

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with Jesus. God had been at work for a long time. Salvation, which is the main business of Jesus, is an old business. Jesus is coming together in final form of themes and energies and movements that had been set in motion before the foundation of the world.

Matthew opens the New Testament by setting the local story of Jesus in its world historical context. He makes sure that as we read his account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see the connections with everything that has gone before. "Fulfilled" is one of the Matthew's characteristic verbs; such and such happened "that it might be fulfilled." Jesus is unique, but is not odd.

Better yet, Matthew tells the story in such a way that not only is everything previous to us completed in Jesus; we are completed in Jesus. Every day we wake up in the middle of something that is already going on, that has been going on for a long time: genealogy and geology, history and culture, the cosmos—God. We are neither accidental or incidental to the story. We get orientation, briefing, background, reassurance.

Matthew provides the comprehensive context by which we see all God's creation and salvation completed in Jesus, and all the parts of our lives—work, family, friends, memories, dreams—also completed in Jesus. Lacking such a context, we are in danger of seeing Jesus as a mere diversion from the concerns announced in the newspapers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Commentary on Matthew from The Bible Project:

- <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/matthew/>
- <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/gospel-kingdom/>

Commentary on the "Sermon on the Mount" from bible.org:

- <https://bible.org/article/summary-understanding-sermon-mount>
- <https://bible.org/seriespage/44-sermon-mount>
- <https://bible.org/series/counter-cultural-christianity-sermon-mount-matthew-51-729>

READ Matthew 5

(The following discussion questions are adapted from The Serendipity Bible)

Opening

- What saying or bumper sticker do you keep on your desk or car?
- What's the best advice you have been given on how to deal with anger?

Digging in — Discovering the Word

- How would modern society evaluate Jesus' teachings in 5.3-12
- Is Jesus describing who his followers are? Or prescribing what they must do? Why do you think so?
- What kind of mourning do you feel Jesus is talking about in in verse 4?
- Who do you admire as a good example of meekness? How do they model humility?
- Where are you a "peacemaker": In your home? At work? At church? In your neighborhood? In what ways do you try to make peace?
- How are these beatitudes related to being salt and light (vv.13-16)?
- How would Jesus' teachings in this passage hold up in a court of law?
- In what ways are anger and murder connected? What new standard of right and wrong is Jesus creating?
- How does Jesus apply this new standard to the commandment about adultery? What is Jesus' point in using such exaggerated language (vv.29-30)?
- How is Moses' allowance for divorce (Dt 24:1-4) being misused? What inner quality is Jesus seeking instead?
- What is the heart of the matter regarding oaths? Why is keeping promises so important?
- What was the original intent of "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" (ex. 21:24; Lev 24:17-20)? How is this law being perverted? What qualities ought to replace those desires for revenge?
- What characteristic is to distinguish a Christian from a pagan? What actions demonstrate this characteristic?
- What is your initial reaction to verse 48? What challenge is Jesus presenting to you?
- Since turning your life over to God, what affect has this had on our ability to love others - even those who hurt you?

Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word

- This past week, did you feel more blessed or stressed? What can you do to be more focused on God's blessings in your life?
- When it comes to making things right with others who comes to mind? What steps could you take this week to reconcile with that person?
- Which of these moral demands challenges you the most?
- If these standards are like a doctor's thermometer to show us how sick we are, what is the medicine needed to heal us? What is the hope for us here?
- What do these teachings suggest about the direction in which God wants us to grow after we have received his mercy? Which of these qualities do you want to cultivate most right now? How would your life be different as God helps you to put this quality into action?