

PREFACE

Usually people want to read the Bible one time. They don't want to start from the Old Testament, but from the New Testament. When they open the New Testament, they find the Gospel according to Matthew. Anyone who reads Matthew's Gospel, chapter one, feels tedious, because the book starts from Jesus' genealogy which contains so many names of men and women. Then they close the book and give up reading. But when we overcome reading the genealogy of Jesus, and go on reading we find Matthew's messages about Jesus and his ministry, mainly the kingdom of God. We studied Matthew's Gospel dividing into 52 lectures. There we find three very important lessons.

First, the man named Matthew.

Matthew, as a Jew, lived under Roman occupation. The Roman Empire, with the slogan "Peace to the World" (Pax Romana), extorted from all the colonial countries, especially from the people of Israel. When something happens in a country, always young people stand out as important because they are considered as future leaders of the nation. Matthew lived in unbearable circumstances in the land of Israel, one of the colonial countries. The major agonies of young people are first, the marriage problem, and next, the future security problem. Matthew was not an exception.

Matthew was very able. On top of this, he was a man of possibility. He never knew how to despair. In that situation, as a Jew, everybody would despair; at best they were hoping for the coming of Christ. When we read Matthew's Gospel, we find that Matthew is so great we cannot but call him the teacher of all human beings. It is because he knew the heart of Jesus the most and wrote the Sermon on the Mount. But in reality his original name was Levi the tax collector. His name, Levi the tax collector, indicates he gave up his utopian human dreams and national identity, which was unthinkable. Most of all he gave up his own noble human integrity. After much thought, he thought he had to survive and should not die. He thought he should support his family.

What was the result of becoming a tax collector? He was hated by his own people. He was known as a quisling. Later, he hated himself because

he felt unhappy even though he had money in his pocket. He was very lonely, so lonely that he became a man similar to those who are living in no-man's land. His loneliness ate like a worm from the four corners of his head. His loneliness dried his soul as if he were a scarecrow in the wilderness of Siberia.

Jesus knew that Matthew had money, but he was very lonely. Jesus saw him as he was, that he was an able man and that he was a lonely man. Jesus had hope in him. One day he visited his tax collector's booth. No one was there except him. Jesus knocked at the door of his tax booth when he was trying to swallow a piece of peanut butter sandwich with his own willpower. But it was difficult for the piece of peanut butter sandwich to pass through his throat. This was the time when Jesus knocked at the door of the tax booth. Jesus looked at him and said, "Follow me." Then he immediately followed him. How did Jesus know that he would follow him all at once? It was because Jesus knew that he had realized money is not everything. And the loss of his identity as a Jew made him impure in his heart. As a result, his idea that money is everything had robbed him of happiness in his soul. It was the time when he wanted to be a different person. Jesus' saying "Follow me" shook him, and strong sunshine smeared into his heart. Mysteriously, a kind of hope bubbled up in his soul. Confidence grew in his heart that he could be a new man in Jesus. So he left his position as chief of the IRS office and followed Jesus. Jesus had a great insight to see Matthew. He was smart, but he was going astray. Jesus decided to raise him as one of his disciples. Humanly speaking Jesus' decision to make Levi the tax collector his disciple looks like a great mistake. But Jesus had hope in Levi the tax collector. Finally his integrity grew and grew to the level of Jesus.

Second, the Sermon on the Mount.

All people of the world down through the generations in history liked the Sermon on the Mount. Even many gangsters were happy to memorize the Sermon on the Mount in the government hotel (jail). The Sermon on the Mount raised so many saints and great men and women of God. The Sermon on the Mount has been a medicine for spiritually sick people. The Sermon on the Mount gave so many people the direction of life and moral standard and ethical standard and spiritual standard. Above all, the Sermon on the Mount became the constitution of the kingdom of God. We cannot compare the Sermon on the Mount with the constitutions of worldly

nations. It is because the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the heavenly kingdom, and the worldly constitutions of all nations are for power struggles and are empty promises. It is amazing that the former tax collector Levi, who was changed into Saint Matthew, wrote the Sermon on the Mount, which is the constitution of the kingdom of God. He was attached to this world and only knew the terrible situation of his country and Roman oppression. Finally he saw the kingdom of God in Jesus. So many people down through the generations call the Sermon on the Mount the "golden rule." The Sermon on the Mount is very easy to read, but very difficult to practice. Whoever lives up to the Sermon on the Mount will be great and blessed both humanly and spiritually. This is the reason many people down through the generations called the Sermon on the Mount the "golden rule." Jesus' hope in Matthew produced a person who wrote the Sermon on the Mount. The despicable Jewish quisling was changed to the teacher of all human beings. Because Matthew's writing the Sermon on the Mount was so excellent, other synoptic gospel writers and John's Gospel could only briefly imitate the Sermon on the Mount, but could not write it like Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount is only three chapters. But many theologians and Bible scholars have written five hundred thousand volumes of books about it during the last 200 years. Recently, innumerable mental patients caused by anxiety were healed by one verse of the Sermon on the Mount. It is Matthew 6:33. It says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Throughout history all human beings wanted to be holy and righteous. But they were sick with sin and became useless. Yet so many people became exemplary people, also influential people, because they were changed by Matthew 5:13-15. It says, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." People's master passion is to be holy so that they may be happy in their souls. But most people who live in this sick world become corrupted, influenced by the corrupted world. They are healed by reading the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew was one of those who read the Sermon on the Mount in Jesus and was a happy man in his soul.

In this world we have to survive. So we are eager to establish our future security. These days most of the excellent students choose to study a kind of engineering or medicine to make more money. Humanity study like history and literature and philosophy and music are chosen by those whose grades are not enough to get into professional courses. But if humanity and music study and philosophy studies are ignored in any

country, that is the sign that people only like to make money and their humanity becomes lower and lower. Finally the people of the country are corrupted from the root and are destroyed. Good examples are the Babylonian civilization, Egyptian civilization, Greek civilization, and Roman civilization; next seems to be the country which resembles the Roman Empire.

Third, parables in Matthew's Gospel.

There are formally sixteen parables in Matthew's Gospel. But in reality there are so many parable-like Bible narratives in this gospel. The parable of the sower (13:1-23) talks about the seed of the kingdom of God compared with the seed of the devil in a man's heart. The parable of the mustard seed talks about the character of the kingdom of God (13:31-32). The kingdom of God, based on one word of God, grows in one's heart and can produce thirty, sixty or one hundred times fruit in one's life. It means the citizens of the kingdom of God are not destructive people, but fruit-bearing people. The parable of the hidden treasure is compared with a treasure hunter (13:44). The citizen of the kingdom of God must be like a treasure hunter. The parable of the wedding banquet strongly emphasizes the invitation of God to his people to his Son's heavenly banquet (22:1-14). The invitation to the heavenly banquet is very intensive and thorough. But people are very indifferent. The parable of the heavenly banquet teaches us that people are indifferent, but we must be zealous to invite indifferent people to the Son's banquet in the heavenly kingdom. The parable of the ten virgins tells us that there are two kinds of women in this world (25:1-13). One kind is very lazy. They think if they wash dishes or clean the restroom they would die. This kind of woman is hard on her husband. Finally her happy family between husband and wife is broken. When their family is broken, their children's hearts are broken and remain broken throughout their lifetimes. These are lazy women. These are women who do not prepare the lamp oil. When the master came, they could not welcome him with a lighted lamp. When they went to the gas station to get some oil, the door of the kingdom of God was shut. The other kind is a diligent woman. The woman is essentially a mother of the universe. There are many women who married and live in very happy families and raise children, giving them a good education. Finally they grow up to be men and women of integrity and blessings to others simply because their mothers were wise virgins. In other words, they are women from above and who know how to respect their husbands, embracing all their weaknesses; and then wash dishes and clean the carpets. Most of all, they personally know Jesus and live according to Jesus' teachings.

There is the parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46). These days people believe the kingdom of God. They believe the love of God. They say, "God is love." Therefore, even though they are wrong and selfish, they think they can enter the kingdom of God. This parable of the sheep and goats clearly tells us that before they go into the kingdom of God, God will separate the sheep and goats. Sheep represent the children of God who shed many tears and sacrifice much to extend the kingdom of God on earth, living as holy pilgrims. On the other hand, the goats look like sheep. But their hearts are on the earth. What they had done was butting innocent people with their horned heads. They only hurt people and hated people and wounded people and beat their wives. In short, they had never been a blessing to others. Even though God is love and they believe in Jesus, God judges them and casts them into the darkness, where there is weeping forever.

When I was going to write messages carefully, I found that there are so many parables. The parables were so simple it was hard for me to make messages. So I complained, "Why did Matthew write so many parables?" But all the parables are focused on the kingdom of God.

Fourth, the kingdom of God in Matthew's Gospel.

When we read Matthew's Gospel, the entire Bible narratives focus on the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is repeated 52 times. Matthew really urged people to repent and enter the kingdom of God. Matthew 3:2 says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Matthew 4:17b says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." At the outset of the gospel ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ preached to repent the attachment to the world and have hope in the kingdom of God. Everybody wants to be blessed and live happily and richly. But when they do not have the kingdom of God they are not happy. They want to buy the kingdom of God with money, but they cannot buy it—like Levi the tax collector. Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This verse clearly tells us that those who have the kingdom of God in their hearts are indeed happy people. This verse also tells us that in order to have the kingdom of God we must empty ourselves and have a humble spirit. Matthew 5:10 says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew also urged people to be persecuted because of Jesus, for in the end their reward will be the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:20 says, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Those who accept Jesus have the kingdom of God in their souls; they must be different from worldly people. Matthew 6:10 says, "...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Those who have the kingdom of God in their hearts through Jesus must pray that God's kingdom may extend in this world and the territory of the kingdom be enlarged and the number of God-fearing people increased. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Human beings are seeking so many things in the world. One who received a doctor's degree was happy the day he received the doctor's degree. But after that, he was not happy because many other things he wanted to have occupied his heart. Therefore those who have the kingdom of God through Jesus must seek first and last his kingdom and righteousness. Matthew 13:44 says, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." The human destination is not death, but the kingdom of God. Human death has tragedy. John F. Kennedy's son died when he flew his personal airplane without having enough aviation training. Therefore those who have the kingdom of God through Jesus must have a treasure in the kingdom of God instead of trying to have many treasures in the world. Once Jesus' disciples argued, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Mt 18:1) Jesus answered them in Matthew 18:4, "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Those who have the kingdom of God in their souls through Jesus must be humble, humble like a child.

Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." We like money. Even children like money to buy something, a toy or chocolate. But If we are going to enter the kingdom of God, we must like Jesus more than material things. Matthew 23:13 says, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to." The Pharisees were proud and had no respect for the Son of God. So they became a hindrance to those who want to enter the kingdom of God by believing Jesus personally. These days many people are troubled because

of moral corruption and perversion and no respect between teacher and student. Up until 1998, we had a “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” memorial holiday. But in 1999 they erased the title “Dr.” Journalists began to call him “Martin Luther King Jr.” He was a black man and a well-educated person and a civil rights leader. Nobody was called “Dr.” But Martin Luther King Jr. was called “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” However, by 1999 all the journalists began to call him only “Martin Luther King Jr.” instead of calling him “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” This is tragedy. In truth, they did not erase “Dr.” from “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,” they erased the word “respect” in this country. Matthew 25:34 says, “Then the king will say to these on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’” The kingdom of God is our final goal and final destination. The kingdom of God is where God rules. The kingdom of God is where God rewards his children who were faithful in their pilgrimage days.

Fifth, Matthew’s Gospel is the first gospel.

I did not know why Matthew’s Gospel was placed as the first gospel. But it is very obvious that Matthew’s Gospel mentioned most about the kingdom of God. Matthew’s Gospel urged that Jesus is the King. When we reflect on Peter’s expression, we see that there have been many kings in the world, but nobody was a real king. Everybody died. Peter quoted Isaiah saying, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall” (1Pe 1:24). Here we learn the true meaning of the kingdom of God. A man is not born accidentally. Human life is not just suffering itself, and the end is not just death, nor is man’s finality a funeral ceremony. Man is born by God’s providence. Man is born with God’s specific mission to fulfill in this world. Those who believed in Jesus personally obtain the promise of eternal life and the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Man is not an accident. Each man is a child of God who will live forever in the kingdom of God with our King, Jesus, who was slain for our sin.