextricably bound to their trust in Jesus because, as has been clear throughout the narrative with those who humbly approach Jesus in faith, humility is necessary for true faith.[92]

Later, in the eschatological discourse, Jesus refers three times to the faithful servant. First, it is "the faithful [πιστὸς] and wise servant" (24:45), who faithfully cares for his master's household and other servants while he is gone. This servant's faithfulness toward the master reverberates into faithfulness toward his fellow servants. As he faithfully cares for them (juxtaposed with the "wicked servant" who instead beats them), he himself is faithful to his master. Second and third, it is "the good and faithful [πιστέ] servant," who has been "faithful [πιστός] over a little" (25:21, 23) by multiplying his master's money while he is away.[93] Both instances refer to a servant who has been set over responsibilities by his master and has faithfully carried them out. While these

[92] As O'Donnell writes, "Humility is also part of the nature of their faith ('whoever humbles himself like this child,' 18:3)." O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 201n190.

[93] Interestingly, Jesus's commendation of the "good and faithful servant" here—"You have been faithful over a little [ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός]" (25:21, 23)—bears linguistic resemblance to Jesus's wholly unique referent for the disciples—ὀλιγόπιστος. It could certainly simply amount to a linguistic coincidence, but there could also be an ironic allusion here to the stark difference between the faithfulness of the servant over a little and the disciples' little faith despite the incredible mission entrusted to them.

instances reflect a different tone from most of Matthew's πίστις language—*faithfulness* rather than *trust*—they only serve to round out Matthew's understanding of the virtue of faith, which in various instances refers both to trust in Jesus and faithfulness to him.

Trust and faithfulness are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. As discussed in relation to the concept of faith in the ancient world, to trust in someone is to assume their trustworthiness or faithfulness toward the one trusting, and to trust someone naturally builds a relationship in which both parties trust the other and exhibit faithfulness toward the other. In these two instances, the servant is faithful toward the master. Considering Matthew's frequent narrative theme of characters putting their faith in Jesus, along with Jesus's implicit role in these parables as the "master," the reader may assume that "the faithful servant" is also one who trusts in his master. Indeed, the falsely-founded fear of the wicked servant in the parable of the talents (25:25) juxtaposes the trust of the faithful servant, who absorbs the risk of putting his master's money to work with hopes of multiplying it precisely *because* he trusts in his master's goodness. As Konradt notes,

> It is evident from the whole context of Matthew that, in any case, the appraisal the slave has made of his master which derives from his claiming the harvest is to be considered false in the light of who Jesus actually is: Jesus is no "harsh man." He is characterized rather by gentleness (11:29; 21:5), humility (11:29), and mercy (e.g., 9:36; 14:14), manifested in his merciful turning toward sinners (9:2–13). As their master, Jesus challenges his disciples to perform their assigned mission and demands a life that accords with what he has commanded (29:20). . . . Anxiety is therefore unfounded. Rather, all this should inspire trust to take up the job with confidence.[94]

Jesus, therefore, calls his disciples to faithfulness to him not as an arbitrary call to obedience but as a necessary corollary to their trust in Jesus himself, whose own character both alleviates fear and invites absolute trust.

The pairing of faithfulness with another virtue—wisdom ("φρόνιμος") in 24:45 and goodness ("ἀγαθὲ") in 25:21 and 23—furthermore, highlights faithfulness as a

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[94] Konradt, *Matthew*, 374. See also Luz, *Matthew*, 3:257.

general moral category for Matthew that serves as an identifier for disciples of Jesus. Wisdom recalls the "wise man [ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ]" of 7:24 who builds his house on the rock (cf. 25:2, 4, 8), and goodness serves for Matthew as a general morally positive category (e.g., 5:45; 7:17–18; 12:34–35; 19:16–17; 22:10), with the metaphor of a "good tree [δένδρον ἀγαθὸν]" bearing "good fruit [καρποὺς καλοὺς]" lying at the center of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus (7:17–18). The servant of 24:45 being called "flourishing [μακάριος]" also recalls the flourishing life of the disciple envisioned by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–11; cf. 11:6; 13:16; 16:17).[95] In this sense, the virtue of faithfulness can be understood as an identifier of Jesus's disciples alluding to the overall faithful life of the disciple laid out in the Sermon.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, coming directly after that of the talents, Jesus refers to the sheep as the "the righteous" (25:46). As I argued in chapter 4, this title is used to refer to those who enter into the kingdom—"the righteous"—juxtaposed with its opposite—"the unrighteous"—serving to delineate disciples of Jesus from those who reject him. In the same way, disciples may identify in these two earlier passages with the faithful servant and consider themselves "the faithful." In each of these instances, the unfaithful, wicked servant is punished while the faithful is rewarded. In 24:45–51, the "wicked servant" is cut in pieces and put with "the hypocrites [τῶν ὑποκριτῶν]" (24:51), recalling the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes denounced in the woes in chapter 23.[96] That unfaithfulness is punished alongside hypocrisy shows that the opposite is also true—faithfulness should be considered on par with righteousness—and the rest of Matthew's narrative bears out that faith, as a virtue of both trust and faithfulness, marks the disciple who is truly righteous.[97]

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[95] Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:724.

[96] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:303.

[97] Luke's version of this parable ends with the slave who beats his fellow slaves being punished with "the unfaithful [τῶν ἀπίστων]" (12:46). The parallel between Matthew's "hypocrites" (Matt

Negative examples of faith. At the same time, Matthew also provides his reader with examples of characters who clearly lack πίστις—the people in Nazareth, the present generation, and the Jewish leaders. In 13:53–58, the people in Jesus's hometown Nazareth reject Jesus, refusing to believe that he could have gained this wisdom and ability to perform miracles from his lowly status as the son of a carpenter (13:53–56). This story comes just after Matthew's third discourse section, which develops teaching about the different responses to the Kingdom—rejection and acceptance. The people are astonished by Jesus's teaching in the synagogue, but their knowledge of and relationship with his family keep them from trusting him and his identity as messiah.[98] Because of their "unbelief [ἀπιστίαν]" (13:58), Jesus does not do miracles there and moves on.[99]

Their offense ("they took offense at him [ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ]," 13:57a) echoes the offense Jesus warns his disciples against (11:6) and the offense of the Pharisees (15:12), and their total unbelief is only shared explicitly by the "faithless [ἄπιστος] and twisted generation" (17:17) Jesus refers to later, though the scribes and Pharisees in their many interactions with Jesus clearly share this unbelief.[100] In this sense, the people of Jesus's hometown provide the first completely unbelieving foil to the many characters who exhibit faith in Matthew. While many Jews and Gentiles come to Jesus in faith and are healed, the people of Jesus's hometown—blinded by their own misunderstanding of Jesus's identity and status—are unable to trust him and his identity.

24:51) and Luke's "unfaithful" (Luke 12:46) perhaps confirms some level of correspondence between the two terms in Matthew's eyes. To be unfaithful is to be a hypocrite in the sense that one's identity as a servant to his or her master is at odds with unfaithfulness toward him.

[98] As France writes, "Here the problem is not so much doubt over Jesus' ability to carry out any specific healing as skepticism as to his whole image as a miracle-working 'man of God.'" France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 398.

[99] It is important to note that Matthew softens Mark's version of this story (Mark 6:5) by shifting the emphasis from Jesus's *inability* to do mighty works to *his decision* not to do many mighty works because of their unbelief. Konradt, *Matthew*, 221; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:303.

[100] Konradt, *Matthew*, 221. I will discuss the "faithless [ἄπιστος] and twisted generation" (17:17) below in my discussion of the disciples' complex faith.

Set in stark contrast to the Canaanite woman, who will soon display an incredible trust in Jesus and his mission, the people of Nazareth cannot move past their surface-level understanding of who Jesus is.[101] Matthew, therefore, once again presents faith as the necessary prerequisite for the mercy of Jesus.[102] Without it, the people of Jesus's hometown reject Jesus himself and thus remain outside of his kingdom.

The most consistently negative example of faith in Matthew comes from the Jewish leaders—including the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees—who have actively opposed Jesus and seek to have him killed (e.g., 9:1–8, 10–13, 34; 12:24; 16:21; 20:18; 21:15).[103] In 21:23–32, the chief priests and elders confront Jesus in the temple, questioning his authority. Jesus then questions them whether John's baptism came from heaven or man. If they answer, "from heaven," they know that Jesus will ask, "Why then did you not believe [ἐπιστεύσατε] him?" After they fail to answer, Jesus tells the parable of two sons, comparing those who did not believe John with the tax collectors and prostitutes who did: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe [ἐπιστεύσατε] him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed [ἐπίστευσαν] him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe [πιστεῦσαι] him" (21:32).

While the Pharisees previously questioned Jesus's association with tax collectors and sinners (9:10–13), Jesus here shows that faith (as another way of describing doing "the will of [the] Father" (21:31a)—rather than a *false perception* of righteousness—gains one entrance into the kingdom of God (21:31).[104] Matthew here

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[101] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 149.

[102] Konradt, *Matthew*, 221.

[103] O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 143–44.

[104] This commendation of the faith of tax collectors and prostitutes here resembles Jesus's earlier commendations of Gentiles who express faith, like the centurion and Canaanite woman. As France observes, "When Jesus speaks not only of [the tax collectors and prostitutes] entering God's kingdom but also going in there *first*, he is making a no less radical pronouncement than when he spoke of Gentiles

places John once again in the role of messianic forerunner—to believe John is to believe Jesus. The chief priests and elders have rejected John and thereby have rejected Jesus. While they consider themselves righteous, their lack of faith in Jesus shows that their righteousness is only external and thus not the *wholistic* righteousness that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. They should have repented once they realized that John's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, but like the second son who says he will go and then does not, the Pharisees have disobeyed the will of God by rejecting both John and Jesus.[105]

Later in his woes in chapter 23, Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees extensively for their hypocrisy. In his fourth woe, Jesus accuses them, alluding to Micah 6:8b and Hosea 2:21–22, specifically of focusing on the outward practice of the ritual aspects of the Law at the expense of the inward motivations and outward social aspects of the Law:

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe mint and dill and cumin yet have neglected the more important matters of the Law—justice [τὴν κρίσιν], mercy [τὸ ἔλεος], and faithfulness [τὴν πίστιν]. These you should have done [ποιῆσαι] without neglecting the others. Blind guides, straining out a gnat yet swallowing a camel! (23:23–24)[106]

While here we have πίστις rather than πιστός, the emphasis on *neglecting* and *doing* in the passage forces πίστις here to the other end of the semantic range toward faithfulness.[107] The Pharisees have focused on the daily minutia of Law-keeping to the detriment of their right relationship with God. Faithfulness here is closely tied to wholistic righteousness. As the scribes and Pharisees focus on the *appearance* of righteousness (23:28), they

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coming into the kingdom of heaven to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while the 'sons of the kingdom' found themselves outside (8:11–12)." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 804–5.

[105] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:198.

[106] For a more thorough discussion of this woe, see chap. 4.

[107] See also France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 593; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:670; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:124. Others see πίστις as "faith" in God here. See Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:294; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:254. While there are strong arguments on both sides, the alternative semantic meaning is likely implied at some level no matter which view one may hold. See discussion in the body below.

should have focused on true, wholistic righteousness—"the more important matters of the Law" (23:23)—which Jesus more extensively discusses in the Sermon on the Mount. In this sense, their lack of faithfulness is symptomatic of their larger hypocrisy.

It is important to note here once again that πίστις is an inherently relational word that often implies a relationship between two parties. As I have mentioned previously, both faith and faithfulness are often assumed in a relationship, and especially in the relationship between God and his people, both trust in God and faithfulness toward him are required. Through Matthew's use of πίστις language—emphasizing different ends of the semantic range in different contexts—this broad understanding of faith becomes clear. The disciple of Jesus should both trust him as Lord and pursue faithfulness toward him through obedience to the Father's will.[108] Love for God, then, is the affection that motivates this kind of trust in and faithfulness toward God.[109] As the disciple, therefore, pursues this kind of faith motivated by love, he pursues the greater righteousness of 5:20.

Finally, at Jesus's crucifixion, some of the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock him: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will trust in him [πιστεύσομεν ἐπ' αὐτόν]. He has trusted in God [πέποιθεν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν]; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (27:41–43). Of course, their promise to trust in Jesus is without foundation. They do not expect him to come down from the cross, and they have refused to trust in him throughout the entire Gospel. The irony comes from the fact that

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[108] As Brown describes this virtue more broadly: "Disciples are to pursue the virtue of loyalty (πίστις; 23:23): loyalty to Jesus and the kingdom . . . and loyalty toward others." Jeannine K. Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel," in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 24.

[109] As Luz writes, "Taken together the three expressions mean simply what Matthew had named as the highest commandment: love (22:34–40; cf. 5:21–26, 43–48; 7:12)." Luz, *Matthew*, 3:124. Similarly, Brown writes, "In reality, love provides the culmination of the discipleship values of justice, mercy, and loyalty." Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 24.

their trust in Jesus should not have been contingent upon his ability to save himself but on his ability *to save others*, both through physical healing and through eschatological salvation offered through his death and resurrection.[110]

The juxtaposition, furthermore, between the Jewish leaders' mocking of Jesus and Jesus's faithfulness to the will of the Father in death on the cross is stark. They—the leaders of God's chosen people—mock the one sent to save them and their people. The irony of their statement—mocking Jesus's trust in God when Jesus's trust in God both leads to the salvation of his people and serves as an example for them of true faith in the Father and obedience to his will—underscores Matthew's negative portrayal of the Jewish leaders throughout his Gospel. They have rejected the Son of God, mocking him for accomplishing the purpose for which he was sent. In the words of the Jewish leaders here, the reader is confronted with their absolute lack of faith and the incredible faith of Jesus himself, implicitly calling the reader to evaluate his own faith and ultimately follow Jesus's own example.

The disciples' complex faith. Matthew presents the disciples in relation to faith more consistently yet also more complexly than any other characters. As already seen in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's description of the disciples as ὀλιγόπιστος is unique outside of one instance in Luke and characterizes the disciples' complicated relationship with faith throughout Matthew. As noted previously, Matthew's first

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[110] Wilson writes similarly,

> In ridiculing Jesus's ability to save others (27:42), his enemies appear to be making a startling concession, though the reader knows that they are in fact blind to the true nature and scope of his saving work. Indeed, the reader has known from the beginning that Jesus was sent to "save his people" (1:21) by giving "his life as a ransom for many" (20:28), his blood establishing a covenant through which they can be reconciled with God (26:28). . . . On the other hand, the challenge for Jesus to save himself by coming *down* from the cross (27:42; cf. 27:40) represents the exact opposite of what he expects of his followers, who save themselves by taking *up* the cross and following him (16:24–25; cf. 10:38). In refusing to save himself, then, Jesus remains true to his own teachings, his shameful death serving not to contradict but to confirm his messianic status. (Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:409–10)

See also Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:619–20; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:839; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:538.

narrative block has a compounded interest in πίστις, using the word group seven times in five different pericopes (8:5–13, 23–27; 9:1–8, 18–26, 27–31). In four of these five stories, Matthew portrays someone as explicitly exhibiting πίστις (the centurion in 8:5–13; the paralyzed man and his friends in 9:1–8; the woman with the blood discharge in 9:18–26; and the two blind men in 9:27–31). The second of the five stories in this section, however, portrays a negative example—an imperfect πίστις.

After the disciples follow Jesus into a boat, they encounter a "great storm," but Jesus somehow sleeps through it. The disciples are desperate, so they wake Jesus up: "Lord, save us! We are perishing" (8:25). Before rebuking the winds and the sea, Jesus rebukes the disciples: "Why are you afraid [δελοί], you of little faith [ὀλιγόπιστοι]?" (8:26). Jesus then rebukes the winds and the sea, calming the storm, and the disciples marvel at the mystery of Jesus's authority: "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (8:27).[111]

Two observations about Jesus's response to the disciples helps us better understand Matthew's portrayal of faith. First, an unhealthy fear drives the disciples' desire for salvation from the storm, rather than a healthy trust in Jesus's ability and willingness to save them. Earlier in Matthew, Joseph fears taking Mary as his wife (1:20), and he also fears being in Judea with Mary and Jesus while Archelaus reigns (2:22). While Matthew uses φοβέω rather than δειλός in both earlier instances, the two concepts hold similar meanings. In both situations in the birth narrative, Joseph responds with faith (although Matthew does not use πίστις language to describe it). In the first case, an angel of the Lord tells Joseph not to fear because the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:20), and he responds with trust and obedience. In the second case, Joseph is warned in a dream and trusts and obeys by withdrawing to Galilee. While his trust is implicit,

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[111] For a discussion of the intertextual allusions in this story, particularly to Jonah 1:4–5 and Exod 14:21–31, see Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:290–92.

Joseph's fears drive him to trust in God and obey him.

For the disciples, however, fear of the storm only results in despair. Just a chapter after the present story, the woman who has suffered for twelve years with a blood discharge says to herself, "If only I touch his robe, I will be saved [σωθήσομαι]" (9:21). The woman's desire for salvation is different from the disciples' because she trusts both in Jesus's authority and willingness to heal her, which Jesus affirms just verses later. The disciples' fear does not drive them to trust that Jesus can save them but to despair that they will perish. Jesus himself points to the inappropriateness of their fear when he asks why they are afraid. The implication is that even though Jesus is asleep in the boat, his very presence should have been enough to alleviate the disciples' fears. If they truly trusted him as God's trustworthy and authoritative representative, they would have realized that Jesus's presence is more than enough to keep them from perishing.

Second, Jesus's question further confirms faith as a virtue of discipleship in Matthew's narrative. Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (8:26). Faith, as I have shown, inextricably involves the whole person—both inner desires/emotions and outward action—and Jesus's parallel of faith with fear makes it likely that fear similarly involves the whole person. The disciples experience the storm but rather than turning their minds immediately to Jesus's authority and care for them, their minds focus on the storm and their inability to save themselves, resulting in their conclusion that they are perishing. This mental process goes directly against what Jesus has already encouraged them to pursue in 6:25–34—to turn their minds to God's own care for them rather than their inability to care for themselves.[112] In other words, if the disciples had learned from Jesus as their teacher in the Sermon and put into practice this mental habit, they would not have become filled with the vice of fear but the virtue of faith in the one who could save them.

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[112] Luz, *Matthew*, 2:22.

The disciples have been confronted with the opportunity to put into practice what Jesus taught them in the Sermon—to trust God despite the precariousness of their own ability to care for themselves amidst difficulty. Rather than set their minds on God's care for them—indeed, Jesus's clear ability to save them from the storm despite being asleep—they are deeply afraid of the storm and fall into despair. In contrast to the many characters surrounding them in the narrative who exhibit trust in Jesus, the disciples exhibit a fear for their own circumstances that betrays a heart that is divided between God's care for them in the present and their fear of what *could* happen.[113]

Yet the disciples' "little faith" is not a complete lack of faith, like those in Nazareth or the Jewish leaders. They have still left family and friends to follow Jesus. They have gotten into the boat with him. And they have trusted him *enough* to ask him to save them. Furthermore, Jesus responds to their "little faith" with salvation from the storm, even though it is communicated through a rebuke.[114] Though imperfect and small, therefore, their faith is still *faith* at some level, despite it being overpowered by fear, and has the potential to grow into a greater faith that can even move mountains (17:20).[115] Through the stark juxtaposition of these characters who trust Jesus amidst incredibly difficult circumstances and the disciples who fear their own circumstances rather than fully trusting in Jesus, Matthew invites his reader, once again, to pursue wholistic

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[113] As Cairoli observes, this fear should drive the disciples to "the virtue of the perseverance of faith [la virtù della perseveranza della fede]," yet their faith is overcome by fear. For Cairoli, the wavering nature of the disciples' faith is representative of realistic discipleship as a whole: "The disciple lives in a constant state of fluctuation: from faith to fear and from fear to faith [Il discepolo vive in un constante stato altalenante: dalla fede alla paura e dalla paura alla fede]." Cairoli, *La "poce fede"*, 262; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 67–68.

[114] As O'Donnell writes, "While Jesus's censure is strong, his miracle is merciful. He does not wait until his disciples' little faith turns into great faith." O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 173.

[115] It is important to note at this point that in Mark's version of this same story Jesus asks the disciples, "Do you still have no faith [οὔπω ἔχετε πίστιν]?" (Mark 4:40). Matthew's version, therefore, takes a slightly more hopeful tone in reference to the disciples' faith. Davies and Allison note the pedagogical intention of Matthew's use of "little faith": "In Matthew's mind the story of the stilling of the tempest is instruction for the faithful. It is a call not to come to faith but rather to exercise the faith one already has." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:74.

righteousness by putting his faith in Jesus, no matter the difficulties encountered.[116]

Just after the narrative examples of both faith and mercy throughout chapters 8 and 9, Jesus commissions the disciples to represent his messianic ministry to God's people (10:1–42). While the primary call to his disciples is for them to reflect his own mercy toward others, the bulk of his commission (10:8b–39) focuses on various ways that the disciples should trust God amidst the difficulties of their mission. They are to trust God to provide for them in their daily needs (10:8b–10),[117] to send them to the right people (10:11–15), and to help them persevere through persecution (10:16–33). In his discussion of persecution, he tells them not to fear the various persecutions they will face (10:26, 28, 31) because of their value to the Father: "You are worth more than many sparrows [πολλῶν στρουθίων διαφέρετε ὑμεῖς]" (10:31). This comparison recalls Jesus's earlier encouragement not to be worried because God values them more than birds of the air (6:26b—"Are you not worth more than they are [οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν]?").[118]

Just after these calls not to fear, Jesus centers this implicit trust in God in love for God: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever 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" (10:37–39). As Jesus teaches in the

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[116] Hagner similarly writes,

> The call to discipleship involves an absolute demand that can often involve risks. But in the living out of discipleship, faith enables the disciple to know that he or she can count upon the provision of the Master (cf. Jas 1:6), whatever storms may be encountered. It is, after all, the sovereign Lord who has called them to that discipleship, who looks after his own, and who has promised to be with them to the end of the age (18:20; 28:20). (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:223)

[117] As France writes, "The essence of this instruction is to travel light by not making special provision for their material needs while on the mission; here is an opportunity to exercise the practical trust in God's provision which they have been taught in 6:25–33. If the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (8:20), his representatives can expect no material security except in God." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 384. See also Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:171; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 184–85.

[118] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 404–5; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:286; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:203.

Sermon, one's love shows one's commitments and loyalties (6:24). In the Sermon, Jesus encourages love for God over love for money while here he encourages love of Jesus himself more than love for family. This love then expresses itself in faithfulness to follow Jesus in taking up his cross and losing one's life (10:38–39). Amidst all of this uncertainty and persecution, the disciples should trust in the one who values them above all of creation and provides the hope of acceptance before the Father (10:33) and true life (10:39). Faith in God, therefore, empowers the disciple to greater faithfulness to God in the mission given to him by Jesus. In the context of the disciples' "little faith," Jesus's encouragement is meant to grow their faith and empower them to greater faithfulness, yet Matthew's narrative makes it clear as it progresses that the disciples' faith, compared to others who come to Jesus, remains mixed with fear and doubt.

Later in 14:22–33, Jesus has just fed the crowd of five-thousand and sends the disciples to the other side of the sea without him. Once again the disciples find themselves in tumultuous weather as the wind and waves beat at their boat, but this time, Jesus is not present at all. In the middle of the night, Jesus comes to them walking on the water. They are terrified and cry out in fear because they think that he is a ghost, but Jesus allays their fears by speaking: "Take heart! It is me [ἐγώ εἰμι]. Do not be afraid [μὴ φοβεῖσθε]" (14:27). In this allusion to God's self-revelation (e.g., Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 52:6), the disciples should understand that Jesus's presence, like in 8:23–27, should be enough to alleviate their fears and protect them from the storm.[119] Peter, however, puts Jesus to the test: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (14:28). Jesus obliges, and Peter begins to walk to Jesus on the water, imitating

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[119] Isa 43:1–13 LXX is an especially close parallel in its combination of a call not to fear, God's people passing through water, and God's self-revelation through the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι. In this text, there is also a call to "believe . . . that I am he [πιστεύσητε . . . ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι]" (Isa 43:10 LXX). Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 506; Turner, *Matthew*, 372–73n3.

initially Jesus's own faith in God's authority over creation.[120] He soon sees the wind, though, and once again becomes afraid (ἐφοβήθη) and begins to sink. In desperation, just as the disciples cried collectively in 8:25, Peter cries to Jesus, "Lord, save me [σῶσόν με]" (14:30). Jesus grabs Peter and says, "You of little faith [ὀλιγόπιστε], why did you doubt [ἐδίστασας]?" (14:31).

Like the disciples in 8:23–27, Peter has gone directly against Jesus's teaching on worry in 6:25–34. Though he knows that Jesus cares for him and though he has witnessed Jesus's power in numerous ways (most recently in the miraculous feeding of the five thousand in 14:13–21), he sets his mind on the things that he fears—in this case, the raging waves around him. Jesus calls his disciples to set their minds on God's special care for his people rather than the things that they fear or worry about. France describes Peter's doubt here as "a practical hesitation, wavering, being in two minds. Peter's problem was not so much lack of intellectual conviction as the conflict between the evidence of his senses and the invitation of Jesus."[121] This division between what Peter trusts about Jesus and what he knows about physical reality reminds the reader, then, of the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, who are not wholly righteous—both inwardly and outwardly. Like the anxiety that Jesus warns against in 6:25–34, Peter is torn between trusting Jesus's authority over creation and his fear of what may happen to him if he sinks into the water.

What would have been the righteous response to Jesus's command to come to him on the water? To exhibit true faith in Jesus as God's trustworthy and authoritative representative, setting his mind on the reality of Jesus's relational care for him rather than

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[120] Keener similarly writes, "Disciples were expected to imitate their masters, and Jesus is training disciples who will not simply regurgitate his oral teachings but who will have the faith to demonstrate God's authority in practice as well (see especially 17:19–20; 21:20–22)." Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 407. See also Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:24–25.

[121] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 570–71.

the waves that threatened to drown him. Like in chapters 8 and 9, the “little faith” of the disciples is set in stark contrast to the “great faith” of the Canaanite woman (15:21–28), who comes to Jesus in such genuine faith that she repeatedly responds to his rebuffs with continued faith. Once again, however, this “little faith” is still *faith*, though it is currently imperfect and mixed with fear.[122] As Keener writes,

> Once Jesus had given the command, walking on water was simply a matter of trusting the one who had performed so many miracles in the past. Peter’s failure came as he observed the wind (14:30), looking to the natural circumstances rather than to God’s power that was sustaining him. Still, Peter knew by this point to whom to cry out; while Jesus is disappointed with Peter’s inadequate faith, Peter had acted in greater faith than the other disciples—he was learning through his growing observation of Jesus. Matthew’s whole story line progressively develops the disciples’ faith, simultaneously inviting his audience to explore deeper realms of faith in their day.[123]

Once Peter is overcome by fear, Jesus still responds to Peter’s cries for salvation and saves him, though he rebukes him at the same time. Peter’s combination of faith and fear/doubt paint him in a distinctly realistic light, allowing the reader to identify with him through his own experience in life, even if he is simultaneously spurred on to greater faith than Peter has in this particular story.[124]

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[122] Van Aarde understands “little faith” as fear in Matthew. Andries van Aarde, “Little Faith as an Alternating State of Religious Consciousness: A Pragmatic-Empirical Perspective on Matthew’s Portrayal of Jesus’ Disciples,” *SHE* 39 (2013): 187–212; van Aarde, “Little Faith: A Pragmatic-Linguistic Perspective on Matthew’s Portrayal of Jesus’ Disciples,” *IDS* 49, no. 1 (2015): 1–5. While I think van Aarde primarily intends to communicate that fear is central to the disciples’ “little faith,” aligning them in an almost synonymous way is unhelpful and tends to ignore the inherently hopeful tone of “little faith” against the backdrop of those characters in Matthew who have absolutely no faith.

[123] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 407. See also O’Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 180–81.

[124] Luz notes the “mixture” of courage and fear here:

> Once again faith is “little faith,” that is, that mixture of courage and fear, of listening to the Lord and looking at the wind, of trust and doubt that according to Matthew remains a fundamental characteristic of Christian existence. That “doubt” is part of faith is important to him, as the repetition of the word in his last text in 28:17 shows. That is not to say that Matthew declared doubt to be an essential characteristic of faith, but neither does he condemn it. What the believer obviously experiences is that it is precisely one’s doubt that the Lord receives and overcomes. (Luz, *Matthew*, 2:321)

While I largely agree with Luz, I do think that Matthew’s parallel between fear and doubt at least *implicitly* condemns doubt. The main truth in Luz’s comment is that Matthew, nevertheless, acknowledges and portrays fear and doubt as a reality for the disciple of Jesus. Especially its inclusion in the final narrative in Matthew (28:17) communicates that fear and doubt are present in the life of the disciple, yet the disciple should always pursue greater trust in Jesus. This narrative portrayal of Peter and the disciples both making

The disciples, furthermore, do make some level of progress in this story. While in 8:27 they respond to Jesus's admonishment for their lack of trust with the question, "What kind of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (8:27), here they respond by affirming Jesus's divine sonship, "Truly you are the Son of God" (14:33). While still mixed with fear and doubt, their "little faith" has grown at least to the level that they are beginning to understand more Jesus's identity and authority and their need to trust in him.[125] And the reader, understanding the disciples' faith—in between the complete lack of faith of some characters and the great faith of others (including the Canaanite woman who appears on the scene just a couple of stories later in 15:21–28)—begins to identify with the disciples and their realistic depiction of the back-and-forth nature of faith, all the while being encouraged by the narrative to pursue the same growth that they are beginning to see within the disciples.

Shortly after in 16:6–12, Jesus once again rebukes the disciples for their "little faith." Jesus has continued his healing ministry (14:34–36), experienced conflict with the Pharisees and scribes over their hypocrisy in once again prioritizing the outward expressions of obedience to the Law over the wholistic righteousness required by Jesus (15:1–20), commended the Canaanite woman's great faith and healed her daughter (15:21–28), and then healed and miraculously fed a second large group (15:29–39).

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some progress while still struggling with fear and doubt is one means by which the readers (disciples of Jesus) are encouraged to pursue greater faith. Wilson helpfully builds on Luz's observation, noting, "The 'mixture' Peter demonstrates here prepares the reader for his role at Caesarea Philippi, which juxtaposes understanding (16:16–19) with misunderstanding (16:22–23), as well as his role in the passion narrative, which juxtaposes confession (26:33–35) with denial (26:69–75)." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:26. Similarly, Konradt notes the importance of Peter here as "a representative sample of discipleship": "The characterization of Peter here includes motifs from the earlier scene depicting the disciples in v. 26 (fear, crying out), and the cross-references to 8:23–27 and 28:17 show that Peter should not be considered a special case but is to be understood as a representative sample of discipleship." Konradt, *Matthew*, 231.

[125] Davies and Allison observe,

> The reader of the First Gospel has been informed previously about Jesus' status as Son of God (cf. 2.15; 3.17; 4.3, 6; 8.29). But it is only in 14.33 that the disciples themselves come to make the confession of the church. Thus the unfolding of the gospel has witnessed a growth in their knowledge, a growth which will reach its pre-Easter maturity in 16.16. In short, the disciples are beginning to catch up with the readers of the gospel. (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:510)

Especially if one takes the four thousand in 15:29–39 as Gentile, there is a clear Gentile trajectory in this section: the eating restrictions disputed with the scribes and Pharisees would serve as a divider between Jews and Gentiles, Jesus commends the Gentile woman for her faith in contrast with the Jewish leaders and disciples, and then Jesus provides a foretaste of the ultimate redefinition of God's people in providing the same miraculous feeding to the Gentile four thousand as he just did to the Jewish five thousand.[126]

Just after this second feeding, the Pharisees and Sadducees approach Jesus to test him, asking for a sign. Jesus rebukes them and tells them that the sign of Jonah is the only sign that will be given to them. The sign of Jonah, while likely foreshadowing Jesus's death and resurrection, also further confirms the Gentile trajectory of this section. Jesus's earlier reference to the sign of Jonah clearly alludes to the inclusion of Gentiles as it follows Jesus's quotation of Isaiah 42:1–4 (12:18–21) and includes his commendation of Gentiles (those in Nineveh and the queen of the South) over against the present generation. As Jesus warns the disciples, therefore, of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he likely refers to their hypocrisy of focusing on the ritual aspects of the Law while ignoring the clear redemptive plan that is unfolding before them through Jesus. Their focus on the external matters of the Law prevents them from following the true interpreter of the Law—the Messiah—and pursuing wholistic righteousness. The disciples, of course, misunderstand this warning to refer to their lack of bread, which underscores their continual worry over trivial matters (despite Jesus's teaching in 6:25–34), even though they just witnessed Jesus miraculously multiply bread for two separate groups of thousands of people.[127]

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[126] For a more thorough discussion of the Gentile trajectory in this section, see J. Benjamin Hussung, "Jesus's Feeding of the Gentiles in Matt 15:29–39: How the Literary Context Supports a Gentile Four Thousand," *JETS* 63, no. 3 (2020): 482–88.

[127] France similarly writes,

> The charge of lack of faith recalls especially 6:30, where the same epithet is used for those who worry about the provision of food and clothing instead of trusting their heavenly Father. Their knowledge of God's fatherly care should alone have been enough to allay their concern; but in fact

Jesus responds by calling them, once again, “you of little faith [ὀλιγόπιστοι].” In this instance, it seems clear that their “little faith” refers primarily to their cognitive misunderstanding of Jesus’s teaching, which likely alludes more broadly to their misunderstanding of Jesus’s mission.[128] At the same time, their lack of trust in Jesus’s ability to provide for them seems to lie at the core of why they misunderstand him.[129] They are too focused on their daily needs (6:25–34) at the expense of the larger mission of which they are a part.[130] This misunderstanding is in stark contrast to the incredible understanding of the Canaanite woman (15:21–28), who rightly calls Jesus “Son of David” and “Lord,” comprehending his mission to the extent of perceiving the blessings of the Messiah extended even to Gentiles. Like in the most recent boat story, the disciples once again make a bit of progress here, understanding finally that Jesus is referring to the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:12). And just after, Peter confesses Jesus as “the Christ, the son of the living God,” clearly understanding both Jesus’s identity as Messiah and his mission to God’s people (16:16).

In 17:14–21, Matthew offers one of the clearest pictures of his spectrum of faith in a single story. A man approaches Jesus, kneels before him, and asks for mercy on his son who suffers from seizures. Despite Matthew not using πίστις to describe the man,

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> they have recently been given more tangible proof, twice over, that God (through Jesus) can provide food when it is needed. (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 610)

[128] As O’Donnell writes, “The nature of their ‘little faith’ here is connected with misperception (οὔπω νοῖτε) and memory lapse (οὐδὲ μνημονεύετε, 16:9). The disciples have forgotten Jesus’s power and misunderstand the purpose of his mission.” O’Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 104. See also Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:60.

[129] Keener makes a similar observation,

> Jesus explains why they cannot understand him. *Spiritual understanding cannot come apart from faith* (16:8). Had they simply forgotten to take bread—a technical rather than a moral failure—Jesus could have provided bread (16:9–10). That Jesus could miraculously supply bread had already eluded them twice (14:15–17; 15:33; cf. 6:11, 25–34; Deut 8:3–5 and Mt 4:4); by this point his disciples should have more faith, so he corrects them. (Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 423)

See also Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:590; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:459.

[130] O’Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 104.

it is clear that he has faith in Jesus and his ability to heal his son, even though he had already brought him to Jesus's disciples and they were unable to heal him.[131] Jesus's response then offers a negative juxtaposition to the man's expression of faith: "Faithless [ἄπιστος] and twisted generation, how long must I bear with you?"[132] This generation likely broadly refers to those who have rejected Jesus and lacked faith in him, like the people of Nazareth (13:53–58) and the Jewish leaders, yet Jesus's response is instigated by *the disciples'* inability to heal the boy. In some sense, then, Jesus considers the disciples to be in a similar category.[133]

The disciples then ask Jesus why they were unable to heal the boy, and he responds: "Because of your little faith [τὴν ὀλιγοπιστίαν]" (17:20a). Once again, Jesus rebukes the disciples' "little faith" for its imperfection. Despite witnessing many miracles at the hands of Jesus and despite some of them even being present at his recent transfiguration (17:1–13), they are here unable to take part in Jesus's merciful mission to his people because of their "little faith." Yet Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them the incredible power in even the tiniest faith: "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith [πίστιν] like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (17:20b).

Similarly, in 21:21, Jesus symbolically curses a fig tree and uses the opportunity to teach the disciples about faith: "If you have faith [πίστιν] and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this

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[131] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 440–41; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:409; O'Donnell, *O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*, 200–201.

[132] Wilson notes the allusion here to the wilderness "generation," which in Deut 32:5 is described as "a crooked and twisted generation [γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη]." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:93.

[133] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 441. While Konradt takes Jesus's words here to refer to the disciples exclusively, I think my explanation makes more sense of the narrative as a whole. The disciples' alignment here with the obvious referents—those who have clearly shown faithlessness throughout the narrative—indicts the disciples' "little faith" as *approaching* no faith at all. See Konradt, *Matthew*, 267.

mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (21:21–22).[134] Even faith as small as the tiniest seed holds the power to move mountains, and while this encouragement in 17:20b implies that their "little faith" is smaller even than a mustard seed, mustard seeds do grow larger.[135] In this sense, a comparison of Jesus's words here with his teaching on the kingdom growing like a mustard seed (13:31–32) holds out for the disciples, as Wilson notes, "a sliver of hope, insofar as it implies that faith has the potential to be cultivated and grow."[136] Despite the disciples' frequent lapses in faith and understanding, the very *existence* of their faith, though it is often imperfect, along with their small glimpses of progress throughout the narrative, provides hope that they will grow in faith as disciples of Jesus.

Throughout Matthew's narrative, then, the disciples consistently prove to have

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[134] Especially in the context of Jesus's cleansing of the temple and symbolic cursing of the fig tree (21:12–13, 18–19), Jesus's reference to *moving mountains* in these two texts likely goes beyond the simple power of faith. As Yeung describes it,

> Jesus' saying in the Marcan tradition (Mk 11:23 // Mt 21:21) makes better sense when interpreted against the Jewish tradition of linking eschatological judgment and salvation with mountain removal. In saying that faith can remove "this" mountain . . . Jesus is actually speaking of a faith that appropriates God's will, calls upon God to judge the disbelieving Israel as represented by the Jewish religious leaders who rejected Jesus as Messiah, and to hurl the covenant mountain into the sea. (Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul*, 44)

[135] France notes, "Faith compared to anything less than a mustard seed would be no faith at all. Faith is not a measurable commodity but a relationship, and what achieves results through prayer is not a superior 'quantity' of faith but the unlimited power of God on which faith, any faith, can draw. The disciples, Jesus implies, had failed to bring any faith at all to bear on this situation." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 662–63. See also Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:505. While I certainly agree with France's emphasis on faith as a relationship that rests on God's power rather than one's own abilities, Matthew does, nevertheless, present a clear spectrum in which the quality (perhaps not quantity) of faith is clear. Some have great faith. Some have none. And the disciples have little. Even though Jesus's comments about their little faith in conjunction with the mustard seed are clearly a rebuke, they do hold out hope in the sense that the disciples, though they are at times aligned with this "generation" in its faithlessness, do still have *some level of faith*. Even if it is virtually ineffective at the moment, it still holds the potential to grow.

[136] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:95n449. Or as Olivares puts it, "Jesus addresses their failure, bringing them to understand their situation and giving them strength and courage when facing distress. This implies that even though Jesus censures them for their limited form of faith, his reproach is also an invitation to discipleship: to seek to develop a greater faith." Carlos Olivares, "The Term ὀλιγόπιστος (Little Faith) in Matthew's Gospel: Narrative and Thematic Connections," *Colloq* 47, no. 2 (2015): 290. See also Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:726; Yeung, "Faith," 261. Contra Konradt, *Matthew*, 268.

imperfect faith in Jesus. They are repeatedly described as having "little faith," yet they do make small amounts of progress amidst their "little faith," like when they come to recognize Jesus as God's Son between the two storm accounts (8:23–27 and 14:22–33). Perhaps even more importantly, while their faith is small, they do *have faith*, unlike the people in Nazareth, the present generation, and the Jewish leaders. Their faith may not be as unique as the centurion's (8:5–13) or as great as the Canaanite woman's (15:21–28) or even simply as progressed as the other characters who exhibit faith in chapters 8 and 9, but they do *have faith*. And even though that faith is often small and mixed with fear and doubt (even after Jesus's resurrection [28:17]),[137] their growth throughout the narrative shows that their faith can also grow and hopefully one day be able to move mountains.[138]

For the reader, then, the disciples exist between the two planes of those who exhibit adequate or exceptional faith in Jesus and those who completely lack faith in Jesus. While those two groups do not change but serve as the clear positive and negative examples of faith for Matthew's reader, the disciples provide a more realistic and identifiable picture of faith in the life of a follower of Jesus. The life of discipleship is full of periods of slow development, repeated failure, and at times, little faith.[139] Matthew invites his reader to pursue the virtue of faith, but he does not do so simply by offering static positive and negative examples. Rather, he paints for his reader a world in which

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[137] Cairoli notes that the back and forth nature of the disciples' faith confronts the reader with "an existential paradox [un esistenziale paradosso]": "On the one hand the disciples' faith will always be 'little.' On the other hand, it is tenaciously urged to grow [Da un lato la fede dei discepoli sarà sempre 'poca', dall'altro essa è tenacemente sollecitata a crescere]." Cairoli, *La "poce fede"*, 264.

[138] It is important to note, of course, that this kind of faith is not, as Davies and Allison note, "a power in and of itself (it is not positive thinking or some active force), nor does it give its possessor power to wield." Instead, it

> calls upon God or Jesus to act on its behalf: "Lord save, we perish!" One may therefore say that the eye of faith, like the physical eye, contemplates not itself but the object before it, which for Matthew should always be God in Christ. Above all, when faith, even faith the size of a mustard seed, passes beyond simple belief or assent, it becomes the opportunity for God, the mover of mountains, to enter his world in a fresh and surprising way. (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:729)

[139] As Black notes, "The disciples and the crowds display some of the rounded complexity of human life, torn between the summons to faithfulness and temptations to infidelity." Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 40.

faith exists on a wide spectrum, as do his characters, and the reader must step into this world and learn to navigate the life of discipleship by relating to each of these characters in different ways, all the while resting in the hope that even the smallest expression of faith—the size of a mustard seed—holds life-changing power relationally bound to Jesus himself.

Conclusion

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew portrays faith as trust in and faithfulness toward Jesus as God's authoritative and faithful representative. Faith is a *virtue* for Matthew, encompassing the whole of the disciple's being—from inner motivations and understanding to outer actions—and it is particularly *active*, not simply requiring intellectual assent but clear action trusting in Jesus's authority and power. Figure 2 below visualizes this relationship of faith: the disciple trusting in God as God is faithful toward the disciple (with Jesus serving as God's representative).

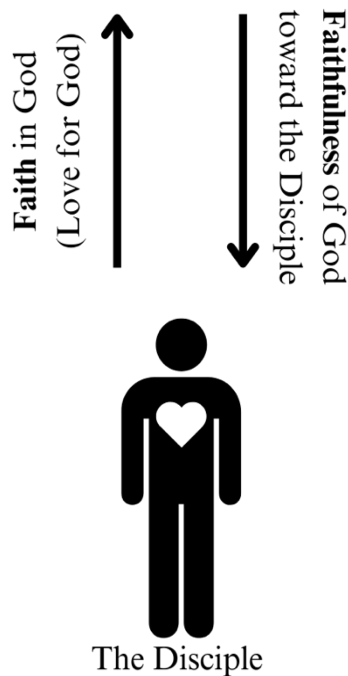

Figure 2. The virtue of faith

Note: The line pointing upward represents the disciple's faith in and faithfulness toward God, motivated by his love for God, and the line pointing back down to the disciple represents God's own faithfulness toward the disciple. These reciprocal lines, therefore, represent the relationship between God and the disciple, in which the disciple trusts in and is faithful toward God, as God is faithful toward him.

The disciple fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor.

I have shown that Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one's love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous. Through Jesus's teaching on trusting God in every aspect of life and mission, through his unique spectrum of characters exhibiting a wide range of quality of faith, and of course through his portrayal of Jesus as the ultimate example of trust in and faithfulness toward the Father, Matthew utilizes his narrative for

the purpose of virtue-formation, encouraging his reader to embody faith as a virtue of discipleship and thus become righteous. The disciple's faith in God, furthermore, is in some sense a response to God's own faithfulness toward him. As the disciple experiences God's own faithfulness toward him in Jesus, the disciple trusts in Jesus and pursues faithfulness toward him. At the same time, the disciple begins to reflect God's own faithfulness not only back toward God but also toward others. As God exhibits faithfulness toward the disciple, therefore, often in the form of mercy, the disciple is called to refract that faithfulness outward toward others by embodying the virtue of mercy.

CHAPTER 6

THE VIRTUE OF MERCY IN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE

While clearly a key theme in Matthew's Gospel, mercy has not received the same devoted attention in Matthean scholarship as righteousness and faith.[1] Several scholars, nevertheless, discuss mercy and its importance in Matthew's narrative as a whole.[2] Among them, Konradt describes well the centrality of mercy to Matthew's overall understanding of Christian identity:

> [Mercy] is an essential manifestation of Christian identity, which is determined by the relationship to God and to Christ. In this grounding it is implicit that compassionate mercy toward those who are in need cannot be an action that a Christian person must decide forever anew in view of a decision between options for action that is open in principle but rather a fundamental ethical attitude that organically grows out of the believing conviction of the mercy of God as it has shown itself in the messianic activity of Jesus.[3]

Konradt's articulation of mercy as "a fundamental ethical attitude" resonates well with the understanding of virtue that I have articulated in previous chapters. Moral development, for Matthew, is not simply preparing disciples for ethical decision-making

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[1] Matthew uses the term *ἐλεέω* 8x, *ἐλεημοσύνη* 3x, *ἔλεος* 3x, and *ἐλεήμων* 1x.

[2] While mercy has not typically received the same attention as righteousness in discussions of Matthew's Gospel, several significant works devote substantial attention to it: Jeannine K. Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel," in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 9–26; Mary Hinkle Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means: Hosea 6:6 and the Ethic of Mercy in Matthew's Gospel," *WW*, 18, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 355–63; Matthias Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Wayne Coppins, BMSEC (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022); Jens-Christian Maschmeier, "The Dynamic Polarity between Justice and Mercy in the Old Testament Formula of Grace (Ex 34:6) and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18:23–35)," in *Biblical Ethics: Tensions between Justice and Mercy, Law and Love*, ed. Markus Zehnder and Peter Wick, Gorgias Biblical Studies 70 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2019), 235–49; Maschmeier, "Love for Enemies, Justice and the Concept of Reciprocity in Paul (Rom 12:17–21) and Matthew (Mt 5:43–48)," in Zehnder and Wick, *Biblical Ethics*, 301–19; Maschmeier, *Reziproke Barmherzigkeit: Theologie und Ethik im Matthäusevangelium*, BWA(N)T 227 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021).

[3] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 157.

but virtue-formation in which the entire disciple—desires, motivations, emotions, and actions—is transformed into the kind of disciple who, through learning from and imitating Jesus, embodies righteousness and the virtues that it encompasses.

In this chapter, therefore, I will argue that Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one's love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. First, I will give an overview of the concept of mercy in the ancient world. Second, I will survey Matthew's portrayal of mercy throughout his narrative, showing the ways that he utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation in encouraging his readers to pursue the virtue of mercy. Jesus's messianic activity lies at the center, then, of Matthew's portrayal of mercy, and often in narrative contrast to his portrayal of the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus's teaching and embodiment of mercy implicitly call his readers to pursue this virtue of mercy.[4]

Mercy in the Ancient World

In the Greco-Roman world, the concept of mercy typically refers to an emotion or virtue, experienced most commonly between people, by rulers toward subjects, or at times by gods toward people. Aristotle describes ἔλεος in *Rhetoric* 2.8.2:

> We will now describe what things and persons excite pity [ἐλεοῦσι], and the state of mind of those who feel it. Let pity [ἔλεος] then be a kind of pain [λύπη] about an apparent evil, deadly or painful, that befalls one who does not deserve it; an evil that one might expect also to come upon [παθεῖν] himself or one of his friends, and when it seems near. (Aristotle, *Rhet.* [Freese and Striker, LCL])[5]

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[4] Brown similarly writes, "Mercy, like justice, is both a virtue that is to mark a disciple (23:23) and a central trait of Jesus himself: Jesus is a compassionate Messiah." Brown, "Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty," 23.

[5] Rudolf Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω, ἐλεήμων, ἐλεεινός, ἐλεημοσύνη, ἀνέλεος, ἀνελεήμων," in *TDNT*, 2:477.

Aristotle goes on to explain that ἔλεος provokes pain in the one feeling it because there is an underlying fear that whatever has befallen this other person may actually befall oneself:

> Men also pity [ἐλεοῦσι] those who resemble them in age, character, habits, position, or family; for all such relations make a man more likely to think that their misfortune may befall him as well. For in general, here also we may conclude that all that men fear [φοβοῦνται] in regard to themselves excites their pity [ἐλεοῦσιν] when others are the victims. (*Rhet.* 2.813–14 [Freese and Striker, LCL])

For Aristotle, ἔλεος can, however, be a positive emotion contributing even to virtue itself. Elsewhere he writes,

> One can be frightened or bold, feel desire or anger or pity [ἐλεῆσαι], and experience pleasure and pain in general, either too much or too little, and in both cases wrongly; whereas to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, toward the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner, is to feel the best amount of them, which is the mean amount—and the best amount is of course the mark of virtue [ἀρετῆς]. (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 2.1106.21–28 [Rackham, LCL])

As an emotion, ἔλεος is neither inherently positive nor negative; it is simply *felt* by someone. The appropriate occasion, object, purpose, and disposition, however, dictate whether ἔλεος contributes to virtue or to vice.

Stoics, on the other hand, often take a decidedly more negative view of the emotional aspects of mercy (*misericordia*) but a more positive view of the virtuous aspects (*clementia*).[6] Seneca, for example, distinguishes between *clementia* as leniency in punishment and *misericordia* as the emotion of pity or compassion. In *De clementia*, he describes *clementia* as "restraining the mind from vengeance when it has the power to take it, or the leniency of a superior towards an inferior in fixing punishment" (Seneca, *Clem.* 2.3.1 [Basore, LCL]). *Misericordia*, however, has no place in appropriate *clementia*:

> Pity [*misericordia*] is the sorrow of the mind brought about by the sight of the distress of others, or sadness caused by the ills of others which it believes come

[6] Bultmann comments, "Stoicism regarded ἔλεος as a sickness of the soul; as πάθος, and even a form of λύπη, it is unworthy of the sage." Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:478.

> undeservedly. But no sorrow befalls the wise man; his mind is serene, and nothing can happen to becloud it. Nothing, too, so much befits a man as superiority of mind; but the mind cannot at the same time be superior and sad. (*Clem*. 2.3.4 [Basore, LCL])

Pity prevents the wise man from accessing his full mental faculties in order to make a wise and reasonable judgment. His mind is clouded by the sorrow of pity. This warning to avoid pity, however, does not negate the need for *clementia*. While some may see Stoics as harsh and unloving, Seneca sees this avoidance of sorrow as a way to love others more effectively: "But the fact is, no school [other than the Stoic school] is more kindly and gentle, none more full of love to man and more concerned for the common good, so that it is its avowed object to be of service and assistance, and to regard not merely self-interest, but the interest of each and all" (*Clem*. 2.3.3 [Basore, LCL]).

While not using the explicit language of mercy or pity, Epictetus expresses a similar sentiment in commenting on how to relate to someone whose child has gone on a journey or who has lost property: "Do not, however, hesitate to sympathize with him so far as words go, and, if occasion offers, even to groan with him; but be careful not to groan also in the centre of your being" (Epictetus, *Ench.* 16 [Oldfather, LCL]).[7] The inner peace of the wise man, therefore, precludes him from feeling such sadness and pity toward others, but elsewhere Epictetus explicitly encourages pity toward others (*Diatr.* 1.18.3, 9; 1.28.9).[8] The wise man must approach these situations with wisdom, therefore, rather than being driven by emotion.

Perhaps the clearest arena for mercy in public life in the Greco-Roman world is the relationship of the ruler toward his subjects. Seneca, for example, extols the importance of *clementia* for all people to exhibit but most importantly for rulers: "The

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[7] Discussed in Bruce F. Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," in *God Who Is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. Peter Thomas O'Brien and David Gilbert Peterson (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer, 1986), 100.

[8] Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:478.

quality of mercy [*clementia*], then, as I was saying, is indeed for all men in accordance with nature, but in rulers it has an especial comeliness inasmuch as with them it finds more to save, and exhibits itself amid ampler opportunities" (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.5.2; cf. 19.1).[9] Julius Caesar, for example, became characterized by the *clementia Caesaris*, clearly expressed in his mercy shown toward the Gallic tribes and then later in the Civil War, in order to distinguish himself from the *crudelitas* of Sulla and Pompey.[10] In 44 BC, a coin was authorized which showed the temple that the Senate planned to build in honor of his *clementia* (the temple was never actually built).[11] This *clementia Caesaris* became a central virtue for the Roman ruler moving forward. In Augustus's autobiographical *Res gestae divi Augusti*, he describes a shield given to him in 27 BC by the Senate and Roman people "in recognition of [his] valour, [his] clemency, [his] justice, and [his] piety" (Augustus, *Res. gest. divi Aug.* 34.2 [Shipley, LCL]).[12] It is difficult to know, of course, the extent to which these statements offer a truthful account of reality versus political propaganda, but as Harris notes, "There was a hardness and political realism about [*clementia*] which left little room for the more humane feelings of pity and tenderness associated with it."[13]

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[9] Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 98.

[10] Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 96.

[11] R. A. G. Carson, *Principal Coins of the Romans*, vol. 1 (London: Nelson, 1980), cited in Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 96–97.

[12] Also mentioned in Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 95–96; Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, "'To Forgive Is Divine': Gods as Models of Forgiveness in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome," in *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judaic, and Christian*, ed. Charles L. Griswold and David Konstan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121.

[13] Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 97. Similarly, Braund concludes,

> There is no discussion of "empathy-based forgiveness" (to use Morton's phrase) in surviving Roman texts. Rather, the concept that captures the attention of those writing from within Roman culture is specifically *clementia*. . . . The Roman concern with *clementia*, especially under the new regime of the Principate, corresponds with the wider Roman preoccupation with power, hierarchy, and social status. In a society where the *paterfamilias* had absolute jurisdiction in legal, social, and economic matters over his entire household – even over adult sons holding high office – it should not surprise us that the only kind of "forgiveness" to receive attention in Roman texts is one that reinforces absolute and arbitrary authority. (Susanna Morton Braund, "The Anger of Tyrants and the Forgiveness of Kings," in Griswold and Konstan, *Ancient Forgiveness*, 95–96; Adam Morton, "What

Though rarer, mercy could also be attributed to the gods. Seneca writes, “But if the gods, merciful [*placabiles*] and just, do not instantly avenge with the thunderbolt the shortcomings of the mighty, how much more just is it for a man, set over men, to exercise his power in gentle spirit” (Seneca, *Clem*. 1.7.2 [Basore, LCL]). The context of Seneca’s statement, however, tempers this encouragement toward mercy for the ruler with the realization that even mercy is often pragmatic rather than heartfelt. Mercy, for the ruler, was often a way of maintaining order and perpetuating power, rather than a true extension of divine forbearance.[14] The Altar of Mercy in Athens represents this idea of divine *clementia* as well. Statius, in his epic *Thebaid*, describes the altar:

> In the midst of the city was an altar made over to no deity of power; gentle Mercy [*Clementia*] made there her seat and the unfortunate consecrated it. Never was she without a new suppliant, no prayers did she condemn with a refusal; whoso ask are heard. Night and day they are allowed to come and propitiate the goddess by plaints alone. . . . Always the place has at hand the fearful, always bristling with gatherings of the needy; only to the fortunate is her altar unknown. . . . For we may fitly believe that the sky-dwellers themselves, to whom Athens has always been hospitable ground, just as they gave laws and a new man and sacred rites and seeds hence descending into empty soils, even so hallowed in the place a common refuge for living creatures in trouble, whence anger and threats and monarchies should stand far removed and Fortune withdraw from the righteous altar. (Statius, *Thebaid* 12.481–505 [Shackleton Bailey, LCL)

Statius’s description, however, must be understood within its context in the idealistic reign of Theseus. As Harris observes, “The cult plays a passive role, that of a haven and refuge, and of itself brought no solutions. These remained in the hands of men who were willing to be guided by reason and who find themselves in harmony with the cosmos, as the Stoics taught.”[15] In the Greco-Roman world, therefore, mercy—despite hesitancy on

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Is Forgiveness?,” in Griswold and Konstand, Ancient Forgiveness, 13–14, quoted in Braund, “The Anger of Tyrants,” 95.)

[14] Harris comments on the same passage: “Self-interest and the perpetuation of power are the obvious motives for this, beyond any possible reflection of divine beneficence. The ruler increases his *securitas*, particularly amongst the military guards and those individuals upon whom he has shown mercy (1.9.12, 13.1).” Harris, “Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context,” 98.

[15] Harris, “Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context,” 101–2.

the part of some in terms of its emotional aspects—was encouraged as a kind of leniency toward others, a virtue to be practiced interpersonally but most prominently by the imperial ruler as the divine regent on earth.[16]

Moving to the concept of mercy in Jewish thought, the relational and indeed covenantal aspects of the concept come more to the fore. The noun ἔλεος occurs about 350x in the Septuagint (over half in the Psalms), with over 200 of these occurrences translating חֶסֶד.[17] The verb ἐλεέω is used about 135x (a little less than a third in the Pss and Isa), with ἐλεάω being used an additional 10x. The verb typically translates חנן (40x) or רחמ (25x, especially in Isa, Jer, and Hos). The adjectives ἐλεήμων and ἀνελεήμων occur about 30x and 11x respectively, with the latter only in Wisdom literature (e.g., Job 19:13; Prov 5:9; Wis 12:5; Sir 13:12). Finally, the noun ἐλεημοσύνη occurs about 60x, mostly in the Apocrypha. It can at times be almost synonymous with ἔλεος (e.g., Gen 47:29 for חֶסֶד), but in the Apocrypha it predominantly comes to refer to specific acts of mercy or charity, like almsgiving (e.g., Tob 1:3; Sir 29:12).[18]

This mercy language in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint most often refers to God's own mercy toward his covenant people.[19] For example, when God appears to Moses on Mount Sinai, he says, "I will pass by before you in my glory, and I will proclaim before you my name, the LORD. And I will have mercy [ἐλεήσω] on whom I have mercy [ἐλεῶ], and I will have compassion [οἰκτιρήσω] on whom I have compassion

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[16] While this last point is mostly implied, Harris comments, "In Hellenistic theory of kingship, the ruler's authority was derived from Zeus, often equated with absolute Justice or Law. He was vice-regent of God on earth, and his power was only to be limited by those considerations appropriate to its successful exercise. Acts of clemency were amongst these, worthy of the good ruler but not specially godlike in themselves." Harris, "Mercy in Its Graeco-Roman Context," 97.

[17] For these statistics on the usage of ἔλεος in the LXX, see Moisés Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω, ἐλεήμων, ἐλεεινός, ἐλεημοσύνη, ἀνέλεος, ἀνελεήμων," in *NIDNTTE*, 2:167–68.

[18] See also Philo, *Virtues* 83 and Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.211.

[19] For this emphasis on God's own mercy, see also Morgan's overview in Michael L. Morgan, "Mercy, Repentance, and Forgiveness in Ancient Judaism," in Griswold and Konstan, *Ancient Forgiveness*, 137–57.

[οἰκτίρω]" (Exod 33:19; cf., Deut 7:9; Kgs 8:23; Pss 89:49 [88:50 LXX]; 106:45 [105:45 LXX]; Sir 5:6; Wis 6:6; 2 Macc 6:16; Tob 8:16; Jdt 13:14).[20] God's mercy, then, is primarily enacted in his covenant with his own people. God is faithful to his people even when they are not faithful to him, showing them mercy both in physical protection and deliverance and also in forgiveness for their unfaithfulness to the covenant (e.g., Exod 34:9; Num 14:19; Jer 3:12).[21] God's mercy also takes a distinctly eschatological tone as God promises to be faithful to his covenant and show mercy to his people in the end.[22] For example, Micah ends with this appeal to God's covenantal blessings and mercy: "He will give faithfulness to Jacob and mercy [ἔλεον] to Abraham, as you swore to our fathers in the former days" (Mic 7:20; cf., Isa 54:8–10; 55:3; 63:7; Pss 25:6 [24:6 LXX]; 106:45 [105:45 LXX]).[23]

While the Jewish concept of mercy may not refer to an emotion in the Aristotelian sense, mercy does often coincide with and include emotion.[24] In the Hebrew Bible, when חֶסֶד is linked with רַחֲמִים, the idea of mercy more clearly evokes an emotive sense. While רַחֲמִים may often evoke a broader sense of love than compassion or pity alone, linked with חֶסֶד and in the context of God providing some kind of deliverance from trouble, it often refers to the more emotional compassion that can serve as motivation itself for mercy (e.g., Ps 25:6 [24:6 LXX]; Isa 63:15; Hos 2:21 [2:19 LXX]; Zech 7:9).[25] In the Septuagint, for example, Isaiah 63:15 is translated, "Turn from heaven

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[20] Dean Pinter, "Mercy," in *DPL*, 2nd ed., 693. Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:479–81.

[21] Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:168–69.

[22] Similarly, the Dead Sea Scrolls often emphasize God's covenantal loyalty to his people with חֶסֶד (e.g., CD XIII.18; 1QS I.8; 1QM XII.3). Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:169.

[23] Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:480n48.

[24] Philo, however, does at times refer to ἔλεος as an emotion, as in *Virtue* 144, where he describes it as "that most vital of emotions [πάθος] and most nearly akin to the rational soul" (Colson, LCL). Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:482.

[25] For further discussion, see Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:480–81; Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:168.

and look from your holy house and from your glory. Where is your zeal and your strength? Where are the multitudes of your mercy [τοῦ ἐλέους] and your compassion [τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν], which you have kept from us?" The Hebrew reads, "Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious home. Where are your zeal and your strength? The stirring of your inner parts [הֲמוֹן מֵעֶיךָ] and your compassion [וְרַחֲמֶיךָ] are held back from me" (Isa 63:15).

The translator here seems to indicate some level of feeling or emotion ("the stirring of your inner parts") in the term ἔλεος. Even if one takes the translation as more of a summary of the two corresponding ideas ("the stirring of your inner parts and your compassion" as "your mercy and your compassion"), the point remains the same: mercy in this instance includes emotion as part of its motivation. As Bultmann notes, in later Judaism, חֶסֶד and רַחֲמִים became almost synonymous and can be used almost interchangeably, similar to ἔλεος and *οἰκτιρμοί*.[26] This progression of the two terms toward one another further exhibits the emotive aspects of mercy. As the two terms become more closely related, the potential for the inclusion of emotion within the concept of חֶסֶד increases and may be carried over into its association with the Greek term ἔλεος.

In this overview, two aspects of mercy within Jewish thought become clearer. First, mercy is most often expressed by God toward his covenant people *within the context of his covenant*, either through physical deliverance and protection or through forgiveness for their unfaithfulness to the covenant. Second, mercy in Judaism often moves beyond a mere emotion or disposition *alone* to express clear *action*. This tendency may be illustrated by the common expression in the Septuagint of someone (often God) *doing* mercy (e.g., Gen 24:12; Exod 34:7; Deut 5:10; Josh 2:12; Ruth 1:8; 1 Sam 15:6; Ps 103:6 [102:6 LXX]; Zech 7:9).

Pinter summarizes mercy in the Hebrew Bible in terms of its active nature:

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[26] Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:481.

> Mercy and compassion, often linked together, are characteristic of who God *is*. Mercy is expressed not only as self-revelatory of who God *is* but as an action of what God *does* in mercy by forgiving *sin (e.g., Ps 51:1) and by rescuing his people when they are endangered, enslaved, or in exile (e.g., Is 63:15; see Gupta). Mercy is active. God "does" mercy (Deut 5:10; 13:17), and his people reflect this by also doing mercy (e.g., Ruth 1:8; 3:10; 1 Sam 15:6). Mercy, on God's part, is an expression of his *abundant* love (e.g., Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Ps 51:3; 68:14; 86:5, 15; 103:8; Jon 4:2), which extends through the generations (e.g., Ex 20:6; 34:7; Deut 5:10; 1 Chron 16:34; 2 Chron 7:3; Ps 100:5; 103:17; 118:1–2)—even unto the heavens (e.g., Ps 36:5; 57:10).[27]

It is important not to take this line of reasoning too far. Pinter is right to acknowledge the "*abundant* love" often motivating God's expression of mercy and mercy as a part of God's self-revelation of who he himself *is*. There is a tendency, however, to emphasize the active aspects of mercy in Judaism *at the expense* of the emotive or dispositional aspects. For example, Bultmann writes, "And it must be emphasised that חֶסֶד primarily denotes, not a disposition, but the act or demonstration of assisting faithfulness."[28] And later, "It is typical that normally רַחֲמִים and רָחַם, too, denote the act or expression of love rather than the emotion."[29] While he is right in the sense that the emphasis does often fall upon God's own merciful acts toward his people, to drive a stake between merciful acts and the emotions and dispositions of the one acting creates an unnecessary distinction between one's character and emotions and one's actions. Even if the terminology used to refer to mercy in a given case does not inherently reflect emotion, the mercy indicated cannot be considered without reference to the character and emotions of the one being merciful.

Approaching the first century, then, ἔλεος in Jewish thought does reflect similarities with its understanding in Greco-Roman thought. It may refer broadly

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[27] Pinter, "Mercy," 693. Pinter cites here Nijay Gupta, "What 'Mercies of God'? *Oiktirmos* in Romans 12:1 against Its Septuagintal Background," *BBR* 22 (2012): 81–96.

[28] Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:480.

[29] Bultmann, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:481. Similarly, Silva writes, "When God keeps חֶסֶד with his people—and thus also when human beings act in a sim. way—the stress is not on the basic attitude but on its manifestation in acts." Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:169. Also Nicholson, "Overall, the OT concept of mercy, typically marked by the term *ḥesed*, involves action on behalf of another who is in need; mercy is not merely a feeling or emotion." Suzanne Nicholson, "Mercy," in *DJG*, 585.

speaking to a characteristic of leniency toward others who deserve punishment, and its frequent use in political contexts describing a ruler's disposition toward his people bears similarities with the Jewish religious context describing God's disposition toward his people. The Jewish conception of mercy, however, remains decidedly planted within the context of God's covenant with his own people, and because of his long history of *acting* mercifully toward his people, this emphasis on merciful *action* within the covenant comes to the fore.[30] This mercy is often motivated by God's own love and compassion for his covenant people. Mercy, therefore, refers to a compassionate feeling toward someone and the resultant action to alleviate their need, whether physical or spiritual.

Mercy in Matthew's Narrative

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew portrays mercy as fundamental to the life of discipleship. Centered in Jesus's teaching on mercy throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew fills out his reader's understanding of mercy through both Joseph and Jesus's embodiments of mercy, conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees, and continued calls for his disciples to become merciful. Matthew utilizes these narrative means, therefore, to encourage his readers, as disciples of Jesus, to pursue the mercy that he himself taught and embodied.

Mercy in the Introduction

1:19. While I have already discussed Matthew's portrayal of Joseph as the first example of righteousness and faith in his narrative, it is important to note once again that Joseph's righteousness here in 1:19 is not *in conflict with* his desire to show mercy to

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[30] As Silva notes,

> It is an interesting question, and one not easily answered, whether the meaning of ἔλεος (and its cognates) underwent a transformation because it was used to render חֶסֶד or, more precisely, because (as a result of this lexical equivalence) ἔλεος was now found in numerous new contexts. At the very least, ἔλεος must have conveyed a richer complex of meanings to a Gk.-speaking Jew familiar with the Scriptures than it would have to a secular Gentile. And such semantic associations must be taken into consideration when assessing the NT use. (Silva, "ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, ἐλεάω," 2:169)

Mary but *representative of* it.[31] While Joseph could have taken public legal action against Mary, he pursued instead the compassionate and merciful action of divorcing her quietly, protecting her honor and inviting upon himself the potential shame of being thought by others to be the father himself.[32] In my discussion in chapter 4, I noted that Jesus himself embodies righteousness throughout the remainder of Matthew's narrative, with Joseph foreshadowing the righteousness of his own son. Jesus's frequent displays of compassion and mercy toward others are perhaps the clearest examples of Jesus embodying righteousness throughout the rest of the narrative (9:1–8, 35–38; 11:25–30; 14:13–21; 15:21–28, 29–39; 17:14–20; 20:29–34). At the outset, then, Matthew offers his readers an example of mercy in action—an expression of righteousness that recalls God's own mercy toward his covenant people and foreshadows both the mercy of Jesus himself toward others and the mercy to which he calls his disciples.

Mercy in the Sermon on the Mount

Despite the explicit language of mercy only being used twice (5:7; 6:2) in the Sermon, the concept proves prominent in Jesus's teaching. He calls his disciples to become *merciful* (5:7), which he then fills out throughout the rest of the Sermon. Mercy toward others is an active expression of the motivating affection of love (5:43–47) and can only be righteous if the disciple's motivations and desires are aligned with the Father. The merciful disciple must, therefore, be *whole* (5:48), with his inner motivations and desires matching his outer actions. Jesus calls his disciples to show mercy toward others both in alleviating physical needs (6:2–4; 6:22–33) and in forgiving the sins of others

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[31] For a fuller discussion of Joseph's portrayal as righteous in 1:19, see chap. 4.

[32] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 94–95; Robert G. Olender, "Righteousness in Matthew with Implications for the Declaration of Joseph's Righteousness and the Matthean Exception Clauses" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 153–54; Jonathan T. Pennington, "Joseph the Just and Matthew's Matrix of Mercy: The Redefinition of Righteousness," *JMT* 10, no. 1 (2021): 49; Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 1:43.

(6:12, 14–15), and the disciple's embodiment of mercy is ultimately based in his own trust in God's provision and forgiveness (6:12, 14–15, 25–33). The disciple, therefore, pursues wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor.

5:7. Depending on whether one takes the Beatitudes to be structured in two sets of four or three sets of three, the fifth Beatitude on mercy either begins the second set of four or lies at the center of the second set of three, in the exact center of the structure.[33] Of most interest in terms of structure is the fifth Beatitude's relationship to the fourth. As I argued in chapter 4, righteousness serves as the most significant theme in the Beatitudes and the Sermon as a whole. Jesus's call to mercy here, placed directly after his call to righteousness, in a sense fills out Jesus's call to righteousness.[34] As the Sermon progresses (and as I will show in this section), this call to mercy in 5:7 expands into several different types of mercy throughout the rest of the Sermon: love for enemies (4:43–48), care for the poor (6:1–4, 22–34), and forgiveness (6:9–13, 14–15; 7:1–6).

While the rest of the Sermon and Matthew's narrative as a whole will fill out Matthew's conception of mercy more clearly, several observations from 5:7 set a framework for Matthew's remaining portrayal of mercy. First, Matthew's focus on "proper interiority" in the Beatitudes cannot be ignored in considering his understanding

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[33] For a fuller discussion of the structure of the Beatitudes, see chap. 4.

[34] As Wilson writes,

> With the second strophe of 5:7–10, the paraenetic impulse, already implicit in the first strophe, becomes more pronounced and consistent. Indeed, the first member of the second strophe (5:7) can be seen to build on that last member of the first (5:6). Mercy explicates justice, and in a world thirsty for justice, God's people have an obligation to practice mercy, the lack of a qualifier after "blessed are the merciful" signaling that it represents a fundamental demand of all human relations. (Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:141–42)

of mercy, despite its emphasis on action throughout Matthew's narrative.[35] With most of the Beatitudes dealing with matters of interiority (e.g., "the poor in spirit," "those who mourn," "the meek," "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," "the pure in heart"), it should be expected that the mercy Jesus describes here involves some aspect of interiority. Indeed, as Matthew continues his narrative after the Sermon, his compassion is closely aligned with his mercy, often serving as its motivation (e.g., 9:36; 14:14; 15:32). Mercy, then, cannot be considered apart from the compassion that often motivates it.

Second, Matthew's focus here in the fifth beatitude is on the flourishing of "*the merciful* [οἱ ἐλεήμονες]."[36] It is important to note that Jesus points to the identity of *being* merciful here as the basis for human flourishing. Once again, in the Sermon Jesus calls his disciples to the greater righteousness of 5:20, wholistic alignment with God's will as articulated in Jesus's own interpretation of the Law. This wholistic alignment—righteousness—requires one's motivations, desires, and actions all to align with God's will. As Jesus points to the importance of being merciful here, he is not simply calling his disciples to *do* acts of mercy (although he does call them to *do* that) but to *be* merciful. As he explains more clearly in 6:1–4, being merciful requires not just the right merciful actions but the right merciful actions responding to the right motivations. Mercy, therefore, is not simply something for disciples to do but a virtue for them to embody—a way of pursuing righteousness that encompasses the disciple's motivations, desires, and actions.[37]

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[35] See my discussion of Branch-Trevathan's understanding of "proper interiority" in the Beatitudes in chap. 4. George Branch-Trevathan, *The Sermon on the Mount and Spiritual Exercises: The Making of the Matthean Self*, NovTSup 178 (Boston: Brill, 2020), 202.

[36] Emphasis added.

[37] Similarly, commenting on Matthean mercy as a whole, Davies and Allison write,

> Matthew's gospel has a great deal to say about mercy. It is a fundamental demand (cf. 9.13; 12.7; 23.23) which is fleshed out both by Jesus' words (5.43–8; 19.21–35; 25.31–46) and by his example (9.27–31; 15.21–8; 17.14–18; 20.29–34). In much of this there is strict continuity with the OT and

Third, Matthew here succinctly foreshadows the circular nature of mercy that he will portray more clearly throughout the rest of his narrative: "Flourishing are the merciful [οἱ ἐλεήμονες], *for they will receive mercy* [ἐλεηθήσονται]" (5:7).[38] As Matthew makes clearer throughout the rest of the Sermon, the disciple's own forgiveness of sins by God is in some sense dependent on his own forgiveness of others (6:12, 14–15). Forgiveness is one form of mercy for Matthew, and in the later parable of the unforgiving servant, it becomes clear that one's forgiveness of others is also dependent upon God's forgiveness of the disciple himself (18:21–35). Konradt describes this circularity:

> The disciples come from God's mercy, who has forgiven them their debts/sins and continues to do so (6.12), and they go toward God's mercy at the final judgment. In short, one can speak here of a circle of mercy, which begins with God and flows to God again, but which is interrupted and breaks off if human beings do not let themselves be fundamentally determined by the experience of the mercy that they have been given and are being given in their own action.[39]

This call is not simply a call to imitate God but a call to respond *righteously* to God's extension of mercy toward the disciple as a sinner in need of mercy. It is also inherently Christological in the sense that Jesus himself embodies this mercy in caring for others throughout his ministry. The disciples have received mercy from God through Jesus himself, and Jesus calls them to respond to this mercy with their own embodiment of mercy expressed toward others.[40] As the Sermon progresses, Jesus outlines the various

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> Jewish tradition, for the disposition toward mercy—both an outward act and an inward feeling—was, of course, acknowledged as a human virtue as well as a divine attribute (1 Sam 23.21; Ps 72.13; Prov 14.21; Mic 6.8; T. Zeb 5.1, 3; 7.1–8.6; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 4.72, 76–7; rabbinic texts in SB 1, pp. 204–5). (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC [London: T&T Clark, 2004], 1:454–55)

[38] Emphasis added.

[39] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 138.

[40] While Maschmeier prefers the language of reciprocity to describe Matthean mercy, especially that of Matt 18:23–35, I agree with Konradt's assessment of his work—in short, that reciprocity does not capture Matthew's conception of mercy because the mercy received from God by sinners is not then directed back toward God. For mercy to be reciprocal, it must be mutual. While Maschmeier acknowledges this distinction at some level, his description of Matthean mercy as reciprocal nevertheless introduces, as Konradt notes, "an ideational fuzziness" that confuses the circularity of mercy in Matthew. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 138n21. For Maschmeier's views, see Maschmeier, "Love for Enemies, Justice and Reciprocity"; Maschmeier, *Reziproke Barmherzigkeit*.

forms this mercy may take in the lives of the disciples.[41]

5:43–48. The mercy Jesus has in mind in 5:7 is expansive, and in the last of his exegeses of the Law in 5:43–48, he describes it without using the language of ἔλεος. Jesus expands the call to love one's neighbor from Leviticus 19:18 to include one's own enemies: "But I say to you, 'Love [ἀγαπᾶτε] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (5:44–45a). The focus on mercy as an expression of love is unclear here at first, but Jesus's justification for this love highlights God's own mercy: "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (5:45b). The assumption is that the good and the righteous deserve the necessities of light and water, but the Father not only alleviates the needs of those who deserve it but also of those who do not deserve it.

Jesus goes on to explain that there is nothing unique about someone loving those who love them back because even the tax collectors and Gentiles do the same (5:46–47). Instead, Jesus's disciples are to love widely, reflecting the mercy of God on everyone.[42] Jesus ends this section, as I have discussed previously in chapter 4, by calling his disciples to wholeness, as the Father himself is whole. Calling back to the greater righteousness in 5:20, Jesus's disciples are to pursue wholistic righteousness—aligning

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[41] For a discussion of the interpretive history of the fourth Beatitude, see Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 171–93.

[42] Davies and Allison similarly write,

> God who, in his cosmic fatherhood, exercises providence over all in mercy (Wisd 15.1), even over those outside the covenant, is full of long-suffering (cf. 2 Bar. 12.1–4; 24.1–4; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. 2.22.2), and thus for the present—but not necessarily the future; see *Midr*. *Ps*. On 22.1—he gives good gifts to all, even to the wicked. Now since God's sons are to be like him—a well-attested Jewish idea—, that is, share his moral character, they too must show mercy to all, even to their enemies. (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:555)

See also Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 317–18; Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 201–2.

their desires, motivations, and actions with God's own will—and central to this wholistic righteousness is the central motivating affection of *love*. Just as God has expressed his love for everyone through showing mercy even to the evil and the unrighteous, so are Jesus's disciples to express love through mercy.

6:1–4. Just after Jesus's call to reflect God's own expansive mercy toward all (5:43–48), he narrows in on three practical examples of pursuing righteousness in acts of piety.[43] The overarching call of this section is to be sure that one's motivations are pure in practicing piety. Jesus opens the section with a warning: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (6:1). The first of these examples, then, is giving to the poor or giving alms.[44] Jesus says,

> Therefore, when you give to the poor [ποιῇς ἐλεμηοσύνην], do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they might be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving might be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (6:2–4)

Almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη) was a frequently encouraged practice in Second Temple Judaism (e.g., Prov 3:27–28; Tob 12:8–9; 14:2, 9–11; Sir 3:30–4:10; 12:1–7; 17:22; 29:8–13; 40:17; T. Zeb. 5.2; T. Job 9.11–12; CD XIV, 12–14; Philo, *Virtues* 83; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.211), and the importance of giving to the poor in secret was at times

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[43] For a broad overview of this section as it relates to righteousness as a whole, see chap. 4.

[44] For a discussion of mercy in Matthew's Gospel, with particular attention to Jesus's response to poverty, in which I analyze several of the same texts from the current chapter, see J. Benjamin Hussung, "Mercy as Jesus's Response to Poverty in Matthew's Gospel," in *Rich in Good Deeds: A Biblical Response to Poverty by the Church and by Society*, ed. Robert L. Plummer, Faith and Work Project 2 (Dallas: Fontes, 2022), 1–18.

emphasized (e.g., T. Job 9.7–8), given the tendency to use charity as a means for self-promotion.[45]

Two aspects of Jesus's exhortation further fill out Matthew's understanding of mercy. First, Jesus provides ἐλεημοσύνη as a localized example of mercy, which itself is a way of pursuing righteousness. The first verse of this section serves as a "thematic heading," as Branch-Trevathan puts it, for this section as a whole (6:1–18).[46] Giving to the poor publicly in order to receive praise from men is an example of "practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them" (6:1–2). The opposite corollary is that the disciple should instead practice their righteousness in secret *by* giving to the poor in secret. Mercy, therefore, is an individual virtue of discipleship that falls under the larger moral category of righteousness for Matthew. The disciple pursues righteousness as he pursues the individual virtue of mercy.

Second, Jesus's focus on the motivation that undergirds the disciple's practice of mercy and pursuit of righteousness further highlights mercy as a *virtue*. This wholistic alignment with God's will encompasses all of the disciple's being: both his inner motivation and outward action. As Pennington comments on the statement on righteousness in 6:1, "New-covenant kingdom righteousness—that which is necessary for entering the coming kingdom of heaven—is a matter of internal motives, not just external actions; it is a matter of the whole (*teleios*) person; it is virtue."[47] Jesus's exhortation, therefore, is not simply to *practice* mercy but to become, as he says in 5:7, *merciful*—to be a disciple who embodies mercy in such a way that even his innermost desires and

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[45] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:579–80; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 1:299–300; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:199n313.

[46] Branch-Trevathan writes, "By beginning the section with this general principle and connecting it with the subsequent instructions using an illative particle ('therefore,' οὖν, 6:2), the SM casts Jesus' teachings on fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as among the specific inferences that follow from a generic rule." Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 226.

[47] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 211.

motivations are driven not by a love for self but a love for others. The proper motivation, taken within the context of the previous section (5:43–48), is this expansive love for others as an expression of God's own universal mercy along with a desire for reward from God.[48] When the hypocrite expresses mercy toward someone else in order to gain praise from others, his person is disjointed. Instead of a love for others, his motivation is a love for self. Instead of a desire for God's reward, his desire is the immediate reward of praise from men. Inner motivation is at odds with the outer action.[49] The disciple, on the other hand, is to give in secret so that, hyperbolically, even his *own self* does not realize what he is doing ("do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" in 6:3).[50] This virtuous practice of mercy (and the pursuit of righteousness it represents),

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[48] On the theme of heavenly rewards, see Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Nathan Eubank, "Storing Up Treasure with God in the Heavens: Celestial Investments in Matthew 6:1–21," *CBQ* 76, no. 1 (2014): 77–92; Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, BZNW 196 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Tzvi Novick, "Wages from God: The Dynamics of a Biblical Metaphor," *CBQ* 73, no. 4 (2011): 708–22.

[49] As Branch Trevathan writes,

> Such almsgiving constitutes hypocrisy because it involves a discrepancy between what, according to the SM, the visible action should signify (desire to glorify God or win God's praise) and what it actually signifies (desire to be glorified, to win people's praise), because it misrepresents one's interior state (see also 23:23–8). Readers, by contrast (σοῦ δὲ), should not let one hand know when the other is giving alms, meaning, figuratively, they should obscure their actions from even a part of themselves. Just as one must not give alms in front of others to win their praise, so also must one not give them in front of oneself to win one's own admiration. God alone is the proper audience and esteemer of one's piety. In other words, almsgiving must occur "in secret," where only God sees and to produce only divine approbation. Only then, only when religious practices result from proper motives, do they earn eschatological rewards. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 228–29)

Similarly, in commenting on 6:1, Davies and Allison write,

> True piety is not for show. Right deeds must be accompanied by right intention (cf. the rabbinic *kawwānâ*, as in *b. Meg*. 20a). The father in heaven rewards only those whose motives are pure, who care not for what others think but only for what is right before heaven. The key is intention. Even a good deed brings no reward if it springs from the desire for self-aggrandizement. (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:575–76)

Wilson also discusses the focus on intentionality in this passage in Walter T. Wilson, "Seen in Secret: Inconspicuous Piety and Alternative Subjectivity in Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18," *CBQ* 72, no. 3 (2010): 484–87; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:200–201.

[50] Clearly, Jesus's exhortation here is to be applied with wisdom rather than literally. As Pennington writes, "Giving in secret is meant not as a new prescription requiring cash-only gifts (rather than checks used for tracking tax-deductible giving), or that when helping a homeless person the helper must wear a ski mask lest he or she be recognized. The countless impossibilities and absurdities of a literalistic reading are easily recognized." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 215.

therefore, requires cultivating the right motives *and* the right actions through reflectively and wisely applying Jesus's principle here. By pursuing this kind of merciful virtue, the disciple himself does not only *practice* mercy but actually *becomes* merciful.

6:7–15. Jesus's second example of pursuing righteous piety with right motivation is prayer. His exhortation to pray in secret, unlike the hypocrites who pray with fanfare, follows the same structure as the prior instruction on almsgiving (6:2–4) and the following on fasting (6:16–18). In between the mirror-structured examples on prayer and fasting, Jesus provides an even more specific example of prayer. At first glance, 6:7–15 seems like an intrusion on Jesus's three examples of righteous piety.[51] The negative party changes from "the hypocrites" to "the Gentiles," and their problem is not improper motivations—praying ostentatiously in order to garner praise from men—but a lack of trust that manifests itself in "babbl[ing] on [βατταλογήσητε]" as a means to gain God's ear (6:7).[52]

In the Lord's Prayer, therefore, Jesus seeks to show that the disciple may pray to God expectantly without fear or anxiety but instead with confidence, "for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (6:8). In this sense, 6:7–15 fits within this larger section (6:1–18) begun with Jesus's call to proper interiority in the disciple's pursuit of righteousness (6:1). While the three main examples focus on the motivation of reward, this extension of the second example focuses on the motivation of faith in God to hear and answer prayer.[53] The prayer itself bears this theme out in its focus on God's own

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[51] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 230.

[52] On the background of this practice of using many words in prayer, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:587–88; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:202–3.

[53] As Branch-Trevathan comments,

> Nonetheless, vv. 7–15 do develop the portion of 6:1 that commands vigilance over one's motives. They condemn not lengthy prayers *per se* but rather prayers whose length and presumably other qualities, given the consistently general and figurative nature of the language in this section, are determined by one's fear that God will not listen. They therefore exhort readers to examine whether

providence: his name, his kingdom, his will, his provision, his forgiveness, and his deliverance.

While the first half of the prayer (6:9b–10) focuses on the disciple's relationship to God, the second half focuses on his relationship to others (6:11–13), and at the center of this latter half lies a plea for forgiveness: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12). Jesus uses a commercial metaphor ("debts [τὰ ὀφειλήματα]") to describe the disciple's own sin. This metaphor was common in Jewish teaching, and the term's use in the parable responding to Peter's question about forgiving the sins of a brother, along with Jesus's use of "trespasses [τὰ παραπτώματα]" in the similar concluding statement to the Lord's Prayer (6:14–15), points clearly to Jesus's focus on the forgiveness of sins.[54] Like in 5:7, the circularity of mercy in forgiveness is clear here.[55] The disciple is to pray to the Father for forgiveness *on the basis* of one's own forgiveness of others.

Just after the prayer, Jesus turns back directly to the disciples and concludes, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14–15). In the context of 6:7–15 as a whole, this concluding statement offers a further reason for praying as Jesus exemplifies through the Lord's Prayer. The prayer is introduced with Jesus's discouragement of lengthy, wordy prayer "for [γὰρ] your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (6:8), and after he gives the example of the Lord's Prayer, he offers another reason for praying succinctly as he instructs—this concluding statement on forgiveness introduced by "for [γὰρ]." The

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fear or faith determines their prayers. In this sense, these verses only partially intrude. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 230)

[54] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 223; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 226n42.

[55] See again Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 138.

disciple does not need to trust in his own ability to pray because God already knows what is needed. Furthermore, this focus on the prayer itself is misplaced because the central need is forgiveness, and as Jesus emphasizes here, this forgiveness does not come as a result of prayer alone but as a result of whether or not the disciple forgives others.[56]

This logic—the disciple's own forgiveness of others as the basis for God's forgiveness of him—however, is not as straightforward when one takes Matthew's Gospel as a whole. In the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21–35), the servant's refusal to forgive is so wicked because of the unbelievable debt he was forgiven by his own master. The implication, then, for Peter's question about forgiving a brother that instigates Jesus's telling of the parable, is that the disciple's forgiveness of others is based on God's own forgiveness of the disciple's sin. Once again, Konradt's understanding of the circularity of mercy in Matthew is key here.[57] To quote him again, this circle of mercy "is interrupted and breaks off if human beings do not let themselves be fundamentally determined by the experience of the mercy that they have been given and are being given in their own action."[58] As Pennington concludes, therefore, "This [concluding statement] does not contradict justification by faith but shows that a revenge-seeking heart is clearly not one that has believed in God's forgiveness of sins alone."[59]

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[56] Branch-Trevathan makes this point at length:

> Verse 8 has offered one rationale for laconic prayer: disciples should pray tersely because God already knows what they need (v. 8). To this reason, vv. 14–15 add another: because if readers forgive others, God will forgive them (vv. 14–15). The logic connecting these two justifications, the implication of their juxtaposition, is that what the audience needs is God's forgiveness and since, according to vv. 14–15, that forgiveness depends on forgiving others, it does not depend on imploring God at length. Because the satisfaction of one's ultimate needs does not necessitate a particular form of prayer, one can pray tersely without fear. Verses 14–15 diminish anxiety and promote trust. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 231)

[57] Mbabazi describes interpersonal forgiveness in 18:21–35 as "reciprocal." While he is making a similar observation as Konradt, Konradt's image of a circle more clearly captures the nature of God's forgiveness toward the disciple, the disciple's forgiveness toward others, and the potential break that comes when the disciple refuses to forgive others. Isaac K. Mbabazi, *The Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness in the Gospel of Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 188–89.

[58] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 138.

[59] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 229.

This localized focus on forgiveness as a form of mercy, furthermore, highlights mercy as a virtue and Jesus's way of praying as a means for cultivating it.[60] Jesus is not focused only on the act of forgiveness alone but on the heart of the disciple who forgives.[61] The Lord's Prayer is not simply an *example* of how to pray but a *practice* meant to habitually develop the virtue of mercy within the disciple.[62] Jesus introduces the prayer by reminding the disciple that "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (6:8). If the Father already knows the disciple's needs, why does the disciple still need to pray to him? As Branch-Trevathan explains,

> Praying thusly renders one more likely to forgive. By declaring God's sovereignty (vv. 9b–10) and one's fundamental dependence on the divine (vv. 11–13), one cultivates a humble subjectivity, a subjectivity that is then inclined to forgive and love others. The point of prayer according to 6:7–15 then is not to make one's needs known to God but rather to shape's [*sic*] one's dispositions and foster the interiority for which one must watch (προσέχετε, 6:1).[63]

Furthermore, the centrality of the Lord's Prayer to the Sermon as a whole—as Pennington describes it, "the center of the center of the center of the Sermon," structurally speaking[64]—and the clear emphasis on interpersonal forgiveness in the prayer itself[65] both underscore the importance of the virtue of mercy expressed in forgiveness

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[60] See Kangil Kim, "A Theology of Forgiveness: Theosis in Matthew 18:15–35," *JTI* 16, no. 1 (2022): 40–56. Kim understands prayer and repentance as practices that cultivate the embodiment of forgiveness.

[61] As Pennington writes, "The introduction emphasizes the heart disposition related to the first half of the Prayer—the divine—and the conclusion highlights the heart disposition of the second half of the Prayer—the human." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 228.

[62] The importance of the cultivation of the virtue of mercy in the life of the disciple is perhaps further emphasized by the somewhat unique Matthean emphasis on forgiveness as an *obligation* required for the offended person. Mbabazi compares Matthean forgiveness passages with a selection of Greco-Roman and Jewish writings, with one of his conclusions highlighting Matthew's emphasis on obligation: "For Matthew, however, forgiving is not merely an appropriate moral act, or an honorable practice; rather it is primarily an *obligation* which lies squarely upon the shoulders of the offended person; it is a 'must.'" Mbabazi, *Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness*, 192.

[63] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 231.

[64] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 125.

[65] Mbabazi notes that the material concerning interpersonal forgiveness makes up 47 percent of the words in and around the prayer (43 of 91 words). Mbabazi, *Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness*,

for Jesus's disciple. As with the unforgiving servant, the disciple who has received and trusts in God's own mercy will be so transformed by his mercy that he himself becomes *merciful*—his inner dispositions and outward actions aligned with God's own will—flourishing as a member of God's kingdom, replicating and mirroring the Father's own mercy toward others through forgiveness.

6:22–34. While I have already discussed 6:22–34 extensively in both chapters 4 and 5, it is important to note briefly the implications that these verses have on Matthew's understanding of mercy. With the broader section's focus on the disciple's relationship to God and material possessions (6:19–34),[66] Jesus focuses in 6:22–23 on the disciple's eye being "whole and generous" or "evil and greedy." This translation, following Pennington, provides a clear picture of the word play intended in Matthew's use of ἁπλοῦς and πονηρὸς, both of which within the context of Jesus's discussion of possessions and money would have had clear resonances for his listeners with the dichotomy between generosity and greediness.[67]

The eye, furthermore, serves as the window to the inner life of the disciple, evidenced further by Jesus's turn just afterward to the disciple's overarching love either

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147. The theme's repetition in Jesus's concluding exhortation, of course, highlights this emphasis most clearly. As Luz writes,

> With this logion Matthew repeats the forgiveness petition of the Lord's Prayer and puts it in parenetic form. Both the conditional wording and the "negative" v. 15, missing from Mark 11:25, make clear that human forgiving is a condition for divine forgiving. Thus with this statement the evangelist emphasizes precisely the part of the Lord's Prayer where human activity was most directly involved. In contrast to the logion leading into the Lord's Prayer (vv. 7–8), which emphasizes God's nearness, this logion that brings the Lord's Prayer to a close is designed to secure the relationship between prayer and action. Matthew makes clear that prayer is also part of Christian practice, and practice will again be the subject in 6:19–7:27. The forgiveness commandment corresponds in substance to the heart of his ethics, the love commandment. (Luz, *Matthew*, 1:327)

While I largely agree with Luz's assessment, I would prefer the language of virtue opposed to his emphasis on "action." While the emphatic conclusion certainly does highlight the most active element for the disciple in the prayer, the larger context of the Sermon requires an understanding of action within the context of virtue-formation as a whole.

[66] Walter T. Wilson, "A Third Form of Righteousness: The Theme and Contribution of Matthew 6.19–7.12 in the Sermon on the Mount," *NTS* 53, no. 3 (2007): 303–24.

[67] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 242; Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 233–35.

for God or for money (6:24). Jesus's encouragement is to love God with one's whole being. If the disciple's love for God is singularly focused, his whole person will become *loving*, and his love for neighbor (i.e., generosity) becomes an extension of his love for God. Generosity, of course, may be understood as a form of mercy—lovingly providing financially for others who are in need. The following section (6:25–34) turns to the necessity of trusting in the Father rather than being anxious for physical needs. While coming from a different angle, mercy in the form of generosity once again lies in the background. If the disciple is anxious about his own well-being, he will not be able to be "full of light" because his eye will not be "whole and generous" (6:22). Personal anxiety prevents the disciple himself from being generous to others, but trusting in God—moving beyond 'little faith' (6:30) to whole-hearted faith in God—allows the disciple both to seek "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (6:33) and to show mercy to his neighbor, which is simply another side of pursuing righteousness.

7:1–12. The following section (7:1–6) moves once again to focus on the disciple's love of neighbor. In short, the judgment or measure the disciple issues or uses with others will likewise be issued or used with him (7:1–2). There is a clear echo here of the circle of mercy discussed previously in 5:7 and 6:12, 14–15, where the merciful will receive mercy and the forgiving will receive forgiveness.[68] The implication, of course, is that whatever disposition one has toward others who sin against him will be the same disposition that God has toward the disciple who sins against God himself. Jesus, therefore, is once again discussing a form of mercy as an expression of love of neighbor. The disciple should not have a cold, heartless disposition toward an offender but a loving, merciful disposition, just as the disciple pleads with the Father to have with him (6:12).

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[68] Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2020), 115; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:353; Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 255; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:232.

As Betz notes, "Self-righteousness, lack of mercy and compassion, and antisocial destructiveness are attitudes that are incompatible with the ethics of the SM."[69] Jesus, however, is not telling the disciples to lack any sort of moral discernment in relating to others. Just verses later he refers to some as "dogs" and "pigs" (7:6). Rather, the disciple is to do so wisely and reflectively, embodying the very love and mercy that he desires himself.[70]

The following verses reflect further on the hypocrisy of many in issuing judgment on their brother, judging his offense while overlooking their own. This turn toward self-reflection once again points to the virtuous nature of mercy and its focus on interiority. As Branch-Trevathan discusses,

> In vv. 3–4, the statement that he who wants to correct a splinter, or minor fault, in his brother's eye but does not consider (κατανοεῖς) the beam, or major fault, in his own eye cannot see well enough to remove the splinter capitalizes on 6:22–23's claim that the eye indicates one's interior condition in order to declare that the person intent on "judging" others suffers from a dark and deformed interiority. He has forgotten that he too is a debtor in need of forgiveness (6:12; see also 6:14–15). He has abandoned the humility that enabled him to repent. He casts himself as morally superior when in fact he is inwardly corrupt, which renders him a hypocrite (v. 5). He is evil (v. 11).[71]

Like the unforgiving servant in 18:21–35, this person lacks the self-awareness to understand the disjointedness between one's heart and one's actions.[72] The disciple, on the other hand, should seek wholeness and righteousness in the way he loves others. His

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[69] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 490.

[70] As Davies and Allison observe, "Jesus himself, after all, delivered himself of [*sic*] numerous polemical utterances, and it would in any case be futile to forbid people to exercise their faculties of discernment (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. 4.30.2). One can, however, enjoin mercy, humility, and tolerance, and such is the case with Mt 7.1–2 (cf. 6.14–15; 18.21–2)." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:668.

[71] Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 237–38.

[72] Pennington similarly writes, "This hypocrisy is yet another example of the Sermon's theme of wholeness. Righteousness requires consistency between one's inner person and one's outer actions. Discerning the state of another without first examining one's own heart is a dangerous and deadly business precisely because it is a kind of doubleness." Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 260.

disposition, therefore, should be one of mercy toward someone in whom he observes sin, reflecting on his own sin and need for repentance and forgiveness from God.[73]

The final statement of this section (7:12), then, reflects the thematic statement in 7:1–2. Jesus says, "Therefore, in everything, whatever you want others to do to you, do the same to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7:12). This statement, in a sense, calls forward to Jesus's later pronouncement that the entirety of the Law and the Prophets depends on the commands to love God and love neighbor (22:34–40). His statement in 7:12 is really a succinct way of summarizing the love of neighbor he requires of his disciples, and the required internal reflection of one's own status and relationship to God echoes the command to love God himself. As I have observed extensively in chapter 4, the double love command undergirds much of Jesus's focus in the Sermon, and his three summary statements of the Law—5:20, 7:12, and 22:37–30—may be taken together to understand his overarching interpretation of the Law.[74] The disciple fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment —both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor.

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[73] As Branch-Trevathan writes,

> Verse 5 nonetheless sanctions fraternal correction. It states that if one first excises the beam from his own eye, "then he will see clearly (τότε διαβλέψεις) to remove the splinter from his brother's eye." Since sight continues in this passage to represent one's inner state, this restoration of the eye to health signifies a change in disposition, presumably in this context involving the extirpation of the inclination to condemn. If one first transforms himself, he can address his fellow community member's peccadilloes. The correction that v. 5 imagines coheres then with the admonition not to judge in 7:1 because it is not an act of condemnation but of friendship, of love. As elsewhere in Matthew, the moral quality of the action depends on the moral quality of the actor. (Branch-Trevathan, *Sermon on Mount and Spiritual Exercises*, 238)

Konradt similarly writes, "The point of vv. 3–5 is that one's gaze is redirected to one's own ethical inadequacy—and thus on one's own need for mercy. Those who want to deal judgmentally with the mistakes and sins of others must first of all deal with their own failures." Konradt, *Matthew*, 116.

[74] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 268; Konradt, *Matthew*, 119.

Mercy Taught and Embodied by Jesus

Throughout the rest of the narrative, Matthew portrays mercy in three primary contexts: Jesus embodying mercy and alleviating the needs of others (9:1–8, 35–38; 14:13–21; 15:21–28, 29–39; 17:14–20; 20:29–34), a juxtaposition between the mercy of Jesus and the rigidity of the scribes and Pharisees (9:10–13; 11:25–12:14; 19:16–22; 23:23), and Jesus continuing to call his disciples to be merciful (10:40–42; 18:21–35; 25:31–46). Jesus, therefore, becomes the prime narrative example of mercy, in contrast with the negative examples of the scribes and Pharisees, and his continued calls for his disciples to become merciful reinforce the teaching of the Sermon, implicitly encouraging Matthew's readers to pursue mercy as Jesus's disciples, following his example.

8:1–9:38. The narrative block just after the Sermon on the Mount encompasses chapters 8 and 9, and in many ways provides narrative examples of the embodiment of Jesus's teaching from the Sermon. In the previous chapter, I highlighted the examples of faith in this section. Mercy, often as Jesus's response to faith, proves central to this narrative section as well. Following Jesus's clear calls to his disciples to embody the virtue of mercy in the Sermon—there mainly focused on generosity and forgiveness of sins—Jesus here expresses mercy toward others through both the forgiveness of sins and physical healing.

In chapter 8, Matthew does not use any form of ἔλεος, yet Jesus expresses mercy toward others in several instances. He heals a leper who comes to him with the request, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (8:2b); a centurion's servant who is paralyzed, commending the centurion for exemplary faith (8:5–13); and Peter's mother-in-law who is sick with a fever, along with many others who are sick or demon-possessed (8:13–17).[75] He also saves the disciples, who are terrified of a great storm on the sea

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[75] For a wide-ranging and thorough study of supplication in general in the ancient world, see F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

(8:23–27), and casts the demons out of two demon-possessed men in the Gadarenes (8:28–34).

Chapter 9 begins with Jesus's healing of a paralyzed man brought to Jesus by his friends.[76] Jesus's surprising response to their faith—proclaiming the forgiveness of the man's sins rather than healing his paralysis—engenders an angry response from the scribes, who take him to be blaspheming. Jesus knows their hearts and responds by using their skepticism to highlight his authority and mercy as the Son of Man. It is "easier" for Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven" because there is no objective way to substantiate the claim.[77] There is no denying, however, his truthfulness if he tells the man to "Get up and walk," and the man does get up and walk. Jesus, therefore, turns to the man and heals him, both showing his own mercy toward the man and confirming his authority to forgive sins.

Matthew develops several themes related to mercy in this story that began in the Sermon. First, as begun in chapter 8, Matthew offers Jesus as the prime example of mercy embodied. This string of stories in which Jesus shows mercy toward others who come to him exemplifies the kind of habitual mercy that marks the life of *the merciful*. Jesus does not simply occasionally *do* acts of mercy, but this virtue is so developed within him that his life is consistently marked by it. He is himself *merciful*.

Second, Matthew again highlights forgiveness of sins as a key example of the type of mercy Jesus calls his disciples to (6:12, 14–15). Jesus, however, does not serve as an example of interpersonal forgiveness *per se*, since the paralyzed man has not wronged Jesus interpersonally in any way known to the reader. Rather, Jesus forgives the man's sins in general as the authoritative Son of Man. Elsewhere in the narrative, Jesus refers to

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[76] For a fuller discussion especially of the theme of faith in this story, see chap. 5.

[77] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 346; Konradt, *Matthew*, 144.

himself as "Son of Man," often in reference to his authority as eschatological judge (e.g., 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:36–43; 16:27–28; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; 26:64) and reminiscent of the authority of the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7 over his own kingdom.[78]

Jesus, therefore, casts *himself* as the one who has the authority to forgive the disciple's sins on behalf of the Father. Furthermore, through Jesus's surprising response—immediately turning to the priority of the paralyzed man's need for forgiveness compared to his need for physical healing—Matthew emphasizes forgiveness of sins as the primary need for Jesus's disciples compared to their physical needs. There is even a hint of irony in Jesus's statement asking, "Which is easier—to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Though the logic of Jesus's statement means on the surface that it is easier *to say* your sins are forgiven, as opposed to telling him to get up and walk, on a deeper level the reader understands, given the centrality of forgiveness of sins to the life of the disciple in the Lord's Prayer (6:12, 14–15), that forgiving the man's sins, though easier *to say*, is the more difficult and important task at hand. Just as Jesus concludes the Lord's Prayer by highlighting the disciple's need for forgiveness from the Father (6:14–15), Jesus here—without ignoring the man's desperate need for physical healing—implies his more fundamental need for forgiveness of sins.[79]

Just after this story, the theme of forgiveness of sins continues, as Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him and then has a dinner with tax collectors and sinners (9:9–13). The greed and dishonesty often associated with tax collectors, along with Matthew's clear grouping of them with sinners in 9:10, makes it clear that Jesus's

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[78] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:304.

[79] This point does not deny a link between spiritual sin and physical sickness and disease. As Konradt notes, "For Matthew, the recovery from physical infirmity and the forgiveness of sins that separates one from God are closely related (cf. Ps 103:3), without, however, establishing a strict regularity that sin *always* results in sickness (otherwise, all healthy people must be sinless), and sickness is *always* caused by sin (cf. the 'if' in Jas 5:15)." Konradt, *Matthew*, 143.

association with them is one implicitly based on his forgiveness of their sins.[80] This dinner highlights most clearly the contrast between Jesus's ministry and that of the Pharisees. Whereas the scribes take issue in the previous story with Jesus's forgiving the sins of the paralyzed man, the Pharisees here question his association with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus's response, like the juxtaposition of forgiveness and healing in the previous story, uses physical illness and healing as a metaphor for spiritual sin and forgiveness: "Those who are well do not need a doctor but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy [ἔλεος] and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call righteous people but sinners" (9:12b–13).

Jesus's logic here is clear: he has come providing physical healing and spiritual forgiveness. Those who are well or *righteous* have no need for Jesus. The irony, of course, is that the Pharisees only *seem* to be righteous, recalling the hypocrisy Jesus denounces throughout the Sermon and foreshadowing his woes against them in chapter 23.[81] While the Pharisees assume Jesus should only associate with other *righteous* people like themselves, Jesus pursues those who accept their own need for his forgiveness of their sins. At the center of his response is his quotation of Hosea 6:6.[82] In Hosea, God's people feign repentance (6:1–3), and God responds to them:

> What should I do with you, Ephraim?
> What should I do with you, Judah?
> Your ἔλεος [וְחַסְדְּכֶם] is like a morning cloud and like the early dew that goes away.
> Therefore I have cut down your prophets.
> I have slain them with the word of my mouth, and my judgment will go forth like a light.
> For I desire ἔλεος [חֶסֶד] and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

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[80] For a discussion of the social stigmas of tax collectors in the first century, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 351; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:312.

[81] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 355.

[82] Notably, neither Mark nor Luke include Hos 6:6 in their versions of this story (Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32).

Within the context of Hosea, ἔλεος, translating the Hebrew חֶסֶד, likely refers to God's people's faltering love for him. While God has been faithful in his love toward his people, his people have not been faithful in their own love toward him. This love that God expects, however, reverberates beyond just their relationship to God alone. Throughout Hosea, the prophet highlights the various ways that the people have been unfaithful to God by being unfaithful to other Israelites (e.g., Hos 4:1–2; 6:7–10).[83]

In Matthew, this sense of mercy as an expression of faithful love becomes even clearer.[84] The Pharisees fault Jesus for associating with sinners, yet Jesus shows that they are missing the point. As Edin notes,

> The Pharisees appear to be concerned with righteousness—at least they are concerned with law observance—yet Jesus argues that their understanding of righteousness is at odds with what God desires. Their teaching is internally inconsistent (Matt 23:16–22) and their practice is inconsistent with even those elements of their teaching that are true (Matt 23:3). Their lives are characterized by a failure of words and actions to match one another; hypocrisy, rather than loyalty, describes their way of life. Their actions are not faithful to their speech.[85]

The Pharisees' intense focus on external observance of the Law has made them neglect the wholistic righteousness required by Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law.[86] If they understood this, they would follow the Law to its natural end—a radical mercy toward those in need as an expression of their faithful love toward God and neighbor.[87]

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[83] As Edin notes, "The people are loyal neither to the Lord nor to their fellow Israelites." Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 359.

[84] As Nolland writes, "In Hosea the Hebrew term is likely to have meant wholehearted covenant loyalty to God, but the move to Greek here shifts the emphasis clearly to human interaction." John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 387. See also Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 140.

[85] Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 359.

[86] As Konradt notes, "For the evangelist, Jesus' compassionate devotion to sinners does not reflect a critical stance toward the Torah, but rather the manifestation of the fulfillment of the Torah and Prophets by Jesus." Konradt, *Matthew*, 145–46.

[87] For a similar understanding of 9:10–13, see Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 256–60. Davies and Allison similarly write,

> We should consider the possibility that ἔλεος still carries for Matthew the connotations of *ḥesed* and that he understands Hos 6.6 as did the prophet: cultic observance without inner faith and heart-felt covenant loyalty is vain. On this interpretation, the Pharisees are castigated because their objections

Jesus's response, furthermore, highlights Jesus as the embodied expression of God's own mercy. As Konradt observes,

> Hos 6.6 does not merely formulate the claim that God places on human beings *and that is realized by Jesus in an ideal way*. Instead, Matthew views Jesus, as the messiah, as *the medium of the action of God*, i.e., for him Jesus' life practice is a manifestation of God's own mercy. The fact that Jesus *has come* to call sinners is synonymous with the fact that he *was sent by God* to do this (cf. 15.24). To learn what the prophetic saying is about therefore means to recognize that Jesus, as the medium of the merciful God with his turning to sinners, realizes and embodies the mercy with which God is pleased. Thus, Jesus' behavior is not merely portrayed and thus justified as being in agreement with the prophetic saying, but in Jesus' turning to sinners it becomes fully clear for the first time what that saying means: mercy means not fixing sinners to their previous deeds but welcoming them in order to lead them into a new life.[88]

Especially taken within the context of chapters 8–9 as a narrative section of the Gospel, Jesus's quotation of Hosea 6:6 emphasizes his role as God's own embodiment of mercy toward his people.[89] Jesus's healing, exorcism, and forgiveness show the love and mercy

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> show that despite their concern with external ritual their hearts are far from the God they think they honour (cf. 23.25–6). That is, their religious concerns are not properly animated, with the result that they are hindering God's work in Jesus. Unless informed by a spirit of mercy, observance of the Torah can become uninformed slavery to the traditions of men (cf. 15.5–6). (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:105)

Luz also emphasizes love as central to Jesus's quotation of Hos 6:6:

> With their objection the Pharisees show what inferior righteousness is; Jesus, on the contrary, shows what higher righteousness is. That means more, however, than that Jesus gives his disciples an example. Instead, the entire Jesus story shows that his behavior results in mercy for the tax collectors, the sick, and the Gentiles. Thus beyond our pericope, in the context of Matthew 8–9, the quotation from Hos 6:6 is a kind of "explanatory word" of Jesus' healings. In them is manifested the mercy of which Hosea speaks. It is not by accident that from this point on the sick will address Jesus with ἐλέησον ("have mercy"; 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30–31). (Luz, *Matthew*, 2:34)

Contra Ribbens, who offers the novel proposal that ἔλεος refers to the covenant faithfulness of Jesus's followers, including the tax collectors and sinners in this story. Benjamin J. Ribbens, "Whose 'Mercy'? What 'Sacrifice'? A Proposed Reading of Matthew's Hosea 6:6 Quotations," *BBR* 28, no. 3 (2019): 381–404. While Ribbens offers a fresh interpretation of Jesus's use of Hos 6:6, this reading does not fit with the way Matthew portrays mercy throughout the rest of his narrative. The ἔλεος of Jesus's quotation of Hosea 6:6 must be understood within the context of Jesus's own embodiment of mercy toward others. He indicts the Pharisees for their lack of mercy toward others—the same indictment of Hosea toward God's people. Their lack of faithfulness toward God expresses itself in their lack of mercy toward others. Matthew's Gospel—through its portrayal of Jesus as the perfect embodiment of mercy—intends its readers to pursue this same embodiment of mercy as disciples of Jesus.

[88] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 141–42.

[89] As Ahn argues in his dissertation, Jesus's quotation of Hos 6:6 here is typological in the sense that God's people continue to fail in showing covenantal love to God, despite his steadfast love toward them. Jesus's quotation of Hos 6:6, therefore, both solidifies his role as authoritative forgiver of sins on behalf of God himself and excoriates the Pharisees for their rigid focus on external Law observance at the expense of reflecting God's own love toward them in mercy toward others. Daniel Ahn, "The

that God has for his people. The role of healer, filled by God in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod 15:26; 2 Chr 30:20; Ps 147:2–3; Isa 6:10; Jer 3:22; Hos 6:1), is now taken up by Jesus himself.[90] Taken in conjunction with his own call for his disciples to be merciful in the Sermon (5:7), Jesus provides both the perfect embodiment of God's mercy and an example for his disciples of how to fulfill the Law through the righteous expression of mercy toward others.

As this narrative section moves on, Matthew continues his focus on Jesus's embodiment of mercy. In 9:18–26, Jesus raises a ruler's daughter from the dead and heals a woman with a bleeding disorder, and in 9:27–31, two blind men approach Jesus, begging him: "Have mercy [ἐλέησον] on us, Son of David" (9:27). Though Jesus has shown mercy to others with similar requests in several preceding instances, their request is the first to use explicitly the language of mercy, and it echoes cries to God for mercy in the Septuagint:

> And you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice according to all the things that I command to you today, from your whole heart and your whole soul. And the Lord will heal your sins and have mercy [ἐλεήσει] on you, and he will gather you again from all nations, among which the Lord scattered you. (Deut 30:2–3)
>
> Have mercy [ἐλέησόν] on me, Lord, for I am weak. Heal me, Lord, for my bones are troubled. (Ps 6:3)
>
> I said, "Lord, have mercy [ἐλέησόν] on me. Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you. (Ps 40:5)[91]

Taken within the context of these cries to God for mercy, Jesus, as Konradt observes, "appears here, insofar as the petitionary cry is addressed to him as Son of David *and*

Significance of Jesus's Use of Hosea 6:6 in the Gospel of Matthew" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2020), 42–78.

[90] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:314n236.

[91] Wilson mentions these same three texts. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:313–14. Konradt notes the additional examples of Ps 9:14; 24:16; 25:11; 26:7; 29:11; 30:10; 40:11; 50:3. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 143n40.

Lord, as a medium of the mercy of God. With the coming of Jesus God shows mercy to his people. Alongside forgiveness of sins, the healings are a fundamental expression of this merciful turning of God to his people."[92] Their appeal to Jesus as "Son of David" resonates with Matthew's presentation of Jesus in the line of David in chapter 1 and is used both by others in their requests of Jesus (cf. 15:22; 20:30–31) and by Jesus in discussing his own messianic status (12:23; 21:9, 15).[93] Jesus asks the men if they believe him, and with their positive affirmation of faith, Jesus affirms their faith and restores their sight.

After recounting Jesus casting demons out of a mute man, which garners more accusation by the Pharisees, Matthew provides a summary statement of Jesus's ministry: "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion [ἐσπλαγχνίσθη] on them, because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:35–36). Matthew uses the verb σπλαγχνίζομαι five times, four with Jesus as the subject (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34) and once with the master of the unforgiving servant as the subject (18:27). The noun σπλάγχνον, in both Greco-Roman and Jewish sources, most basically refers to bodily entrails, often referring to those of sacrificial animals (e.g., Homer, *Il.* 2.426–27), but it comes to have a figurative meaning referring to the heart or seat of affections or emotions.[94] In the Septuagint, σπλάγχνον most commonly refers to the seat of emotions or heart (e.g., Prov 12:10), and in the Testament of Zebulun, σπλαγχνίζομαι seven times

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[92] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 143–44.

[93] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 366. For a thorough overview of Matthew's use of the title Son of David and its possible background, see Luz, *Matthew*, 1:47–48. For a discussion of the possibility of an allusion to Solomon's healing ministry as Son of David, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:136–37.

[94] Moisés Silva, "σπλάγχνον, σπλαγχνίζομαι, εὔσπλαγχνος, πολύσπλαγχνος," in *NIDNTTE*, 4:351–54.

refers primarily to the act of having compassion, often in conjunction with mercy (e.g., T. Zeb. 4.2; 6.4; 8.1).[95]

Matthew uses the term, similarly to the Testament of Zebulun, to refer to Jesus's own compassion on others, typically in conjunction with his acts of mercy toward them. Here in 9:36, Matthew makes explicit what may be assumed of Jesus's encounters with those in need throughout chapters 8 and 9: Jesus responds to those who approach him in need with compassion, an emotional and loving response to their situation.[96] And he responds to this internal response with an act of mercy, whether that be healing, exorcism, or forgiveness. Matthew's use of this kind of emotional language in conjunction with Jesus's embodiment of mercy again underscores Matthew's presentation of mercy as a virtue. For mercy to be righteous, Jesus must embody it holistically—unifying his internal and external responses to human needs.[97] As he encounters those in need, he perfectly responds with both internal emotional compassion and external merciful action. In this sense, compassion and mercy are habitual responses to need for Jesus, and he thus perfectly embodies this virtue of mercy, serving both as the human representative of God's own mercy toward his people and as the prime example for his disciples (and Matthew's readers) of the righteous mercy commanded in the Sermon.

10:1–42. Jesus's compassion always leads to action for Matthew, and in this case it leads him to send out his disciples. In this way, 9:35–38 is in a sense a transition

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[95] Silva, "*σπλάγχνον, σπλαγχνίζομαι, εὔσπλαγχνος*," 4:352.

[96] On compassion as emotion or affection in Matthew, see Tanja Dannenmann, *Emotion, Narration, und Ethik*, WUNT 498 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 245–48.

[97] As France writes, "In each case [of Matthew's use of *σπλαγχνίζομαι*] there is not only sympathy with a person's need, but also a practical response which meets that need; emotion results in caring and effective action, in this case the action of sending out his disciples among the people. It is a verb which describes the Jesus of the gospel stories in a nutshell." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 373; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:340.

passage between Jesus's own ministry of teaching and mercy and his disciple's ministry of the same. The metaphor of the people being "sheep without a shepherd" is common in Jewish literature (Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Isa 13:14; Ezek 34:5, 8; Zech 10:2; Jdt 11:19), where Israel's leadership is often indicted for leading Israel away from God.[98] In Ezekiel 34, God himself appoints his servant David as their shepherd.[99] He, therefore, is sending out his workers for the harvest as his representatives. In this sense, as Konradt notes, "The disciples are placed in the service of the messianic devotion of the Shepherd of Israel to his flock and thus participate in Jesus' own pastoral office."[100] He grants them authority to mirror his ministry of healing and exorcism in chapters 8 and 9 (10:1), and in his charge to them (10:5–42), the themes of faith and mercy are again essential.[101]

His charge begins by telling them to go to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," whom he has just said to be in need of a shepherd. The ministry of the disciples here in some sense represents Jesus's ultimate ministry to Israel as their perfect shepherd, and the mercy ministry he calls them to—"heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (10:8a)—perfectly matches what Matthew has just shown Jesus doing in chapters 8 and 9 and has done in his ministry throughout the entire Gospel (cf. 3:2;

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[98] Konradt, *Matthew*, 155; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:339.

[99] Konradt writes,

> In the light of the way Matthew perceives Ezekiel 34, a central reference text throughout his Gospel, and in view of the conflict situation that permeates his narrative, readers should conclude that the statement implies an indictment of the previous authorities (Ezek 34:2–10). In Ezekiel 34, their failure is followed by their replacement, for God himself assumes responsibility for his flock (vv. 11–16) and appoints "his servant David" as their shepherd (v. 23). Matthew sees this constellation as fulfilled in Jesus, who, as the Davidic messianic shepherd (cf. Matt 2:6), takes the place of the previous authorities, who have failed as shepherds of the people (alongside Ezek 34, see also Jer 23:1–6). (Konradt, *Matthew*, 155)

[100] Konradt, *Matthew*, 155.

[101] For a discussion of the theme of faith in this section, see chap. 5.

4:17).[102] The rest of Jesus's charge focuses on the responses and persecution that the disciples should expect from those they are trying to reach, implicitly calling them to trust in God amidst it all. He ends by emphasizing more explicitly the disciples' representation of his own ministry: those who receive the disciples, receive Jesus and will receive a reward (10:40–42). The disciples' own ministry of mercy reflects and represents Jesus's own ministry of mercy, and the response of those to whom they minister—if it reflects the faith of those who trust in Jesus directly—will result in their own reward in his kingdom.

11:25–12:14. The following narrative section focuses on Jesus's messianic role, and near the center of this section, Matthew offers a stark contrast between the mercy of Jesus and the callous hypocrisy of the Pharisees. After Jesus identifies himself as the sole entryway to the Father (11:25–27), he calls the weary to himself: "Come to me, all who work and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (11:28–30). In chapter 3, I discussed that Jesus's call here is to learn from both his character and his practice, thus indicating virtue-formation.[103] Important to note is one aspect of Jesus's character that is emphasized here. In contrast to the Pharisees, who "bind up heavy burdens [φορτία βαρέα]" on people (Matt 23:4), Jesus's "yoke is easy" and his "burden [τὸ φορτίον] is

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[102] As Konradt writes, "As Jesus is the medium of the mercy of God toward his people, so the disciples are now placed in the service of the merciful turning to the people, and healings again play a prominent role here." Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 145.

[103] As Davies and Allison write, "'Learn of me'—which is yet one more indication that in 11.25–30 Jesus is the functional equivalent of Torah: the Sages learned Torah, the disciples learn Jesus—has as its immediate antecedent the revelation spoken of in 11.25–7. But because that revelation encompasses Jesus' sayings and acts (cf. 11.2, 19, 20), one inevitably thinks of all that Jesus has said and done." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:291. Or similarly Konradt, "In addition to hearing and following Jesus' instruction, this also implies adopting his life as a model." Konradt, *Matthew*, 183.

light" (11:30).[104] In this call, he seeks to alleviate the burden placed on the people by the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy—offering a path to true, wholistic righteousness through his own authoritative interpretation of the Law. By seeking to remove this burden and giving his people rest, therefore, Jesus shows himself to be *merciful*.[105] While Jesus's interpretation of the Law as taught in the Sermon on the Mount may not seem "easy" or "light," the narrative context of Jesus's mercy and forgiveness toward sinners forms the basis for his disciples themselves to embody these virtues of discipleship in community with one another.[106] The following narrative focus on Jesus's mercy continues to bear out this point.

The Pharisees take issue with Jesus allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain and eat them as they walk through grain fields on the Sabbath (12:1–8). Jesus responds,

> Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which was not lawful for him to eat nor those with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath priests in the temple profane the Sabbath yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy [ἔλεος] and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. (12:3–8)

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[104] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 166.

[105] Jesus's invitation to rest has parallels with several examples in wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 1:33; Wis 8:16; Sir 6:28). Wilson discusses these examples, Sirach in particular, and situates Jesus's statement among them: "An important difference between Sirach and Matthew is that the fictive household group forming around Jesus establishes relationships through which its members not only receive instruction but also experience compassion." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:406–7.

[106] Konradt writes,

> In view of the ethical challenges presented in the Sermon on the Mount, which are not at all "easy," v. 30b may at first glance appear strange. Yet, these commands must be heard as embedded in the Matthean emphasis on the mercy with which Jesus encounters sinners (9:9–13), and which accordingly should shape the community of believers (cf. 18:10–35). Moreover, Jesus' yoke proves to be light inasmuch as it relieves people of the burden of having to give so much attention to the rigorous ritual-cultic requirements of the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law in their everyday life. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees that directly follows in 12:1–8, about a humane practice of the Sabbath—the *day of rest* (Exod 23:12; 31:15; 35:2; Lev 23:3)—determined by compassion, provides an exemplary illustration. (Konradt, *Matthew*, 184)

Jesus's response points to scriptural precedent for exceptions to Sabbath Law, resting upon (1) the authority of the Son of Man over the Sabbath, and (2) the centrality of mercy to a proper understanding of the Law.[107] As noted in my discussion of Jesus's earlier quotation of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 9:13, Jesus points the Pharisees to mercy as the righteous expression of faithful love toward both God and neighbor.[108]

In the following story (12:9–14), Matthew extends this focus on mercy as central to the Law by showing Jesus's mercy toward someone in clear physical need. Jesus enters the synagogue, and the Pharisees ask him if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by appealing to a relatively natural instinct for mercy: a shepherd saving his sheep from a pit on the Sabbath. Jesus's metaphor, alluding once again to his role as "shepherd" of the "lost house of Israel" (9:36; 10:6; 15:24; 18:12; 25:32; 26:31), further emphasizes Jesus's point from the previous conflict over the disciples' plucking grain: mercy as expression of faithful love toward God and neighbor is the goal of the Law and what God truly desires.[109] When Sabbath Law and one's ability to show mercy toward others seem to conflict, the truly righteous person—exemplified by Jesus here—chooses mercy, following Jesus as both lord of the Sabbath and authoritative interpreter of the Law.[110] In this section (11:25–12:14), therefore, Matthew first highlights Jesus's

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[107] Whether "something greater" refers to Jesus's own ministry or to mercy itself, the point remains largely the same: Jesus's ministry as Son of Man focuses on mercy, contrasted with the Pharisees' focus on ritual observance of the Law *at the expense* of prioritizing mercy. Both Jesus's authority over the Sabbath (12:8) and the centrality of mercy to his ministry (12:7) are clear here, so the evidence does not clearly point in one direction or the other for defining "something greater." For those who interpret "something greater" Christologically, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:314; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 460–61; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC 33 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1:329–30; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:414–15. For those who interpret it as mercy, see Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 357; Konradt, *Matthew*, 186–87; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:181–83.

[108] As in Matthew's previous allusion to Hos 6:6 in 9:13, the parallel stories in Mark and Luke of this story again do not include the Hos 6:6 quotation (Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5).

[109] Or as Edin puts it, "Righteous observance of the law is expressed in merciful action toward the neighbor." Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 357.

[110] As Davies and Allison comment on 12:1–8, "Scripture shows that one commandment can outweigh another (cf. 12.5–6); and to this Jesus adds that the command to keep the sabbath, although it is worthy of observance, is subordinate to a greater law, which is his own person. That is, if Jesus' eschatological purposes come into conflict with sabbath law or custom, then sabbath law or custom will

messianic role as the merciful giver of rest (11:25–30), and then portrays him embodying mercy toward neighbor and teaching that it is the true goal of the Law (12:1–14). In doing so, Matthew sets Jesus in stark contrast with the Pharisees, whose rigid, externally-focused interpretation of the Law prevents them from becoming truly righteous by embodying mercy as the expression of their love for God and neighbor.

13:54–17:27. In the third narrative section, Jesus once again exhibits mercy toward others in several stories. After Jesus removes himself upon hearing of John the Baptist's death, crowds once again follow him (14:13). Jesus sees them, has "compassion [ἐσπλαγχνίσθη]" on them, and heals their sick (14:14). Not only that, but he afterward multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to feed the five-thousand men present with twelve baskets left over (14:13–21). Jesus's mercy in this instance extends not only to their need for physical healing but also to their need for physical sustenance.

Shortly afterward, Jesus's encounter with the Canaanite woman results in his showing mercy toward her daughter.[111] As mentioned previously, the woman's appeal to Jesus as "Lord" and "Son of David" echoes Jewish cries to God for mercy and deliverance, reemphasizing Jesus's role as representative of God's own mercy toward his covenant people.[112] Furthermore, the woman's identity as a "Canaanite" aligns her with the historical enemies of Israel.[113] Thus Jesus's extension of mercy toward her, like his

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fare the worse." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:315. Similarly, Konradt writes, "In cases of conflict, priority must be given to the more important commandment. Sabbath observance is thus to be shaped according to the standard of the central requirements of the Law and Prophets, namely, love and mercy." Konradt, *Matthew*, 187.

[111] While the woman cries out for mercy in Matthew's version of this story—"Have mercy [ἐλέησόν] on me" (Matt 15:22)—in Mark's version she simply bows down at his feet and begs him to cast the demon out of her daughter (Mark 7:24–30).

[112] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 143–44.

[113] Konradt, *Matthew*, 239.

mercy toward the centurion's servant (8:5–13), highlights the expansion of God's mercy toward those traditionally held to be outside of God's covenant.

Just after Jesus's healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, Jesus once again finds himself amidst a crowd in need of his help. He heals many in the crowd, and like in 14:14, he has "compassion [σπλαγχνίζομαι]" on them (15:32). This time his compassion is not explicitly directed toward their need for healing (although it is surely implied in the previous verses) but toward their hunger (which is likely also implied in 14:15–16).[114] Jesus multiplies seven loaves of bread and a few small fish into enough food to feed the crowd of four-thousand men with seven baskets left over (15:33–38). Like in the earlier account (14:13–21), Jesus feels compassion toward the crowd and then directs merciful action toward them, satisfying their physical need for sustenance. This mercy, therefore, is wholistic in the sense that it encompasses his feelings, intentions, and action. Furthermore, if one takes the crowd here to be Gentile, Jesus's mercy is once again extending beyond the bounds of God's covenant with Israel, defining God's people by their alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus rather than by their ethnicity.[115]

A little later, a man approaches Jesus in similar fashion to the Canaanite woman: "Lord, have mercy [ἐλέησόν] on my son, for he has seizures and suffers severely. For he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your

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[114] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:50–51.

[115] For a literary argument for a Gentile crowd in this account, see J. Benjamin Hussung, "Jesus's Feeding of the Gentiles in Matt 15:29–39: How the Literary Context Supports a Gentile Four Thousand," *JETS* 63, no. 3 (2020): 473–89. Others who see a Gentile four-thousand are France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 596–99; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 601–2, 608–9. Most commentators take the crowd here to be Jewish: J. R. C. Cousland, "The Feeding of the Four Thousand Gentiles in Matthew? Matthew 15:29–39 as a Test Case," *NovT* 41 (1999): 1–23; Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:562–65; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:452; Konradt, *Matthew*, 245; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:344; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 640–41; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:53–54.

disciples, yet they could not heal him" (17:15–16).[116] Jesus rebukes the demon possessing the boy, which leaves him, and the boy is healed instantly (17:18).[117] Once again, the man's appeal to Jesus as "Lord" for mercy echoes God's people's cries to him for mercy. Matthew, therefore, continues to present Jesus as the embodiment of God's own mercy toward his people.

18:15–35. The parable of the unforgiving servant, unique to Matthew, lies at the center of Matthew's conception of mercy. It is part of Jesus's Community Discourse, and Jesus presents the parable within the context of a discussion of forgiveness.[118] The Father does not want even one "little one" to perish but goes after even one who goes astray (18:10–14). Implicit here is that the "little one" has sinned in some way and thus the Father's pursuit and forgiveness as response to the little one's sin is assumed.[119] Jesus's teaching then turns to interpersonal forgiveness among disciples themselves (18:15–20). When sinned against, they are to confront the brother one-on-one, then with one or two others, and then in front of the congregation. If at any point in the process, he "listens" and presumably repents, the disciple has "gained" his brother back, assuming the forgiveness of the offended disciple. The authority to "bind" and "loose" is given to the community of disciples, transferring (as in Jesus's commission of the disciples in chapter 10) Jesus's own authority to the church itself.[120]

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[116] In Mark and Luke's versions of the story, the man does not explicitly ask for mercy (Mark 9:14–29; Luke 9:37–43).

[117] For a more thorough discussion of the resultant conversation between Jesus and his disciples about their "little faith," see chap. 5.

[118] Mbabazi highlights interpersonal forgiveness as the predominant theme of the Community Discourse, noting that about 60 percent of the material in Matt 18 revolves around the theme of interpersonal forgiveness. Mbabazi, *Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness*, 188.

[119] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 134.

[120] As Wilson writes, "The practice of forgiveness, then, is one of the ways in which believers experience his presence as a community as well as one of the ways in which the community becomes a living expression of that presence." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:305.

Peter then asks how many times he should forgive an offending brother. The absurdity of Jesus's answer—"seventy-seven times"—makes it clear that the disciple's forgiveness should be unlimited.[121] Jesus then teaches the parable of the unforgiving servant, which has mercy in the form of forgiveness as its central theme (18:23–35). A servant owes his king an unbelievable sum but cannot pay the debt. The master orders him to be sold, but when the servant begs the master to be patient with him, the master has "compassion [σπλαγχνισθεὶς]" on him and forgives the entire debt. The same servant immediately goes and demands payment from another servant who owes him a relatively small sum. When that servant asks for the same patience, the first servant refuses and has him thrown in prison. When the master hears of the servant's hypocrisy, he confronts him: "You evil servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And was it not necessary for you to have mercy [ἐλεῆσαι] on your fellow servant, as I had mercy [ἠλέησα] on you?" The master has the servant thrown into prison until his entire debt is paid, and then Jesus applies the parable in a final statement: "In this way my heavenly Father will do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from your heart" (18:35).

This parable provides three insights into Matthew's presentation of mercy. First, compassion once again motivates forgiveness as a form of mercy. The master feels compassion for the servant and then forgives his debt. Later the master describes his action as mercy. As Jesus's compassion toward the crowds motivates his healing and provision, the master's compassion here motivates his forgiveness.[122] Second, this parable fills out Jesus's discussions of mercy and especially forgiveness from the

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[121] Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 134.

[122] As Konradt describes, "While the meanings overlap, σπλαγχνίζεσθαι directs the eye more strongly to the inner affectedness by the servant's plight, which prompts the following action, and ἐλεῖν, conversely, to the action that arises from this, i.e., here concretely to the remission of the debt." Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics*, 135.

Sermon. In 5:7, 6:12, and 6:14–15, Jesus makes it clear that only the merciful and forgiving will receive mercy and be forgiven by the Father, highlighting both the disciple's need for forgiveness and the necessity of forgiving others. The most significant new emphasis in 18:23–35 is that of the master's initial forgiveness of the servant.[123] The servant should forgive the other servant because of the lavish forgiveness he himself received, yet he instead hypocritically demands the restitution from which he himself was spared.[124] This compassion and mercy shown to him should have motivated him to humbly direct forgiveness toward others. Jesus's call to forgive others in order to be forgiven is not, therefore, a way for the disciple to earn forgiveness, but an encouragement to reflect the forgiveness already shown to the disciple by the Father toward others.

The Father's foundational mercy in the life of the disciple, furthermore, shows that the merciful disciple is not simply one that transactionally forgives others out of a selfish desire to pursue his own forgiveness. His desire should be to reflect the mercy shown to him toward others. His desires and intentions, thus, round out this mercy so that it is not simply an act to be done but a virtue to be embodied holistically. He is to forgive his brother "from [the] heart" (18:35). This kind of forgiveness requires the whole of one's being rather than a surface-level dismissal of wrongs done. As Luz notes, "God's forgiveness is not simply an external matter; it is a power that overwhelms and

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[123] Maschmeier compares grace in Exod 34:6 and Matt 18:23–35, concluding that "justice and mercy are two opposite but mutually dependent attributes of the one God of Israel and . . . in regard to this dynamic polarity Matthew stands in the tradition of the Old Testament formula of grace." Maschmeier, "Dynamic Polarity between Justice and Mercy," 247.

[124] As Davis and Allison describe the servant's lack of patience with his peer: "The plea for patience is ignored. The debtor is thrown in prison. The action is as surprising as the master's forgiveness of the unforgiving servant, not because it is unlawful or unjust but because it trumpets hypocrisy. The wicked servant asked for and benefited from mercy yet refuses to bestow it. He has broken the 'golden rule' of 7.12 and treated another as he would not wish to be treated." (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:801)

transforms the whole person."[125] Mercy, therefore, as an individual virtue of discipleship, is one key element of the wholistic righteousness Jesus teaches in the Sermon.[126]

Third, the narrative parallel of the king's mercy in this parable and Jesus's frequent showing of mercy toward others highlights Jesus's authority as the Son of Man. Matthew presents Jesus as the one "on earth" with authority to forgive sins on behalf of the Father (9:6). As such, he holds the same authority as the Father in the kingdom. His frequent displays of mercy and forgiveness, therefore, reemphasize his authoritative, messianic role as the Son of Man. Jesus's mercy toward others, shown throughout Matthew's narrative, motivates his disciples to show mercy toward others. In this sense, the reader himself begins to see Jesus as both the motivation for his own forgiveness and the prime example of its embodiment.[127] The embodiment of this virtue is necessary for the disciple in community with other disciples because, as Davies and Allison connect this parable with Jesus's previous discussion of the process of forgiving or expelling a brother from the community, "The process of expulsion is too serious a matter to be left in the hands of any but the meek and merciful, who know that they themselves are the unworthy recipients of God's constant mercy and forgiveness."[128]

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[125] Luz, *Matthew*, 2:474. Similarly, Wilson writes, "Mercy is properly received only if it changes one's 'heart' (18:35; cf. 5:8)." Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:130. See also Mbabazi, *Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness*, 187–88.

[126] Key to this point is differentiating between righteousness and justice in Matthew. As Maschmeier observes, "After all that has been said, the necessity of differentiating between righteousness and justice comes to the fore. It is the 'exceeding righteousness' (Mt 5:20), not justice, that in the Gospel of Matthew can be identified with mercy." Maschmeier, "Dynamic Polarity between Justice and Mercy," 246.

[127] Kangil Kim takes this line of reasoning a step farther, seeing "forgiveness as an embodied way of life" as "a hermeneutical key to theosis." Kim, "A Theology of Forgiveness," 55. Kim's conclusion further supports mercy as a virtue in Matthew because he sees this embodied forgiveness as requiring "the cultivation of particular practices: prayer and repentance" (55). To put this in the language of virtue, for the disciple to embody mercy in the form of forgiveness, he must pursue habituation and practices that cultivate this kind of forgiveness, which include centrally prayer and repentance. As the disciple himself recognizes his own need for forgiveness through prayer and repentance, he becomes more forgiving himself.

[128] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2:804.

19:2–20:34. While most of Matthew's focus on mercy rests on interpersonal forgiveness and physical healings, Matthew also portrays financial support of the poor as an extension of the virtue of mercy. Despite its lack of the explicit language of mercy, Jesus's encounter with the rich young man serves as a test case for several themes from the Sermon: love for others and wholeness (5:43–48), mercy toward those in need (6:2–4), and the love of money (6:24–33). The man approaches Jesus asking what "good thing [he] must do to have eternal life?" (19:17). Jesus responds by explaining that anything commanded by the "only one who is good" (i.e., God himself) is good and must therefore be done in order to have eternal life (19:18; cf. Deut 6:4).[129] The man asks Jesus for clarification of which commandment must be kept, and Jesus responds by listing five interpersonal commands from the Decalogue (Exod 20:12–16; Deut 5:16–20), with the addition of the command for love of neighbor (Lev 19:18; cf. 5:43). The addition of the love command—given its clear prominence to Jesus in both the Sermon (5:43–48; 6:24–33) and in his understanding of the double love command as the central hermeneutic to understanding the entire Law (22:40)—is not arbitrary but serves a summative function: the five commands listed are all localized ways of loving one's neighbor.[130]

The young man claims to have kept all these commandments but asks what else he lacks (19:20). Jesus answers—"If you want to be whole [τέλειος], go, sell your possessions and give them to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me"—and the man leaves sorrowfully because of his wealth (19:21–22). Jesus's response echoes several themes from 5:43–6:4.[131] Jesus's call in the Sermon to be

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[129] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 732–33.

[130] Konradt writes similarly, "Since in 22:40 Matthew specifically identifies the double commandment of love as the sum of the Law and Prophets, this suggests that the love commandment in 19:19 is not to be understood merely as coordinated with the other commandments, but as superior to them." Konradt, *Matthew*, 291. This addition is unique to Matthew, as Mark and Luke's versions of this encounter do not include it (Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30).

[131] Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:149.

"whole" as the heavenly Father is "whole" comes just after his call to love not only neighbor but enemy (5:43–48). This extension of love toward all and then the call to wholeness highlights the necessity of right motivations when following the Law. Jesus's interpretation of the Law requires wholistic righteousness—outward action motivated by righteous desires and affections. Love for others, therefore, serves as the motivating affection for the interpersonal requirements of the Law. Just after this, Jesus reinforces the necessity for wholeness by explaining that one's *desires* must be properly aligned for giving to those in need to be righteous. One's love for others and desire for reward from the Father must be one's motivation rather than praise from men (6:1–4).

These themes help the reader better to understand Jesus's interaction with the rich young man. If the man is to be "whole," or holistically aligned—both inwardly and outwardly—with the will of the "only one who is good," he must give his possessions to the poor (19:21).[132] Jesus's addition of the love command from Leviticus 19:18 to his list of commandments now makes more sense. As Konradt writes, "By adding the love command, the requirement of renouncing his possessions for the good of poor people can now be understood as the explication of what it means for the rich man in his concrete situation to fulfill *perfectly* the Torah in the sense of the love commandment."[133] Jesus

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[132] Davies and Allison write, "In 5.48 the connotation of completeness is foremost. But whereas in the SM it is the completeness of love, here it is the completeness of obedience. The rich man would be perfect if he exhibited whole-hearted obedience to Jesus Christ. This, then, is the point to be generalized: all are called to be perfect, by which is meant: all are called to obey the divine word that comes to them." Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:48. While I largely agree with Davies and Allison's assessment, there is no need for a dichotomy between wholeness in obedience and wholeness in love. Both senses exist in both passages in Matthew because the motivating affection for obedience throughout all of Matthew *is* love itself. In the case of the rich young man, this love is expressed in obedience by following Jesus (love for God) and giving to the poor (love for neighbor). Similarly, Luz writes,

> Those persons are perfect who understand God's commandment in the sense of love of enemy and of neighbor as an unbounded, indivisible demand and who act accordingly (cf. 5:43–48). In this sense for Matthew for the young man to give up his possessions as he was challenged to do was a radical expression of the love command that for Jesus knows no boundary. In the first place, therefore, perfection is love. (Luz, *Matthew*, 2:513)

[133] Konradt, *Matthew*, 292.

reinforces the need for right motivations by highlighting the goal of this giving—“treasure in heaven.”

Furthermore, Jesus’s call to come and follow him shows that both love of God and love of neighbor are necessary to be “whole.” The righteous disciple will love God by following his Son and love others by showing them mercy.[134] The young man’s sorrowful reaction shows that he—like the hypocrites and Pharisees—is not whole and does not want to be. Though he claims to have “kept” each of these interpersonal commands from the Law, he has not kept them *holistically*. In other words, while he may outwardly give to the poor, honor his parents, and avoid hurting others in various ways, he does not do these things because of his love for God and for others. Once again, mercy is shown to be a virtue in that it requires the wholistic embodiment by the disciple, who, through following Jesus’s example and practicing mercy while focusing on desires and motivations, may not simply *do* acts of mercy but *become* a disciple who is *merciful*. Jesus’s following discussion with his disciples about the difficulty for rich people to enter the kingdom reinforces this focus on wholeness as the disciple must first trust and love God, who will reward disciples in his kingdom, rather than focus on one’s own abilities (19:23–30). It is God himself who empowers his disciples to follow him with their whole person.

A little later, Jesus once again portrays mercy in healing. Two blind men cry out to him, “Lord, have mercy [ἐλέησον] on us, Son of David!” (20:30). When the crowd tries to rebuke them, they make the same request even louder (20:31). Jesus asks what they want him to do, and they answer that they want their eyes to be opened. Jesus, “having compassion [σπλαγχνισθεὶς]” on them, touches their eyes, healing them, and they

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[134] France writes, “The release from material preoccupation is not in itself the secret of eternal life; it is the introduction to a new way of life as a disciple of Jesus: ‘follow me.’ It is in this, rather than in the act of renunciation and generosity alone, that the eternal life which the man is looking for will be found. This is the treasure in heaven.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 735.

follow him. Like previous requests (9:27; 15:21–28), the men appeal to Jesus's role as messianic Son of David, and despite opposition from others, they persist and are healed. Matthew portrays Jesus's merciful action holistically, motivated by love for others in the form of compassion (cf. 9;36; 14:14; 15:32). Jesus—whose ministry is bookended by healings of blind men who trust in his identity as the messianic Son of David (9:27–30; 20:29–34)—is the embodiment of God's mercy toward his people and an example to his own disciples of how to *be merciful* (5:7), acting mercifully toward those in need motivated by a love for God and neighbor.[135]

23:1–25:46. Jesus's confrontations with the Pharisees regarding mercy in 9:13 and 12:7 find their culmination in the woes of chapter 23. As I discussed in chapter 4, these woes fill out Matthew's portrayal of the scribes and Pharisees as the negative contrast to true righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees focus on the outward *appearance* and *performance* of righteousness at the expense of holistically aligning themselves with God's will—both inwardly and outwardly. Central to this righteousness for Matthew, of course, is mercy. The woes begin with an indictment for tying up "heavy burdens [φορτία βαρέα]" on people but not being willing to help alleviate those burdens (23:4). This disposition is starkly different from Jesus's, who offers rest to those who are "burdened [πεφορτισμένοι]" (11:28), and then shortly after emphasizes the need for a merciful disposition rather than the Pharisees' focus on the rigid application of Sabbath Law (12:1–8). Jesus's own actions throughout Matthew, furthermore, reemphasize this contrast: his frequent mercy toward others substantiates his calls for mercy and indictments against the scribes and Pharisees.

In his fourth woe, Jesus critiques the scribes and Pharisees directly for their neglect of the most important aspects of the Law, including mercy (23:23–24):

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[135] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:109; Konradt, *Matthew*, 307; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:177.

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe mint and dill and cumin yet have neglected the more important matters of the Law—justice [τὴν κρίσιν], mercy [τὸ ἔλεος], and faithfulness [τὴν πίστιν]. These you should have done [ποιῆσαι] without neglecting the others. Blind guides, straining out a gnat yet swallowing a camel![136]

Understood within the context of Matthew's possible allusions to Micah 6:8b and Hosea 2:21–22, Jesus here accuses the scribes and Pharisees of focusing on the outward practice of the ritual aspects of the Law at the expense of the inward motivations and outward social aspects of the Law. At the center of these three virtues listed by Jesus is mercy itself. While the passage alone does little to add to Matthew's understanding of mercy, it does serve to highlight further the contrast between the Jewish leaders and Jesus. Up to this point, Matthew has painted the scribes and Pharisees in a clearly negative light, burdening the Jewish people with ritualistic Law observance with little focus on the inward transformation that makes obedience possible. All the while, Jesus has offered an interpretation of the Law focused on the transformation of the *whole* disciple, and he has offered himself as an example as he consistently embodies mercy throughout the narrative.

At the end of this discourse section, Matthew brings Jesus's teaching on judgment to a close with his parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31–46). In the parable, the nations are gathered before the king, and he separates them into sheep and goats. The king informs the sheep that they will inherit his Father's kingdom because they fed him, gave him something to drink, welcomed him, clothed him, visited him, and came to him all when he was in need (25:35–36). They are surprised, and the king explains that when they did these things for "one of the least of these [his] brothers," they did it for him (25:40).

The opposite is true of the goats. They will receive "eternal punishment" because they did not help the king in these ways when he was in need (25:46). They are

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[136] For a more thorough discussion of this woe, see chap. 4.

similarly surprised, but he explains that they did not help him because they did not help "the least of these" (25:42–45). Jesus's parable develops Matthew's portrayal of mercy in several ways. First, it is important to note the prominence of the virtue of mercy here, despite the lack of explicit mercy language. This prominence should not be a surprise given its frequent focus throughout Matthew's Gospel, but here mercy as care for those in need is placed above other virtues of discipleship in a stark way: in Jesus's final parable on judgment, the sole quality required for inheriting the kingdom is *mercy*.[137]

Second, the universality of the mercy required for entrance into the kingdom parallels the universality of Jesus's own mercy portrayed throughout the rest of Matthew's narrative. While there are good reasons to understand "the least of these my brothers" more narrowly as Christian disciples or missionaries, a broader understanding more appropriately expresses Jesus's calls to and embodiment of a boundary-breaking mercy motivated by radical love that extends even to enemies.[138] As Davies and Allison write, "Is not the identification of the needy with all in distress more consistent with the command to ignore distinctions between insiders and outsiders and with Jesus' injunction to love even enemies? . . . 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy' requires

[137] As Konradt writes,

> That here compassionate turning to the needy is declared to be this criterion corresponds to the preceding emphasis on compassion and love for the neighbor as the very center of God's will (5:43–48; 12:7; 19:19; 22:34–40; 23:23). From the point of view of the history of tradition, Matthew's emphasis on such acts of mercy is entirely in line with the ethics of the Old Testament and early Judaism (cf. e.g., Job 22:5–10; Isa 58:5–10; T. Zeb. 6:1–7:4; 2 En. 9:1; Midr. Pss. On 118:17). The listing of the hungry, thirsty, strangers, those without (adequate) clothing, those sick and imprisoned, is illustrative, not exhaustive. Wherever people are needy and in distress, compassion and love for the neighbor are required; accordingly, the list of merciful acts must always be reformulated according to social conditions. (Konradt, *Matthew*, 378)

[138] For an overview of the interpretive options, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:428–29. For the narrower view, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 957–60; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:279–82. While "brothers" often refers to disciples (e.g., 12:48–50; 18:15, 21, 35; 23:8; 28:10), it can also express an implicitly more general sense (i.e., fellow human beings), as in 5:22–34 and 7:3–5. Furthermore, the superlative ἐλάχιστος occurs in 25:40 and 45, but μικρός in 10:42–44; 11:11; 18:6, 10, 14. The identity of this group, therefore, is not as clear as it may seem at first glance. Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:429; Konradt, *Matthew*, 377.

no qualification."[139] Nevertheless, even if one understands "the least of these" to refer primarily to disciples, the mercy embodied and taught by Jesus throughout Matthew requires one to pursue mercy as a virtue and thus holistically. To be merciful toward some in need and not others is, therefore, not virtuous. Thus, those who show mercy to disciples in need are almost certainly those who also show mercy to all in need.[140]

Third, this parable highlights the virtuous nature of mercy and its relationship to righteousness. The king gives five examples of the types of mercy that the sheep showed to him, implying that no one act alone encompasses the entirety of the mercy shown. While he explains that they showed mercy to "one of the least of these," this broad list and the heightened importance of mercy for inheriting the kingdom imply that it is not simply one isolated act of mercy being rewarded but a life marked by mercy. In other words, the sheep are the *merciful* of 5:7. Their life has been marked by a consistent and practiced mercy shown toward others. Furthermore, Jesus calls the sheep "the righteous [οἱ δίκαιοι]" (25:37). Their merciful disposition toward others thus contributes to their righteousness. As they pursue the individual virtue of mercy, therefore, they pursue righteousness, which serves as Matthew's overall category of virtue. This appellation of "the righteous" also brings to mind the discussions of wholeness in the Sermon. In showing mercy toward "the least of these," the sheep's desires, motivations, and actions are all holistically aligned with the Father's will. The reader, receiving

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[139] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 3:429. See also Konradt, *Matthew*, 377–78; Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2:326–28.

[140] Furthermore, the parable does not teach that showing mercy *specifically* toward Christians or Christian missionaries indicates their acceptance of Jesus's message. Though disagreeing with my broader understanding of "the least of these," France helpfully writes,

> It is probably right to read "these my smallest brothers and sisters" as a description of disciples. But to draw that conclusion does not establish that the "sheep" are commended because their treatment of disciples reveals their positive attitude to Jesus himself. For the striking feature of this judgment scene is that both sheep and goats claim that they *did not know* that their actions were directed toward Jesus. Each is as surprised as the other to find their actions interpreted in that light. They have helped, or failed to help, not a Jesus recognized in his representatives, but a Jesus *incognito*. As far as they were concerned, it was simply an act of kindness to a fellow human being in need, not an expression of their attitude to Jesus. (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 958–59)

Jesus's teaching secondhand through the lens of the disciples, is thus confronted with these two groups—the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the unrighteous—and once again is implicitly called to evaluate his own life of discipleship and which of these groups he would fall in. For Matthew, the disciple should pursue mercy, just as he has seen Jesus teach and embody throughout, and as a result seek the righteousness required for entrance into the kingdom.

Conclusion

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew portrays mercy as a compassionate feeling followed by merciful action. Often as a response to faith, Jesus shows mercy to those who come to him in need of healing and forgiveness, and Jesus encourages disciples to follow his example in embodying mercy. In this sense, mercy is a *virtue* for Matthew, encompassing the whole of the disciple's being—both inner motivations and outer actions. Disciples, therefore, are not simply to *do* acts of mercy but to *become*, as Jesus says, merciful (5:7), and the disciple's mercy toward others is a response to the mercy that they have received from God himself through Jesus. As God is faithful toward the disciple expressed in mercy through Jesus, the disciple responds to God's mercy by refracting that mercy outward toward others. Figure 3 below visualizes this relationship between the disciple's reception and embodiment of mercy:

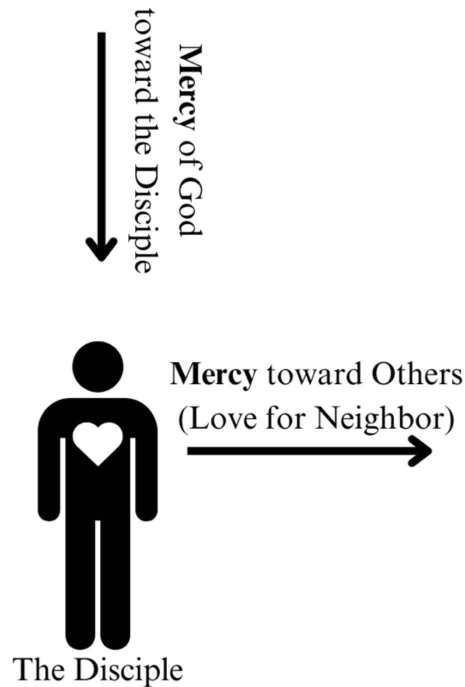

Figure 3. The virtue of mercy

Note: The line pointing down toward the disciple represents God's mercy toward the disciple, and the line pointing outward represents the disciple's own mercy toward others, motivated by love for neighbor. The disciple's own mercy expressed toward others, therefore, is a response to the mercy that he himself has received from God.

The disciple fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor. I have shown that Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one's love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. Through the narrative examples of Joseph and Jesus, who embody mercy toward others, through Jesus's conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees, who serve as negative examples opposed to mercy, and of course, through Jesus's continued calls for his disciples to embody mercy toward others in compassion, generosity, care, and forgiveness, Matthew utilizes his

narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation encouraging his reader to embody mercy as a virtue of discipleship and thus become righteous.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Matthew's Gospel depicts a world in which disciples of Jesus pursue righteousness *by* embodying the two virtues of faith and mercy. As the disciple seeks to love both God and neighbor, he expresses this love by trusting God in faith and showing mercy to others in need. Matthew utilizes the relationship between the implied author and reader, influencing through his storytelling the moral evaluation of certain characters and stories. He depicts characters in varying lights, from positive to negative and somewhere in between, in order to confront the reader with his own virtue or vice, urging him toward identification with, or distance from, certain characters that lead to his own virtue-formation. He also shapes his plot in order to build the reader's understanding of Jesus, his mission, and the reader's place within it. Through these narrative means, Matthew encourages his reader toward greater righteousness.

In doing so, Matthew reflects a convention of many narratives and certainly of similar Greco-Roman biographies—utilizing narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within readers. In this sense, the reader implicitly becomes the disciple of the subject of the biography. By sitting under the teaching of Jesus via Matthew's Gospel and through witnessing his virtuous life (and the virtuous and vicious lives of those surrounding him), the reader as disciple is called to greater virtue and moral discernment in his own life. Virtue-formation, proves essential, then, to the master-disciple relationship envisioned by Matthew between Jesus and Matthew's reader. As the reader understands more clearly his *identity* as a disciple of Jesus through reading Matthew's narrative, he begins to embody righteousness through faith and mercy more *holistically*—aligning his whole person with God's will as interpreted by Jesus himself, motivated by his love for God and

love for neighbor. In what follows, I review this argument in depth, provide several implications and opportunities for further research, and finally conclude my thesis.

Review of Argument

Any understanding of Matthean discipleship must begin with the nature of the Gospel's genre and its propensity for virtue-formation (chapter 2). Virtue-formation in Greco-Roman biography is often centered in the author's stated aim and characterization of the subject, which implicitly encourages imitation by the reader. The reader's involvement is also necessary for virtue-formation—identifying with the subject, evaluating his morality throughout the narrative, and wisely seeking virtue by applying what he has learned in his own context. Any narrative method used to analyze the Gospels must, therefore, offer narrative tools for understanding virtue-formation while remaining firmly planted within the Gospels' context as examples of Greco-Roman biography.

While there are certainly dangers in appropriating tools from modern literary criticism for understanding the Gospels, a *via media* approach is most helpful, utilizing aspects of narrative criticism in order to understand the virtue-formation offered by Matthew's Gospel, while firmly seated within a clear understanding of Matthew's place within ancient biographical tradition and the tradition's conventions.[1] J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended in Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew's Gospel in this light. Martha Nussbaum identifies three elements of Aristotle's understanding of practical reasoning that Dryden then applies to the value of narrative: plurality and noncommensurability, the

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[1] J. de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 104–5, 121. See also Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 6.

priority of particulars, and the centrality of emotions.[2] As Dryden summarizes the Aristotelian understanding of practical reasoning, "So, discernment (φρόνησις) uses intellectual and affective perception of situational particulars to judge right actions among the claims of incommensurable goods."[3] Based on this foundational understanding of practical reasoning that highlights narrative's particular potential for virtue-formation, Dryden provides a helpful taxonomy—three ways narratives communicate and instill morals or values within readers.[4] For Dryden, narratives instill values implicitly through the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader, the intensity and mode of identification with characters, and the shape of their plots.[5] The narrative, then, provides the reader with "secondhand experience," which uniquely positions the reader to embody the virtues exhibited within it.[6] This secondhand experience inherently expands the reader's own experience, instilling the values of the narrative within the reader and allowing him to embody its virtues.[7]

Matthew, whose Gospel participates in this genre which is often focused on virtue-formation, utilizes his own narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus (chapter 3). In the ancient world more broadly, moral development often proved central to the master-disciple relationship, and Matthew's Gospel implicitly calls its readers to discipleship, seeking their moral

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[2] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56–84.

[3] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 115.

[4] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 115–19.

[5] Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 116–19.

[6] Marshall W. Gregory, *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 62.

[7] Gregory, *Shaped by Stories*, 67. See also Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism, and Self-Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 60.

development through both explicit means—Matthew's many examples of Jesus's moral teaching (the five discourses, several minor discourses [e.g., 11:7–19, 21–30; 19:28–20:16], the Great Commission)—and implicit means—Matthew's presentation of the relationship between the implied author and reader, character identification, and plot trajectory. This moral development, furthermore, is best described in Matthew as virtue-formation.

While variation certainly existed within the different philosophical schools, Julia Annas describes virtue in ancient thought as dispositional, affective, and intellectual.[8] Virtue, then, requires wholistic learning, imitation, and habituation, often within peer and master-disciple relationships. Building off the work of both Annas and Max Lee, then, virtue-formation is the development of particular dispositions and actions based on the model and teaching of a master.[9] The discipleship identity and relationship with Jesus envisioned by Matthew's Gospel extends to the reader himself and provides the setting for the type of relational learning required for virtue-formation. Jesus's teaching, centered upon the call to learn from both his explicit teaching and his lived practice (11:28–30), along with his frequent emphasis on the necessity of *wholeness*—both inward and outward transformation in line with Jesus's teaching—underscores Matthew's interest in virtue-formation.

Matthew's interest in virtue-formation, then, is primarily directed toward *disciples*, and in Matthew's narrative, the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus is righteousness (chapter 4). A close narrative analysis of righteousness—centered in the Sermon but broadened to include Matthew's entire narrative—results in a picture of Matthean righteousness as virtue itself. In other words, righteousness serves as

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[8] Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 78–79.

[9] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; Max J. Lee, *Moral Transformation in Greco-Roman Philosophy of Mind: Mapping the Moral Milieu of the Apostle Paul and His Diaspora Jewish Contemporaries*, WUNT 515 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

Matthew's highest moral category, an umbrella category of morality under which individual virtues, like faith and mercy, may be situated. In Jewish thought, righteousness reflects similarities with both the broad and particular senses we find in broader Greco-Roman thought—both the comprehensive social virtue, or even virtue itself, and the more particular justice or equity—while remaining firmly planted in the Jewish concept of God's covenant with his people. Righteousness, therefore, refers both to God's own righteous actions toward his people and the world more broadly and to humans' own actions toward God and others that align with God's Law.

Throughout the entirety of Matthew's narrative, he portrays righteousness as wholistic alignment with God's will as expressed through Jesus's authoritative interpretation of the Law, and throughout Matthew, this righteousness is comprised of the two primary virtues of faith and mercy. Figure 1 below visually represents the relationship between these concepts in Matthew.

Matthew encourages his reader toward embodying righteousness through (1) offering Joseph (1:19), John (3:15; 23:32), and Jesus (3:15; 27:19) as examples of righteousness; (2) recounting Jesus's teaching on righteousness in the Sermon; and (3) reinforcing the disciples' identity as "the righteous" by identifying them with both the "the righteous" of old and the eschatological "righteous" while contrasting them with the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Love, furthermore, serves as the central motivating affection that undergirds Matthean righteousness. While not a frequent theme throughout Matthew as a whole, its prominence at key points in Matthew's narrative highlights love as central to the way that Matthew understands discipleship. The command to love one's neighbor occurs three times (5:43; 19:19; 22:39), and the double love command provides Jesus's understanding of the greatest of all God's commandments (22:34–40) and Jesus's own interpretive lens for the Law. Jesus's conception of greater righteousness (5:20) and his understanding of the greatest commandment of the Law are thus inextricably linked. As the disciple pursues the individual virtues of faith in God and mercy toward others,

properly motivated by love for God and love for neighbor, he pursues the greater righteousness to which Jesus calls him (5:20).

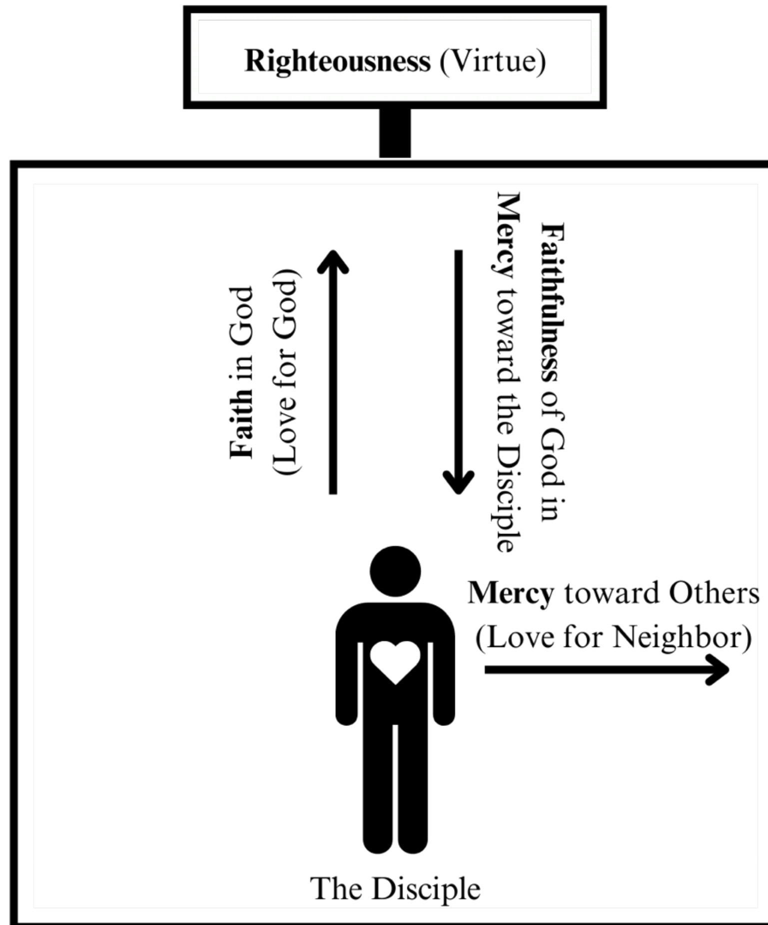

Figure 1. Righteousness as virtue

Note: The box surrounding the disciple indicates that righteousness—as Matthew's highest moral category of virtue—encapsulates what it means to be a disciple, including the disciple's faith in God, motivated by love for God, and his mercy toward others, motivated by love for neighbor. This pursuit of righteousness is founded in God's faithfulness toward the disciple, often expressed in his mercy toward the disciple through Jesus.[10]

[10] This figure can also be found in chap. 4.

The first primary virtue of discipleship that comprises righteousness, therefore, is faith (chapter 5). Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one's love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous. Figure 2 below visualizes this relationship of faith: the disciple trusting in God as God is faithful toward the disciple (with Jesus serving as God's representative):

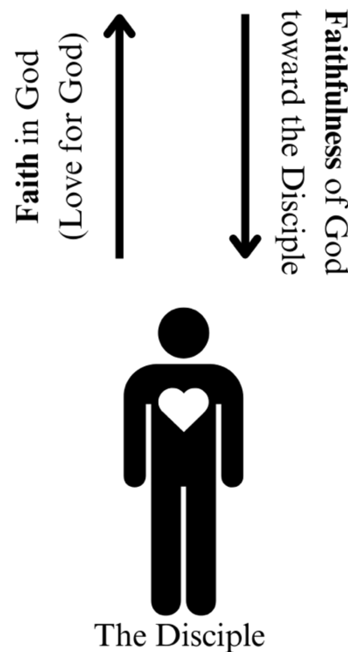

Figure 2. The virtue of faith

Note: The line pointing upward represents the disciple's faith in and faithfulness toward God, motivated by his love for God, and the line pointing back down to the disciple represents God's own faithfulness toward the disciple. These reciprocal lines, therefore, represent the relationship between God and the disciple, in which the disciple trusts in and is faithful toward God, as God is faithful toward him.[11]

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[11] This figure can also be found in chap. 5.

In the Greco-Roman world, faith most often refers to some kind of relational trust or fidelity and is often reciprocal. In this sense, faith is absolutely essential to communities and to society as a whole, and in Jewish thought, the relational dynamics of faith are often centered within the covenantal relationship between God and his people—God's faithfulness toward them and their trust in and faithfulness toward God.

Matthew builds upon this understanding, utilizing his narrative to present faith as both trust in and faithfulness to Jesus as God's authoritative representative. Central to his teaching in the Sermon, on trusting the Father for provision in every aspect of daily life (6:25–34), Matthew continues to portray Jesus teaching the disciples about the virtue of faith—requiring wholistic trust in God as a way of pursuing righteousness (17:14–21; 21:18–22; 24:45–51; 25:14–30). All the while, Matthew depicts characters who exhibit faith along a spectrum, from absolutely no faith, like the Jewish leaders and those in Jesus's hometown (13:53–58; 17:14–21; 23:23–24), to exemplary faith, like the centurion, Canaanite woman, and others (8:5–13; 9:1–8, 20–22, 27–31; 15:21–28; 18:1–9), to the in between "little faith" of the disciples (8:23–27; 14:22–33; 16:1–12; 17:14–20). Most importantly, Jesus embodies perfect faith in and faithfulness to God the Father in his humble trust and obedience to the Father's will in his death on the cross, shown by both his resolve in Gethsemane (26:36–46) and the Jewish leaders' ironic mocking of his faith on the cross (27:27:41–43). Through this narrative presentation, Matthew encourages his readers to embody the virtue of faith, motivated by their love for God in pursuit of greater righteousness.

The second primary virtue of discipleship that comprises righteousness is mercy (chapter 6). Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one's love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. Figure 3 below visualizes this relationship between the disciple's reception and embodiment of mercy:

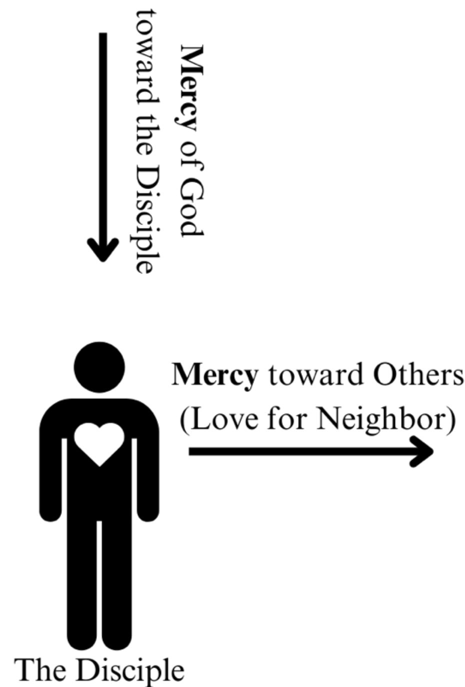

Figure 3. The virtue of mercy

Note: The line pointing down toward the disciple represents God's mercy toward the disciple, and the line pointing outward represents the disciple's own mercy toward others, motivated by love for neighbor. The disciple's own mercy expressed toward others, therefore, is a response to the mercy that he himself has received from God.[12]

Mercy in Jewish thought, reflecting similarity with that in Greco-Roman thought, may refer broadly to a characteristic of leniency toward others who deserve punishment, and its frequent use in political contexts describing a ruler's disposition toward his people bears similarities with the Jewish religious context describing God's disposition toward his people. The Jewish conception of mercy, however, remains decidedly planted within the context of God's covenant with his own people and his long history of *acting* mercifully toward his people, motivated by his love and compassion for them.

Building on this understanding, Matthew portrays mercy throughout his

[12] This figure can also be found in chap. 6.

narrative as a compassionate feeling followed by merciful action, which is fundamental to the life of discipleship. Centered in Jesus's teaching on mercy throughout the Sermon on the Mount (5:7; 6:2–4), Matthew fills out his reader's understanding of mercy through both Joseph and Jesus's embodiments of mercy (1:19; 9:27–31, 35–38; 14:13–14; 15:21–28, 32–39; 17:14–21; 20:29–34), conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees (9:9–13; 12:1–8; 23:23–24), and continued calls for his disciples to embody mercy toward others in compassion, generosity, care, and forgiveness (10:1–42; 18:21–35; 19:16–22; 25:31–46). Through this narrative presentation, Matthew encourages his readers to embody the virtue of mercy, motivated by their love for neighbor in pursuit of greater righteousness.

Thesis and Implications

Matthew, therefore, portrays the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus as righteousness, which serves as his overall category of virtue and is comprised of two primary virtues—faith and mercy. For Matthew, the disciple of Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor. As the reader encounters Matthew's narrative, therefore—Jesus's own direct teaching and lived example, along with characters who offer a wide range of positive, negative, and mixed examples—he is encouraged toward the formation of virtue that defines true discipleship.

This understanding—that Matthew's narrative utilizes teaching and lived examples through characters for the purpose of virtue-formation within his readers—implies that *any* narrative holds the potential for virtue-formation within its reader. And in narratives as theologically and ethically interested as the Gospels, understanding the virtue-formation they encourage and how they go about it is essential to understanding their narratives as a whole. The evangelists did not write their Gospels *only* to recount the events of Jesus's life but also to influence their readers to *respond* to Jesus's life in a

certain way. For Matthew, I have shown that this virtue-formation centers around embodying greater righteousness *by* pursuing faith in God and mercy toward others. The other Gospels likely utilize similar narrative means to produce similar ends in their readers. Similar studies on the other Gospels, therefore, may bring new light to our understanding of Mark, Luke, and John.

My understanding of the relationship between righteousness, faith, and mercy, furthermore, holds value for Christian ethics at large. For Matthew, righteousness serves as the overall moral category of virtue under which *all* other virtues fall—faith and mercy most prominently, but also humility, wisdom, etc. Virtue ethics, as a form of Christian ethics, obviously bears particular affinities with Matthew's moral scheme, but this way of understanding Christian morality—with righteousness as the overall category of virtue and all other virtues contributing to it—is a simple yet fruitful way of understanding the Christian life and the virtue it requires. The Christian, as a disciple of Jesus, is to pursue the righteousness that Jesus himself embodied, and that righteousness is expressed through the daily learning and practice of individual virtues—trusting God for daily needs and showing mercy toward others in need through care, generosity, and forgiveness—at the feet of Jesus as master and teacher.

Opportunities for Further Research

My thesis provides several opportunities for further research. First, the importance of discipleship for Matthew (and the evangelists more broadly) lies in stark contrast to the seeming lack of interest in the term *disciple* as an identifier for Christians in early Christian literature outside of the Gospels and Acts. Trebilco discusses this question at length in *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*, concluding that "other language was clearly felt to express more adequately the

relationship between Christ and the Christian after the resurrection."[13] Trebilco goes on to show that the evangelists (perhaps excluding Mark) "are seeking to redefine the meaning of μαθηταί, so that it is not tied, for example, to itinerancy and abandoning livelihood, but is more suited to settled life in a Greco-Roman city."[14] Trebilco may be correct in his assessment, but he does not clearly answer the question of why the evangelists would collectively use this identifier intentionally *while the rest of the New Testament authors would not.* It is possible that the *genre* of narrative and perhaps even biography itself provides the answer. Because the term *disciple* referred at times narrowly to the Twelve, it has its most natural foundation within a narrative in which they are characters, with reader identification flowing from this historical narrative. Further research on the implications of narrative criticism on this particular question could bear fresh insight.

Second, the clear relationship between faith and mercy in Matthew's Gospel provides more room for correspondence between Pauline literature and the Gospels than has at times been assumed. Faith as pre-requisite for mercy and mercy as response to faith—two narrative realities in Matthew's Gospel—sound quite similar to the relationship between the two concepts in Paul. And while there are certainly distinctions between the relationship between faith and righteousness in Paul and Matthew, the disciple's embodiment of faith leading to the disciple's righteousness is also similar to the Pauline concept of one becoming righteous *by* faith (Rom 4:3; 5:1; Gal 2:16). While scholars have attempted to compare Matthean righteousness with Pauline righteousness over the years,[15] the relationship between faith and righteousness in Matthew has not

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[13] Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 232.

[14] Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity*, 242.

[15] See, for example, Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives*, SNTSMS 48 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

always been central to the conversation, so there is certainly room for fresh insight on this question.

Third, in regard to the three main concepts discussed in my thesis—righteousness, faith, and mercy—there is room for more work in comparing these concepts with contemporary Greco-Roman literature. While I offer brief overviews of the concepts in the ancient world, setting Matthew's use within the context of the Greco-Roman world, there are many interesting similarities and dissimilarities that require further study. Morgan's *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* is perhaps the most robust recent work of this type, but she focuses on the entire New Testament.[16] More work dedicated to Matthew's relation to the wider Greco-Roman intellectual world is needed. Mercy, in particular, has received surprisingly little devoted attention in Matthean scholarship, yet may hold the most promise for new insights in comparing Matthew's use with Greco-Roman literature. As I noted briefly in my overview, Matthew's portrayal of mercy, flowing from God's covenant with his people, is distinct from the often political virtue in the Greco-Roman world, and the breadth of philosophical discussion written on the concept would provide plenty of primary literature for comparison.

Fourth, while I understand faith and mercy to be the two primary virtues of discipleship comprising righteousness in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew, nevertheless, portrays virtues beyond these two that also reinforce and contribute to the disciple's righteousness. Humility (5:5; 10:24; 11:11, 25–30; 20:24–28; 23:12) and wisdom (11:19; 12:42; 13:54; 25:1–13) are perhaps most prominent among the others, and more attention to these two concepts in Matthew's narrative may be fruitful.[17] Love also proves central

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[16] Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[17] Good's article on meekness and humility as virtues in Matthew's Gospel is a helpful start, but there is certainly more that could be done. Deirdre Good, "Moral Dualism and Virtues in Matthew's Gospel," in *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs*, ed. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International, 1997), 101–23.

to Matthew's narrative, and more work, especially in relation to Matthew's context in the Greco-Roman world, is warranted. Furthermore, further research not only into Matthean virtues *but vices*—hypocrisy, doubt, fear, etc.—may provide even more insight into the virtue-formation offered to the reader in his narrative.

Conclusion

In his Gospel, Matthew portrays the life of discipleship through characters who encounter trials, suffering, and persecution, yet actively pursue faith in Jesus and his mercy toward them. Jesus's own life of trust in the Father, faithfulness toward him, and mercy toward others centers the narrative around his own example as the goal of discipleship—to become more like the master. As the reader encounters the characters surrounding Jesus, he sees Jesus's own virtue reflected in the lives of some characters yet more pronounced against the backdrop of others. And the instability of the Twelve's discipleship provides a starkly realistic picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The reader finds encouragement in the narrative to trust in Jesus amidst the many difficulties of a life following him, knowing that Jesus's own faithfulness to extend mercy toward even the most wavering disciple empowers him to pursue greater righteousness. Inviting the reader into his narrative world, therefore, Matthew encourages his reader to pursue wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor.

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ABSTRACT

THE VIRTUES OF DISCIPLESHIP: FAITH AND MERCY AS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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In this dissertation I argue that Matthew portrays the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus as righteousness, which serves as his overall category of virtue and is comprised of two primary virtues—faith and mercy. Matthew's portrayal of the relationship between these three key concepts in his narrative—righteousness, faith, and mercy—clarifies for the reader what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. For Matthew, the disciple of Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets by pursuing wholistic alignment—both inward and outward—with God's will (i.e., greater righteousness) through trusting in God and showing mercy toward others as expressions of love for God and love for neighbor. As the reader encounters Matthew's narrative—Jesus's own direct teaching and lived example, along with characters who offer a wide range of positive, negative, and mixed examples—he is encouraged toward the formation of virtue that defines true discipleship.

In chapter 1, I introduce my thesis and its significance, articulate my methodology, and outline my argument. In chapter 2, I argue that J. de Waal Dryden's three-part taxonomy of narrative's communication of values, when combined with a careful analysis of the virtue-formation intended in Greco-Roman biographies, provides a sound methodology for analyzing Matthew's Gospel. In chapter 3, I argue that Matthew utilizes his narrative for the purpose of virtue-formation within the lives of his readers as disciples of Jesus. In chapter 4, I argue that Matthew portrays righteousness as his overall

moral category—virtue itself—and the fundamental mark of the disciple of Jesus. In chapter 5 I argue that, Matthew portrays faith as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward God—that in trusting Jesus, motivated by one's love for God, the disciple himself becomes righteous. In chapter 6, I argue that Matthew portrays mercy as the individual virtue of discipleship directed toward others—that in embodying mercy toward others, motivated by one's love for neighbor, the disciple himself becomes righteous. In chapter 7, I conclude by reviewing my argument, re-articulating my thesis and discussing its implications, and offering opportunities for further research.

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