

A Longer Look at the Lessons

November 2020

Series A, All Saints' Day,
Propers 27-29

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:1–12

All Saints' Day

November 1, 2020

Matthew organized his Gospel in ways that would help him teach the Christian faith and life. At the outset, as he got into Jesus' ministry, he provided the Sermon on the Mount, a summary of Jesus' teaching about the righteousness of the disciple. Jesus insisted that faith is more than sentimental "believing" or merely intellectual agreement with theological propositions. It involves a relationship with Him that is expressed in a godly lifestyle that honors Him. The classic analysis of faith listed three ingredients: knowledge, assent, and trust. One Christian teacher has quite properly added action. In Christian discipleship, faith always acts on the basis of its trust in God's good will.

Scholars identify five "books" in Matthew, delineated by the phrase "when Jesus finished these sayings." In this first book, the Sermon on the Mount, the ending emphasizes Jesus' unique qualities as the Teacher sent from God: "When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (7:28–29).

The Greek says, "He sat down and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying" This was the classic way of introducing a teacher's setting forth something of vital importance. It says, "Sit up and take notice! This is Jesus' official teaching!" The nature of Jesus' kingdom is immediately evident. Things are turned around, the opposite of what we expect—but consistent with the surprising Good News that God loves sinners and wants us to find new life in Him. The eight statements are called the Beatitudes because each begins with "Blessed."

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called out, "Repent!" The first "Blessed" echoes that call and pertains to those whose poverty of spirit has produced true repentance. *Prochos*, "poor," is from a verb that describes cringing or crouching like a beggar. Pride is the antithesis of this poverty of spirit and prevents the proud from being blessed.

193. What blessing do the poor in spirit receive?

God's basic, most valuable gift is "righteousness"—being right with Him through Christ and right with others in Christ. "Hunger" and "thirst" are present tense in the Greek, suggesting "keep on hungering and thirsting."

196. Why must this hungering and thirsting for righteousness be continual?

The Greek word for "satisfied" is very emphatic. It was used for feeding and fattening cattle by giving them all they will eat and more!

197. Where is the Lord's "filling station" for this blessing?

The first four beatitudes look toward God. The next three look toward other people, citing virtues that disciples of Jesus display in their interaction with others.

198. Of what does "blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" remind you? Consider the opposite. What does one who is unmerciful and unforgiving reveal about how he feels about himself?

199. What is the source and basis of a Christian's purity of heart? Paul said we will see God "face-to-face" in heaven. How do the pure in heart see God now as part of their daily life experience?

200. Why is it the peacemakers who are called "sons [and daughters] of God"? What limits are there in this matter of peacemaking? (See Romans 12:18; Luke 12:51–53.)

God's ways and the world's ways are usually antithetical. State this by working through the Beatitudes in this way: Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," but our world says, "Blessed are those with very high self-esteem."

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:1–13

November 8, 2020

The parable of the ten virgins warns Christians to be wise and watchful, ready for their Lord's return in glory. Combine it with the parable of the talents, which follows it, and you know clearly that Christian watchfulness is not a matter of lazy waiting, but calls us to faithful use of all Jesus has entrusted to us as we work and wait expectantly for Him.

The story base of the parable is that of a grand Jewish wedding. In Jewish society of that day, it was the betrothal, the formal agreement between two families or two individuals, that was the legally binding action. Though the betrothed continued to live in their separate homes and families for a time—sometimes for as long as a year—they were legally husband and wife. Then, on a scheduled evening, the bridegroom and his friends went in festive procession to the home of the bride to bring her and her maiden companions in procession to the groom's house for the consummation of the marriage with its days of wedding festivities. This story speaks to all Christians (ten is the Bible's number of completeness) as we watch and wait for our heavenly Bridegroom to take us, His Bride, the Church, to the heavenly wedding feast.

244. What is the point around which the parable turns?

245. What is the oil that will ensure that our lamps, our lives, will be burning brightly when Jesus returns as Bridegroom and King?

246. What is suggested by the fact that all ten thought they were ready for the bridegroom, but the foolish ones learned only when it was too late that they were not properly prepared for his coming? (See Matthew 7:21–23.)

247. What is stressed by the fact that the wise virgins could not share their oil with the foolish ones?

248. Where can we get oil for our life-lamps that will have them burning brightly with faith, hope, and love as we wait for our Lord? (See Matthew 11:27–30; 2 Timothy 3:14–17.)

A daily practice of Dr. Horatio Bonar reminds us that we should live with a sense of urgency as we watch and wait. His last act each night before lying down to sleep was to draw aside the curtain and, looking up into the night sky, ask, “Tonight, Lord?” In the morning, his first movement was to look out the window at the dawn and ask, “Today, Lord?”

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:14–30

November 15, 2020

The parable of the talents is the second of three parables in Matthew 25, all of which tell what the kingdom of heaven is like and relate especially to Judgment Day. As we consider the parable, we must remember always that Jesus is that man and we are the slaves, bought at a price and entrusted with the message of reconciliation. (See 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2 Corinthians 5:14–21.)

260. On what does the point of Jesus' story turn? What does it say that the man gave one servant five talents, another two talents, and another one talent?

261. What does it say to us that the servant who gained two more talents for his master heard the very same commendation as the servant who gained five more?

We must keep in mind that it is faithfulness in using what He has entrusted to us that is honored by the Lord. And we need to remember that it is He Himself who must provide the results that He is looking for. (See 1 Corinthians 3:5–11; 4:1–2.)

262. When the time for the accounting came, how did the servant who had hidden his master's talent in the ground show he knew he was without excuse? Why did the master call him not only "slothful" but "wicked"?

263. Is it fair that the one who already had ten talents was given the one that was wasted by the lazy, wicked one? Since he did not steal his master's talent but returned it to him, is it fair that the "worthless servant" is thrown "into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"?

264. What is the emphasis of this parable of the talents that speaks to us regarding our lives as Jesus' disciples?

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:31–46

November 22, 2020

When Jesus referred to Himself in relation to His saving work, He usually avoided the title Messiah, which means “the anointed one.” Christ is the same word but from the Greek language. Among the Jews it had been associated mainly with the promise of a kingly messiah who would establish David’s throne forever. It had taken on definitely political overtones as they longed for someone to free them from Roman domination.

Jesus usually referred to Himself as “the Son of Man.” Also “Son of Man” was a messianic title drawn from Daniel’s prophetic vision, but it was not as commonly used—and surely was not suggestive of a glorious earthly kingdom of Israel, as “messiah” could be construed to mean. In Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats, a picture of the final judgment, the full thrust of the apocalyptic meaning of “Son of Man” comes through. His story is about the coming of the Son of Man, accompanied by all His angels, to sit on His throne in heavenly glory.

271. What is the obvious purpose for which all nations will be gathered before the glorious Son of Man on His throne? On what basis will He separate the sheep from the goats? (See John 3:16–18, 36.)

It is important to note that the King’s “Come, you who are blessed by My Father” to those on His right and His “Depart from Me, you cursed” to those on His left, as well as His words about their serving Him or not serving Him, all are spoken after the separation has already taken place. Martin Franzmann says in *Follow Me*: “Before a word is spoken or any deed of man is told, the Shepherd separates the nations and places them at his right hand and his left. He is the Judgment in person; the Christ Himself divides” (p. 183). (See Luke 12:49–53; Matthew 10:34–39.)

272. Since the separation and its eternal consequences had already been determined, why does the King make such a point of “as you did/did not do it to one of the least of these My brothers”?

273. Whom does He mean by “the least of these My brothers”? What is the point of His saying, “As you did/did not do it to one of the least of these, My brothers, you did/did not do it to Me”?

Franzmann adds in *Follow Me*: “Whether a man has been for Him or against Him has shown itself, not in men’s pious sentiments but in their deeds. And the King, the righteous Judge, unrolls the history of men before all eyes to show how the verdict which His action has pronounced has long since been written by the deeds of men. All deeds of mercy done to the least of these whom He in mercy calls His brethren have been a Yea to Him. . . . All deeds of mercy left undone have been a Nay to Him.” (p. 183)

274. What does this parable encourage in us, who rejoice that “one is justified by faith apart from works of the law”? (Romans 3:28; see also Galatians 5:6; James 2:14–26.)

275. What are some practical ways in which you can serve Jesus in serving the needy?

276. What if you were to take the approach “I’m saved by grace through faith; why should I bother to do works of service?”