Chapter Three: An Analysis of the Kingdom Teaching in Matthew

In chapters one and two, I have investigated the socio-political context of the Christian community in Myanmar and that of the Matthean community as they both relate to a wider context. In some respects they were both found to be wrestling with their religious identities within the wider community as well as with socio-political pressures from outside. From my reading of the socio-political context of the Matthean community from the context of Myanmar, I would argue that Matthew arranges the kingdom teaching of Jesus systematically and symmetrically, beginning with the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This is followed by the challenge of the two ways, the description of the kingdom of heaven in parables, and the warnings for eschatological communities. These themes are developed throughout his Gospel in order to address the socio-political context encountered by his community. To make this argument, this chapter will investigate some specific texts: Matthew chapters 5-7, 13:1-50, and 25:1-13, 31-46, which focus on the kingdom teaching of Jesus. A closer investigation of these texts thus follows.
A. The Central Kingdom Teaching of Matthew: The Sermon on the Mount

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is the first of five great discourses which describes “the theme of Jesus’ teaching regarding Righteousness”.\(^1\) It presents “the first and main example of the ethical teaching of Jesus”,\(^2\) and is a central focus of Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ teaching and introduces the way of life of the kingdom.\(^3\) The recurring and unifying motif of the Sermon is the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10, 12, 19-20, 48; 6:9, 20; 7:21, and very rarely the kingdom of God, 6:33).\(^4\)

In the Great Commission of Matthew’s Gospel, the risen Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey “everything I have commanded you” (28:20), referring back to the great teaching discourses. These final words seem primarily to refer to the Sermon on the Mount, the foundation discourse on ethics. Ulrich Luz is thus right in stating that the Sermon is “the heart of the Great Commission to teach the Gentiles”.\(^5\)

Over the last few decades, some scholars have viewed the Sermon on the Mount in different ways. W. D. Davies, for example, argues that the Sermon on the Mount is to be regarded as the Christian response to Jamnia.\(^6\) On the other hand, Betz claims that the whole Sermon is to be seen as a pre-Matthean and anti-Pauline tradition. Though Matthew has no doubt drawn much material from pre-Matthean traditions, as Betz argues, the evidence of the whole narrative of the Gospel shows that Matthew reshaped and re-

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\(^2\) Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 82.
\(^3\) Byrne, *Lifting the Burden*, 51.
\(^6\) Davies, *The Setting*, 315.
interpreted these kingdom teachings of Jesus considerably within his own context. Thus I will argue in this section that the Sermon on the Mount is not so much a Christian response to Jamnia nor primarily pre-Matthean tradition but substantially Matthew’s redaction on the theme of Jesus’ kingdom teaching.

The sayings of the Sermon on the Mount are partly derived from Q (cf. Luke 6:20-49) with other scattered Q sayings and a considerable amount of material unique to Matthew. It seems to me unlikely that all the material in the Sermon was preached at the same time in the same place on a particular Mount. This is because, as I will argue further, the context of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is different from that of Luke. Most material unique to Matthew and his editorial handiwork is also related to a distinctive Jewish flavour. In broad terms, the Sermon on the Mount thus appears to be addressing an audience from a Jewish background while the Sermon on the Plain in Luke is directed more to an audience from a Greek background.

The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of Jesus’ teaching bearing in different ways on the theme of discipleship, which Matthew has rearranged to fit the context of his community. Matthew carefully evaluates these materials and synthesises them to fit his own reconstructed discourse. He provides Jesus’ words with a new theological and ethical

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7 So also Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 73; and Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 324; both affirm the importance of Matthean redaction in the Sermon on the Mount.
9 So argued by Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 83.
11 This is a position widely accepted even by more conservative scholars, such as France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 105-106; and Donald A. Hagner, “Ethics and the Sermon on the Mount”, *ST* 51 (1997): 44. Hagner rightly states that the Sermon on the Mount is “an artificial construction of the Evangelist” which “contains a reliable representation” of “the actual teaching of the Jesus of history”. See also Luz, *Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 44.
emphasis in order to encourage his community in the critical situation they face.\textsuperscript{12} The contents of the sermon as a whole are fundamentally Jewish, “while at some points they admittedly go beyond what is typically Jewish teaching and reflect the originality of Jesus (e.g., 5:39-42, 44; 7:12, which puts in positive form what Judaism expressed negatively)”, so the Sermon had special relevance for the response of his Jewish-Christian readers.\textsuperscript{13}

Relevant questions to be considered in this section are: Why did Matthew place the Sermon on the Mount in the first part of his Gospel? Why did he include more Jewish materials in Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? What was the theological significance of his emphasis on the Mount rather than the Plain? A further investigation thus follows.

\textit{i) The Introduction of the Sermon (Matt 5:1-16)}

The Sermon on the Mount is best described in three parts: the introduction, which heightens the kingdom blessing (5:1-16); the main body of the Sermon, which reconstructs the social ethics and religious ethics for the community, with the warning and admonishment to practise these instructions (5:17-7:12); and the conclusion of the Sermon, which challenges the community about which way they will choose (7:13-28).

\textsuperscript{12} As argued also by Herman Hendrickx, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount} (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1979), 5; and Overman, \textit{Church and Community in Crisis}, 73-75.

\textsuperscript{13} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 83.
i. a) The Setting (5:1-2)

Matthew’s context for the Sermon is different from that of Luke. There are four different emphases between Luke’s Sermon on the Plain and Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. Firstly when Luke focuses on the Sermon on the plain, Matthew emphasises the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:1 and Luke 6:17). Secondly, whereas Luke’s Jesus is in the midst of the crowd, Matthew’s Jesus is separated from the crowd, that is, Jesus is seated respectfully as a teacher, and it is arguable that Matthew assumes a hierarchy: Jesus, surrounded by the apostles and then by the crowd (as in the rabbinic style, cf. 5:1; 7:28 and Luke 6:17 [the crowds!]). Thirdly when Luke’s Jesus is lifting up his eyes, Matthew’s Jesus is opening his mouth instead (cf. 5:2 and Luke 6:20). Finally, whereas Luke’s Sermon occurs after the choosing of the twelve apostles, Matthew’s Sermon occurs after the choosing of just four apostles (cf. 4:18-22 and Luke 6:12-16).

Matthew begins the Sermon with the ascension of Jesus up the mountain, opening his mouth and teaching the disciples and the crowds (5:1-2 and 7:28). Hagner rightly observes that Matthew carefully constructs the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount by starting with Jesus ascending the mountain (providing a special place for a special revelatory event — like a new Sinai), sitting down, with his disciples coming to him (as they would to a rabbinic teacher), then opening his mouth and instructing them — all in order to heighten the weighty importance of what Jesus was about to say.\(^{14}\)

In the Gospel of Matthew, the ‘mountain’ is a significant place where special events occur (for example, 4:8, the mountain of temptation; 17:1, the mountain of transfiguration; 28:16, the mountain of a resurrection appearance and the Great

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Commission). T. L. Donaldson links the mountain with a Zion-oriented eschatology, providing a scene for the Messiah’s renewal of Torah for his eschatological people. Allison argues that, “if the opening of the Sermon on the Mount be linked up with Sinai, then Matt 1-5 in all its parts reflects a developed exodus typology”. Many scholars regard the mountain as part of Hebrew typology, by which Matthew recalls the revelation of God in Exodus in giving the Law to his own people (cf. Exod 19-20; 34). The deliberate allusion to Jesus going up the Mountain indicates that Matthew likens Jesus to Moses. Matthew presents Jesus as superior to Moses, however: Jesus did not receive the Torah from God, but he himself is Messiah, the Son of God, from whose mouth the Law proceeds and who came to renew and fulfil the Law without the added oral traditions and Pharisaic teachings (5:17). All ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount demand radical discipleship and are set against the background of eschatological judgment.

i. b) The Beatitudes (5:3-16)

The Sermon begins with the beatitudes of Jesus. These beatitudes describe the attitudes of true disciples who accept the demands and realities of God’s kingdom. Their rewards are described in the second half of each saying. Four of these beatitudes are also found in Luke 6:20-23. It seems that Matthew dismisses Q/Luke’s four woes against the

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15 T. L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (JSNTSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 111-118.
19 Hagner argues that for Matthew, “Jesus is far more than a new Moses, and his teaching is not to be construed as a new law. Indeed, Jesus can teach as he does because of his unique identity as the Messiah, the Son of God”. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 86. Similar arguments are also made by France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 107; Harrington, *Matthew*, 82; and Byrne, *Lifting the Burden*, 51.
rich and extends the four beatitudes to eight. The original form of these beatitudes is closer to Q/Luke’s version where Jesus teaches directly to his audiences in the second person. In Matthew, the pronouns of the eight beatitudes are in the third person (cf. 5:3-10 and Luke 6:20-26). Only the pronouns in Matthew 5:11-12 and the double parables ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world’ (5:13-16) which follow it are in the second person. Arguably Matthew rearranges the narrative of Matthew 5:3-16 into two parts. The first part is the eight beatitudes taught by Jesus to his disciples and the crowds in the third person (5:3-10). The deliberate change of the pronoun from the third to second person in Matthew 5:11-12 followed by the implications of discipleship in the second part (5:13-16) shows that Matthew redirects the implications of kingdom blessing into his own community.  

The Teaching of Kingdom Blessing (5:3-10)

Matthew’s first section of eight beatitudes describes the blessed as those who are poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Scholars contend that these eight beatitudes (5:3-10) should be subdivided in two parts: the first four beatitudes find their focus primarily in a state of mind or an attitude (5:3-6), while the later four relate to attitudes toward others (5:7-10). Each beatitude in the first part speaks about reversal for the unfortunate and in the second part describes rewards for the virtuous.  

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23 So argued also by Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 93; and Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom”, CBQ 58 (1996): 462.
The first beatitude declares: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (5:3). The phrase ‘poor in spirit’ is Matthew’s redaction of Q ‘poor’ (cf. Luke 6:20). Matthew’s ‘poor in spirit’ refers neither to socio-economic poverty alone as in Luke, nor to the spiritually poor. A convincing argument has been made by Mark Allan Powell that ‘poor in spirit’ refers to those “who have no reason for hope in this world, period”. It also denotes ‘a beggar’. Thus Matthew’s ‘poor in spirit’ implies a beggar for spiritual need, that is, those who humbly depend on God’s grace. These are designated as the disciples of Jesus who “embrace the poverty of their condition by trusting in God” and “whose only identity and security is in God” (1:21). This beatitude also appears to recall the Old Testament texts, which outline the beatitudes for the ‘poor’ or ‘meek’ (Isa 61:1-2, 4; Ps 37:5). The kingdom of heaven, according to Matthew belonged to these people for they have the identity of God’s people.

The second beatitude declares: “Blessed are those who mourn” (5:4). The phrase is unlikely to refer to those who mourn for repentance for their sins or in sorrow over the dead. Rather, it indicates “the abject condition of persecuted disciples”. They are particularly “those who suffer for their loyalty to God” (cf. 5:3). This beatitude reflects the suffering of those who were under the burden of heavy taxes and who mourn because

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24 According to Hagner, the addition ‘in spirit’ has often been misinterpreted, but in fact “Matthew or the tradition before him has not ‘spiritualised’ the Lukian (and probably original) form of the beatitude”. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 91.
26 Gundry argues that originally the bare term “stressed the humiliation of poverty. Matthew’s addition emphasises relying on God within the spirit, as opposed to depending on visible means of support, such as wealth and the power it brings”. Gundry, Matthew, 67. So also argued, in a similar way, by Douglas R. Hare, Matthew (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 37; France, The Gospel According to Matthew, 109.
28 Gundry, Matthew, 68-69. Gundry states that Matthew wants conformity to the Lord’s mission “to comfort all who mourn” by drawing this beatitude from “later material in the tradition: the correspondence to Isa 61:2 makes natural its replacement after a beatitude alluding to Isa 61:1”.
the system was rigged unjustly “in favour of the rich and the powerful”. God will comfort these people because of their loyalty to God (11:28).

The third beatitude asserts: “Blessed are the meek” (5:5). The meek in this phrase is synonymous to ‘poor in spirit’ (5:3), which implies the “acceptance of a lowly position”. This characterises “those who are aware of their identity as the oppressed people of God in this world, those who have renounced the violent methods of this-worldly power”. More accurately they are “the humble oppressed saints of God”. They are people of non-violence, who are gentle and humble in all their dealings with others and who are humble before God. This also indicates their identity, which is in Jesus (11:29; 12:15-21; 21:5). These people according to Matthew will inherit the earth, which is “an eschatological metaphor for participation in the renewed earth” (19:28).

The fourth beatitude declares: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (5:6). Matthew redacts the ‘hunger’ of Q (Luke 6:21) to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’. ‘Righteousness’ is a strong theme in Matthew’s Gospel (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32). In Matthew’s Gospel, ‘righteousness’ means not the legally righteous but those doing the will of God in practice (7:23). It is a demand for “conduct in keeping with the will of God seen in relationship to others and to God” (5:20, 21-48; 6:1-18). Thus Boring rightly states that the fourth beatitude refers to those “who long for the coming of

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30 Hare, Matthew, 38.  
31 See the comment of Gundry, Matthew, 69.  
33 Hill, Matthew, 111.  
34 Hare, Matthew, 39.  
36 See further in chapter four below.  
God’s kingdom and the vindication of right, which will come with it, and who on the basis of this hope actively do God’s will now”.  

The fifth beatitude affirms: “Blessed are the merciful” (5:7). This passage has no parallel in Q/Luke, but echoes Hosea 6:6, which describes, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (see also 9:13; 12:7). For Matthew, “mercy is the focal point of Jesus’ message, which shows what it means to fulfil the Law” (5:17-20; 9:13; 12:7; 25:31-46). Matthew also heightens the significance of mercy in Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21-35). The reward for these people is expressed in eschatological terms, that is, they will obtain mercy in the last day.

The sixth beatitude asserts: “Blessed are the pure in heart” (5:8). This beatitude also has no parallel in Q/Luke. The term ‘pure in heart’ is a Jewish expression, which is reflected in the piety of the Hebrew psalms (Ps 23:4; 50:12; 73:1). This expression refers to the central behaviour — reflecting human wants, thoughts, attitudes and motifs — which indicates the complete integrity and sincerity of one’s existence before God. These people, who can stand openly, transparently and humbly before the Divine, will see the face of God.

The seventh beatitude proclaims: “Blessed are the peacemakers” (5:9). This beatitude seems to speak against “the Zealots, the Jewish revolutionaries who hoped through violence to bring the kingdom of God”. The ‘peacemakers’ here refer to those who devote themselves in the hard work of reconciliation among the hostile individuals or...

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39 Schweizer, Matthew, 92. This section will be developed further later on.
40 Talbert, Reading the Sermon, 53.
41 Luz, Matthew 1-7, 238-239.
42 So also Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 94; and Guelich, The Sermon, 90.
43 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 94.
groups or nations. Matthew also heightens the significant role of ‘peacemaker’ in the later parts of the Sermon (5:24, 43-48). The reward for these people is that they will be called the children of God.

The eighth beatitude reassures the victims of oppression: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (5:10). This is a typically Matthean addition. This beatitude reflects the situation of the Matthean community under the experience of persecution. Matthew looks back on this persecution, which had happened earlier, and encourages his readers not to be surprised or alarmed by such experiences, but to endure it. Like the first beatitude, the kingdom of heaven belongs especially to these people.

In sum, the first four beatitudes emphasise the persecuted and impoverished condition of Jesus’ followers, and the second four emphasise the “ethical qualities which led to their persecution”. Each beatitude in the first statement describes the believers’ present whereas the second half, promising a new perspective, represents the anticipation of eschatological benefits. Unlike Luke, Matthew carefully embodies the kingdom beatitudes into three forms: the meek will inherit ‘the earth’; the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteous sake will obtain ‘the kingdom of heaven’; and the pure in heart and the peacemakers will see God, be called God’s children, and thus also be related to the kingdom of heaven. At this point, I agree with W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann in their observation that Matthew is very careful in distinguishing between the ‘kingdom’ or ‘kingdom of God’ and the ‘kingdom of heaven’. The kingdom of heaven speaks about the

44 Hare, Matthew, 42.
45 Gundry, Matthew, 72.
46 So Hill, Matthew, 113; Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 95; and Luz, Matthew 1-7, 242.
47 Gundry, Matthew, 73.
continuing community of the people and the kingdom of God represents the reign of God the Father. The kingdom of heaven is preparing the way for the kingdom of God.\footnote{As argued more fully by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, \textit{Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes} (AB 26; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), 155; and John Christopher Thomas, “The Kingdom of God in the Gospel According to Matthew”, \textit{NTS} 39 (1993): 136-146. Nau also argues that the kingdom of heaven(s) is “the dominant dimension in the author’s cosmology — inclusive, unlimited, timeless, inescapable, the one true reality. It is the arena of all spiritual activity. It is in this present world, co-existing with the visible kingdoms of this world, but having its own brand of ethics, economy, citizenship and politics”, and the scope of the kingdom of God appears “to be narrower, referring only to the spiritual realm or dimension in its eschatological perfected state where God the Father’s absolute rule is recognized as the prevailing condition”. Nau, \textit{The Impact of Context}, 207, 210.}

Moreover, the special material of Matthew such as reference to ‘the meek’, ‘the merciful’, ‘the pure in heart’, ‘the peacemakers’, and ‘those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’ indicates that the Beatitudes were edited in the light of the persecution and hardship at the time of Matthew. This is evident especially in the abrupt transition in the pronoun from third to second person in the last beatitude (5:11-12). The additional Beatitudes and the changing of the Q sayings therefore confirm that Matthew is particularly concerned with an ethical conduct that helps his community to endure and overcome the critical conditions that they have and are facing.\footnote{Stanton, \textit{A Gospel for a New People}, 299-300.} All Matthew’s eight beatitudes contend that beyond these difficulties, there will be kingdom blessing.

\textit{The Implications of Kingdom Blessing (5:11-16)}

In this pericope, the Evangelist changes all pronouns from the third to the second person plural. The passage functions as the focal point of the eight Beatitudes where the Evangelist directly addresses his community. Matthew 5:11-12 especially indicates the critical situation in the community at the time of Domitian.\footnote{Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 242.}
Following this passage, the Evangelist conflates the double parables of the salt and the light, whereas there is only one parable of the salt in Mark and Luke (cf. Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34). The pronouns in these parables are also in second person plural. The opening phrases “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world” suggest that they both come from the same source and might belong to M. Why did Matthew bring these parables together after the eight beatitudes?

The first metaphor emphasises the identity of ἀλαζ τὴν γῆν, ‘salt of the earth’ (5:13). In the ancient world, salt was used for giving flavour to food (see Job 6:6), for preserving, purifying and as part of sacrifices (see Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24). In ancient times, as in much of the world today where electricity is uncertain and freezers are a luxury, the principle function of salt was to preserve protein-rich foods, such as meat and fish. Salt is thus absolutely essential for survival. The supplementary functions of salt (flavouring/taste) attract much attention from Western commentators on this verse, but they often miss the point completely in debates over whether salt can lose its taste (5:13b). Its purifying and preserving qualities symbolise endurance and value. Salt loses its saltiness — or rather, its usefulness — not by itself, but by becoming impure and losing its value by mixing with other elements, and in particular, water. In humid environments (like the Middle East in summer, and the country of Myanmar in the rainy season), salt cannot itself be preserved except by using it quickly. Otherwise, it absorbs the humidity, liquefies, and becomes useless. The metaphor expresses compellingly the idea

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that a community not involved in mission to the earth, will itself become useless and lose its identity.

The second metaphor emphasises the identity of φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, ‘light of the world’ (5:14-16). In the Old Testament, ‘light’ is associated with God, his Messiah, and his people (Ps 18:28; Mic 7:8; Isa 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). In Judaism, ‘light’ referred to the Law, the temple, and Jerusalem. In the New Testament, it is used to refer to Jesus (John 8:12; 13:35), the Jews (Rom 2:19), and the Christians (Rom 13:12), who experienced salvation.56 The ‘light and truth’ teaching of Jesus (see also the tradition in Ps 43:3) also implies the light which the world of darkness needs, “though it reproaches those that bear it as it reproached the prophets, including David”.57 In quoting Isaiah 9:1-2 earlier on, Matthew has distinctively described the image of Jesus’ mission as ‘light’ for those who are in darkness and in the dark land of death (4:14-16).

These two metaphors follow the eight beatitudes and the implications of the final beatitude with its abrupt transition from the third to the second person plural pronouns (5:11-12). This change indicates that Matthew directly addressed the challenge of discipleship in his community to endure and rejoice in suffering and hardship in the mission of Christ (cf. Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34-35; and Col 4:6).58 Perhaps, in the time when the Gospel was written, the Matthean community “was losing ground politically in terms of their reputation beyond the walls of their gathering place”.59 This loss of ‘saltiness’, warns Matthew, means that unless they serve the world with their good deeds

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56 See Guelich, The Sermon, 122, for details.
58 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 99.
59 So Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 76.
they will become useless and be rejected (5:13). The disciples of Jesus are exhorted not to focus on preserving their own purity, but to ‘mix in’ with the wider world in order to purify and preserve it. That is, they are not only to be conspicuous witnesses, but also the means for the worship of God by all.

Thus the combination of the double metaphors implies that Matthew encouraged his community to embody the double identities of ‘salt’ and ‘light’, that is, the “missional identity and lifestyle of disciples”. As the nature of salt gives flavour and prevents corruption, his community should serve and make the wider society a purer and “more palatable place”. Also, as light representing God’s new people, they are called to the mission of Jesus to embody the good works of the beatitudes in lighting their dark world.

Thus as Jesus admonished his disciples, the Evangelist reminded his community not to be like the discarded salt and the lamp under a bowl, but instead to be like salt that is useful for the whole human race and the lamp on the stand that gives its light to the whole house and the whole world (5:13-14). Matthew also warned his community that their good works were not to glorify themselves but only to glorify God, the Father (5:16).

**ii) The Main Body of the Sermon (Matt 5:17-7:12)**

Following the beatitudes, Matthew constructs the main body of the Sermon with four distinctive sections: (i) the introduction of Jesus as the one who comes to fulfil the

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63 See further below in chapter four.
Law (5:17-20), (ii) the teaching about social ethics in six case studies (5:21-48), (iii) the teaching about religious ethics (6:1-34), and (iv) the summary statement of the Sermon (7:1-12). I will explore each section as follows.

ii. a) Jesus and the Fulfilment of Old Testament Prophecy (5:17-20)

This section begins with the assertion by Jesus that he is the one who comes to fulfil the Law or the Prophets (5:17). Scholars designate this section as “a programmatic statement of Jesus’ relationship to the Law and the fidelity required of his disciples”.65 The language and style indicate that they are the handiwork of Matthew.66 Relevant questions to be considered in this section are: Why did Matthew relate the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount with the Law and the Prophets? What is the significance for him of relating Jesus to the Law and the Prophets? A further investigation follows.

The main body of Sermon begins with the negative imperative pattern: “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (5:17). The text indicates that there is tension in the Matthean community. Perhaps the Matthean community encountered opponents who accused them of breaking the Law or of being those who wished to abolish the Law. A convincing argument has been made by Overman that “if Matthew were not struggling to maintain this distinction between violating the Law and fulfilling it through the proper and the true interpretation, he would not have included in this section 5:17-20 at all”.67 These accusers, according to Overman, were the Jewish leadership outside the

65 Senior, Matthew, 73; and also argued by Overman, Matthew’s Gospel, 89-90.
67 Overman, Matthew’s Gospel, 88.
Matthean community who “maintained a high view of the Law”.\textsuperscript{68} Some scholars however see these accusers as charismatic Christians,\textsuperscript{69} or an antinomian group\textsuperscript{70} who wished to abolish the Law. As I have argued in chapter two, these accusers were not just the Jewish leadership or an antinomian group. Matthew makes clear distinctions in this section. First, the distinctive texts, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (5:17), “Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (5:18b) and “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same…” (5:19), show that for Matthew, disciples of Jesus must obey the Law and reject any form of antinomianism completely. Second, Matthew specifies that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20). Thus the response of Matthew in this pericope points to the accusers of the Matthean community as being from two parties: a small numbers of Torah extremists within the Matthean community who accused the rest of community of breaking the Law, and an antinomian group who claimed that the coming of Christ abolished the Law and in so claiming deceived the rest of the Matthean community (cf. 5:19 with 7:15-20).\textsuperscript{71}

The declaration of Jesus, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (5:17b), shows that for Matthew, Jesus is not a new lawgiver but is “the legitimate interpreter of God’s will as contained in the Torah”.\textsuperscript{72} Unlike the scribes and the Pharisees,

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{68} Overman, \textit{Matthew's Gospel}, 89.
    \item \textsuperscript{69} So Eduard Schweizer, “Observance of the Law and Charismatic Activity in Matthew”, \textit{NTS} 16 (1969-70): 216-223; and Banks, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law”, 239.
    \item \textsuperscript{70} Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law”, 64-75, esp. page 75.
    \item \textsuperscript{71} Cf. Sim, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 207-209. According to Sim, these two parties are the Pauline churches who reject the Law and the scribes and the Pharisees who misinterpret it. See further my discussion of ‘Pauline extremists’ later in this chapter.
\end{itemize}
Jesus comes not merely renewing the Torah but, through his birth, his mission activities, his passion, and his death, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies (cf. 5:17 with 1:22-23; 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:31, 54; 27:35), from Matthew’s perspective.

In the Gospel of Matthew, though Jesus urged fulfilment of Law through the development of the original ethics of Torah, like many other rabbis, Jesus suggested “his own exegesis — the radical demand of love, the center of Jesus’ ethics”. Matthew distinctively emphasises that the pivotal point of Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is love and mercy (5:43-48; 7:12; 9:13; 12:7; 19:19; 22:34-40; 24:12; 25:31-46). For Matthew, the Law is focussed on ‘doing’ (5:19; 23:3, 23; 25:31-46). Thus Matthew and his community claims that they are not lawbreakers but that they interpret and fulfil it according to Jesus’ teaching. This is Matthew’s understanding of the Law of Jesus that surpassed that of the scribes and the Pharisees and constituted the perfect righteousness for entering the kingdom of heaven (5:20). Thus the placement of the declaration “I have come…” (5:17b) in the beginning of the main body of the Sermon opposes the first half of sentence, “Do not think…”, and the whole pericope of Matthew 5:17-20 should be regarded as a preface for what Jesus is going to teach about the Law and the Prophets in the later

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73 Lapide, The Sermon, 14.
75 So Overman, Matthew’s Gospel, 89; and Senior, The Gospel of Matthew, 43-44.
76 So Overman, Matthew’s Gospel, 89-90; Schweizer, “Observance of the Law”, 229; and Sim, The Gospel of Matthew, 208. Here, Sim summarises the two basic points which Matthew makes in this section: (i) Matthew “stipulates that the followers of Jesus must obey the Law and reject completely the Law-free gospel of the Pauline wing” (5:17-19); and (ii) he explains to his readers that their righteousness must surpass the righteousness of their Jewish opponents (5:20). Matthew then provides some examples of Jesus’ particular interpretation of the Law (5:21-48). I agree with Sim that Matthew opposes both antinomians and Torah extremists, but I do not include Paul himself in the former category completely, since it seems to be ‘works of Law’ rather than ethics in general that he opposes.
77 In Matthew, “righteousness refers to ethical behaviour”. See Snodgrass, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law”, 43.
parts of the Sermon (5:21-7:12). It also underlines Jesus as fulfilling God’s purposes in his teaching and preaching as well as in his actions. This is clearly seen in the reconstruction of the Law, as the following investigations demonstrate.

ii. b) The Teaching about Social Ethics (5:21-48)

This section is widely known as the six antitheses. The term ‘antithesis’, however, is not suitable for the Matthean context. Hagner rightly argues that the word ‘antithesis’ in this section is misleading. A better word would be ‘intensification’ or ‘transformation’. This is because here Jesus is interpreting the Law “in terms of its inner, deeper significance”, while in principle, “other Jewish interpreters of the law would not have disagreed with Jesus’ stress on the inner dimension or the spirit of the law”. Since Jesus has come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them (5:17), the word ‘antithesis’ is inconsistent with the Matthean context. Thus it is better to name this section as the social ethics of ‘six case studies’ for the Matthean community, or as the ‘transforming initiatives’.

The material in this pericope is paralleled in Mark and Luke (cf. 5:30 and Mark 9:43). However, none of these parallels are given the distinctive form of the introductory

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80 Hagner, “Ethics”, 47.
81 See further later on.
82 Hagner, “Ethics”, 47.
83 Byrne, Lifting the Burden, 58.
84 According to Stassen, the Sermon on the Mount is “God’s transforming initiative to deliver us from the vicious cycles in which we get stuck”.
formula “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient time…. and I say to you…” as in Matthew.\textsuperscript{85} This introductory formula indicates as the handiwork of Matthew.\textsuperscript{86}

This introductory formula in each case study describes that for Matthew, Jesus was a perfect and authoritative interpreter of the Law (5:17, 20).\textsuperscript{87} Brooks Holtzclaw overstates the case when he says that being a perfect interpreter, Jesus is “replacing the old legislation with new approaches of his own”.\textsuperscript{88} Rather, Jesus in Matthew fulfils the true intention of the Law and prophets. The challenges in the second part of each case study indicate that Matthew maintained the identity of his community as interpreting the Law in the way of Jesus. These challenges are not only responding to the small number of Torah extremists in his community who accused them of breaking the Law, but also to those who wished to abolish the Law (5:18-19).\textsuperscript{89}

In all six case studies, Matthew makes clear that the pivotal centre of Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is love. Love does not abolish the Law and the Prophets but fulfils them (5:17). Thus Luz rightly states, “The love commandment does not abolish the ‘least commandment’ (5:18), but relativises them from case to case”.\textsuperscript{90} A closer investigation of the six case studies thus follows.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[85]{Hare, \textit{Matthew}, 50. In my view, ‘and’ would be a better translation of ἀδὲ than ‘but’.
\footnotetext[86]{As argued also by Senior, \textit{Matthew}, 76; and Hare, \textit{Matthew}, 50.
\footnotetext[87]{See Byrne, \textit{Lifting the Burden}, 58; and Hagner, \textit{Matthew I-13}, 112. Hagner rightly states that Matthew stressed the authority of Jesus as “eschatological Messiah who in bringing the law to a new, definitive interpretation can also transcend it”.
\footnotetext[89]{See also pages 174-175 above.
\footnotetext[90]{Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 279.}
\end{footnotes}
The Teaching about Anger (5:21-26)

In this first case study, Jesus uses the language of everyday anger and compares it with murder. According to the Mosaic Law, those who murder will be subjected to the death penalty (cf. Exod 20:13; 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16-17). In this case study Jesus extends the judgment of murder to a man who is angry with his brother or sister (5:21-22).

Unlike murder (5:21), the judgment for anger is in two categories: the one abusing (ρακό) brother or sister will be subject to the council, but the one calling brother or sister ‘You fool’ will be subjected to divine judgment. Since brother or sister in the Gospel of Matthew regularly means fellow believers (as in 18:15-20), anger against brother or sister in this pericope indicates anger against a fellow Christian of the faith community in particular.

This reference (5:21-26) is problematical and contradicts even some texts in the Gospel of Matthew, for Jesus himself became angry in cleansing the temple and in calling the scribes and the Pharisees fools (21:12-13; 23:17). One should regard the anger of Jesus in these references as related to divine wrath against religious hypocrisy, whereas the teaching of anger that Matthew highlights in this first case study is human anger that opposes love and leads to sin. The way of avoiding divine judgment in the following verses is reconciliation. For Matthew, reconciliation is more important than bringing sacrifices to God, for God desires not sacrifice, but mercy (cf. 5:23-26; 9:13).

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91 This text should be regarded as a later expansion of a saying which in the original form might not have gone beyond the word ‘judgment’. See Manson, The Sayings, 155; Holtzclaw, “A Note of Matthew 5.21-48”, 161.
93 So Dale C. Allison, The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999), 65; and Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 118.
94 For more discussion on the nature of anger, see Allison, The Sermon, 61-71.
The Teaching about Adultery (5:27-30)

In this second case study, the commandment “Do not commit adultery” is extended to “every man who looks at a woman lustfully”, who has already committed adultery in his heart (5:28). For Matthew, the inclusion of what occurs ‘in the heart’ deepens Jesus’ interpretation of the old Law for it is the foundation of the external act (cf. 5:27-28 and Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18). Moreover, the following phrases — “If your right eye causes you to sin”, and “If your right hand causes you to sin” (5:29) — indicate that Matthew is strongly urging men to take responsibility for the root causes of their lust. The imperative clauses “gouge it out and throw it away” and “cut it off and throw it away” (5:30) indicate that for Matthew, “it is better to suffer minor losses willingly than to suffer the ultimate loss unwillingly” (cf. 18:8-9).

The Teaching about Divorce (5:31-32)

The third case study, which describes men who divorce as causing adultery, is related to the second case study. In Mosaic Law, divorce was allowed by giving a certificate of divorce (5:31; cf. Deut 24:1-4). In this case study, Jesus seems to disallow divorce except on the ground of unchastity (5:32b). Otherwise the man who divorces causes a woman to commit adultery and anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery (5:32).

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95 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 121.
96 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 121.
97 The teaching on divorce does not occur in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. In response to the question of the Pharisees on divorce in the latter part of Matthew’s Gospel (which parallels Mark and Luke), Jesus similarly said, “Whoever divorces his wife … and marries another commits adultery” (19:9; cf. Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18). Ben Witherington thus argues that this exceptive clause was a later addition to the tradition directed specifically against “the Jewish permission of incestuous relationships involving a proselyte”, which “the Evangelist could have added to answer a question raised by the Jewish-Christian portion of his audience.
This case study clearly reflects the possible negative outcomes in a Jewish context where the letter of the Law is being exploited.\(^9\) It seems to target men who are exploiting women by divorcing them easily to suit themselves. Jesus makes it plain that men are responsible for the adultery — not the women.\(^9\) This response confronts the dominant male power and the ‘liberal’ Pharisaic interpretation of divorce, which on the one hand mistreated a divorced woman and on the other hand regarded adultery as a capital offence (cf. Lev 22:13 and John 8:1-11).\(^1\) As many Jews regarded adultery with shock, and divorce with complacency, “Jesus’ saying was intended to shock the Jews out of their complacency over divorce by categorising it as adultery”.\(^1\) Thus this case study is an example of the love of Jesus for the disadvantaged woman,\(^2\) by which Matthew “stresses the responsibility of the husband to have compassion on his wife”.\(^3\) So what seems here to be a stricter interpretation of the Mosaic divorce law (‘a greater righteousness’) is actually motivated by love for the victims of this law: the divorced women.

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98 Guelich, *The Sermon*, 200. Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee suggest that Mark seems to offer “the rendering closest to Jesus’ original words, though perhaps adapts to his Hellenistic Gentile readers, and that Matthew clearly adapted his material for his Jewish readers”. Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2003), 281.


The Teaching about Oaths (5:33-37)

The fourth case study parallels Matthew 23:16-22 and James 5:12. The Law “You shall not swear falsely” indicates that it prohibited only false or irrelevant oaths, but otherwise seemed to allow taking oaths (cf. Exod 20:7; Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 5:11; 23:21-24). In contrast, the response of Jesus was “do not swear at all”, either by heaven or earth, or Jerusalem, or even your head (5:34-36). This distinctively describes Jesus as absolutely prohibiting the taking of oaths. The response of Jesus on taking oaths here should not be viewed as a religious matter (for example, banning vows). Rather, it should be regarded as prohibiting those who misuse the divine or sacred name in their oaths as a way of ‘improving’ the truth or strengthening their words, that is, a diplomatic way of deception (cf. 7:22; 23:16-22; 26:74). The concluding saying, “Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’”, makes clear that Jesus wants disciples to speak the simple truth rather than ‘verifying’ it by taking oaths. In situations of persecution and interrogation, this is a very difficult demand indeed, but we should note that the option of silence in the face of unjust accusations is also endorsed by Matthew’s Jesus (26:59-63a; 27:11-14).

The Teaching about Retaliation (5:38-42)

In Mosaic Law, the right to equal retribution was expressed by the saying, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21). In this fifth case study, Matthew offers the four principles of Jesus’ teaching on retaliation which heighten

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104 Manson, *The Sayings*, 158.

105 Manson, *The Sayings*, 158-159.
a new understanding preventing legitimate retribution from becoming revenge, especially for a community in the situation of persecution (cf. 5:11-12).\textsuperscript{106}

The first three principles apply to a victim facing social and political mistreatment by those in authority (5:38-41).\textsuperscript{107} The first principle is, “If anyone strikes you on the ‘right’ cheek, turn the other also” (5:39). In Hebrew Scriptures as well as in Greco-Roman and in Jewish culture (1 Kgs 22:24; Job 16:10; Isa 50:6; Mic 5:1), a slap on the face was interpreted as “an extreme humiliation”.\textsuperscript{108} Slapping on the right cheek was an even more extreme humiliation. Commentators note that the slap on right cheek would imply a left-hand slap or a right backhand slap. Both involve an extremely insulting act, because a left-hand slap implied the use of the unclean hand in Semitic culture, and a right backhand slap implied a double penalty, an insult and a violent assault.\textsuperscript{109} In response Jesus said, “Turn the other also” (5:39b). Betz interprets the phrase “turn the other also” as “a highly provocative challenge”.\textsuperscript{110} In my opinion, since Jesus’ saying in the introduction of this case study is “do not resist an evildoer”, the interpretation of “turn the other also” would imply non-retaliation rather than a provocative challenge to the aggressor (cf. 5:39 and 5:43-44, 48).\textsuperscript{111} Thus Stassen and Gushee are right in stating that to turn the other cheek was “to surprise the insulter” by saying non-violently, “you are treating me as an unequal,
but I need to be treated as an equal”. 112 In my view, in a context of violent oppression, the responses suggested by Jesus should be seen as surprising rather than provocative.

The second principle is that “if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat” (perhaps possible in the judicial system in the East), “give your cloak as well” (5:40). The context here indicates the victim as a poor person (cf. 5:40 and Exod 22:26-27). Again, the ethical exhortation is encouraging unexpected generosity to the aggressor by giving him/her not only the unworthy inner garment ‘coat’ (χιτώνα), but also the more valuable outer garment ‘cloak’ (ιμώτιον) as well. 113 This will surprise the aggressor and encourage them to think about how they have behaved and about the love that transforms the expected response (cf. 5:8). 114 It also leaves the victim naked in a public place and threatens to bring shame on both aggressor and victim. Again, this is a non-violent invitation to the aggressor to reconsider their actions.

The third principle is “if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (5:41). Perhaps this third principle indicates the forced service frequently imposed by Roman soldiers on the population in Syrian Antioch in that time (5:41; 27:32). 115 This kind of forced service occurs frequently to those who live in the frontier areas of Myanmar. 116 Here again, the ethical exhortation is to surprise the oppressor and express inoffensively an offer to go the second mile as well (5:41b). Wink considers that Jesus “is helping an oppressed people find a way to protest and neutralize an onerous practice

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112 Stassen and Gushee, Kingdom Ethics, 139.
114 Walter Wink, The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 104, on the contrary, suggests that by stripping, “the debtor has brought shame on the creditor” in order to “humiliate him”. In my view, this would be against the social ethics of Jesus in Matthew which do not emphasise retaliation but rather love and mercy (5:39; cf. 5:43-48; 9:12; 12:7).
115 So argued by Weaver, “Thus You Will Know Them By Their Fruits”, 110; and Barbara E. Reid, “Violent Endings in Matthew’s Parables and Christian Non-violence”, CBQ 66 (2004): 244.
116 See pages 53-57 above.
despised through the empire”, by inviting the occupying Roman soldiers to disobey their own laws against overuse of forced porterage.\textsuperscript{117} This interpretation may be helpful in some contexts. But in contexts of extreme persecution, this way to protest (even non-violently) and neutralize the onerous practice of forced porterage results in a far worse outcome.\textsuperscript{118} Thus the above three principles show that the response of Jesus is not to retaliate to evil with evil but to overcome an act of physical violence with a non-violent response. That is, to extinguish violence by showing love to the aggressors and an opportunity to reconsider their actions, is to enact the transforming initiatives of Jesus’ way (5:39b; cf. Rom 12:17-21).\textsuperscript{119}

The fourth principle suggests the response of a helper to the needy (5:42). Here, Matthew emphasises Jesus’ advice to his followers to be charitable to the beggar or the borrower (cf. 10:8-9 and Deut 15:7-11).

In sum, all four principles of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:38-42 exhort that non-retaliation is “a strategy toward restoration of justice in specific kinds of violent confrontations between persons of unequal power and status”.\textsuperscript{120} Non-retaliation is not the way of playing the victim. Rather it is the way of reconciliation and peace-making which negates and transforms evil (cf. 5:9, 23-26).

In these interpretations, there is an element of the “hidden transcripts” discourse analysis used in some post-colonial interpretations.\textsuperscript{121} That is, for interpreters to be attuned to the indirect and non-verbal ways that systematically oppressed people express their

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{117} Wink, \textit{The Powers that Be}, 108. \\
\textsuperscript{118} See examples on pages 23-25 above. \\
\textsuperscript{119} See also Senior, \textit{Matthew}, 79-80; and Schnackenburg, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 60-61. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Here I agree with Reid. See Reid, “Violent Endings”, 244. \\
dissent and their hopes — indeed, their human dignity. In the face of overwhelming power, these expressions of hope must remain ambiguous at best, and largely hidden, lest they lead to an even worse outcome. When the interpretative context is truly post-colonial, it may indeed be possible to explore these “hidden transcripts” openly — as I have attempted here with Matthew’s text and context. When colonial and/or imperial oppression is still in place, however, it is dangerous to reveal too much in this area. Clearly, the precise way by which the persecuted may hope to surprise, non-violently, the aggressor and invite them to reconsider their actions, needs to be reflected on very carefully in each context. These examples of Jesus in Matthew’s story provide a wonderful inspiration to take up this challenge, but not a model that can be applied uncritically. Each new context asks new questions of Gospel ethics. Matthew thus encourages non-violence against violent oppression, and giving more, for what is demanded by the needy. This is the way of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20) and the way to perfection (5:48), which will be explored further in the next section.

The Teaching about Loving Enemies (5:43-48)

This sixth case study forms the climax of all the studies and is a call to share the perfection of the Father (5:48). In the Torah, the love commandment for neighbour is “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Matthew also indicates later that this love commandment is part of the greatest dual commandment (22:36-40). The reference ‘neighbours’ in Matthew would imply the Jews or fellow Christians. Hagner suggests that ‘neighbour’ refers to fellow Jews and ‘enemy’ to Gentiles. According to Hill, ‘neighbour’ refers to a member of the same religious community (the Church), and ‘enemy’ to “a persecutor of the faith, the enemy of the Messianic community formed by the first Christians”. Here Hill’s suggestion is more consistent with the context. I would argue further that since the distinctive reference “pray for those

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study, I would argue that Matthew emphatically heightens the teaching of Jesus on loving ‘enemies’. Here the plural ‘enemies’ is used (5:44). The reference “love your enemies” and “pray for those who persecute you” (5:44) shows that Matthew heightens two distinctive groups which threatened his community. The first group comprises the enemies of truth (cf. 7:15-20; 13:25, 28, 39) as I will discuss later, and the second group is the Gentiles, perhaps the Roman authorities who persecuted the faith community, as I have discussed in chapter two.

Thus as also emphasised in Matthew 5:11, Matthew reminds his community to love and pray for their opponents for the reward to those who are insulted and persecuted is great. In this sixth case study, Matthew again contends that those who love enemies and pray for the persecutors will be called the children of God (5:44-45). Matthew encourages his community that even as God loves the righteous, he loves the unrighteous too (5:45). So the command to love the enemies and pray for the persecutors is part of the essence of radical discipleship, which responds to the call for perfection just as the Father is perfect (5:45, 48). This call to perfection by Jesus, as Thurston rightly observes, implies “wholeness of consecration to God” rather than complete sinlessness and full virtue. It is understood more as a process and a goal, rather than an achieved state.

In sum, the context of all six case studies indicates that on the one hand, the Matthean community was encountering fierce debate with some Torah extremists regarding the interpretation of the Torah about the social crises confronting the community who persecute you” (5:44) has been added, ‘love your enemies’ could refer more specifically to the enemies of truth rather than persecutors. Cf. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 134; Hill, *Matthew*, 129-130; Reid, “Violent Endings”, 245-246.

124 Jesus’ teaching here is not “impossible moral ideals, or idealistic moral perfection, but practical deeds of love toward enemies, including prayer for them”. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 141.
(5:21-37). For Matthew, Jesus was the perfect interpreter and embodiment of Torah and he encourages his community to observe the Torah as interpreted and lived by Jesus. Matthew believed and maintained that he and his community did not break the Law, but that they understood it fully and fulfilled it (5:18-19, 48). Thus Matthew used and reworked the gospel traditions and distinctively articulated the understanding of the Law in his community in order to defend the identity of his community as well as to respond to his accusers. On the other hand, as his community faced insults, threats, and the use of force by the political and civil authorities from outside (5:38-48), Matthew counsels his community to adopt a strategy of passive resistance: they were to turn their other cheek, to give their cloak as well, to go also the second mile, to give to the beggar or borrower, and to love their neighbours and enemies. As the Christian community of Myanmar experience similar forms of violence to the Matthean community, the strategy of passive resistance, especially Jesus’ teaching of non-retaliation and loving enemies is particularly relevant and challenges them to adopt and articulate it effectively in confronting violence. This ethics of passive resistance arose and was tested “within the volatile context of Roman imperial rule where there was a supreme cost to overt resistance and the decision to meet force with force”. Thus the strategy of Matthew’s social ethics enabled his community to survive and continue their mission such that they did not “catch the eye of those who possessed the power to imprison, to harm, or kill”.

126 I do not agree with Harrington who argues more abstractly that the context is “the debate within Judaism about the authoritative interpretation of the Torah”. Cf. Harrington, Matthew, 92.
128 So argued by Overman, Matthew’s Gospel, 87, 89-90.
129 Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 84.
130 Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 85.
ii. c) The Teaching about Religious Ethics (6:1-34)

After shaping the teaching of Jesus to inform their social ethics, Matthew develops the Sermon further to a more profound level addressing religious ethics. Matthew divides the teaching of Jesus on religious ethics into two sections: the first section deals with the practice of religious piety (6:1-18), and the second section deals with seeking God’s Kingdom (6:19-34). The teaching of Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 is directed to the “context of a society that has accepted practices, and respects a certain religious norm”. A further investigation of these sections follows.

The Practice of Religious Piety (6:1-18)

Except for the traditional material to do with prayer (6:7-15//Luke 11:2-4), this section has no parallel in Mark or Luke. Perhaps, Matthew derived most of the material in this section from the distinctive oral tradition (M) available to him. It seems that Matthew believed some members (i.e., Torah extremists) in his community practised their righteousness to be seen by others (6:1). By reminding them about the essence of religious piety, Matthew offered three significant models through Jesus’ teaching, specifically relating to the acts of (i) almsgiving, (ii) prayer, and (iii) fasting. These three models of religious piety require inward practice, that is, in secret, which will be credited

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132 So Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 137.
133 According to Overman, Matthew believed that his church’s opponents were practising their righteousness to be seen by others. Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 88. These opponents, in my opinion, were the Torah extremists (i.e., the opponents who influence members within the Matthean community) since the pronouns in this section are in the second person and it begins with a warning which seems to address the Matthean community (6:1).
by “Your Father in heaven” (6:1, 4, 6, and 18). A closer investigation of these three models of religious piety follows.

_Almmsgiving (6:1-4)_

The first model of religious practice is ‘almsgiving’ (6:1-4). This is a Jewish practice which expresses not merely desirable behaviour or a social obligation, but a “ritual required by the Torah”.

The Jews regarded giving money to the poor as not merely a humanitarian act but a religious obligation (Deut 15:7-11; Ps 112:9; Prov 25:21-22). The practice of almsgiving also indicates the care for the needy operating among the Jewish as well as the Christian communities in the first century (cf. Acts 4:32-37).

In the honour-shame culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, almsgiving apparently could be abused since it offered an opportunity to display wealth and self-righteousness in public. Luz observes that a person who “pledged a large amount was especially honored and was permitted, e.g., to sit next to the rabbi”.

In order to gain public praise and be seen by others, almsgivers might boast about their almsgiving in conversation, identify themselves as sponsors for food distribution, or memorialise themselves in inscriptions and monuments.

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134 Hagner rightly observes that the expression ‘your Father in heaven’ occurs “more often in Matthew than any other Gospel” (in addition to the references above, see also 5:12, 16). Hagner, _Matthew 1-13_, 139.
135 Betz, _The Sermon_, 354.
136 See also France, _The Gospel according to Matthew_, 131; Hare, _Matthew_, 63; Carter, _Matthew and the Margins_, 160.
137 Guelich, _The Sermon_, 302.
138 See Luz, _Matthew 1-7_, 356-357.
139 Thus scholars are right in seeing that the warning “do not sound a trumpet” is a hyperbolic claim, which satirises conventional cultural behaviour. See Harrington, _Matthew_, 94; Guelich, _The Sermon_, 278; Carter, _Matthew and the Margins_, 160. Similar forms of practice are familiar to some Christian communities in Myanmar today as they are surrounded by a culture of public almsgiving.
In this first model of religious piety, since ‘hypocrites’ and ‘synagogues’ have been mentioned explicitly, the Evangelist might have in mind a contrast between the acts of almsgiving in the wider Jewish context and that of the true disciples of Jesus (6:2).\textsuperscript{140} In the eyes of Matthew, this behaviour belonged to hypocrites (6:2). By way of contrast, therefore, Matthew heightens the teaching of Jesus to warn his community that alms were given for the benefit of the poor, and not for the self-glorification of the givers.\textsuperscript{141} God will seek out those who give secretly and reward them.\textsuperscript{142}

Prayer (6:5-15)

The second model of religious ethics concerns prayer (6:5-15). A very similar form of the Lord’s Prayer is also found in Luke (Luke 11:2-4). Matthew begins the teaching on prayer with a criticism of prayer-practice in two contexts (6:5-8), whereas in Luke, the disciples requested Jesus to teach them how to pray like the disciples of John (cf. Luke 11:1). Furthermore, in Matthew’s version, the Lord’s Prayer is connected with the Sermon on the Mount, while it is disconnected from the Sermon in Luke (cf. Luke 6:20-49).\textsuperscript{143} Thus the relationship between the text and the literary and social contexts of Matthew needs to be investigated.

In Matthew’s version, since ‘hypocrites’ and ‘synagogues’ again have been mentioned, the first context refers to prayer-practices in Jewish contexts (cf. 6:2 and 6:5). Within the Jewish community, prayer is a religious obligation at least three times a day (morning, noon, and evening). Whilst there may be a preference to pray in the

\textsuperscript{140} Matthew 6:2-4 has no parallel and indicates the composition by the Evangelist. So Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, 102.
\textsuperscript{141} So Hill, \textit{Matthew}, 133.
\textsuperscript{142} Hare, \textit{Matthew}, 64.
\textsuperscript{143} So Hendrickx, \textit{The Sermon}, 107.
Jews could also pray anywhere, even on the streets or in public squares, by facing towards the holy of holies of the temple in Jerusalem, in the morning, noon, and evening for their regular private prayer. Thus prayer on the streets could occur frequently, though in Jewish texts this is not seen as a problem. Moreover, praying ‘in the synagogues’ and ‘at the street corners’ indicates that these prayer-practices were referring neither to private nor formal public prayer. Rather, they refer to visible informal practices. In the eyes of Matthew, these visible practices amounted to seeking to attract public approval rather than to address God. In contrast to these ways of praying, Matthew admonished his community to get into their inner room and seek God who sees in secret for “prayer is not public performance but communication with God” (6:5).

The second context refers explicitly to prayer-practices among Gentiles (6:7-8). Since Matthew includes “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do”, he seems to have in mind a contrast between the prayer-practices in Gentile contexts, those in Jewish contexts, and those of Jesus. Given the probable location of the Matthean community in Antioch, a major economic centre and one of the larger cities of the Roman Empire and “home to many gods”, Matthew would have been familiar with Gentile prayer-practices.

The ordinary people of the wider Greco-Roman world people knew from bitter experience that life was under the control of mysterious and powerful forces whose ways were completely unpredictable. They struggled to placate those named and unknown gods as best they could. When they prayed, they multiplied words and their prayers became a

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144 Strecker, The Sermon, 103.
146 Luz, Matthew 1-7, 359.
147 Carter, Matthew and the Margins, 161-162.
148 Carter, Matthew and the Margins, 162.
long persuasive discourse. This is true also of traditional worship in the context of Myanmar and the struggle to placate those named and unknown gods through lengthy prayers. Jerome Crowe observes that their prayers “often degenerated into a desperate invocation of a long litany of gods in the hope of enlisting the support of the appropriate power by calling on the correct name”.

The critique of Matthew that the Gentiles “heap up empty phrases” in this context seems to be inconsistent with the practice of long prayer and repetition; for Jesus himself in the Gospel of Matthew prayed all night and repeatedly (14:23-25; 26:36-46). But as Carter rightly observes, the critique by Matthew of Gentile prayer-practices was theological in intent, suggesting that the deities to whom the Gentiles prayed were unknowing, deaf and uncaring.

Thus the criticism of prayer-practice in these two contexts indicates that Matthew warns his community to pray neither like the hypocrites (presumably, the scribes and the Pharisees), who prayed to be seen by others, nor like the Gentiles, who heaped up empty phrases. Instead, he admonishes his community to go into their room and “shut the door and pray to (their) Father who is in secret” (6:6). This means that their concentration

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151 According to Crowe, Jesus was not the first to criticise these pagan excesses. For centuries, “Greek poets had made parodies of this kind of prayer the stuff of Greek comedy. Greek philosophers like the Stoics and Epicureans asserted categorically that prayer was futile, for, even granted that the gods existed, they were far removed from human concerns or interference in human affairs”. Crowe, *From Jerusalem to Antioch*, 116.
152 Thomas G. Long states that the target here is “not lengthy prayers per se, but what could be called ‘safecracker’ prayers; that is, windy and fawing prayers that attempt to use flowery charm to pick the lock on the favor of gods, to manipulate the gods into action by uttering the right combination of words”. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 68.
should be solely on God and in their prayers they should also trust God, who knows their
needs before they ask (6:8).  

Matthew then encourages his community to practise a radical prayer, known as the
Lord’s Prayer, taught by Jesus (6:9-15). The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew’s version consists
of seven petitions while in Luke there are only five petitions (cf. 6:9b-13 and Luke 11:2-4). Scholars consider that the prayer was probably handed down in different
geographical locations and the two Evangelists transmitted it in slightly different wordings
to fit their own context.

Since the context of Matthew’s prayer consists of critique, the model prayer given
is to be regarded as a standard one, probably given to Jewish-Christians who have learned
prayer from their childhood but whose prayer stands in danger of becoming a routine (6:5-8). In contrast, since Luke’s version begins with the request about how to pray, it was
more likely addressed to Gentile-Christians who were learning how to pray in this way for
the first time, and whose courage in prayer must be roused (Luke 11:1). The shorter
form of Luke’s version is most likely closer to the original form, and the Matthean version
an expanded one. The original form of the prayer taught by Jesus might have had a
stronger eschatological reference. The context and editing of Matthew, however, suggests
that the prayer now also reflects the current situation of the Matthean context.

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155 Allison argues that the Lord’s Prayer consists of only six petitions. See Allison, The Sermon, 112. The
majority of scholars, however, accept the Lord’s Prayer as consisting of seven petitions. Joachim Jeremias,
The Prayer of Jesus (London: SCM, 1967), 86; Schnackenburg, The Gospel of Matthew, 66; Hagner,
Matthew 1-13, 145; Gundry, Matthew, 105.
156 So Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 145; Jeremias, The Prayer, 89-90.
157 So argued also by Jeremias, The Prayer, 89-90; and Hendrickx, The Sermon, 107-108.
158 Jan Lambrecht, The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation & Exhortation (Wilmington, Delaware:
159 For more discussion about the original form of the Lord’s Prayer, see Hendrickx, The Sermon, 109;
Jeremias, The Prayer, 85-89; Birger Gerhardsson, “The Matthean Version of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9b-
In Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘our’ and ‘in heaven’ in the first petition are two of Matthew’s favourite expressions (cf. 5:48). The third petition “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (6:10b), and the seventh petition “But rescue us from the evil one” (6:13b), are also widely regarded as the addition of the Evangelist. The ‘we’ petition indicates that for Matthew, the relationship between God and the disciples of Jesus was an intimate relationship like a family.

The first three petitions of Matthew’s prayer are consistent with the invocation of God’s kingdom to be a reality on earth. The requests indicate that the Matthean community was suffering the consequences of injustice and longed for God’s rule. The prayer creates an order on earth in which legitimate actions are shaped by God’s will. Thus Carter rightly states that the prayer significantly “claims for its cosmic order an ultimacy which is to be manifested in a new and alternative socio-political order on earth”.

The fourth petition, “give us this day our daily bread” (6:11), taken together with Matthew’s wider literary context, also seems to reflect the current social context of the Matthean community. We should note that in the later part of the Sermon, Matthew extended the instruction not to worry about what to eat and about tomorrow (6:25-31, 34).
The distinctive parables of the workers in the vineyard and the parable of the final judgment also indicate that there were the poor, perhaps the day labourers who were hungry, thirsty and needing clothes, in the Matthean community (20:1-16; 25:31-46). Thus arguably, the fourth petition is not mere repetition of tradition but reflects the socio-economic needs of the poor in the Matthean community at the time. Since ‘bread’ was the most important food for nourishment in Semitic idiom, this petition was not so significant for all classes and groups of people in Palestine, but applied especially to day labourers who received payment for each working day and thereby survived for the next day. As Hare observes, “if they were not hired, their families went hungry”.165

The fifth petition describes the request for divine forgiveness (6:12). Many scholars see this petition as “eschatological in reference”.166 We should note, however, that the second half of this petition “as we also have forgiven our debtors” is in “the aorist imperative by the use of perfect tense (ἀφίκτομεν) referring to past, complete action”.167 In the later part of the Gospel, Matthew alone heightens the reference to forgiveness (cf. 18:21-35, and the parable of unforgiving servant). Furthermore, unlike Luke, Matthew attaches the explicit connection between human forgiveness and divine forgiveness in the appendix of his prayer (6:14-15).168 This petition thus implies that Matthew is linking the present action of human forgiveness with divine forgiveness, as also in Matthew 5:23-26. This has profound significance for relationships within the community: human reconciliation must precede worship!169

The sixth and seventh petitions are interrelated. The sixth petition asks for divine protection (6:13a). In the eschatological discourse, the disciples of Jesus are told they will be tempted and led astray if they are not careful (24:15-27; Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24). Nevertheless, the tense of the verb in μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν “lead us not into ‘temptation’ or ‘testing’”, in this petition is aorist subjunctive rather than imperative, perhaps because it is influenced by the negative.\(^\text{170}\) The petition thus reflects the context of the Matthean community as potentially being tempted by the tests of social-political and religious crises.\(^\text{171}\) The seventh petition, “deliver us from the Evil one” (6:13b), is regarded as Matthew’s addition, which asks for divine deliverance. The term ‘the Evil one’ found in the rest of Matthew’s Gospel (5:37, 39; 13:19, 38) indicates the context as being the Evil one of the present age.\(^\text{172}\) Thus both petitions imply a request for spiritual and physical protection against, and deliverance from, the power of evil in the present age.\(^\text{173}\)

In sum, all the petitions of Matthew’s prayer indicate that the Matthean community was suffering crises in both the social-political and religious realms. Jeffrey B. Gibson is right in arguing that in the eyes of Matthew and Luke, the background of the Lord’s Prayer is not to be found so much in the future eschatological coming of God as King but in present realities. For them (i) prayer is “grounded in (and arises from) a perception on Jesus’ part that his disciples are in grave danger of becoming members of ‘this generation’”, and (ii) the focus of prayer is “to have the disciples invoke God’s protection

\(^{171}\) Cf. chapter two, pages 143-153 above.
against engaging in ‘this generation’s’ recalcitrance”. So instead of praying like the hypocrites who prayed on the streets and in the synagogue, or like the Gentiles who heaped up empty phrases, Matthew encouraged his community to pray and practise a more profound prayer, which asked for the daily needs and radical obedience of his community.

**Fasting (6:16-18)**

After almsgiving and prayer, the third model of religious practice is ‘fasting’. This passage has no parallel in Mark and Luke and seems to be Matthew’s addition. Fasting was a traditional Jewish religious practice, which was thought to be effective in atoning for sin (Lev 16:29; Pss. Sol. 3:6-8), healing and exorcising (Apoc. El. 1:21). In Jewish religious practice, fasting had an honoured position as a means of expressing “an act of personal humility before God”. Since Jesus himself practised fasting (4:2), the negative reference to fasting in this passage should not be seen as Jesus opposing the practice of fasting (6:16). Rather, it should be viewed as a warning for the hypocritical practice of doing it in a way that earned public admiration.

As fasting could be accompanied by wearing sackcloth made of coarse, hairy material, sprinkling ashes or flour on the face, letting the dirt accumulate by abstaining from washing the body, leading to gloomy looks and disfiguring the face, it was in danger of becoming a public spectacle rather than an inward discipline (6:16). Thus these outward signs advertised in public that they were fasting.

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177 So argued also by Hill, *Matthew*, 140; and Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 69.
In contrast, Matthew offered the instruction to “put oil on your head and wash your face” (6:17). Thus as Carter suggests, “Fasting does not display itself; normal daily hygiene renders it inconspicuous” (2 Sam; 14:2; Jdt 16:7).\textsuperscript{180} Hendrickx and Allison interpret anointing one’s head to be a visible sign of rejoicing (as in Ps 23:5; 104:15).\textsuperscript{181} We should note that since this passage has mentioned nothing about rejoicing,\textsuperscript{182} the instruction of Matthew should be regarded as a sign of preserving the integrity of the inward practice, that is, fasting ‘in secret’ (cf. 6:16 and 6:18). As Hare rightly states, true fasting is invisible.\textsuperscript{183} Thus the instruction to anoint one’s head and wash one’s face when fasting should be regarded as the removal of a dismal look, an outward expression of fasting, so that the one fasting looked normal.\textsuperscript{184} As already heightened with regard to praying, the credit for religious piety is not to be from the public, but from God who is in secret and who knows the inward attitude (6:1, 4, 6, and 18).

\textit{The Teaching about Seeking God’s Kingdom (6:19-34)}

The materials in this section mostly derive from Q (6:19-21//Luke 12:33-34; 6:22-23//Luke 11:34-36; 6:24//Luke 16:13; 6:25-33//Luke 12:22-32).\textsuperscript{185} In Luke, these sayings of Jesus occur in a different context, but it seems that Matthew constructs them in a unit to fit the Sermon on the Mount.\textsuperscript{186} The sayings include the antithetical form of Jesus’ sayings which are divided into three groups: treasures on earth or in heaven (6:19-21), on serving

\textsuperscript{180} Carter, \textit{Matthew and the Margins}, 171.
\textsuperscript{181} See Hendrickx, \textit{The Sermon}, 136; and Allison, \textit{The Sermon}, 136.
\textsuperscript{182} So rightly Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, 111.
\textsuperscript{183} Hare, \textit{Matthew}, 71.
\textsuperscript{184} So argued also by Senior, \textit{Matthew}, 84; Hill, \textit{Matthew}, 141; and Davis and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 1:619.
\textsuperscript{185} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon}, 156-159; and Schweizer, \textit{Matthew}, 161.
\textsuperscript{186} Schnackenburg, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 70.
two masters (6:22-24), and anxiety and the kingdom of God (6:25-34). A closer investigation of these texts follows.

**The Heart’s Commitment and Sound Eyes (6:19-23)**

This text echoes the context of the Ancient Near East where people invested their treasures such as grain, gold, silver and precious stones in garments and stored them in a hidden place in the earth (cf. the parable of hidden treasure, 13:44). Since the possession of material wealth is subject to decay and loss, storing them up on earth becomes a source of danger, insecurity and anxiety. Thus this text stresses that treasures stored up on earth are of a perishable nature (6:19).

By way of contrast, Matthew also offers a positive reference to storing up treasure in heaven (6:20). Here, Matthew does not explain further about how to store up treasures in heaven but the context indicates his intent. In Jewish tradition, the concept of ‘treasure in heaven’ was usually understood as the good works of a person before God (Tob 4:9; 4 Ezra 6:5; Sir 29:10-13; Pss. Sol. 9:5). It was a commonly used image in Jewish literature to represent eschatological reward. In the parable of the rich man, Matthew distinctively describes that treasure in heaven as consisting of selling possessions and giving money to the poor, that is, almsgiving (cf. 19:21). Since the reference in Matthew 6:19-23 immediately follows the teaching about religious piety — almsgiving, prayer and fasting — storing up treasure in heaven indicates doing good works practically by sharing one’s possessions with the needy (cf. 25:31-46). Thus storing up treasure in heaven here is

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187 Hendrickx, *The Sermon*, 140. The details about storing up treasure in the time of ancient Near East will be discussed in considering the parable of hidden treasure.
consistent with the image of almsgiving, because where your treasure is, your hearts will also be (6:21; 19:21b).

Following this warning about the heart’s commitment, Matthew adds the statement about the eyes being the lamp of the body (6:22-23). This statement does not seem to refer to bodily eyes. Rather, it seems to articulate further the warning about the heart’s commitment. In Judaism, the ‘eye’ is a metaphorical expression which reflects the character and the moral quality of a person. Thus this claim about the eyes being the lamp of the body alludes to the purity and openness of a heart that flows from a clear discernment, that is, to visualise the treasure in heaven through ‘healthy eyes’.

The Choice about Serving (6:24-34)

This pericope is a warning about decision-making for the community regarding the service of God or of earthly possessions. Matthew warns his community that no one can serve both God and earthly possessions (6:24). This warning appears to anticipate the challenge of the two ways, which I will discuss further (cf. 7:13-14). In serving God, the community is not merely required to turn away from earthly possessions but also not to worry about their life. Instead they should be single minded in serving God (6:33). The description of the nature of creatures — the birds of the air and lilies of the field — indicates that Matthew admonishes his community to discern how God provides for and sustains his creation (6:26, 28). Matthew warns his community that anxiety is an attitude of the Gentiles (6:32). He heightens the common perception of Gentiles as those who

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191 So argued also by Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 397.
192 So Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 397; and Byrne, *Lifting the Burden*, 67.
194 See also Lambrecht, *The Sermon*, 166.
worry for their life and strive for earthly possessions (6:7, 32). As he describes in the later part of his Gospel, those who are worrying and striving for their lives will find it very hard to enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. 19:23-24).

So Matthew then affirms that the disciples of Jesus are not to worry for their life because God knows their needs before they ask (6:8, 32b). Instead of worrying for tomorrow, Matthew encourages his community to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (6:33, 34). This righteousness is in agreement with the will of God, at the heart of which lies “obedience and trust”. In their seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, God will provide not only for their need but also will reward them in the time of the consummation (cf. 6:25-34; 19:27-29 and 1 Kgs 3:5-13).

**ii. d) A Summary Reminder of the Sermon (7:1-12)**

This section appears to be a turning point in the Sermon after what Jesus has said in chapters 5-6. It begins with the three negative imperatives (i) “do not judge” (7:1-2), (ii) “do not give what is holy to dogs” (7:6a); and (iii) “do not throw your pearls before swine” (7:6b). The pericope is then followed by two positive imperatives (i) “ask”, “search”, and “knock” for the kingdom of heaven/God (7:7-11), and (ii) “do to others as you would have them do to you” (7:12).

The first negative imperative, “do not judge others” (7:1-2) identifies the Matthean community as imperfect in their way of life (7:13-14). They were growing, however, under the demand for perfection in practising the instructions of Jesus towards the consummation.

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195 Here, we should note that in the Sermon on the Mount, the term ‘righteousness’ occurs five times (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). It is a typically “Matthean concept”, which with the verb ‘to do’ and ‘to see’, indicates the demand of the Evangelist to his community to practise a better righteousness. See Hill, *Matthew*, 145; and Lambrecht, *The Sermon*, 167-169.
In practising these instructions Matthew warns his community not to judge others (7:2). Thus the rebuke in Matthew 7:3-5 seems not to address the whole community, but only those (perhaps they were the Torah extremists as I argued in chapter two) who misjudge others. They were the ones portrayed as the ‘hypocrite’ (7:5). Some scholars argue that ‘hypocrites’ in the Gospel of Matthew refers to the scribes and the Pharisees. Among them, Neil J. McEleney argues that the rebukes in Matthew 7:3-5 are intended for the scribes and the Pharisees, since elsewhere in Matthew the scribes and the Pharisees seem to be hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 22:18; 24:51). McEleney also notes that the ‘hypocrite’ in Matthew 7:5 “must apply to individuals among the crowds and disciples” to whom the Sermon was addressed. On the contrary, I would argue that Matthew 7:3-5 seems to reveal the hypocrites in Matthew as insiders in the community. Three factors to be considered are, first, Matthew’s Sermon is addressed to the crowds and disciples who follow Jesus (4:25-5:1; 7:28). Second, the terms ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ are closely related to fellow Christians (cf. 5:22). Third, the pronouns in this section are in the second person plural (cf. 5:13-16). Thus whilst the hypocrites in Matthew 7:5 may fit the scribes and the Pharisees in general as McEleney argues, they seem to be referring more explicitly to fellow Christians. Presumably these were a number of Jewish conservatives within the Matthean community who were influenced by the Pharisaic tradition and caused

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198 McEleney, “The Unity”, 492.
201 See my arguments on pages 170-173.
trouble for the rest of community as I have argued in chapter two. Matthew describes them as those who see the speck in their brother’s eyes but fail to notice the log in their own eyes (7:3-4). Perhaps they misjudge others by seeing only those religious pieties that are practised in public and failing to recognise others who practise them in secret (cf. 6:2, 5; 7:5 with 6:1, 4, 6, 17). Thus Matthew warns them not to judge others (7:1), and to take the speck out of their own eyes first so that they will see clearly to remove the speck out of their brother’s eyes (7:5).

The second and third negative imperatives, “do not give what is holy to dogs” and “do not throw your pearls before swine”, in Matthew 7:6 are enigmatic. Perhaps they are proverbial statements of the Matthean Jesus (cf. Prov 11:22). In the Hebrew Bible/Jewish Scriptures, swine were among those animals whose unclean flesh was not permitted to be used as a sacrificial offering (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8; Isa 66:3). In rabbinical texts, they appear as a metaphor for ‘Gentiles’ or ‘Rome’. Likewise, in rabbinic usage, ‘dogs’ also applied to persons ignorant of the Law or to Gentiles (cf. 15:26-27). Thus some scholars interpret this verse as a warning against mission to Gentiles (cf. 10:5). Against that claim, I would argue that since the purpose of Matthew’s Gospel is to make disciples of all nations (28:18-20), such an interpretation would be inconsistent with the prohibition of Gentile mission. It should rather be considered that this verse follows the admonishment not to judge others (7:1-2) and the rebuke to the hypocrites (7:5). In chapter

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202 Davies and Allison suggest that it is natural to think of Matthew’s characteristic addition of the word ‘brother’ in terms primarily of ‘intra-ecclesiastical activity’. Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:674. According to Hagner, “it is primarily the Christian community that is in view”. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 169. Similar arguments are also put by Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 100; and Schnackenburg, The Gospel of Matthew, 73-74.


204 So Luz, Matthew 1-7, 418-420; and McEleney, “The Unity”, 495-496.

205 So Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 171-172; and Manson, The Sayings, 174.
6. Matthew has heightened attention to the inward practices. Thus I would suggest that the ‘holy’ and the ‘pearls’ in this verse are consistent with the inward practices of religious pieties in secret: that is, the precious treasures that are being stored up in heaven (cf. 6:1, 4, 6, 17 and 6:19-21). Thus the negative imperatives, “do not give what is holy to dogs” and “do not throw your pearls before swine”, are consistent with the admonishment to disciples not to practise their religious pieties in public (6:2, 5; 7:5).

The Sermon then continues with the two positive imperatives of encouragement. The first involves the three verbs: ask, search, and knock (7:7-11). These three verbs function as Jewish expressions of prayer. The illustration of bread and fish in verses 9-10 seems to agree with Jesus’ feeding of the crowds in the later part of the Gospel (cf. 14:16-21; 15:32-38). Bread and fish comprised the most likely daily food for the common people of the land. Thus it seems that Matthew consistently changes Luke’s request of the child for fish and egg to bread and fish to fit his own context (cf. Luke 11:11-13).

The simple request of a child here indicates that the Matthean community needs to pray for their daily physical nourishment (cf. “give us this day our daily bread” in the fourth petition, 6:11). Here Matthew portrays the relation between his community and God as the relationship between father and son. Matthew reinforces the idea that God answers those who pray in a ‘childlike’ manner (7:9-11). Thus instead of judging others, Matthew reminds his community to concentrate on their religious pieties such as almsgiving, prayer, fasting and seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness as he suggests in Matthew 6:1-34. Matthew also affirms the promise that everyone who asks

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207 So argued also by Gundry, Matthew, 124; and Hendrickx, The Sermon, 169.
208 So Luz, Matthew 1-7, 423.
receives, who searches finds, and to those who knock, the door will be opened, for God
knows before they ask (cf. 7:8 and 6:8).209

The second positive imperative pattern in the climactic part of the Sermon is the so-
called ‘Golden Rule’ (7:12). Scholars note that the Golden Rule probably does not
originate with Jesus. Rabbi Hillel, who was contemporary with Jesus, also used the Golden
Rule as a “summary of the whole Torah”.210 In Luke, the Golden Rule is solely related to
the instruction of loving enemies, which parallels Matthew 5:42 (cf. Luke 6:31). In
Matthew, it is relocated to the end of the Sermon. Matthew also adds another phrase, “For
this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (7:12b).211 The addition here seems to recapitulate
the intentions of Matthew 5:17. Thus the so-called ‘Golden Rule’ is logically inconsistent
if seen just as the summary of the preceding verses (cf. 7:7-11). Since it has been relocated
to this climactic part of the Sermon, Matthew has in mind its application not merely to the
instruction about loving enemies, as in Luke. Rather, as Matthew and his community were
from a more Jewish background, Matthew uses the so-called Golden Rule as a fitting
summary of the whole body of the Sermon on the Mount.212 Thus he relocates the Golden
Rule to the climax of the Sermon (5:17-7:12) in order to summarise the whole body of the
Sermon and remind his community of the ethical demands for a better righteousness taught
by Jesus (5:20).213 At the same time, the additional phrase “for this sums up the Law and

209 Luz, Matthew 1-7, 421.
210 So argued by Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew”, 213-214. See also Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:687-
688; and Hendrickx, The Sermon, 170.
211 Here Stanton rightly states that “the additional words ὁ τεσσαράκοντα ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφήται are surely the Evangelist’s own composition”. Graham Stanton, “Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus”, in Das Evangelium und die Evangelien: Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982 (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; WUNT 28; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 279. So argued similarly by Gundry, Matthew, 125;
and Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 176.
212 So Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:689.
213 So Hare, Matthew, 81; Hendrickx, The Sermon, 170-171; Paul Ricoeur, “The Golden Rule: Exegetical
the Prophets” (7:12b) also demonstrates that for Matthew the Sermon on the Mount shows how Jesus has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (5:17) — thus preserving ‘new and old’ (9:16-17; 13:52).

iii) The Conclusion of the Sermon (Matt 7:13-29)

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with three challenges, each of which gives two options using metaphorical language: the narrow and wide gate (7:13-14); the good and bad trees (7:15-23); and the two builders (7:24-29). All these passages are related to both the eschatological and ethical dimensions of Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom.214

iii. a) The Narrow and Wide Gates (7:13-14)

The Sermon abruptly concludes with a warning about the two ways (7:13-14). Hare rightly observes that Matthew 7:13-14 appears to be out of context.215 This antithetical form seems to be a major turning point in Jesus’ ethical instruction in the Sermon on the Mount.

As I discussed in the introduction, for Suggs, these antithetical forms in Matthew are derivative from the earlier Two Ways tradition.216 On the contrary, Luz suggests that Matthew has supplemented the logion about the narrow gate, which was available to him, by the well-known parenetical Two Ways Theme. According to Luz, this is simply a

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215 Hare, *Matthew*, 81-82.
literary result that came about in Matthew by the adding of the Two Ways motif.\textsuperscript{217} We should note that the material in Matthew 7:13-14 is from Q, with Matthew’s own additions.\textsuperscript{218} Since Matthew has shortened the Q saying of the gate (Luke 13:23-30) and conflated it with the idea of the Two Ways, I would argue that as Matthew was a Jewish author he would have been familiar with the idea of the Two Ways Theme from the very beginning.\textsuperscript{219} No doubt he derived the idea of the Two Ways from his Jewish background, but he has been responsible for inserting it here and sharpening the antithetical nature of the metaphor. Four factors to be considered are, first, unlike Luke for whom the saying takes on an eschatological sense, Matthew is focusing on the ethical implications of the Two Ways.\textsuperscript{220} Second, in Luke, the Two Ways Theme is disconnected from the Sermon on the Plain (cf. 7:13-14 and Luke 13:24). Third, the wide gate in Matthew 7:14 is clearly Matthew’s addition. Finally, the deliberate change of the metaphor of the Q logia from ‘door’ to ‘gate’ is consistent with the geographical location of Antioch as the Antiochene readers would understand the analogy well.\textsuperscript{221} Thus the final form of the passage is not dependent solely on a traditional Jewish model, as Suggs has argued.\textsuperscript{222} Rather, it should be related to, and interpreted within, the distinctive Matthean literary and social context.

\begin{footnotes}
\item Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 434-435.
\item This position has been accepted by many scholars such as Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 1:695; Manson, \textit{The Sayings}, 175; Michael H. Crosby, \textit{House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 194; and Sim, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 209.
\item According to Luz, “the original Q saying spoke only of the narrow gate and of the fact that many want to enter, while only few can enter”. Then Matthew would have added the way to the gate (vv. 13c and 14b). See Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 434.
\item Here Manson is right in pointing out that Matthew 7:13 “is concerned with two ways, one leading to life and the other to death”; while Luke 13:24 “is concerned with \textit{one} door, and the question is which side of the door a man is on”. Manson, \textit{The Sayings}, 124, 175.
\item Nau is right in arguing that the Antiochene readers would understand the analogy of the ‘gate’ better than anyone else as Antioch was “famous for its broad and beautiful gates at either end of its renowned double colonnaded street” and “it also boasted one very narrow passageway, the Iron Gate, … which guarded the steep crevice separating Mt. Silpius from the smaller Mt. Staurin to the North. That Donkey-drowner path was certainly ‘confining’, very rocky and uneven”. So Nau, \textit{The Impact of Context}, 39.
\end{footnotes}
In Matthew 5:20, Matthew emphasises that “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”. This warning is articulated in the teaching about the social and religious ethics for the community (5:21-7:12). Thus the narrow gate in Matthew 7:13-14 refers to the way of life described according to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which only a few may find. On the other hand, the wide gate refers to the way of Jewish and Jewish Christian conservatives and false prophets, through which the majority will enter.\(^{223}\)

The imperative verb εισέλθω, ‘enter’ (7:13), shows that Matthew urges his community to follow the way of Jesus as instructed in the Sermon on the Mount. At the same time, he reminds them that the way of the majority is the way that leads to destruction (7:13b).\(^{224}\) The way of Jesus is difficult and unpopular, but “it alone leads to life”.\(^{225}\) Thus Matthew polarises Jesus’ ethical teaching by pointing out to his community the clear choice they face — through the narrow or the wide gate. The wide gate is easy and free, but leads to destruction. On the other hand, the narrow gate is hard and full of difficulties, but leads to life (7:13-14). As Meier rightly states, Matthew highlights the image of two types of disciples who live totally different lives before God, and he reminds his community that like Israel, if they fail to do the will of God, they will be rejected at the last judgment. Thus Matthew shows himself as both “an idealist and a realist”, by proclaiming “the radical demands of Jesus as realizable for true disciples”.\(^{226}\)

\(^{223}\) See also Sim, The Gospel of Matthew, 209.
Matthew goes on to draw the contrast between the way of Jesus and the way of the false prophets in order to define further the challenge to his community to choose which way they will follow.


iii. b) The Good and Bad Trees (7:15-23)

The warning against false prophets follows the antithetical contrast of the Two Ways. Matthew again conflates the saying of Q with his own special material (7:16b-18//Luke 6:43-44; 7:21//Luke 6:46; 7:22//Luke 13:26 from Ps 6:9). In particular, verses 15-20 and 21-23 appear to be loosely connected. Perhaps Matthew brings these two texts together in order to reveal the nature of the false prophets (their fruit) and their fate on the last day (7:21-23).

The false prophets in this section cannot be understood as the scribes and the Pharisees. Three factors are to be considered. Firstly, a rabbi never claimed to be a prophet. Secondly, Matthew distinctively describes the scribes and the Pharisees as ‘the hypocrites’ (6:5, 16; 7:5; 23:13-29). Thirdly, the reference to performing many mighty deeds ‘in my name’ in Matthew 7:23 points away from the scribes and the Pharisees, for they are depicted as opposing Jesus throughout his ministry. Far from performing mighty deeds in his name, they even accused Jesus of demon possession (12:24). Thus the use of ‘false prophets’ and the mighty deeds ‘in my name’ are inconsistent as descriptions of the scribes and the Pharisees. Rather, they are closely related to the Christian false prophets.

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228 Luz argues that “verses 16-20 are unified. Verses 21-23 are different in form and content”. Luz, Matthew 1-7, 439-440.
Thus the warning “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing” (7:15) suggests that they are itinerant Christian prophets of Matthew’s day.

The majority of scholars designate these false prophets as antinomians. According to Sim, these false prophets were from Pauline groups. Sim draws the relationship between the Matthean text (7:21-23) and the two Pauline texts (1 Cor 12:3 and Rom 10:9-13), and persuasively argues that Matthew 7:21-23 should be read as anti-Pauline text which opposes Paul’s claim that confessing Jesus as Lord guarantees salvation. Thus for Sim, these false prophets were “Paul himself and other ‘normal’ Paulinists in his churches”. Whilst I agree with Sim that these false prophets are outsiders to the Matthean community, I think he has polarised the Matthean and Pauline perspectives too far, and placed them at each extreme. I have suggested that Matthew does not seem to highlight “pro-Torah and anti Pauline emphases” in his creation of the Sermon on the Mount as Sim argues. Nor does Matthew label Paul and his groups as false prophets anywhere in his Gospel. Paul himself also observes the Law through Jesus (Rom 3:31). Just as for Matthew (22:34-40; 19:18-21; cf. 25:31-46), for Paul, love is the pivot in fulfilling the Law (Rom 13:8-10; 1 Cor 13:1-13). Thus as I discussed in chapter two, Matthew was interpreting the Law through Jesus in order to correct the Torah extremists within his community.

Furthermore, the distinctive texts: gathering together in ‘my name’ (18:20; cf. 7:22), and the commission for mission to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast demons, and

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give baptism (10:8, 20; 28:19), show that Matthew and his community also used ‘my name’ in fulfilling the mission of Jesus.\textsuperscript{235} As I have argued above and will discuss further,\textsuperscript{236} these false prophets were unlikely to come from Pauline groups. Thus I agree with Luz that the way those texts taken from Q are used (5:12; 10:41; 23:37) suggests that there were still wandering prophets loosely associated with the Matthean networks (7:15-23; 10:7; 13:1-4; 15:1; 24:10-12).\textsuperscript{237} They may in some respects be typified as “extreme Paulinists”,\textsuperscript{238} but should not be associated directly with Pauline communities.

The references to calling Jesus ‘Lord, Lord’ (7:22a) and the performing of many mighty works in Jesus’ name (7:22b) show that these false prophets are miracle-working enthusiasts rather than Gnostics, Essenes, Zealots or anti-Jewish Christian prophets, as some scholars have suggested. Hagner is right in arguing that these false prophets could be “charismatic enthusiasts”, but unconvincingly states that these false prophets were within the Matthean community.\textsuperscript{239} More accurately, Hill observes that these false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23 are both antinomians and charismatics,\textsuperscript{240} “whose activities are insufficient to ensure for them entrance to the kingdom” and who are “a group coming into the church from outside”.\textsuperscript{241} Here I agree with Hill since the warning “Beware of false prophets” is given (7:15a), which suggests that the itinerant prophets were from outside and were trying to infiltrate into the Matthean community.\textsuperscript{242} The distinctive phrase

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{235} Cf. Sim, “Matthew 7.21-23”, 334-341.
\item \textsuperscript{236} See chapter 4, page 275 below.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{238} I note Sim’s rejection of this term (see Sim, “Matthew 7.21-23”, 341-342) and accept his distinction between lawless and charismatic behaviour, but in either case, it is difficult to see these ‘lone-ranger’ false prophets as part of mainstream Pauline tradition.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 182-183.
\item \textsuperscript{240} David Hill, “False Prophets and Charismatics: Structure and Interpretation in Matthew 7.15-23”, \textit{Bib} 57 (1976): 327-348.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Hill, “False Prophets and Charismatics”, 348.
\item \textsuperscript{242} See page 119 above.
\end{itemize}
Matthew designates these false prophets as λύκοι ἄρσαγες ‘ravening wolves’. Wolves were understood as ravaging beasts and the “natural enemies of the sheep” (cf. Isa 11:6; 65:25; Sir 13:17; John 10:12). The distinctive adverb ἐσωθεν indicates that the habits and thoughts of these false prophets were full of danger and immorality (cf. 10:16). Thus Matthew identified them as the natural enemies of the truth, who entered into his community to threaten and scatter believers (cf. Acts 20:29).

Their deeds are then compared with trees and their fruit (7:16-20; cf. 12:33-35//Luke 6:43-45). Hagner rightly states that fruit (καρπος) is “a natural and common metaphor for righteous deeds” (cf. 3:8; 10; 21:43; Gal 2:22; John 15:2-8). The antithetical contrast δένδρον ἀγαθὸν καρποὺς κυλοὺς ποιεῖ in verse 17a and σαπρὸν δένδρον καρποὺς πονηροὺς ποιεῖ in verse 17b also shows that Matthew is alluding to those who follow the way of Jesus’ teaching as those who bear good fruit. On the other hand, those who fail to do the teaching of Jesus and follow the false prophets are those who bear bad fruit.

The emphatic focus of πρὸς καρπῶν and οἵτινες ἐρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς in verse 15, ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν in verse 16a, the parable of good and bad fruit (vv. 16-20), the prophecy about their appeal in the last day (vv. 21-22), and οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν in verse 23, all support the view that these Christian false prophets were Christian

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libertines in the time of Matthew who failed to enact the will of God (v. 16). Gerhard Barth states that these false prophets claimed, “Christ has abolished the Law” and they were relying not on πίστις but “on their charismata, their spiritual gifts”. They confessed Jesus as Lord (vv. 21b, 22b), and used the powerful name of Jesus in performing miracles, prophecies and exorcisms (v. 22). These were all “the tell-tale signs of the end”. These false prophets fail, however, to do the will of God (v. 22c) — that is, they do not live according to the ethical demands of the way of Jesus. Their easy ways of life and their anti-nomistic teachings presumably impacted on the beliefs of the Matthean community. Their miraculous works in the name of Jesus also threatened to attract a lot of the Matthean community and lead the community astray. Their leading of others astray anticipates the allegory of Jesus in Matthew 15:14 of the blind leader of the blind, both of whom fall into a ditch. The Matthean Jesus repeatedly predicts that their mighty deeds will deceive even God’s chosen people on the last day (24:4-5, 11, 23-26//Mark 13:21-23).

The prediction of verses 21-23 indicates that in the Day of Judgment, these false prophets will defend themselves by pointing out how they have prophesied, driven out demons and performed many miracles in the name of Jesus (vv. 22). The Lord however will say to them, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers” (7:23), for they bear no good fruit, that is, they fail to do the will of God by living ethically (vv. 16-20). Thus for Matthew, true prophets are not defined by miraculous deeds, but by a practical life of obeying God’s Law and doing the will of God. Doing the will of God is the greater

247 So Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law”, 75; and Aune, Prophecy, 223.
248 Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law”, 164.
249 So Sim, The Gospel of Matthew, 212; and Apocalyptic Eschatology, 164-167.
250 This warning also partly indicates these false prophets.
righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees and that leads to entry into the kingdom of heaven (cf. 5:20 and 7:21). The warning “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (7:19) and the universal formulation, ‘everyone’ (7:21) also function as the criteria for self-examination of the Matthean community for eschatological judgment. Thus Matthew’s parable of the good and bad trees not only articulates the need for the Matthean community to avoid these false prophets or wolves in sheep’s clothing, but also warns them to bear good fruit by doing the will of God.

iii. c) The Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24-29)

The parable of the two builders (7:24-27) follows the warning against the false prophets. This parable serves as the climactic part of the Sermon and encapsulates the challenge to radical discipleship. Matthew begins this parable with a reference to “Everyone then who hears these words of mine” (7:24). This reference contrasts with the previous warning “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven” (7:21), and reminds the Matthean community to examine themselves as to which foundation they have laid, and to which Lord they have been listening.

This parable is derived from Q (cf. Luke 6:47-49). First, Matthew distinguishes the two builders as ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ (7:24, 26), whereas in Luke, there is no distinction between the builders as ‘wise’ or ‘foolish’ (cf. Luke 6:48-49). This antithetical contrast

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252 According to Heil, “Doing the will of Jesus’ Father in heaven is thus synonymous with doing the greater righteousness necessary to enter (eἰς τὸ βασίλειον) into the reign of heaven”. Heil, “Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders”, 30. So also Hill, Matthew, 152.
The words ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ are distinctively Matthean. The word ‘wise’ occurs seven times in Matthew, but occurs two times in Luke. The word ‘foolish’ occurs six times, but does not occur in the other Gospels. It is a key word in the Sermon on the Mount (if the salt becomes μωρόν μην ‘foolish’ [5:13b] — if you call your brother a ‘fool’ [5:22]) and it also occurs in Matthew 23:17 and 25:2-8! So argued also by Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 190-191.


The storm or wind is “a typical metaphor of judgment or crisis”. So Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1990), 259.


choice of laying foundations on the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount or on the teachings of the false prophets (7:15-23). The foundation of the ‘rock’ here also anticipates the foundation of Peter and his confession of which Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church” (16:18b).261

The Matthean form of this parable thus should be interpreted in terms of the wise and the foolish builder symbolising the obedient and disobedient ones (7:24, 26). The rock is a metaphor for safety (16:18; cf. 1 Sam 2:2; Ps 27:5), that is, laying foundations on the teaching of Jesus; the sand symbolises lack of safety, that is, laying foundations on the teaching of the false prophets;262 and the natural disasters are a metaphor for both the present reality of the persecutions and disasters the Matthean community faces and the eschatological judgment.263

Thus Matthew offers a decisive criterion for discipleship to his community by heightening the contrast between the wise and foolish builder. This is that his community might be aware of the essence of Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount and follow it in order to stand firm in the time of eschatological judgment.264 Those who hear the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and practically do the will of God will survive in the time of eschatological judgment (cf. 5:20; 7:24-25). Those who hear the

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261 So argued also by some recent scholars like Knowles, “‘Everyone Who Hears These Words of Mine’”, 290; Overman, Church and Community in Crisis, 102; and Sim, The Gospel of Matthew, 210.
262 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:721-724; Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 190-191; and Manson, The Sayings, 61.
263 The storm in OT and Jewish literature represents God’s judgment and the trials of the later days (Gen 6-7; Isa 28:2; 29:6; 30:30; Ezek 13:10-16; 2 Bar. 53.7-12; Sib. Or. 3.689-92; 1QH 3.14; 5.377-80), as do rains and rivers (Isa 30:27-30; Ps 66:10-12; Sib. Or. 3.689-91). So Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:721-722; and Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 190-191.
264 Meier, Matthew, 75-76.
teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount but fail to enact it, that is, follow the teaching of false prophets instead, will be rejected (cf. 7:15-23, 26-27).

Matthew then concludes the Sermon on the Mount by referring to the astonishment of the crowds at the authority of Jesus’ teaching (v 28). What astonished the crowds here was not Jesus’ “use of proverbs, parables, hyperbole or other standard pedagogic devices of his day”, but his claim of authority (cf. 28:18). The distinctive change of ‘the scribes’ of Mark (Mark 1:22) to ‘their scribes’ (7:29) indicates that Matthew is contrasting the teaching of his opponents — both Jewish and Christian scribes — with the teaching of Jesus. This is because the use of ‘their scribes’ would also refer to Christian groups of scribes which were likely to have developed by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel (cf. 13:52; 23:34).

iv) Summary

The whole narrative of the Sermon (Chaps 5-7) functions as an ethical guide for the way of radical discipleship which Matthew reshaped from the kingdom teaching of Jesus to his disciples and to the crowds. All of the above arguments show that in order to clarify the identity of his community, as Matthew edits the Sermon on the Mount, he reinterprets the Law which is interpreted in Jesus’ teaching about social and religious ethics. Then he heightens the choice between the two rival ways which lead to two

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265 So Heil, “Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders”, 31-34; and Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 260. According to Blomberg, “(1) the person who responds to the Gospel with obedience will survive God’s final judgment intact. (2) The person who refuses to follow Christ in discipleship, on the other hand, will be destroyed on that last day”.


267 So Hill, Matthew, 154.

268 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 178-180.
different destinations. As the Matthean community was a mixed body, the impact of false prophets from outside was leading the community astray and posing a great threat to the community. The fruit of these false prophets was leading to ethical outcomes inconsistent with kingdom values, in Matthew’s eyes, whereas obedience to Jesus produced good fruit. Thus in the parable of the gates, Matthew exhorts his community to enter through the narrow way, that is, the way of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus has shown the way to life. The way of Jesus is difficult but it alone leads to life. On the other hand, the wide way, that is, the way of the false prophets, may be easier, but leads to destruction. Therefore, the community is exhorted to build its foundations only on the way of Jesus. Thus the Two Ways Theme underlies and foreshadows Matthew’s presentation of ‘the two kingdoms’ in Jesus’ teaching in the parables, as will be developed in the following section.

B. The Comparative Structure of the Kingdom Teaching in Parables

Matthew 13 is the third of the five clearly delineated, major discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel and presents the parables of Jesus about the kingdom.\(^{269}\) In the first discourse (Matt 5-7), Matthew presents Jesus as an authoritative teacher who ascends the mountain and teaches about the social and religious ethics of the kingdom (the Sermon on the Mount) as argued above. In this third discourse (Matt 13), the context is different. According to Matthew’s narrative, Jesus is walking beside the sea, gets into a boat and speaks to the crowds about the kingdom through parables (13:1-3, 13, 34-35). Perhaps this

parable chapter and third discourse should be named “the Sermon on the Beach” or “the Sermon in the Boat”. 270

In this chapter, Matthew systematically builds the kingdom teaching of Jesus through seven parables (Matt 13). 271 The number seven itself would be especially appropriate for the author in composing a definitive collection of the parabolic teaching of Jesus about the secret of the kingdom. 272 Scholars divide Matthew 13:1-52 into two parts: the first part (13:3-35), which is addressed openly to the crowds, and the second part (13:36-52), which is addressed privately to the disciples. The real addressees, however, are the disciples (13:10-17). 273

As in the Sermon on the Mount, not all the material in these seven parables was preached at the same time and in the same place on the beach. This is so because whereas Matthew follows Mark very closely, particularly Mark 4:1-34, he omits some Markan material (Mark 4:21-29), and adds some material probably from Q and the oral tradition available to him. 274 The deliberate introduction: “that same day”, followed by “Jesus went out of the house” (13:1), and “got into the boat” (13:2), as the setting of the parable chapter also shows that Matthew seems to highlight his community as already separated

272 It seems that Matthew has a preference for the number seven in order to symbolise holiness and perfection. So Gerhardsson, “The Seven Parables”, 18; and Schnackenburg, The Gospel of Matthew, 4. Note also the deliberate use of numerical ‘seven’ also found in the rest of Matthew’s Gospel: double ‘seven’ generations, 1:1-17; ‘seven’ petitions, 6:9-13; and ‘seven’ woes, 23:13-36. See O’Leary, Matthew’s Judaization of Mark, 134.
from its main parent body through the linking of this parable chapter with the recurring issue of the acceptance and rejection of Jesus’ message in the previous chapters.\textsuperscript{275}

The main focus in Matthew’s presentation of this third discourse is the acceptance and rejection of Jesus’ message of the kingdom. Harrington rightly points out that what Matthew wrestled with was the reality of the mystery of Jewish acceptance and rejection of Jesus’ message of the kingdom both during the public ministry of Jesus and within his own experience in the second half of the first century CE.\textsuperscript{276}

In this section, therefore I would argue that Matthew systematically and symmetrically redacts these seven parables as a unique discourse in order to fit the situation faced by the mixed body of his community. Firstly, he portrays the kingdom as present reality by polarising the parable of the sower (13:3-9, 18-23) and the parable of the tares (13:24-30, 36-43) as a pair. Secondly, he underlines the kingdom as mysterious growth by pairing the parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32) and the parable of the leaven (13:33). Thirdly, addressing the ultimate value of the kingdom, he juxtaposes the parable of the hidden treasure (13:44) and the parable of the pearl (13:45-46). Then he concludes with a warning about the judgment of the kingdom with the parable of the dragnet (13:47-50).\textsuperscript{277} I would argue that these pairs are constructed as a dualistic sequence in Matthew’s distinctive parabolic setting in chapter 13. From the comparative perspective of my

\textsuperscript{275} Mark and Luke mention nothing about Jesus leaving the house that same day (cf. Mark 4:1; Luke 8:4).
\textsuperscript{277} Contra to my view, see Gerhardsson, “The Seven Parables”, 18, who argues specifically for grouping the parables in Matthew 13 as the introductory parable, the parable of the sower (13:3-9) followed by the three pairs of parables: The parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32) and the parable of the leaven (13:33) as twins; the parable of the hidden treasure (13:44) and the parable of the pearl (13:45-46) as twins; and even argues that the parable of the tares (13:24-30) and the parable of the dragnet (13:47-48), while they are not twins, are identical in meaning and unmistakably a related pair.
reading from a context of persecution, these pairs heighten the response Matthew seeks from his community to the choice between acceptance and rejection of the kingdom teaching of Jesus. A closer investigation from this perspective follows.

i) The Kingdom as Present: The Parables of the Sower and the Tares (Matt 13:3-30, 36-43)

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is near” (6:10, 13; Luke 10:9, 11). It has already come and is in the midst of you (12:28; cf. Luke 17:21). This means that the kingdom, which Jesus proclaims, is at least in some senses a present reality. This present reality of the kingdom is described in the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares.

The Parable of the Sower (13:3-23). Matthew follows Mark very closely in this parable and expands the following section which corresponds to Mark 4:10-12. This parable is consistent with a context within the Galilean environment of Jesus because its listeners were familiar with the images of agriculture. The image of sowing no doubt reflects the customs in Israel, although some scholars disagree over the practice of sowing and ploughing in Palestine during the time of Jesus. While some argue that the field was first sown and then ploughed, others argue for ploughing before sowing.

279 Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 375. According to Keener, most of the Palestinian Jews were like other Mediterranean people who worked in agriculture and “perhaps 90 percent of the Roman world was rural.”
Here I agree with scholars who argue for ploughing before sowing. Ploughing before sowing is more applicable to the context of this parable for it is not only consistent with the nature of normal agricultural practice but also corresponds to Matthew’s understanding of the advent of the kingdom, where the ‘field’ of the kingdom of God/heaven was ploughed by John the Baptist and sown by Jesus (3:1-3, 10-12; 11:10-13; cf. Mal 3:1). Ploughing may well have occurred some time before the sowing (as Fisher suggests), allowing time for paths to be trodden and weeds to grow. But assuming this order is preferable to the idea of ploughing the seed into the soil, which would minimise the differences between the types and location of the soil.

The parable describes that the sower scattered the seeds which were caught up by the wind and blown into four different areas: (i) along the path, (ii) on the rocky ground, (iii) among thorn bushes, and (iv) on good soil. Thus the main focus of this parable is the fate of the seeds, which fall into different kinds of soils. It appears that only the seed that falls on good soil produces satisfactory crops.

In Palestine, crop yields of four-fold and five-fold were common and the average yield was approximately seven-fold. Yields approaching thirty-fold have become possible in modern Israel by the use of fertilisers and sophisticated farming technology, but even these happen “only in very good years”. Wenham suggests that yields of thirty, sixty, and hundred-fold, are not the return of all seeds that were sown, but are evidence of

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284 In the act of sowing, the sower hung the bag of seeds on his neck and walking backwards and forwards across his field, dipped his hand into the seed and scattered it. So David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1989), 42; A. M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now* (London: SCM, 1971), 14.
286 Robert K. McIver, “One Hundred-fold Yield — Miraculous or Mundane?: Matthew 13.8, 23; Mark 4.8, 20; Luke 8.8”, *NTS* 40 (1994): 606-608, esp. page 608. According to McIver, “the grain that gave a yield of thirty-fold in the parable of the sower was giving a crop that was not exceptional, it was miraculous in first-century Palestine”.

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extremely fertile soil that yielded abundantly.\textsuperscript{287} The overflowing yield in this parable indicates the divine fullness of the seeds, which symbolises “the eschatological overflowing of divine fullness, surpassing all human measure”.\textsuperscript{288} Agriculturally, the different yields of thirty, sixty, and hundred-fold not only depend on the field but also on the seed itself that is sown. The better the quality of seed, the better it produces.\textsuperscript{289} Therefore, the overflowing of the yield is because of divine fullness in the seeds as well as in the soil. The concluding words “Let anyone with ears listen!” (13:9) warn the crowds about the deeper concerns beyond the parable of the sower.\textsuperscript{290}

According to the narrative, after Jesus spoke to the great crowds about the kingdom in parables (cf. 13:2-3, 10), the disciples came to him privately and asked him why he spoke through parables and the purpose of this parable and what was its explanation (13:10-17).\textsuperscript{291} Matthew describes Jesus speaking to the crowds in parables because “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand” (13:13).\textsuperscript{292} The distinctive references “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (13:11) and “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (13:16, cf. 13:9) indicate the distinction between the negative and positive response to Jesus’ message in the Matthean

\textsuperscript{287} Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 43.
\textsuperscript{288} So argued by Jeremias, \textit{The Parables}, 150.
\textsuperscript{289} This suggestion comes from my own personal experiences in agriculture, where it became obvious to me that good seeds are also important for producing better yields.
\textsuperscript{290} Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables”, 104.
\textsuperscript{291} Matthew follows Mark very closely (cf. Mark 4:10-12).
\textsuperscript{292} Richard Beaton rightly states, “In Matthew, Jesus speaks to them in parables in response to their hostility towards him and to their unbelief. The use of the verb ‘understand’ is highly significant in this context, as the notions of belief, unbelief and understanding are pivotal to this section. The emphasis, however, is not upon a predestinarian view; rather, as the Isaiah quote makes clear, the use of parables to obfuscate is a response to the unbelief exhibited by Jesus’ listeners”. Richard Beaton, “Isaiah in Matthew’s Gospel”, in \textit{Isaiah in the New Testament} (eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 73.
community (cf. Matthew chapters 11-12).\textsuperscript{293} Here Matthew distinguishes the real disciples of Jesus from the crowds by alluding to them as those who know the secrets of the kingdom (13:11, cf. 13:13-15).

The parable of the sower is explained in 13:18-23. According to the Synoptic Evangelists this interpretation comes from Jesus himself. The majority of scholars, however, find difficulty in accepting this and argue that it did not derive from the historical Jesus himself but was created by the early church.\textsuperscript{294} Yet the lines between parable, allegory and interpretation are never so easy to draw — whether in the oral or written tradition.\textsuperscript{295} Parables will inevitably be heard as allegories from the moment they are told. But even if some form of the allegory goes back to Jesus and the disciples, I am focusing here on the content and context that Matthew gives to the allegory (13:18, “Therefore you all [emphatic!] must hear/discern the parable of the sower!”).

Since the parable of the sower follows the accounts of unbelief in Jesus and his message in Matthew 11 and 12, the sower and the seed in this parable specifically represent Jesus himself and his message of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{296} The fields symbolise the hearts of people, as the parable of the tares makes explicit (vv. 37-38). The seeds that fell along

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{293} Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables”, 104-105.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Gerhardsson, “The Parables of the Sower”, 165; John Dominic Crossan, \textit{In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus} (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 41-42; and Armstrong, \textit{The Gospel Parables}, 35. According to Armstrong, it was an editorial addition. Joachim Jeremias, \textit{Rediscovering the Parables} (London: SCM, 1966), 64, also states that this interpretation was “a product of the primitive Church, which regarded the parable as allegory and interpreted each detail in it allegorically”, in parallel with 4 Ezra.
\item \textsuperscript{296} See Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables”, 104; Jeremias, \textit{The Parables}, 79. According to Jeremias, this interpretation is parallel to 4 Ezra, which compares the divine Word with God’s seed, and on the other hand, compares humans with God’s planting. Marcus argues that the sower is deliberately not named (in Mark – but also Matthew?) because it is a ‘gap’ to be filled by God → Jesus → disciples → us! Joel Marcus, “Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower”, \textit{BibInt} 5 (1997): 247-262. Similarly Heil argues that the sower here refers to Jesus and the disciples of Jesus. See Heil, “Narrative Progression of the Parables Discourse in Matthew 13:1-51”, 71-72. I would argue that though any faithful Christian can become a sower, in Matthew’s context the sower is assumed to be Jesus himself. So argued also by Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew”, 304; and C. H. Dodd, \textit{The Parables of the Kingdom} (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1938), 181.
\end{itemize}
the paths allude to those who hear the message of the kingdom but do not understand it because of their hardheartedness (cf. 13:19 and 13:13-15; 11:21, 23; 12:41-42). The seeds (the seeds are the message, not the people) that fell on the rocky ground refer to those who receive the message but give it up because of persecutions and troubles (13:20-21). The circumstances of this category of seeds supports the view argued above that persecution has already been emphasised in Matthew’s Gospel (cf. 5:11-12; 10:16-25) and the followers of Jesus “must be prepared for this eventuality and be ready to endure to the end (cf. 23:34-36; 24:9-13”). The seeds that fell among thorn bushes remind readers of those who hear the message but do not bear fruit because of worldly concerns (13:22). Matthew heightens the circumstances of anxiety and wealth in the Sermon on the Mount as well as in the later part of the Gospel (cf. 6:19-34; 19:23-24). The seeds that fell on the good soil allude to those who hear the message and understand it and bear fruit (13:23). Bearing fruit here is probably to be understood not as numerical growth but as “the pattern of conduct described in the Sermon on the Mount: the living out of the kingdom of God here and now”.

The major interest of this parable is to explain why some of Matthew’s community refused the kingdom teaching of Jesus. This parable represents not only Jesus’ own fate — the apparent failure of his ministry and proclamation to bear widespread fruit — but also the purposes of God, which are depicted here by using a simple metaphor about the coming eschaton. The parable stresses the importance of people listening carefully to

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299 According to Harrington, “Matthew’s major interest was to explain why some Jews refused Jesus’ ‘word of the kingdom’”. Harrington, Matthew, 201.
300 So argued by Schweizer, Matthew, 297; and Pheme Perkins, Hearing the Parables of Jesus (New York: Paulist, 1982), 80.
the Word of God.\textsuperscript{301} It also presents to the Matthean community the dangers of loss of faith in terms of the effects of persecution and tribulation, the effects of the easy life of false prophets, and the effects of giving in to other worldly concerns.\textsuperscript{302}

The setting of this parable in Matthew is consistent with the view that through God’s judgment the division which had already appeared between the receptive and un receptive hearers of the Word of God is manifested already in the mixed character of the Matthean church.\textsuperscript{303} Thus Matthew challenges his community to examine their position in order to decide which soil they are.\textsuperscript{304} This parable also tells a story of the inauguration of the kingdom, which is present in the midst of us and has been started and sown by Jesus himself. The growth of the seeds depends on the soil, that is, the hearts of the receivers. The growing crop which is the reward of the faithful, may only fully be received at the time of the harvest, that is, at the consummation of God’s gracious reign.

\textbf{The Parable of the Tares (13:24-30, 36-43).} Matthew builds this parable perhaps based on the parable of the seed growing secretly of Mark 4:26-29, and other traditions that are unique to him.\textsuperscript{305} Many scholars argue that this parable was a later addition,\textsuperscript{306} so that perhaps Matthew included some materials from other sources and reconstructed them with his own situation in mind.\textsuperscript{307} The main focus of this parable is the tares which were sown by the enemy. The parable distinctively describes the enemy sowing the tares in the midst of the wheat purposely to disturb the work of the owner (13:27-29).

\textsuperscript{301} Gerhardsson, “The Parable of the Sower”, 166.
\textsuperscript{302} So FitzPatrick, “The Mystery”, 52; and Harrington, “The Mixed Reception”, 199.
\textsuperscript{303} FitzPatrick, “The Mystery”, 52-53; and Donahue, \textit{The Gospel in Parable}, 68.
\textsuperscript{304} See Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 48; and Perkins, \textit{Hearing the Parables of Jesus}, 81.
\textsuperscript{305} So argued also by Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 2:407.
\textsuperscript{306} Schweizer, \textit{Matthew}, 303. Schweizer argues that the introduction of evil in the parable is “the product of later interpretation”. He argues that verses 25, 27, and 28c are interpolations by the community. Dodd points out that nevertheless, the parable is “a realistic story of agricultural life, told vividly and naturally”. Dodd, \textit{The Parables}, 184.
\textsuperscript{307} Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 2:407.
Tares are generally identified with the ‘poisonous darnel’, *Lolium temulentum*, which grows about two feet high and looks the same as wheat. They produce grain similar in size to that of wheat and are very difficult to distinguish from wheat in the earliest stages of its growth.\(^{308}\) Their roots are intertwined with the roots of the wheat and it is impossible to separate the wheat from the tares, as the parable describes.\(^{309}\) Armstrong observes that “the roots of the darnels are interlaced with those of the wheat”\(^{310}\) and begin to displace the wheat. As the parable describes, because of them, the wheat cannot grow as vigorously as it might otherwise (cf. 13:29).

The distinctive nature of the wheat and the tares is manifested in the time of harvest when the grain of wheat becomes a golden colour, and the grain of the darnel becomes a dark colour.\(^{311}\) Therefore, in the parable, when the servants asked the owner if they should pull up the tares before the harvest, the owner answered ‘No!’ The owner allowed the tares to grow together with the wheat for he foresaw what would happen, anticipating separation in the time of harvest.\(^{312}\) In the time of harvest, the wheat will be gathered to the barn of the owner, but the tares will be burned (13:30b).

This parable is explained further in Matthew 13:36-43. The interpretation describes that the sower is Jesus, the enemy is the devil, the field is the world, the good seeds are the children of the kingdom, the tares are the children of the evil one, the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels (13:37-41).


\(^{311}\) So Manson, *The Sayings*, 192-193.

The majority of scholars agree that the explanation of this parable is Matthew’s own embellishment. As I have argued in chapter two, this parable and its interpretation reflect the situation of Matthew’s community, which encountered opposition to the gospel and was concerned about the character of some members within the community. This was because false prophets and their followers who penetrated the Matthean community were potentially a great threat to the community. They were in many respects indistinguishable from the rest of the Matthean community (7:15-20). The parable therefore encourages the community to be patient and co-exist as a mixed community until the time of judgment (13:30). It also serves as a warning about the judgment, which ensures that the faithful will be rewarded but the evil will be punished.

In sum, these two parables suggest that Matthew had in mind a comparison of the two kingdoms: one was starting in the present time through Jesus, and the other was

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314 Byrne argues that it may be wrong to insist that the allegorising of the parable is focussed primarily on a situation in the Matthean community. He suggests that it is best to see “a continuity between the original parable and the allegory in the sense that both are primarily explaining and dealing with the mixture of good and evil, in both world and Church, and relating this to a particular vision of God and what may be hoped for in view of that vision”. Byrne, Lifting the Burden, 112. Though clearly the same situation applies more widely to the world and the Church as a mixture of good and evil as Byrne argues, I would argue that since the parable of the tares is unique to Matthew and since the whole context of the parable chapter (chapter 13) is in ‘a boat’, the particular circumstance which is addressed by this parable is particularly the Matthean community rather than the world in a general sense. Arguments similar to mine are also made by Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:408.

315 According to Jeremias, the original purpose of this parable was “to impress upon the impatient the need of patience, the insisting that the time for separation has not yet come but that God will bring it in his own time, has been turned in Matthew to parenetic use as an allegorical description of the last Judgment, a warning against false security”. Jeremias, The Parables, 85.

316 The reward is clearly not based on church membership as such, since the community contains both tares and wheat, but based on obedience. So Russell Pregeant, Christology Beyond Dogma: Matthew’s Christ in Process Hermeneutic (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 110; and Hill, Matthew, 232. According to Davies and Allison, in the parable of the tares Matthew’s concern is not “the salvation of the righteous”, i.e., the reward, but the terrible fate of the wicked, i.e., the punishment. Cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:427. This is so, not because of vindictiveness, but out of pastoral concern — to exhort the faithful and the wavering.
started concurrently by Satan. This is evident since the sower on the one hand sowed wheat in the field (13:3b, 24), on the other hand, the enemy also sowed tares among the wheat while everyone was sleeping (13:25; cf. 13:4-7). The seeds of both sowers would grow continuously until the time of judgment.

The difference between the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares is that the second involves two sowings. In the parable of the sower, the seeds symbolise the (good and potent) Words of God, which generate believers, and the issue is what kind of soil receives it. In the parable of the tares, however there are two sowings (the sowing of the sower and of the enemy) and the issue is who will bear the fruit of the good seed which was sown by the exalted Son of Man, and who will bear the fruit of the evil seed, which was sown by Satan. So Matthew has specifically highlighted the two opposing natures of the two kingdoms whereby “God permits good and evil to co-exist until the end of time”.  

Matthew pairs these two parables together in order to admonish his community that just as there is a good way, there is also an evil way — not only outside the church, but also within the church. As there is the inaugurated kingdom of God, there is also the corresponding possibility of interruption by evil power. The good and the evil may not always be easy to discern. In the time of separation, however, the righteous will inherit the kingdom of God but the evil go to a fiery fate.

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ii) The Kingdom as Mystery: The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (Matt 13:31-33)

Whereas the kingdom is described as being present, it is also described as ultimately mysterious. In picturing this mystery of the kingdom, Matthew appears to develop the contrast between two types of growth, which are found in the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32). This parable is seen in each Synoptic Gospel (cf. Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19) with a few differences. The original version of this parable is probably closer to that found in Luke and in the Gospel of Thomas (20), and perhaps has connections to Psalm 104:12. Scholars suggest that the text in Matthew is a combination of Q and Mark.

In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field (13:31; cf. Mark 4:31, ‘on the ground’). In rabbinic proverbs, the mustard seed is understood to be the smallest one, though it scarcely becomes a tree large enough for a bird’s lodging. Compared with other trees, the mustard trees grow quickly, especially “in the warm conditions of the Middle East”. They could reach a height of two to three metres and their branches attract the birds of the air even

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319 See Schweizer, *Matthew*, 305-306. Schweizer points out that in Q (Luke 13:18), the mustard bush is called a ‘tree’, not a plant in a field. While “Q emphasises the growth of the seed into a tree”, Mark focuses on the contrast between the “smallest of all and the greatest of all”, which is not in Q. Matthew combines the two. Herman Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 30-33. According to Hendrickx, the narrative form of Q (as found in Luke and partly in Matthew) is closer to the original form. According to Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 37, “the three Evangelists freely adapted an original parable to their own purpose”.
320 Luke does not mention the smallness of the seed (Luke 13:18); Matthew refers to ‘the smallest of all seeds’ (13:33), and Mark mentions ‘the smallest of all seeds on earth’ (Mark 4:31). According to Wenham, the mustard seed is “about a millimetre in diameter” and the proverb, “‘like a mustard seed’ refers proverbially to something very small”. So Wenham, *The Parables*, 53-54.
though birds ordinarily do not nest in them.\textsuperscript{322} There is no doubt that the parable implies the beginning of the seed as small, but the final result is a relatively big one. Even so, one could hardly call a mustard shrub a tree and certainly not the ‘greatest of all’ (in Mark’s words). Surely the reference is deliberately exaggerated to refer to the huge tree in Daniel’s dream (cf. Dan 4:9).

Since the context of this parable is echoing the previous agricultural imagery of fields and sowing (cf. Mark’s more domestic setting of shrubs and a garden), the parable appears to be related to the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares in Matthew’s understanding. In this parable, the sower of the mustard seed can be identified as the Son of Man, the field as the world, the growth of the shrub as the growth of the kingdom of God and the birds as the children of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{323}

Hendrickx argues that this parable is messianic in tone and refers to the kingdom of God still to come.\textsuperscript{324} Yet the parable of the mustard seed mentions something not only about the future realisation, but also about present growth. Hendrickx suggests that the purpose of this parable is not to tell the disciples “the kingdom will come very soon, or that Jesus’ ministry will soon show its marvellous fruits”, but to force them to encounter “the decisive meaning of the present, i.e., the decisive importance of Jesus’ ministry in saving history”.\textsuperscript{325}

The kingdom which is sown by Jesus in Galilee appears to be as tiny as the mustard seed in the beginning, but eventually it will be something immense, though perhaps still not visibly impressive — a shrub rather than a tree, so that it becomes the

\textsuperscript{322} See Hill, \textit{Matthew}, 233; and Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 54.
\textsuperscript{323} So Fisher, \textit{The Parables}, 115.
\textsuperscript{324} Hendrickx, \textit{The Parables}, 37.
\textsuperscript{325} Hendrickx, \textit{The Parables}, 38.
shelter for all nations in the world, and invites every nation to come for salvation.\textsuperscript{326} The fullness of its growth will be manifested in the time of consummation.

Madeleine I. Boucher and Robert H. Stein argue convincingly that the emphasis of this parable is not on evolutionary growth, but on the great and glorious consummation. They do not agree that the Western idea of evolutionary growth, which stems from a Hegelian philosophy that has dominated theological and philosophical thought in the last two centuries, can be read back into this parable. It is not possible to argue that the kingdom began with Jesus and is now growing and will continue to grow until the world manifests the inner rule of God in the human heart. Clearly, then, the growth of the kingdom should not be seen as immanent evolution. Rather, the mystery of its growth is the gracious activity of God.\textsuperscript{327} Thus the mystery of God’s kingdom, which is initially like a mustard seed, seems to be embodied as mysterious growth from a small beginning by Jesus — a domestic bush that nevertheless acts as a huge protective tree.\textsuperscript{328} The mystery of its growth, however, can be fully understood only in the time of consummation, when all the righteous in every nation will participate, like birds nesting in the shelter of a huge tree (13:32).

\textbf{The Parable of the Leaven (13:33).} In my view, this parable appears to contrast with the parable of the mustard seed. It is derived from Q (Luke 13:20-21) and may have been known to Mark, although Mark omits it. This parable and the parable of the mustard

\textsuperscript{326} Hill states, “The tree in which birds nest is a common symbol of a great kingdom which protects its vassal states”. Hill, \textit{Matthew}, 233. According to Manson, in apocalyptic and rabbinic literature, ‘the birds of heaven’ stand for Gentile nations. T. W. Manson, \textit{The Teaching of Jesus} (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 133. Dodd states that the shelter of the birds symbolises the “great empire offering political protection to its subject-states”. Dodd, \textit{The Parables}, 190. Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 54, also points out that there are several passages in the OT, which picture powerful earthly kingdoms as trees with birds nesting in the branches (e.g., Ezek 17:22-23; 31:1-14; Dan 4:11-12).

\textsuperscript{327} So Boucher, \textit{The Parables}, 68; Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables”, 114; and Stein, \textit{An Introduction}, 94-95.

\textsuperscript{328} So Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables”, 114.
seed are traditionally seen as having already been formed as a pair in the pre-Matthean context. One is about what a man did, and the other is about what a woman did. They are indeed a striking feature of Jesus’ teaching but come from different and overlapping sources (the parables of the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed from Mark, and the mustard seed and the leaven from Q). Matthew introduces this parable with his own formula, “He spoke another parable to them” (cf. 13:31a and 13:33a). This formula according to Hagner, “involves altering the question that was probably in Q to an indicative statement, ‘the kingdom of heaven is similar to’” (cf. 13:31, 44, 45, and 47).

In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is compared with leaven, which a woman took and hid or mixed in dough (13:33). Scholars stress the positive aspect of this simile by suggesting that we need not compare the kingdom directly with the leaven, but with what happened when it was put into the dough. They argue that there is no indication that Matthew thinks of the leaven as something evil (as it is usually understood in Jewish tradition). Instead Matthew portrays the kingdom as a dynamic power, which is very small and imperceptible but has an eventual, inevitable and astonishing effect upon the whole loaf when it is first mixed in a lump of dough.

Among such scholars, Wenham argues that the leaven symbolises the positive growth of the kingdom. The kingdom is portrayed as a small group started by Jesus and his disciples, yet as with the leaven, their work eventually becomes influential throughout all nations. According to Wenham, leaven is an appropriate symbol for the disciples of

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329 So argued by Hendrickx, *The Parables*, 45.
331 Gerhardsson argues that sometimes “the power of leaven could be used positively, as of the leavening influence of the Torah”. Gerhardsson, *The Seven Parables*, 22. Blomberg also argues that this parable is just a vivid way of representing the mixing which takes place in common baking practice. Blomberg states that the contrast between the two parables concerning the man and the woman is also appropriate within “the culture of the day”. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 285-286. Similar argument also argued by Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 389; Gundry, *Matthew*, 268-269; and Wenham, *The Parables*, 55-57.
Jesus who were tax collectors and uneducated fishermen; all social outcasts who were despised.\textsuperscript{332} Yet their works were as influential as leaven, parallel to the parable of the mustard seed.\textsuperscript{333} Thus the small amount of leaven, which symbolises Jesus’ ministry and his disciples as an insignificant reality, is “compared to the enormous eschatological upheaval, which the disciples expected when the kingdom of God would come”.\textsuperscript{334}

I would challenge the assumptions of scholars such as Wenham here with the question: Is it really possible to equate the leaven with the disciples, who will soon be warned to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6)? Thus from an opposite view, I would suggest that the simile of the leaven remains for Matthew a negative aspect of kingdom reality.

My contention is that the leaven in this parable primarily contrasts the small amount of leaven and the huge quantity of dough that it leavens. In reality, there is no woman who could prepare such an amount of dough at once. This feature is, therefore, a hint of something else.\textsuperscript{335} In Jewish tradition, leaven symbolises evil influences which carry the threat of infection. It is a hidden threat, and nothing appears to happen; but soon the whole mass starts swelling and bubbling, as fermentation rapidly advances.\textsuperscript{336} In some Roman cults, leaven was not permitted because of its association with weakness, sourness and corruption.\textsuperscript{337} In the Hebrew Scriptures it was also forbidden in cereal offerings consumed by fire (Lev 2:11; 6:17). In the Passover feast only unleavened bread was used (Exod 12:14-20). According to Philo, leaven symbolised swelling, malice, wickedness,

\textsuperscript{332} Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 55-57.
\textsuperscript{333} Leon Morris, \textit{Jesus} (Brunswick: Acorn, 1994), 40; and Dodd, \textit{The Parables}, 192-193.
\textsuperscript{334} Hendrickx, \textit{The Parables}, 47.
\textsuperscript{335} So Hendrickx, \textit{The Parables}, 46; and Jeremias, \textit{The Parables}, 147. According to Jeremias, three measures of flour is equivalent to fifty pounds of flour.
\textsuperscript{336} Dodd, \textit{The Parables}, 192; and Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 2:422.
arrogance, indulgence, and pretension. In the New Testament, leaven generally symbolises evil influence which spreads like an infection, and from this perspective the parable most naturally signifies that a little evil could corrupt a whole life or a whole community (16:6-12; Gal 5:9; 1 Cor 5:6-8).

How then can we compare the kingdom of Heaven/God with the leaven? Should we translate the introduction to the parable (indeed, to all these parables with a similar introduction) as a question: “To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven…” as W. D. Davies and Dale Allison suggest. Since this parable is paired with the parable of the Mustard seed, Matthew might well be continuing the focus on some contrasting aspects of the life of his community as he explained the implications of the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom.

Thus I would suggest that the dynamic power symbolised by the yeast is not the influence of Jesus and his followers as most scholars suggest. Rather, it is a warning against the influential teaching of those who mix within the community and have a corrupting effect. This refers to “the leaven of the Pharisees”, that is, the teaching of the Pharisees that influenced the Torah extremists as I have argued in chapter two (cf. 16:6). Possibly this parabolic warning could also be extended to refer to the false prophets (7:15-23) or some form of proto-Gnosticism.

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340 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:422. Or, more likely, “Is the kingdom of heaven like a mustard seed…? Is the kingdom of heaven like yeast…? This forces the hearer to think hard about the similes and decide for themselves.
341 Cf. Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 286; Dodd, The Parables, 192-193; and Hendrickx, The Parables, 47.
342 Cf. Ewererido, Matthew’s Gospel, 151. In Ewererido’s view, however, the parable of the leaven indicates “what is going on in the experience of Matthew’s community, whose mission is to unveil the hidden truth of
In sum, the above two parables indicate that Matthew continues the contrast between the positive and negative growth of rival kingdoms in his mixed community. As the mustard seed is tiny but produces immense growth, the tiny amount of leaven also produces unexpected growth, but this growth is more naturally seen as negative growth. Two further factors to be considered between the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven are: (i) in the first parable, the one who sowed the mustard seed was a man. In the second parable the one who mixed the yeast was a woman. The idea of the woman ‘mixing’ or ‘hiding’ the leaven in the dough recalls the parable of the tares among the wheat. The use of the verb ‘mix’ or ‘hide’ implies something becoming impure. (ii) In the first parable the positive symbol of the mustard seed was used, whereas in the second parable the leaven is a more ambiguous symbol.

Moreover, the plant of the mustard seed is “Brassica nigra, source of the most important condiment black mustard, which has long been extensively cultivated and was in Biblical times, the source of mustard-seed oil and a medicament” \(^{344}\). In contrast, as I have argued, in ancient times right up until New Testament times, leaven has symbolised an evil influence. The figure of a woman instead of a man here is also associated with the traditions of Judaism and Mediterranean culture, which suggests a shift to the potentially unclean, or religiously impure. \(^{345}\)

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\(^{343}\) According to Davies and Allison, it has even been submitted that 13:33 “was originally a warning against the dangerous contagion of evil”. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:422.

\(^{344}\) Wenham, *The Parables*, 53.

\(^{345}\) In a citation from Albrecht Oepke, Scott mentions that “Characteristic of the traditional position and estimation of woman is a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks and Jews in which man gives thanks that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilised, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave”. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 326. My interpretation here would be a natural one in a patriarchal society because in most of the Matthean narrative, “the dominant tradition is patriarchal”. So Elaine M.
The sandwiching of these two parables between the parable of the tares and its interpretation also implies the same sense as the parable of the wheat and the tares. Matthew’s style in the opening phrase ἀλλὰν παραβολὴν (13:31) suggests that he refers back to the context of the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares. Thus Matthew seems to heighten the opposite dimensions and mysterious growth of the two choices facing his community once again (cf. 13:30, “Let both grow together until the harvest”).

If this hypothesis is right, Matthew arranges these parables as contrasting pairs portraying the mysterious growth of the rival kingdoms in order to admonish his community that as the seed of the mustard starts its growth ultimately to shelter the birds, the leaven also starts its growth eventually to corrupt the dough. This sense of positive and negative growth implies that on the one hand, the message of Jesus about the kingdom starts to grow in human hearts, inviting all nations to come into the shelter of God’s kingdom. On the other, the evil influences of the Torah extremists inside the Matthean community and the false prophets from the outside also introduce the sinful natures of malice, indulgence, deceit and so on into the community of God in order to corrupt the whole community and to lead them away from God. Thus Matthew’s allusion to the mysterious growth in these two parables reflects the social context of his community which provoked him to make this contrast crystal clear by consistently using the Two Ways comparative framework.346

iii) The Kingdom as Ultimate Value: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl (Matt 13:44-46)

In this section, the kingdom is presented in economic terms. Matthew introduces another pair of parables: the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl (13:44-46) and paints the kingdom as the ultimate value. These two parables are unique to Matthew. They are related to the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven (13:31-33), which also emphasise the greatness and value of the kingdom and challenge the hearers to a decision between the two kingdoms.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44). In this parable, the kingdom is compared with a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up (13:44a). In ancient times in the Middle East, the practice of hiding valuables in a field was common. The poor people preserved their valuables by wrapping them in a cloth and burying them in a secret place, and even the wealthy people did the same in unsettled times. It seems that “in ancient times the safest ‘bank’ was a safe hiding place”. By burying treasures, the owner hoped to protect them from being stolen by thieves and enemies. Moreover, Palestine was a place that was invaded and overrun by foreigners many times during its history. If the owner then died or was taken captive, such treasures could remain hidden a long time until by chance they were discovered. Thus

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348 FitzPatrick, “The Mystery”, 54. The theme of ‘hiddenness’ is already introduced in a negative way in the parable of the yeast.


352 So Stein, *An Introduction*, 99-100; and Hill, *Matthew*, 238. Hill concurs that in Palestine in the time of Jesus, the best way to guarantee the security of treasure was to bury it because of bandits and greedy soldiers.


the parable seems to describe the kingdom of God as something of great value that is in some way hidden from a human perspective.

One possible allegorisation of this parable suggests that (a) as the treasure was valuable, the kingdom of God is portrayed as something of immeasurable value; (b) as the treasure was hidden in a field, the kingdom of heaven is also portrayed as hidden, that is, not seen normally; (c) as the man found the treasure in the field by searching, the kingdom of God also needs to be searched for; (d) as the man who found the treasure sold everything he had, so with the kingdom of God there is a need for sacrifice and total commitment; and (e) as the man who found the hidden treasure becomes joyful, those who find the hidden truth of the kingdom also become immeasurably joyful.355

Thus the parable suggests that Matthew presents the kingdom of God as a great treasure. This treasure is hidden and can therefore be possessed by someone without the awareness even of those close to them.356 The parable points out that the finder realises he is stumbling upon something of great value and immediately hides it to secure it for himself.357 Those who find such treasure experience true joy. In order to possess it securely, the finder needs to buy that field. This purchase of the field “represents true discipleship, consisting in and evidenced by economic sacrifice”.358 Thus this parable portrays the cost of discipleship, and the need to sacrifice all for the joyous kingdom.359

The Parable of the Pearl (13:45-46). This parable again seems to form a contrast with its pair — the parable of the hidden treasure. In the Gospel of Thomas, the parable of

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357 Manson, *The Sayings*, 196.
359 So Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 68; and Jeremias, *The Parables*, 198-201. According to Jeremias, this parable presents the challenge of ‘realised discipleship’ rather than just the challenge of the hour.
the hidden treasure and the pearl are separated and it seems that Matthew brought them together in his Gospel.\(^{360}\) In this parable, the kingdom is compared with a merchant who was looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went and sold everything he had and bought it (13:45-46).

In the Mediterranean world in the first century, pearls were regarded as one of the most valuable goods and were in great demand, ranked with gold as symbols of wealth.\(^{361}\) They were fished from the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. They were used in necklaces and decoration.\(^{362}\) Pearls were commonly perceived as objects of great value and thus unattainable to the average person.

The great value of pearls in this parable leads many scholars to interpret it in the same way as the parable of hidden treasure.\(^{363}\) According to Wenham, the parable of the pearl represents a rich man searching for the kingdom, and the parable of the hidden treasure represents a poor man searching for the kingdom.\(^{364}\) From the standpoint of consistency, I would argue that some of the sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels force us to remember that it is very hard for a rich man (represented most ostentatiously by the merchants) to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye

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\(^{360}\) Of course, such a conclusion depends on the early dating of the Gospel of Thomas. Such an issue is beyond the scope of this research, but regardless of the dating of Thomas, the two parables are paired in Matthew’s Gospel and their relationship needs examining. So Frederick Houk Borsch, *Many Things in Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 99.


\(^{362}\) According to Wenham, “the famous Egyptian princess Cleopatra is said to have had one pearl worth a hundred million sesterces (i.e., twenty-five million denarii, a denarius being a day’s wage)”. Wenham, *The Parables*, 208. Jeremias also points out that “Caesar presented the mother of his subsequent murderer Brutus with a pearl worth 6 million sesterces (= £50,000 to 100,000)”. Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 157.


of a needle than for the rich to enter (19:23-24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:24-25). If it is so hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God, this parable seems less likely to portray in positive terms the rich man’s search, despite Wenham’s and Hannan’s suggestions.

Furthermore, from the perspective of peasant farmers and others in the world of Jesus, the nature and character of this merchant who finds the pearl would be seen as full of lust, desire, greed, selfishness and exploitation, one who is never satisfied with his prosperity. As Hannan rightly notes, the whole existence of a merchant “is oriented towards profit”. So his or her desire in general would be seen as for worldly concerns rather than the kingdom of God. Moreover, in searching for pearls, this merchant seeks treasures of a visible, ostentatious and attractive nature. The attraction of the pearls here might represent the tricky attraction of the kingdom taught by the false prophets (cf. Paul’s statement that “what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal” [1 Cor 4:18]). The great value of earthly pearls may also indicate those Jews and Christians who were looking for an earthly messianic kingdom in Matthew’s day. On the other hand, as Hagner also points out, this parable may link with the tradition behind the earthly merchants who weep and mourn because the pearls and earthly treasure of ancient Babylon was destroyed (Rev 18:11-12).

I would argue that this parable is portraying a negative way of searching for the kingdom. It illustrates the warning about desiring to possess earthly treasures that rust and can be stolen, rather than seeking treasure in heaven: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (6:19-21; Luke 12:33-34). Thus I contend that Matthew intends this parable, consistent with his other positive and negative pairings, to be a negative

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366 Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 397.
comparative example in order to warn and challenge his mixed community (who were slack and inconsistent in discipleship) of the need for commitment about the contrasting values of the kingdom of heaven and the false kingdoms.

These two parables reinforce the argument that Matthew continues his development of the kingdom theme as seen from comparative perspectives. As the kingdom of heaven is mysterious and of immeasurable value, those who want to search for it need to sacrifice everything they have, that is, to make a total commitment to God (6:33; 19:16-30). As the one who found the hidden treasure becomes joyful, so the one who finds the hidden truth of God becomes immeasurably joyful. The remarkable thing in the parable of the hidden treasure is that the real treasure hidden in the field was not earthly treasure, but ultimately referred to the treasure of the kingdom of heaven, which cannot rust or be stolen (6:19-21; Luke 12:33-34), nor even bought — since it is the field that is purchased, not the treasure itself.

On the other hand, the question is asked whether the kingdom is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. The difference between these two parables is, (a) while the first searcher was an unspecified person, the second one was a merchant; (b) while the first one refers to a found — but hidden — treasure, the second one refers to a visible pearl of great value; (c) where the words for ‘go’ and ‘buy’ in the first parable are in the present tense, they are in the aorist tense in the second parable; (d) while the first parable was remarkable for the total surprise expressed, the second describes a deliberate process of pearl buying; (e) while the first parable describes the joyfulness of the man, the second one mentions nothing about joyfulness; and lastly, (f) while the first parable was remarkable in describing a man buying the land, not the hidden treasure (this means that
the man is not only gaining access to the hidden treasure but also possessing the land in which it is hidden), the second one describes the merchant just buying the pearl and focusing his greed on that one object.\footnote{So also Stein, \textit{An Introduction}, 101.}

Furthermore, these two parables occur as a pair only in the Gospel of Matthew.\footnote{Though these two parables occur in the Gospel of Thomas, as I have noted, they are separated (Pearls, Saying 76; and Hidden Treasures, Saying 109). Simon J. Kistemaker, \textit{The Parables of Jesus} (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 57, 239.}

Thus these two parables present two perspectives on kingdom values in economic terms (regarding ultimate value). Whereas both tell of selling all to purchase something of ultimate value, the first illustrates the ongoing joy (present tense) that results from finding the mysteriously hidden kingdom of God. The second arguably describes the false option of short-term gain (aorist tense) from seeking a visible, earthly concern (cf. 6:22-24, as I discussed previously).

If this argument is right, Matthew continues his contrasts between good and evil in the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl by presenting again the two ways facing his community, starkly put in his juxtaposition of the two parables. As the kingdom of God is hidden and valuable, the worldly kingdom that represents evil is also depicted as something deceitfully valuable, worthy and attractive.\footnote{Cf. Col 3:2; 1 John 2:15-17. Paul and John also warned their communities of worldly concerns, which are attractive, saying that those who love the world do not love the Father.} As John Drury rightly points out, the major emphasis of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl is “the inner/outer duality which informed so many of Matthew’s previous similes. To the apocalyptic mind of Matthew this contrast holds the eternal secret behind the historical and ethical dualism of the chapter”.\footnote{John Drury, \textit{The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory} (London: SPCK, 1985), 88. See also Sim, \textit{Apocalyptic Eschatology}, 75-87; and \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 119-120.}

The contrast of these two parables thus encapsulates the intent that for Matthew, his community must evaluate themselves in terms of the
opposite values of two ways of searching for the kingdom. These appear deceptively similar (the kingdom of heaven and worldly concerns). The choice depends on which treasure they would like to gain access to and commit themselves to totally, “for your heart will always be where your riches are” (6:21).


The kingdom as judgment is seen in Matthew’s presentation of the parable of the dragnet. This parable is arguably the creation of Matthew. Since Jesus speaks about the kingdom through the parables beside the sea, this seventh parable seems to be the climax of all the parables in chapter 13 and fits the context of the scene where he is speaking. Compared to other parables then, this parable is different in returning to the maritime context. The metaphorical imagery of the kingdom is changed from agriculture and commerce to the business of fishing. Matthew seems to contend that separation and punishment will take place at the end times as Jesus also foretold in the parable of the sower and the tares.

Here the kingdom of heaven is compared with a dragnet which is thrown into the sea and catches up all kinds of fish (13:47-50). In New Testament times, fishing was not only a big business but also a potentially profitable one, and widely practised — not only

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371 Although this parable is found in the Gospel of Thomas (saying 8), the context is different. In the Gospel of Thomas, a wise fisherman is used where there is nothing about a fisherman in the Gospel of Matthew. The eschatological interpretation in the parable of the dragnet (13:49-50) is also missing in GTh 8. So argued by Kistemaker, *The Parables*, 61, 240; W. G. Morrice, “The Parable of the Dragnet and the Gospel of Thomas”, *ExpTim* 95 (1984): 269-273.

in Galilee, but also around Antioch. Thus Matthew’s audience probably understood something about fishing in the Sea of Galilee. By using a dragging net, the fishermen caught every kind of fish, both edible and inedible. According to Jewish Law (Lev 11:9-12), the edible (clean) fish were collected in the baskets, but the inedible (unclean) were thrown away.

This image of fishing recalls the mission of Jesus and his call to his disciples to become fishers of people (Mark 1:17). Scholars argue that this parable may be an inclusive reflection on universal salvation and the invitation to receive and accept the Good News of the kingdom which God offers to all people, high and low, rich and poor, men and women, wise and simple, Pharisees and publicans (cf. 22:9-10, both good and bad). This is true as the Gospel stresses mission to make disciples of all nations (28:19-20).

This sorting of edible and inedible fish indicates a process within the Matthean community, where the mixed community co-exists until the final harvest of the end time, when God will judge between the good and bad. The image of sorting shows that Matthew is warning his readers to examine the reality of judgment and the importance of genuine discipleship. In the time of judgment, the good and righteous will survive, but the bad and evil will be punished (13:49-50, cf. 13:30 and 13:42-43).

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373 Wenham, *The Parables*, 66; Downey, *Antioch*, 4-7; and Kondoleon, “The City of Antioch”, 3. Given the probable location of the Matthean community in Antioch, a city on the banks of the Orontes River and eighteen miles (one day’s sailing) from the Mediterranean Sea, the Matthean community would be familiar with the business of fishing (cf. 17:27).


375 Boucher, *The Parables*, 85; and Dodd, *The Parables*, 188.


377 So argued by Morrice, “The Parable of the Dragnet”, 282; and Wenham, *The Parables*, 66-67. Kingsbury suggests that Matthew may refer to those persons in the Church “who were guilty of moral and religious laxity, or heresy, or acute lovelessness in all of its varied forms”. Kingsbury, *The Parables*, 123.
Matthew in his vision foresees what has happened in his community by warning them that, just as was spelled out in the parables of the wheat and the tares, there will be a separation in the end time. This seventh parable is thus the climax of all these parables; it reaffirms what has been foretold and articulates what will happen in the time of judgment. This need not be seen only as a negative threat, but also as a positive pastoral move by Matthew: judgment is deferred and left in the hands of God, rather than enacted within and between the mixed body of his community.

v) Summary

All the kingdom parables in the third discourse show that Matthew arranges and embellishes the parabolic teaching of Jesus systematically and pairs them deliberately. He portrays the kingdom as embodied in the present by using agricultural terms (sowing and growing 13:3-9, 18-23, 24-30, 36-43), moving on to mystery and dynamic growth (13:31-33). In economic terms, the commitment to the ultimate value of the kingdom as treasures or pearls is presented (13:44-45). And in the climactic section, the judgment of the kingdom in terms of the local business of fishing is presented (13:47-50). In editing these parables together in a unique chapter, Matthew focuses on the Two Ways Theme of comparison by shaping the stories to challenge what was happening in his community. In his community, though there were members who were pious, trustworthy, and faithfully following the way of Jesus, there were also some members who were living life easily, full of worldly concerns, lacking in faith and disturbing the rest of the community. Thus Matthew warns his mixed community by presenting these parables which highlight the
two ways facing them. The parables evoke the kingdom’s hidden and mysterious nature, starting small and growing till the end of the age. In the time of Judgment, the righteous will be separated from the wicked. The righteous will be rewarded, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (13:43, cf. 13:49). However, the wicked will be punished in the furnace of fire (13:42, 50). Thus Matthew highlights the challenge of the two ways to his community and indirectly warns them about the sort of kingdom they would choose and follow (cf. 7:13-14). At the same time he warns them of the imminence of judgment and continually alerts them in the distinctive words of Jesus, “Let anyone with ears listen!” (13:9, 43). This Two Ways warning about eschatological judgment is described and supplemented by further warnings in the following section.

C. The Eschatological Warnings to the Community

The Two Ways warnings to the Matthean community are even more clearly seen in the last eschatological discourse (Matt 24-25). These eschatological warnings to the Matthean community are warnings about the two kinds of eschatological communities. After describing the signs of the parousia (Matt 24), Matthew adds three parables: the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13), the parable of the talents (25:14-30//Luke 19:11-27) and the parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46). Two of them — the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13), and the parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46), which I will discuss in this section — are unique to Matthew.\textsuperscript{378} They function

\textsuperscript{378} I will say more about this later on.
as warnings for the parousia. Matthew challenges his community that there will be two distinctive communities at the eschatological judgment. Thus he begins with the admonishment to be ready for the parousia by presenting the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13). Between the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13) and the parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46), the parable of the talents is sandwiched (25:14-30). This parable stresses faithfulness in doing good works (25:21-30) during the long period of the master’s absence (25:14-15, 19). The parable of the talents continues the theme of a judgment based on deeds found in the other two parables, yet does so with less emphasis on the Two Ways Theme. Unlike Luke, Matthew does not stress the return of the master in the parable of the talents (25:19; cf. Luke 19:12, 15). Perhaps, Matthew might see this as fitting better with the following parable so that the parable of the sheep and goats begins with “When the Son of Man comes ...” (25:31). Then Matthew demonstrates the distinctive separation of eschatological judgment in terms of a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats (25:32), and the reward and judgment of being ‘sheep’ and ‘goats’ according to their deeds (25:34-40, 41-45, 46). A closer investigation of these two parables thus follows.


The parable of the ten virgins is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. Since it is part of Matthew’s eschatological discourse (Matt 24-25), and occurs in the climactic part of the Gospel, it acts as a summary of Matthean eschatology, where his community is
warned about preparation for the parousia. This is clearly seen in his extra additions of the imperative γρηγορεῖτε, ‘be alert’ or ‘watch out’ (25:13; cf. 7:15; and Matt 24//Mark 13).

In this parable, the ten virgins are distinguished as wise and foolish in terms of their preparation for the time when the bridegroom is revealed. Some scholars view this parable as originating from the historical Jesus, whereby Jesus proclaimed his parousia. Some scholars argue, however, that it is an allegory from the very beginning, created by the earliest believers in order to explain why the parousia has not occurred for a long time. I would argue that this parable does originate in some form with the historical Jesus and a story of an actual wedding, which might have been an exhortation to discipleship alertness and readiness in general (cf. 26:36-46 and also Mark 2:18-22 and parallels). Subsequently, Matthew seems to allegorise this marriage symbol with the parousia of Christ, as Jeremias points out, and so reshapes it with his own situation in mind to startle and challenge his community in view of the impending eschatological crisis.

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383 Jeremias argues that since the allegory is not found anywhere else in the rest of Jesus’ preaching, Matthew 25:1-13 does not come from the historical Jesus, but that “Jesus was telling a story about an actual wedding, or rather what immediately preceded the beginning of an actual wedding feast”. Jeremias, *The Parables*, 52, 171.

384 Karl Paul Donfried argues that this conclusion is “underscored by the fact that the various elements in Matt 25:1-13 cohere not with each other but, in some detail, with a theological framework which appears to be outside the story itself”. Donfried, “The Allegory of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13) as a Summary of Matthean Theology”, *JBL* 93 (1974): 418. Green points out that the basic possibilities are “two: (a) an authentic parable of Jesus, later allegorised; (b) a parable of the delayed parousia, created by the later
This parable reflects the customs of ancient Palestine in the time of Jesus, when wedding feasts could sometimes last a week.\textsuperscript{385} Unlike most uses of wedding imagery, the bride and the bridegroom do not play a central role in this parable. Instead, the parable distinctively focuses on the significant role of the readiness of the five virgins and the failure of the other five.\textsuperscript{386} Perhaps, as these ten virgins were bridesmaids, their significant role was to be the supporting actresses for the wedding drama. It was customary that the ten bridesmaids, who were special friends of the same age as the bride, needed to surround her in greeting the bridegroom and his friends with light when they entered into the house of the bride.\textsuperscript{387} According to the custom, this ensured the identity of the bridegroom and that he came openly in good faith, and then the bride and her bridesmaids followed him and his friends to his father’s house where a further wedding feast was held. After the wedding party arrived at the house of the groom’s father, the door was shut, and latecomers were refused entry.\textsuperscript{388}

As the parable describes, these ten virgins became drowsy and fell asleep because of the (customary) delay of the bridegroom (25:5). When the cry rang out, all of them woke up and lit their lamps but the five foolish virgins faced a crisis in lighting their lamps for the oil of their lamps was running out (25:6-7). The parable does not tell us why the virgins could not borrow some lamps from others (apart from the other five), especially from the other


\textsuperscript{386} So Hagner rightly points out that “the focus of the parable is the simple matter of preparedness versus unpreparedness and the tragic character of the latter”. Hagner, \textit{Matthew 14-28}, 728.

\textsuperscript{387} H. Daniel-Rops, \textit{Daily life in Palestine at the Time of Christ} (London: Hawthorn, 1962), 124. According to Daniel-Rops, “The bridesmaids stood about the bride, all dressed in white — there were usually ten of them”.

\textsuperscript{388} J. A. Findlay, \textit{Jesus and His Parables} (London: SCM, 1950), 111.
wedding guests. Perhaps their lamps were different from those of other guests,\textsuperscript{389} and thus anyone who had not been seen to be performing their proper function in the wedding procession might not attend the feast according to their wedding custom.\textsuperscript{390}

Both of these groups of virgins were described as eagerly taking their lamps along with them to meet the groom. The failure of the five foolish virgins was that the oil of their lamps was running out, probably because they were left burning as they slept before the groom came. Matthew distinctively points out that the foolish took “no oil with them” (25:3), unlike the wise who took “flasks of oil with their lamps” (25:4).\textsuperscript{391} The five foolish virgins did not prepare for any delay at all. Maybe they thought that it was unnecessary to take so much oil, since they were hoping for a quick climax to the ceremonies.

The parable then describes how the five wise virgins could not share their oil with the five foolish in the time of crisis, for their oil might not be enough for both of them through the trip (25:9a). The paramount concern was that some, at least, must be able to provide light for the whole journey. To fail to do this would bring shame on the whole wedding party and the families and friends involved. Thus the five wise virgins were not unreasonable in not responding to their request. Since they could not share their oil, they gave the advice they could: to go to those who sold the oil and buy as much as they needed (25:9b). The failure to meet the bridegroom on time, however, was the consequence of their inadequate preparation before the wedding.

\textsuperscript{389} Their lamps appear not to be the usual household lamps, which were made of clay, but torches, which apparently consisted of oil lamps tied atop poles which were used for outdoor purposes and processions. See Jeremias, Rediscovering the Parables, 136; and Hagner, Matthew 14-28, 729.
\textsuperscript{390} Oesterley, The Gospel Parables, 135.
\textsuperscript{391} Gundry states, “Torches resist a breeze, give a bright light, burn only about fifteen minutes, and then need to have the rags that are wrapped around the end of the stick soaked again in oil”. Gundry, Matthew, 498. So the actual burning time of oil in torches is very limited.
The parable moves on to the exclusion of these foolish virgins on their way back to the house of bridegroom’s father after searching for oil. The distinctive reference οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς, “I do not know you”, in verse 12 indicates that these five foolish virgins were totally rejected because they failed to fulfil their social responsibilities at the most important part of the climax to the wedding feast. As the regular time of marriage ceremonies was after dark, a very important feature of wedding ceremonies was the torchlight or lamplight procession from the house of the bride to the father of the bridegroom’s house, in order to give respectability, honour and glory to the couple on the way to the wedding feast. At this time, the friends of the bride and the bridegroom were required to surround them with light, singing songs and dancing with joyfulness in order to give honour to the bride and the bridegroom. Consequently, it was a great insult to everyone that the five foolish virgins had spoiled the wedding of their friend by failing to fulfil their role at the most significant part of the wedding, for they had not only insulted the bride and bridegroom, but also all their parents and relatives. Thus οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς (25:12) is not just a momentary denial of recognition of these foolish virgins, but the social equivalent of eternal exclusion and punishment of them by the bridegroom and his relatives.

This parable has been traditionally allegorised so that the bridegroom is seen as the heavenly Christ (cf. 9:15). The delay of the bridegroom and his sudden coming are the postponement and the unexpected occurrence of the parousia. The (unmentioned) bride is the church (the metaphorical body of the community), and the wise and foolish virgins are

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394 Keener, Matthew, 358.
the faithful and unfaithful members of the church. The wise are those who heard the words of Jesus and put them into practice and the foolish are those who heard the words of Jesus but did not put them into practice (cf. 7:24, 26). Some even go so far as to suggest that the jars of oil taken along with the wise virgins represent obedience to the teachings of Christ in their daily life, the oil as their good works, the light as glory (cf. 5:14-16; 17:2-9), and the final scene as the eschatological judgment.

Such an interpretation is consistent with the view that as the Matthean church was a mixed community, Matthew reminds them that not everyone should expect automatically to enter into the kingdom of God/heaven. Perhaps the faith of the Matthean community was declining (becoming drowsy) or the impressive works of the false prophets attracting his community to look for alternatives to their expectation of the parousia (cf. 7:15-20). Matthew discerns what is happening in his community, and reminds them to keep alert for the coming of the Son of Man (10:16-23; 24:4-31).

Matthew would have in mind that though his community belonged to Christ, unless their good works surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, they would certainly not enter into the kingdom of God/heaven (5:20). This is evident in the petition of the foolish virgins — “Lord, Lord, open to us” (25:11) — and the reply to them: “Truly I tell you, I do not know you” (25:12). The exclusion in this parable is echoing Jesus’ saying in the Sermon on the Mount, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the

395 Some scholars interpret the virgins as the Church and omit reference to the bride. Jeremias, *The Parables*, 51; Manson, *The Sayings*, 243. Here I suggest that the later textual variant including the bride indicates her allegorisation and that as the Church, that is, the metaphorical body of the community, the virgins should be interpreted as its members according to early Christian traditions.


397 According to Argyle, “The significance of the lights was the frequently attested Jewish belief that the Lord is light” (e.g., Ps 27:1). Argyle, “Wedding Customs”, 214.

kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (7:21-23).³⁹⁹ This ‘greater good work’ is expressed not in terms of greater rigour in obeying the Law. Rather, it comprises ongoing good works in terms of eschatological readiness and preparation for the delay of parousia. Thus as demonstrated in the Sermon on the Mount, this parable seems to recall the parable of the two builders (7:24-27), by which Matthew warns his community to be prepared by putting the words of Jesus into practice to be ready for the parousia or its delay (cf. 7:24-27).⁴⁰⁰

In sum, as in the parables of chapter 13, Matthew heightens the Two Ways Theme by including this parable (alone among the Evangelists) and applying it to two groups within his community in order to remind his audience to be prepared and alert for the coming of the Son of Man, and awake to any false teachings. Matthew heightens the contrast between the two communities represented by the two groups of virgins and challenges his community about which community they wish to belong to. The result of the coming eschatological judgment depends on their decision and their preparedness. No-one else can help them when judgment comes (25:9). The hortatory conclusion of Matthew’s comparison is, “Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (25:13; cf. 24:42; Gal 6:7-10).


The passage of the sheep and the goats is the final part of Jesus’ fifth and last major discourse in Matthew’s Gospel. It continues the theme of eschatological judgment, which occurs in this climactic section before the passion narrative. Like the parable of the virgins, this passage occurs only in Matthew’s Gospel. Bultmann suggests that this passage might derive from a Jewish tradition, which in its original form might speak about God’s judgment rather than the parousia. Some scholars argue that this passage is adapted from Jesus’ own teaching. Others contend that it is unique to Matthew. Consequently, some eschatological references (13:40-42; 16:27; 19:28), which are associated with the parousia in Matthew, can be assumed to be the handiwork of Matthew. Thus as Robinson rightly argues, except for the figure of the sheep which is found in Matthew 25:32 and the interpolation of τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου, “your brethren” in Matthew 25:40, the rest of the verses are associated with the handiwork of Matthew.

This unique Matthean passage also troubles scholars today as to whether it conforms to the parabolic type, or belongs to the judgmental oracles as in 1 Enoch and other apocalypses. Whilst it is generally agreed that it is “neither a parable nor an allegory”, it is hard to classify this passage within a specific genre for it includes the element of parable as well as prophetic visions, as Fisher suggests. Robinson offers a more plausible

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401 Bultmann, History, 123-125.
402 So Fisher, The Parables, 122; Schweizer, Matthew, 480-81.
406 So Stanton, A Gospel for a New People, 213, 222; and Simon J. Kistemaker, The Parables of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 147. Kistemaker argues that it is “more prophetic than parabolic”.
408 Fisher, The Parables, 122.
view in arguing that this passage is “a combination of parabolic, apocalyptic and ethical teaching which is yet woven almost without seam into an incomparable literary whole”. ⁴⁰⁹

In this passage, eschatological judgment is portrayed using the metaphor of a shepherd separating his mixed flock — the sheep from the goats — in the context of everyday life in Palestine. In Palestine, sheep and goats were normally pastured together in the daytime, but in the evening, it was customary that the sheep were separated from the goats for the goats had special needs to be kept warm, whereas the sheep preferred more fresh air (25:32). ⁴¹⁰

As the passage suggests the sheep would probably be kept on the right (25:33). This is because sheep were considered to be more valuable than goats, and their white skin colour has often been taken to symbolise righteousness. ⁴¹¹ In Old Testament, sheep represent God’s people and symbolise the blessed. ⁴¹² In the New Testament, Jesus sometimes identifies his followers as sheep (cf. 7:15; 9:36; 10:6, 16; 15:24; 25:32; 26:31; cf. Mark 6:34; 14:27; John 10:2-27; 21:16-17; and so on). On the other hand, the goats would probably be kept on the left. Perhaps, the mottled black skin colour of the goats symbolically associates with evil. In Old Testament times, goats also symbolise the image of sin-bearers (Lev 16:20-22). ⁴¹³

So who were being referred to as sheep and goats? This narrative evokes the allegorical images of the two communities within Matthew’s mixed community. ⁴¹⁴ The passage describes three distinctive groups: the ‘least of the brethren’ (25:40, 45) with whom

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⁴¹⁴ Though the text refers particularly to the Matthean community, it applies in some way to all communities who read these texts as inspired and/or normative.
Jesus identifies himself, the ‘right side’ community (25:33a, 34-40, the blessed ones) and the ‘left side’ community (25:33b, 41-45, the condemned ones). In Jewish culture as well as in many other cultures, the metaphor of ‘right’ and ‘left’ symbolises favour and disfavour, honour and dishonour, good and bad fortune.\footnote{France, \textit{The Gospel According to Matthew}, 356.} As we have seen, Matthew arranges his Gospel very carefully. In Matthew 25:1-13, he exhorts his community to be prepared for the delay of the parousia. In this passage he focuses on the result of how these two groups within his community will be rewarded or judged in the end time. The eschatological judgment — and the categorisation of the left and the right — is not here dependent on legalistic righteousness but rather on mercy and love in fulfilling humanitarian duties to ‘the least of the brothers and sisters’ (25:35-36; cf. Luke 10:25-37).\footnote{As Luise Schottroff rightly states, the criteria of God’s judgment for separating the just from the unjust depend on the deeds of righteousness. See Luise Schottroff, \textit{The Parables of Jesus} (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 223.}

The image of ‘brother’ in the first group is probably derived from Jewish religious custom, which represents co-religionists in this way.\footnote{So argued by Hans Freiherr von Soden, “ἀδελφός”, \textit{TDNT} 1:144.} Jeremias and Wenham argue that the ‘least brothers’ in this passage did not represent the disciples. Rather they were associated with the poor or those who were afflicted and needy.\footnote{See Jeremias, \textit{The Parables}, 207; and Wenham, \textit{The Parables}, 90-93.} The majority of scholars argue, however, that the ‘least brothers’ in this passage refer to the disciples of Jesus rather than the poor in general.\footnote{So argued by Duane H. Thebeau, “On Separating Sheep from Goats”, \textit{CToday} 11 (1972): 1040-1041; David L. Bartlett, “An Exegesis of Matthew 25:31-46”, \textit{Foundations} 19 (1976): 211-213; George Eldon Ladd, “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Recent Interpretation”, in \textit{New Dimensions in New Testament Study} (eds. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 191-199. Kistemaker, \textit{The Parables of Jesus}, 155-156. According to Kistemaker, “the term brother does not apply to everybody, but only to those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior”.}

I agree with the majority view that the poor in general as ‘the least brothers’ is inconsistent with the Matthean context. This is evident in the Matthean narrative. In
Matthew’s Gospel, though Jesus had been in touch with the poor and the needy throughout his ministry, he had not necessarily regarded them as his brothers (cf. 26:11). Matthew distinctively describes that Jesus only identifies those who fulfil the will of God as his mother, brothers, and sisters (12:49-50).

The specific question is the meaning of the use of the superlative μικρός, ‘least’, in verses 40 and 45. O. Michel questions, in this context, whether Jesus means the least as “those who are hungry, sick, or, in prison, and is giving a standard by which He will judge all (5:3-10), or whether He is identifying Himself with the fate of disciples, and making their affliction His own” (10:40-42).420 As I have argued ‘the least’ are less likely the needy in general (5:3-11), but more likely the humble ones, the child-like ones (18:4-5; cf. 20:26-28) and the sacrificial ones whom Jesus called out as disciples for the sake of his kingdom (10:40-42).421 The combination phrase ‘the least brothers’ — τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἑλαχίστων (25:40, 45) — is thus inconsistent with the needy in general. Rather it is more applicable to true disciples, especially those who did the will of God and those who were (or had been) sacrificing themselves for the sake of the gospel (5:47; 5:3-11; 10:40-42; 12:50; 23:8; 28:10). Their integrity is not in question. It is the response of the Matthean community which is being scrutinised in this passage.

In any case, they appear to represent a group coming from outside into the Matthean community, since the community is to be judged according to how they respond to this group. The scenario of a group of impoverished Judean Jewish-Christian refugees arriving amongst their wealthier brothers and sisters around Antioch is one plausible reconstruction

421 So Thebeau, “On Separating Sheep from Goats”, 1041; and Gundry, Matthew, 514.
Thus the ‘least brothers’ in this passage is consistent with the Jewish-Christian refugees from Judea — ‘disciples’ and ‘ministers’ — who really associated with Jesus: bore his witness and did the will of his Father (5:47; 12:50; 23:8; 28:10; cf. the brother who sins against his brother in 18:15). As Stanton rightly states, these ‘disciples’ and ‘ministers’ include members of the Matthean community who “have been sent as missionaries to all nations”. It also applies to the disciples who were sent out in the name of Jesus and the subsequent followers of Jesus in that tradition, who really seek him and regard him as their only teacher (10:40, 45; 23:8; 26:11). Matthew does not mention anything about this group with regard to being put on the right or on the left. Since Jesus has identified himself with this group, this group will be those who will share the ruling power together with Jesus on his glorious throne in the New Age (25:31-32; cf. 19:28-29).

The second group, the ‘right-side’ community is distinguished as those who fulfilled the Great Commandment of Jesus by inviting and providing for the needy, the ‘least of the brothers’ of Jesus. Their reward depends on how they have treated the brothers and sisters of Jesus, for they are not treating the least of the brethren but Jesus himself (10:11, 40-41; 25:40). So the right-side community are those of the true Christian community, who were associated with Jesus and obeyed his teaching, fulfilled the will of God by practically

422 So rightly argued by Saldarini, “Boundaries and Polemics”, 239.
423 So argued also by France, Matthew, 261-264; “On Being Ready”, 192-193; Lambrecht, Once More Astonished, 223-227; and von Soden, “ἀδελφοί”, 144-146.
425 France correctly argues that this passage refers to the “acts of kindness specifically toward the least of Jesus’ followers, rather than to the needy in general”. France, Matthew, 264.
fulfilling the humanitarian obligations of the Sermon on the Mount (5:3-12; 7:13, 17, 21, 24-25; 13:8, 23; 25:4; cf. Luke 10:25-37).\footnote{426}

On the other hand, since the coming of the Son of Man will judge all nations (25:31-32),\footnote{427} the third group, the ‘left-side’ community can be identified as representing all the rest of humankind except the ‘least brothers’ and the ‘right-side’ community.\footnote{428} They include Jews and Gentiles, believers and non-believers alike. Compared with the right-side community, the failure of the left in this passage is not in legal righteousness, but failing to fulfil the responsibilities of humanitarian duties (25:42-43, 45). Their identity indicates that they are believers who heard the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, but failed to do them in practice (7:26). This is also evident in the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who \textit{does the will of my Father in heaven}” (7:21), and the mixed nature of the Matthean community described in the rest of the Gospel (13:24-30, 36-43; 18:15-18). Thus it is plausible to designate them as those who claim to follow Jesus and call him Lord. Particularly in the Matthean community, this includes the Torah extremists and those who were associated with the false prophets and their followers who have failed to do the will of Jesus and have led the community astray, as I have discussed above (7:17b, 26-27; 13:5-7, 19-22, 25-30b, 38c; 15:13-14; 23:13-15, 30-36; 25:3, 8-11). This group would also include non-believers who failed to receive the disciples and their successors — all those who were sent out (10:12-15, 40-42).

\footnote{426} So also argued by J. M. Court, “Right and Left: The Implications for Matthew 25:31-46”, \textit{NTS} 31 (1985): 229-231.
\footnote{427} Here Clay Alan Ham rightly argues that Matthew 25:31 probably refers to Zechariah 14:5 to depict “Jesus as the Son of Man coming at the Parousia”. Clay Alan Ham, \textit{The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew’s Reading of Zechariah’s Messianic Hope} (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 99, 118.
\footnote{428} So Schnackenburg, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 258-259; and Byrne, \textit{Lifting the Burden}, 192-195.
In sum, the combination of parable, allegory and apocalypse in this passage indicates that Matthew develops the idea of Messianic enthronement, which is found in the vision of the judgment in Daniel and in the Similitudes of 1 Enoch, and replaces God with the Son of Man, which is consistent with the developing ideas of the early Christian context (Dan 7:9-14; 1 En 45:3; 51:3; 55:4; 61:8; 62:2, 5; 69:27, 29). As J. M. Court rightly suggests, under the particular pressures of a persecuted community, Matthew finds a warrant to convert the traditional ethic of charitable deeds into the basis for “an apocalyptic programme of ultimate judgment”.

### iii) Summary

The two warnings in this eschatological discourse show that Matthew again uses the dualistic framework of the Two Ways in order to remind his community about the call of Jesus for discipleship and to heighten the choice between the two communities that will be separated at the eschatological judgment. For Matthew, the reward and condemnation are not dependent on legal righteousness. Rather they are in accordance with obedience to and fulfilment of the will of God, which he emphasises from the Sermon on the Mount throughout his Gospel. This is the central concern of Matthew’s Gospel: “the radical call to righteousness”. This righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20). This is a call to be blessed, a call to be perfect as the Father in heaven is, and a call to enter into the kingdom of heaven (5:3-11, 48, cf. 25:34-40, 46b). Thus in the apocalyptic view of

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430 Court, “Right and Left”, 231.
Matthew, the wise ones who heard the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and were prepared to put them into practice, will share the joy of God’s kingdom, but the foolish ones who heard the words but did not act on them will be excluded (25:1-13; cf. 7:21-27). In other terms, the sheep that represent the blessed community will be put on the right side and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for them since the creation of the world (25:34). On the other hand, the goats that represent the cursed community will be put on the left side and will be excluded by God. They will be sent to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41). The reward is related to how they treated others — and especially ‘the least of the brothers’ (7:1-2; 18:18-35). The righteous will go to eternal life (7:25; 13:43, 49; 25:34, 46), and the unrighteous to eternal punishment (7:22-23, 27; 13:42, 50; 25:41).

D. Summary and Reflection: Kingdom Teaching and Gospel Community

The results of the historical-critical and narrative exegesis in this chapter, show that as the Matthean community encountered crises from both socio-political and religious realms, Matthew seeks to show that the kingdom teaching of Jesus is adequate to meet the needs of his community in the midst of their crises. Whether we interpret Matthew primarily within the frame of its location within the Roman Empire (so Carter, for example), or its relationship with formative Judaism (so Overman, Saldarini, and Sim), or its relationship to other forms of ‘Christianity’ (‘extreme Paulinism’, false prophets, or some other formulation) is perhaps less important than whether all these contexts are part
of the ongoing dialogue. I have argued in these last two chapters for the primary significance of the Roman imperial and the intra-Jewish-Christian contexts, with some attention to the threat of ‘wandering charismatic’ wonder-workers who have little regard for ethics. Matthew’s response is to use the teachings of Jesus to present forcefully the ethical outline of an alternative ‘Empire’ (βασιλεία = kingdom, empire) — one that fulfils, even exceeds, the expectations of the Jewish Torah (5:20).

Thus, in response to the needs of his community in this chaotic context, we have seen that Matthew arranges the specific texts of the kingdom teaching of Jesus as unique sections, beginning with the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), followed by the admonishment of the kingdom parables (13:1-50), and concluding with the warnings of eschatological judgment (25:1-13, 31-46). Though the contents of the kingdom teaching of Jesus are derived from Mark, Q and other traditions, Matthew has balanced them systematically and symmetrically in order to challenge his community not only to re-examine themselves and retain their faith identity, but also to be prepared for the parousia. Matthew encourages his community that they are not only to obey the kingdom teachings of Jesus and but also to embody them in their daily lives (5:13-16; cf. 7:24). Matthew also challenges his community to go and make disciples of all nations and to teach them what they have been commanded (28:19-20; cf. 5:19-20). Thus in the next chapter, we will discuss how Matthew’s ethics in the kingdom teaching of Jesus shape his community, its identity, its hopes and expectations, and to explore how his ethical teachings might be applicable to the Christian community in Myanmar and other Christian communities that face similar situations.