

Significant Hints of an Inclusive Gospel  
in the Earliest Chapters of the Gospel of Matthew

---

A Research Paper Presented to  
Dr. James King  
Baptist Bible Seminary

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of MP3:  
“Core Issues of Church Leadership in Global Ministry Outreach”

---

by  
Dave Fredrickson

July 2002

Copyright © 2002 by David Kurt Fredrickson  
All rights reserved

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction .....	1
II. Matthew's Genealogy .....	4
III. The Magi in Matthew 2.....	14
IV. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" .....	20
V. "By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles..." .....	23
VI. "Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'" .....	26
VII. "Unless your righteousness surpasses <i>that</i> of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." .....	29
VIII. Conclusion .....	34
Bibliography .....	36

## **I. Introduction**

Why is the cause of world missions rarely an ongoing focus for even committed Christians, outside of a couple designated days at church each year?

For these stalwarts, ignorance is rarely the issue. They have been around biblical preaching long enough to know that world missions is to be a priority for the New Testament church and the New Testament individual Believer, alike. Nor is a lack of commitment usually the issue: These Christians recognize and accept world missions as a personal priority, and prove it by their words of commitment and with their pocketbooks via faithful giving to missions.

Missions committees in seeking to point to the shortcomings of the “missions-challenged” Christian will point to a shortage of regular prayer times and other like time expenditures on the part of these otherwise-committed Christians. However, this can be a problem of daily distractions more than a problem of weak commitment -- the crush of numerous options for the committed Christians’ time, hourly, causes them to short shrift all manner of priorities to which they are highly committed, beginning with their kids and including world missions.

The missions pastor or committee member will also attribute the lack of ongoing world missions attention on the part of the other committed Christians to an absence of a “passion for missions” or of a “heart for missions”. My sense is that this is both an accurate observation and an unhelpful observation at the same time; accurate because undoubtedly the passions of people do regularly capture their time and attention, making the level of passion for missions on the part of the typical committed Christian suspect,

and unhelpful because the missions pastor or committee member has no clue as how the other committed Christians are to “get it”.

My thesis in this paper is that behind the absence of “passion” or “heart” for missions is the absence of something that is made observable by Matthew in Jesus’ early, pre-Gentile ministry: a warm, genuine affection for and interest in people groups other than the one into which He was born and into which He was called initially to minister.

That is, Jesus had something within Him regarding Gentiles and other “unlikeables” that had more warmth and feeling to it beyond a committed, unconditional love for them – He actually thought about them a lot, with affection. I suggest that the typical committed Christian has the latter – the sense of responsibility, the commitment to other people groups, minus the former – the warm affection and concern for these people. Imitating Christ will for them include a cultivating of His affection for “foreigners,” beyond an emotionless commitment to their salvation. To put it another way, we committed Christians may have to love other people groups and have to want them saved, but we don’t have to like them and spend actual time thinking about them.

(A side comment: While missions committee members may well have this warm affection for foreigners, the fact is that if the “it” they want non-“missions-minded” Christians to “get” is precisely this same warm affection that Matthew surfaces in Jesus, many of these committee members disguise that commonality well. Those of us of the “unwashed,” those whose hearts do not yet beat primarily for world missions, get the sense that the “it” we are supposed to “get” is a lot more joyless and guilt-based than what Matthew surfaces as the “it” that Jesus “got.”)

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the key evidences of Jesus’ genuine interest in and affection for Gentiles (and other disenfranchised groups) even

while Jesus was focused upon serving, and living entirely within, the people group of the Palestine Jews into which He was born.

## II. Matthew's Genealogy

Bible students<sup>1</sup> have noted that Matthew appears to prepare the reader, albeit indirectly, for the inclusion of the Gentiles within Jesus' arena of concern ministry as early as his genealogy of Jesus in chapter one. This section seeks to validate that conclusion, and expand it to "disenfranchised" groups as well within first century Judaism.

Among evangelical commentators there is a consensus that the inclusion of the four women in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is significant. Dr. John Hutchison of Talbot Seminary points out<sup>2</sup> that Matthew's inclusion of any women in the genealogy was a significant variation from the norm and surely was an attention-getting device of some kind. However, there is much less agreement as to the point Matthew is making by the inclusion.

---

<sup>1</sup> As for example, footnoted throughout this section.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchison writes, "As Nolland (John Nolland, "The Four (five) Women and Other Annotations in Matthew's Genealogy," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1977): 527) observes, 'The place of the four women (five counting Mary) in the Matthean genealogy has been much explored. The central drive of most of the investigation has been to find a common denominator between the four women, and if possible, one that can embrace Mary. Occasionally one notes a disgruntled expression of disbelief in any significant commonality, but this has not dimmed the enthusiasm of those who seek to demonstrate one kind of commonality or another.'" John C. Hutchison, "Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 158:630 (Apr 01) p. 154.

One major view is that it is the inclusion of three great sinners plus a progeny of incest via the godless Midianites, Rachel, that is Matthew's intended emphasis, preparing the Jewish establishment for Jesus' ministry to the sinner, the spiritually sick, rather than to them, the (imagined) spiritually well.

There are three weaknesses to this view. One is that the characterization creates no link to Mary, the fifth woman. In Matthew's presentation she is blameless in connection with the birth of Jesus and in all her interactions with God, Gabriel and Joseph. The preferred explanation will ideally explain the inclusion of all five women, not just the four women of the Old Testament. The second weakness of this view is that it does not explain the anomalous mention of Bathsheba by using her husband's name and not her name. If the sinfulness of Bathsheba was being highlighted, identifying her not by her own name but via the name of blameless Uriah instead seems unlikely. The third weakness is that the characterization of the earlier four as great sinners is simply not accurate. Freed, one of the proponents of this view, resorts to an unwarranted conclusion regarding the behavior of Ruth in order to maintain his point: "The women were not shining lights of moral integrity... Ruth, a Moabite girl, showed virtuous conduct in that she loved and remained loyal to her mother-in-law, a Hebrew woman. But Ruth probably lost her virtue one night at a party during the grain festival when she crawled under the covers with Boaz, who later became her husband ([Ruth 3](#))."<sup>3</sup>

Given that at least in the cases of Ruth and Bathsheba the women were models of virtue relative to the Jewish men around them, this line of thinking does not hold up. In addition, Hutchison lists Old Testament scholars such as Davies and Brown who claim that in fact by the intertestamental period, as exemplified in the words of Josephus, all of

---

<sup>3</sup> Edwin D. Freed, "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987): 3-4.

these women had come to be seen in a generally positive light. After mentioning Philo and Josephus, Huchison quotes Brown:

In weighing this understanding of the women, we should note, however, that the Bible does not make all these OT women sinners. It is not clear, for instance, that Ruth sinned with Boaz. Moreover, while in the OT the other women were guilty of unchastity in varying degrees, in the Jewish piety of Jesus' time these women came off quite well. Tamar was esteemed as a saintly Jewish proselyte; for by her initiative she had perpetuated the family line of Judah's son... . She is said to have done this because she had faith in the messianic promise concerning Judah's lineage, and she wanted to share in its blessing. Rahab, also classified as a proselyte, was looked on as [a] heroine for having helped in Israel's victory at Jericho; and in early Christian writing she was hailed as a model of faith ([Heb 11:31](#); 1 Clement 12:1). Even Bathsheba's adultery was not always condemned in rabbinic literature because she ultimately gave birth to Solomon. Thus, there is little likelihood that Matthew's readers would have understood the women as sinners.<sup>4</sup>

Given this positive perception of the four Old Testament women, it seems even less likely that Matthew was attempting to alert the reader to Jesus' ministry focus on sinners – sinfulness would not have been the outstanding commonality to these women, at least for the originally-intended readers.

A second major view is that Matthew mentions the four Old Testament women in addition to Mary because they highlight God's working through women with scandalous marriage and/or childbirth histories. The thinking is that Matthew was able to blunt the credibility issues connected with Mary bringing the Messiah into the world outside of wedlock, by highlighting several women with similar backgrounds who have already been included in the Messiah's lineage. A strength of this view is that it makes an effective link between Mary and the other four women. One weakness is that, again, not all five women appear to fit the category of women with problem marriage histories. Ruth certainly is not going to stand out as a person with a spotty marriage past. Her

---

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 72.

record in fact highlights her commitment to family ties and her circumspectness in regard to other relationships, such as her developing relationship with Boaz.

Another weakness with this second major view is that some of the women were in difficult straights maritally by their own poor choices. Tamar and Rahab were prostitutes by choice, and Bathsheba may or may not have been at fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time to be seen by King David. This is not the characterization Matthew would have wanted the reader to attach to Mary, so that presumably if the undeserved, difficult marriage condition of the women was the intended significance on the part of Matthew, he would have limited his list to those who were innocent victims of their marital condition as was Mary.

A third major view is that Matthew highlighted the members of Christ's lineage that were Gentiles, preparing the most partisan Jewish reader for a ministry to Gentiles on the part of his Messiah. A strength of this view is that it explains Matthew using the name of Uriah, a Hittite, to identify Bathsheba who was possibly a Jew, rather than simply using her name as with the other four women. That is, he found a way of identifying the (likely) Jewish woman by way of a Gentile name of an individual who actually is not part of the genealogy. It would seem that the greatest strength of this view is found in the fact that it's presence at the beginning of the book makes a crucial contribution to the biblical theology of Matthew regarding Gentile inclusion – it provides a wonderful “thematic bookend” at the beginning of the book, to match the Gentile focus of the Great Commission at the other end of the book. Helen Milton expresses this view well:

In [Matthew 28](#) the resurrected Christ declares, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ Thus speaks the son of David, in whom the covenant with David is fulfilled. In the following verses he commands, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you.’ ... A scriptural basis is thus indicated for the missionary outreach of the church, which is commanded to become involved in fulfilling that which has been God’s purpose since the call of Abraham. That such an allusion is intended is indicated by the inclusion of the foreign women, Tamar, etc., in the genealogy.<sup>5</sup>

As with the “scandalous marriage history” view however, this view falters in that not all the five women fit the category of “Gentile.” Tamar could be a Gentile<sup>6</sup>, but Mary is not and Bathsheba likely is not, leaving the group less than “clearly Gentile.” Freed further weakens the view: “One objection to this view is that in post-biblical Jewish literature some of these women were regarded as converts to the Jewish religion, so they would, therefore, be regarded as Jewish rather than Gentile.”<sup>7</sup> It is possible therefore that in first century Jewish eyes *none* of these women were viewed as Gentiles.

A fourth main view is that it is the godliness of the women, and their willingness to go to courageous extremes to extend the Messianic line, which is being highlighted. It is a bit ironic to this writer that this view could stand alongside the view that Matthew is highlighting the women because they are great sinners! While Hutchison views a broader purpose for the inclusion of the women, this kind of “scrappy godliness” shows in Hutchison’s own approach...

---

<sup>5</sup>Helen Milton, “The Structure of the Prologue to St. Matthew’s Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), p. 176.

<sup>6</sup> John Hutchison (p. 159) quotes with approval Richard Bauckham (“Tamar’s Ancestry and Rahab’s Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy,” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 314-20): “Bauckham notes that Tamar’s race or ancestry is not identified in Genesis 38, though Judah’s first wife was a Canaanite (v. 2). Bauckham argues convincingly, however, that Tamar was a Gentile and that she was certainly considered a Gentile by the Jewish community at the time of Matthew’s writing.”

<sup>7</sup> Freed, p. 4.

... the inclusion of the four Old Testament women in Christ's genealogy is an intentional device to remind the recipients of Matthew's Gospel of several Old Testament stories with a common theological point. The allusions to these stories accomplish four theological purposes.

First, they demonstrate God's providential hand in preserving Messiah's line, even in apostate times. This naturally led to Matthew's account of the virgin conception, through which God brought the Messiah into the world.

Second, they demonstrate God's heart for godly Gentiles and the significant role of their faith at crucial times in Israel's history.

Third, they demonstrate the importance of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants in understanding Messiah's mission, with a focus on faith and obedience, not a racial line.

Fourth, they call Matthew's readers to repentance and humility, and to accepting Gentiles into the body of Christ, thereby affirming an important theme of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Hutchison feels that the inclusion of the women is meant to bolster the demonstration of God's heart for godly Gentiles, as emphasized in his proposed second purpose for the genealogy that is mentioned above. That is, the women are not included just because they are Gentile, but because they (or in the case of Bathsheba, because her named husband) trusted God to carry them through extraordinary circumstances, resulting in the continuation of the Davidic, messianic line.

The strength of this view is in the fact that it focuses exclusively neither on the reprobate characteristic that is not common to all five, nor the Gentile characteristic that is not common to all five, but on the combination of the two as significant – that is, all five are, in addition to being women, reprobates and/or Gentiles, socioeconomically at a significant disadvantage, but enabled by their active faith. A significant weakness of the view is in that it fails at the very same point as the others have – just as all the women are

---

<sup>8</sup> Hutchison, p. 164.

neither Gentile, nor of scandalous marriages, nor great sinners, neither are all the women models of godliness. Brown reports that in the thinking of first century Jews “Tamar was esteemed as a saintly Jewish proselyte; for by her initiative she had perpetuated the family line of Judah’s son... . She is said to have done this because she had faith in the messianic promise concerning Judah’s lineage, and she wanted to share in its blessing,”<sup>9</sup> and Weren contends that “The way in which the four women figure there sheds in turn some more light on Mary’s position... those stories reveal how Israel’s history would have been cut short prematurely had these women not seen it as their task to map out alternative pathways to the future,”<sup>10</sup> and Chazal feels “[Tamar] acted to fulfill God’s will...”<sup>11</sup>

But to the contrary, it is difficult certainly to find either a significant level of godliness or this sense of Messianic destiny in the Tamar of the Scriptures, as this Canaanite prostitute plots intercourse with her father-in-law to avoid destitution. Godliness relative to Judah? Perhaps. An unwavering calling to produce the Messiah? Not a reasonable conclusion from the Scriptural evidence, it seems to me.

I would put forth a fifth view, which seeks to validate the commonalities captured in the above views, but which also recognizes that none of those characteristics are truly universal to all five women. That is, while those characteristics are significant, it would seem that it is the cumulative effect of all of them taken together that makes

---

<sup>9</sup> Brown, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Weren, “The Five Women in Matthew’s Genealogy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (April 1997), p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy de Chazal, “The Women in Jesus’ Family Tree,” *Theology* 97 (1994): p. 418.

them universal to the five women. This could be called the “all-of-the-above view.” The key descriptor that I suggest does apply aptly to all five women, and circumscribes all the characteristics captured in the prior views, is the term “disenfranchised.” Each of the women was disenfranchised in her respective generation and culture because of one or more unacceptable or at least undesirable characteristics. Each of the five women had more than one of these “problem characteristics.” In every case the first problem characteristic was that they had been born female in a patriarchal society. In every case there was at least one other characteristic that made them of lesser status than other upstanding, married, Jewish women living around them. In every case they were denied, by god fearing, Law-abiding Jews, the rights, privileges and/or respect that were enjoyed by Jewish, Law-keeping men.

I propose that the impact Matthew intended for his readers in including these five women was to alert them to a key characteristic of the Messiah – He would have a special place in His ministry for the poor, the Gentile, the sick, the tax collector, and all manner of other categories of disenfranchised people. I propose that Matthew is serving notice right from the start that his Messiah does not cater to the privileged of society – if anything, He courts the attention of those that society does not honor. As unexpected as it might be, Jesus will have a heart for all disenfranchised, and will be a rewarder of those who exhibit real faith apart from their social class standing in the eyes of the religious elite.

A Law-keeping, Jewish man who assumed that the Messiah would seek out him and “his people” – those that enjoyed privileged status in his world -- needed to begin adjusting his understanding of status as soon in his reading of the life of Jesus as was possible. Thus, it is appropriate and even expected that Matthew would begin to

highlight these “social reversals of class” even while still leading up to the birth of the Messiah that would be directly championing this cause.

Those that the Jewish male would be uncomfortable interacting with because they were different from him and were not as respected as he was, were suddenly now going to be accorded favor in Matthew’s presentation of Jesus. Reading Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ genealogy would cause him to be struck by, if not be in consternation over, this abrupt equalizing of “caste differences” by Jesus’ proponent Matthew.

In a sense the significance of the Matthean genealogy may be that Jesus had already begun bridging gaps between social classes <sup>12</sup> even before He was born, by engineering His lineage as He did.

Other writers recognize, even if they do not emphasize, the problem of self-righteous Jewish readers who will be unduly put off by Jesus’ openness to the disenfranchised, if not prepared beforehand. Hutchison at least suggests a variation of this motivation on the part of Matthew, focusing on the believing, yet self-righteous Jewish reader, speaking of Matthew’s desire to “... exhort them to forsake the self-righteous attitude of many toward Gentiles who were then joining them in the church, the body of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Bernard states, “The God about whom Jesus taught had shown Himself ready, in the history of the royal family, to accept strangers and sinners.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Would it even be a stretch to say that in first century Jewish culture, Jewish women were functionally a different people group than the men? They were at least a different caste within the Jewish people group...

<sup>13</sup> Hutchison, p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> P. M. Barnard, “Genealogies of Jesus Christ,” in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 638.

A possible argument against my “disenfranchised” view for the women of the genealogy might be that, with that designation there is no longer a need for, and a justification for, the five disenfranchised to be women. If the “disenfranchised” view is correct, this counter-argument might ask, could not the five just as easily be disenfranchised men that exist within the genealogy? My answer would be to the positive. However, the point Matthew would be making, while still valid, would be completely missed by the reader. The disenfranchised men would not stand out (we could surmise in fact that several of the men in the genealogy as it has been constructed were disenfranchised in some way, but for readers any significance to that fact is missed.) Matthew’s use of disenfranchised women creates a literary device that is virtually impossible to overlook. In addition, being a female was one element of being disenfranchised – a man in any of the five women’s situation would have had more resources and societal support.

---

### III. The Magi in Matthew 2

The strongly felt need as seen in Matthew, to introduce early in his Gospel Jesus' love for the disenfranchised via Jesus' genealogy, also explains his move in the very next section into the story of the Gentile wise men ([Matt. 2](#)).

All the commentators I have read see in the magi account significant contrasts between key characters. One is the contrast between King Herod and King Jesus, even leading one commentator to title the account “The Battle of the King against the Christ,” and another to state: “Already in this passage we see a motif that occurs throughout the Gospel: the presence of the messianic king demands decision and therefore causes division between those who accept and those who reject him. This accounts for the *glaring contradiction* (my emphasis) in this passage in the presence of the two kings.”<sup>15</sup> While it is left by Matthew to the reader to discern the key contrasts between the two kings, after making his way further into the Gospel the reader would be able to reflect on the fact that one key contrast, if not the most key contrast, is in how the two kings treat the outsiders, the powerless, the disenfranchised. It is apparent that King Herod's whole life philosophy emphasized the using of the powerless, the outsider, the unawares, i.e. the disenfranchised, for his purposes and then discarding them. Herod attempts to take advantage of the magi through deceit but is stymied by the angel who alerts

---

<sup>15</sup> Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mathew 1-13*, p. 32: Hagner mentions the commentator Schlatter (not footnoted, p. 28) who titles this chapter “The Battle of the King against the Christ.”

the magi in a dream. He succeeds in discarding, literally, the Jewish male infants, bringing calamity upon them and their powerless, Jewish parents.

Even more often, commentators make note of the sharp, unmistakable contrast Matthew draws between King Herod and the Magi. As Hutchison notes, “The Magi’s journey and worship of the Messiah is remarkable in contrast to the king of Israel (Herod), who was seeking to kill his prophesied rival.”<sup>16</sup> Hagner, after suggesting that the most obvious value of chapter two is its provision of a series of place names in order to locate the birth of Jesus geographically and historically, states, “Perhaps even more important, however, is the stress on the *opposite reactions* to the Christ from his earliest days, as exhibited in the magi and Herod.”<sup>17</sup>

There may be an even more significant contrast between Herod and the magi, however, that creates a bridge from the genealogy of Jesus to the ministry of Jesus. That is the contrast between Herod’s treatment of the disenfranchised and the magi’s treatment of them. As described above, King Herod, unlike Jesus, consistently sought to use the powerless, the outsider, the unawares, i.e. the disenfranchised, for his purposes and then sought to discard them. In contrast, the magi, like the adult Jesus coming on the scene a chapter later, exercise only kindness and gentleness towards the weak. The humble setting in which Jesus and his family are found does not put off the magi or cause them to act in a condescending manner, rather they show the greatest respect toward the unimpressive Jewish family.

---

<sup>16</sup> Hutchison, p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> Hagner, p. 23.

The actions of the magi become a powerful continuation of the “honoring the disenfranchised” theme introduced in the genealogy, in yet another way. In the first way, laid out in the prior paragraph, the magi provide a thematic bridge between the genealogy and the rest of the book: God honors the disenfranchised in chapter one as indicated by the five disenfranchised women in the genealogy, the magi honor the disenfranchised family of Jesus and fellow Jews (in contrast to Herod) in chapter two, and so the stage is set for the reader to be unable to miss Jesus being gentle with the disenfranchised in his ministry in chapters three and beyond.

In a second way, the magi provide a thematic bridge between the genealogy and the rest of the book because they are in reality disenfranchised themselves. To the Gentile reader perhaps these men seem powerful and resourceful – obviously they are wealthy, able to travel extensively, and able to converse with kings. But to the originally intended reader, the skeptical Jew, they are “fatally disenfranchised” from God and His people simply by being of the unwashed – Gentiles. What is worse, they are likely from Mesopotamia, land of the despicable Babylonians<sup>18</sup> who led to Israel’s exile and untold

---

<sup>18</sup> Actually, Tony T. Maalouf (“Were the Magi From Persia or Arabia?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156:624 (Oct 99) p. 423) states that “For many twentieth-century readers, especially those who live in areas remote from the Middle East, the “East” may suggest Babylon, Persia, or India. But for those who lived in Palestine in biblical times, travel to those countries started by going north, and anyone who came from those places to Palestine had to enter the land from the north, across the Fertile Crescent. Therefore Babylon and Persia were considered the land of the North,” and then presents a convincing argument for the Magi being Ishmaelekites from the Arabian Desert to the east. Either identification works for my claim that for the Jew the magi were ethnically disenfranchised.

suffering. Wealth or no wealth, they are at the level of dogs in the eye of the typical first century Jew.

The genius of including the magi therefore is that they reiterate Matthew's point about Jesus and the disenfranchised at two levels: at one level they behave as God has in Matthew chapter one and as Jesus will in Matthew chapter three and beyond towards other disenfranchised people, to the probable consternation of the Jewish reader who has followed the lead of his religious leaders in placing no particular importance upon that value. At the second level they are the disenfranchised themselves, being portrayed by Matthew, to the probable consternation of the Jewish reader, as blessed of God. .

Yet, as in the genealogy in the prior chapter Matthew casts the Gentile magi in a clearly positive light. Matthew is able to clarify his evaluation via an unsettling comparison between the magi and the religious leaders, who, as it takes some effort on the part of today's English reader to remember, are the likely heroes in the account for the skeptical Jewish reader who has followed their lead up to this point in his life in rejecting Jesus as valid Messiah.

It is true that the religious leadership in the magi account stands in sharp contrast to Herod and certainly compare well to him, given that Herod commits genocide. But the religious establishment does not compare well to the magi. The magi are aggressively pursuing God's truth, taking seriously all His revelation regarding a coming Messiah. Yes, they do not have near the grasp of Scripture that the religious leaders have, but the leadership is appallingly passive in their application of Scripture to life. The magi have traveled literally years to see the fulfillment of Jewish Scriptures; the religious leaders are not willing to travel an hour from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to perform the same research. The comparison between pagan, ignorant magi and religious leaders steeped in the Scriptures is not unlike the unnerving comparison between the "godless" Ninevites and

the “godly” Jonah. To the end of that book, the behavior of the two parties is virtually the reverse of what the Jewish reader expected. Here the disenfranchised, foreign, Gentile magi spiritually outclass the “godly” religious leaders in the same way.

If the magi are those most attuned to God in this story, and yet are disenfranchised from the perspective of the originally intended reader, the message of the genealogy has just been powerfully reinforced. In fact, just as the magi are *contrasted* favorably to the religious establishment, they *compare* favorably to the five women in the genealogy. That is, of all the persons mentioned in the magi account, the most similar in terms of character to the magi may be “female genealogy participant number five” who carries over to the Magi account, Mary. Note for example how well the characterizations ascribed by commentators to the women in the genealogy fit the magi:

“She [Tamar] is said to have done this because she had faith in the messianic promise concerning Judah’s lineage, and she wanted to share in its blessing.”<sup>19</sup>

“in early Christian writing she [Rahab] was hailed as a model of faith”<sup>20</sup>

“these women [saw] it as their task to map out alternative pathways to the future ... by their ... extraordinary concerted action”<sup>21</sup>

They are viewed by some according to Hutchison as having “showed initiative or played an important role in God’s plan.”<sup>22</sup>

That means that in both of Matthew’s initial chapters the characters who stand out most are people who are disenfranchised according to the Jewish religious

---

<sup>19</sup> Brown, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Weren, p. 290.

<sup>22</sup> Hutchison, p. 155.

establishment, yet who trust God, act on their faith, and live lives of significance in spite of the disadvantaged class they were born into. Effectively, these are presented by Matthew to the readers as models to some extent to emulate, and as the kind of people the reader can expect Jesus to highlight and value in contrast to the religious leadership the original reader follows.

#### IV. “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”<sup>23</sup>

There are two key elements to the presentation made by Matthew in chapters three and four, that would force the first century, Jewish reader to reconsider his presumption that the kingdom is offered exclusively to the Law-keeping Jew versus the disenfranchised. This is an important presumption relative to Matthew’s presentation of Jesus (and God in heaven) as “friends to the disenfranchised.” If this presumption were correct, so that the Messiah was coming exclusively to the Jews, to establish the prophesied, Messianic kingdom with primarily Law-keeping, male Jews to benefit, then Jews certainly might be encouraged to act out the same kind of discrimination toward the disenfranchised around them. If however the intensely ethnocentric/socioeconomic discrimination implicit in the above presumption was foreign to the Kingdom Gospel in Matthew, then the presumption that encouraged such discrimination would need to be revised on the part of the reader.

The first key element in the Gospel of the Kingdom proclamation that undermines the anti-disenfranchised presumption is the collection of hints in Matthew 3-4 that verify the inclusion of Gentiles in the Messianic kingdom and/or de-emphasize class distinctions within the Jews in the Messianic kingdom.

One hint that Matthew is highlighting Jesus’ coming embracing of the disenfranchised is found in John the Baptist’s emphasis on Jesus’ future ministry of baptizing in the Holy Spirit. In Matthew’s record of John’s sermon to the Pharisees in

---

<sup>23</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Mt 3:11). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

chapter three, Matthew selected and highlights Jesus' future ministry baptizing in the Holy Spirit. The first Old Testament passage that the original reader could have and should remembered was Joel 2:28-29:

It will come about after this  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;  
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
Your old men will dream dreams,  
Your young men will see visions.  
Even on the male and female servants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.<sup>24</sup>

The original reader of Matthew could not have, or at least should not have, been able to read John the Baptist's prophecy concerning Jesus without thinking of Joel 2, and the same reader could not or should not be able to think of Joel 2:28 without thinking of Joel 2:29. As D.A. Carson states, "In a time when many Jews felt the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn till the Messianic Age, the announcement could only have been greeted with excited anticipation."<sup>25</sup>

First, Joel indicates that the Holy Spirit is not to be poured out on Jews only, or even on Jews first. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit simply will not be an ethnocentric event. Second, the pouring out of the Spirit is described explicitly as a benefit that will not reflect any class distinctions. It is amazing to note that of all the descriptions that could have Joel could have used to amplify upon the Holy Spirit's coming, the one he

---

<sup>24</sup>*New American Standard Bible*, Joe 2:28-30.

<sup>25</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, p. 105.

selects is one that specifies that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the disenfranchised: the Holy spirit will be poured out on the economic underclass of Israel, the servants, and on the gender underclass of Israel, the women. With the coming of the Messiah comes the Spirit. That is stated explicitly by Matthew via John the Baptist. But with the coming of the Spirit comes as well, per Joel, a blurring of class and gender distinctions. That is an implicit but unavoidable statement for any reader steeped in the Old Testament's Messianic prophecies. That means to support the class distinctions of the Jewish religious leadership was to stand at odds to the values of the Holy Spirit and the Messianic age.

## V. “By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles...”<sup>26</sup>

Another hint that Matthew is highlighting Jesus’ coming embracing of the disenfranchised is found in Matthew’s quote of Isaiah 9:1,2 following Matthew’s mention of Jesus setting up residence in Capernaum of Galilee. It is one of just a handful of Old Testament prophecies that mention Gentiles as a whole, and puts them in a neutral-to-positive light as well. The Isaiah quote designates the region as “Galilee of the Gentiles”, emphasizing the mix of Jews and Gentiles living there.<sup>27</sup> This means that Jesus has selected by choice a truly cosmopolitan, ethnically diverse region of Palestine to live in. Jesus has done the exact opposite of setting up residence in a purely Jewish environment, near a religious elite. Hagner agrees that the mention of Gentiles in the process of describing Jesus’ settling in Capernaum was likely strategic: “Matthew does not refer to a mission of Jesus to the Gentiles, but Matthew’s readers may well have seen

---

<sup>26</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Mt 4:15). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>27</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 142) claims that “Capernaum was more Gentile than Jewish.” He quotes Frederick Farrar (*Life of Christ*, New York: Dutton, 1877, p. 178-179) as follows: “All along the western shores of Gennesaret Jews and Gentiles were strangely mingled, and the wild Arabs of the desert might there be seen side by side with enterprising Phoenicians, effeminate Syrians, contemptuous Romans, and supple, wily, corrupted Greeks.”

In addition to rejecting the value of residing within the shadow of the religious elite of Jerusalem, Jesus even chooses to reside within the shadow of secular, Roman authority: “Even if Christ never entered [Tiberius’] heathenish amphitheatre or grave-polluted streets, He must have often seen in the distance its turreted walls, its strong castle, and the Golden House of Antipas...” (same quote)

in these words a foreshadowing of what would occur after the resurrection (28:19). It is again for Matthew no accident that despite this limitation of his ministry to the Jews, Jesus began his ministry in a region that had gentile associations.”<sup>28</sup> Carson agrees that there is intended here a hint on the part of Matthew regarding Jesus’ openness to the Gentiles: “Matthew is not interested in the mere fact that some prophecy was fulfilled in Galilee but in this particular prophecy: from of old the Messiah was promised to “Galilee of the Gentiles”, a foreshadowing of the commission to “all nations”. Moreover, if the messianic light dawns on the darkest places, then Messiah’s salvation can only be a bestowal of grace – namely, that Jesus came to call, not the righteous, but sinners (9:13).”<sup>29</sup> In his choice of residence Jesus has made a powerful statement regarding His attitude towards, and His comfort level regarding, the disenfranchised Gentile. Matthew has emphasized it and given it Scriptural approval by way of the quote from Isaiah.

Another element of this choice to move to Capernaum, which would be very much in the awareness of the first century Jewish reader, is that even when Jesus is interacting and worshipping with Jews, He is doing so with relatively disenfranchised Galilean Jews. The Jews of Galilee, partially because of their ethnically mixed environment and partially because of their distance from the temple, were looked down upon by the Jerusalem-based, religious elite as being a lower class of Jew. Pentecost remarks, “Since the Sanhedrin sat in Jerusalem, this city was considered the fountain of all knowledge. Those who did not live there could not expose themselves to the wisdom of the teachers. Galilee provided grain and figs, which were the staples of the Jewish diet. It was possible for one to become wealthy by leaving Jerusalem and going to

---

<sup>28</sup> Hagner, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Carson, p. 117

Galilee. Those who settled there were considered materialistic and to have forfeited spiritual privileges for material gain.”<sup>30</sup> (So that Nathaniel would say to Philip, for example, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46)<sup>31</sup>). It would seem that Jesus has gone out of His way to immerse Himself in the lives of the disenfranchised, the groups that the religious elite would consider both different and inferior to themselves.

With these two hints Matthew has forced anyone reading from an Old Testament framework to continue to wrestle with the fact that according to Matthew, firstly God in heaven and secondly the Messiah just being introduced have a warm affinity for the disenfranchised of the first century, Jewish world. Matthew will not relent in making this point, whether speaking to the events in chapters one, two, three or four of his Gospel.

---

<sup>30</sup> Pentecost p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Jn 1:46.

**VI. “Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’”<sup>32</sup>**

Beyond the hints of chapters three and four are Matthew’s explicit statements that serve to further undermine the ethnic-based, gender-based and economic-based class system taught by the religious leadership of the original reader. In his sermon to the Pharisees John the Baptist says in the clearest possible language that their ethnicity is in fact not the basis for acceptance with God. While Jewish ethnicity always has been and always will be significant to God, it is in and of itself not adequate to secure any blessing to the individual.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, what the Pharisees imagined their ethnicity would guarantee, including eternal life and inclusion within the Messianic kingdom, are in fact secured by a dynamic unrelated to their ethnicity, being obedient faith. As Toussaint asserts, “Most of the Israelites of John’s day were taught that every Jew would automatically enter the kingdom at its institution (Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:271). By including the record of this rebuke, Matthew gives a hint of a later movement in the book as to why the Jews did not receive the kingdom with the coming of the Messiah. They refused to turn to God and trusted instead in their self-ascribed merits.”<sup>34</sup> Carson explains succinctly how this concept of merit via ethnicity arose apart from Scripture: “In

---

<sup>32</sup>*New American Standard Bible*, Mt 3:9.

<sup>33</sup>“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.’” *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 3:7-9.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, p. 69.

the OT God repeatedly cut off many Israelites and saved a remnant. Yet in the intertestamental period the general use of descent from Abraham, in the context of a rising merit theology, supported the notion that Israel was chosen because it was choice and that the merits of the patriarchs would suffice for their descendants.”<sup>35</sup>

If Jewish ethnicity is indeed not in and of itself a basis for securing any blessing from God, then the primary justification for the ethnocentric class distinctions of the scribes and Pharisees, along with their perception of an ethnically based disenfranchised population, are invalidated by God, here via John the Baptist.

In addition to undermining the ethnocentric class distinctions promulgated by the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew via John’s sermon invalidates any and all elements of the class distinctions the religious leaders maintained, whether economic, gender-based or otherwise. Obviously, the religious elite was self-perceived and self-declared as such because they were located at the top of all the class distinctions by which they operated. And yet they, of all the “classes” of people seeking John’s baptism, were being rejected by John the Baptist as not qualified to participate in John’s baptism. In the perception of John and Matthew, the religious elite was “lesser” than the “lesser” social classes by some measure that the religious elite obviously were ignorant of. Effectively, John made it publicly known that he ranked those coming to him by a framework that put the religious elite at the bottom, not at the top, of any status framework. His sermon makes it clear that the framework centers on genuine repentance, and by that measure the religious elite is destitute and drastically disenfranchised.

---

<sup>35</sup> D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 103.

Thus John, and therefore Matthew, serve notice via John's sermon that not only are the social classes enforced by the religious elite going to be rejected by the Messiah, they are going to be aggressively, openly reversed.

**VII. “Unless your righteousness surpasses *that of the scribes and Pharisees*, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>36</sup>**

For the first century Jewish reader, here is perhaps the first “warning shot” from Jesus that He is aligning Himself with John the Baptist against the religious leadership. The scribes and Pharisees are not the model to emulate; they and their lives are seriously deficient in terms of godliness. From the immediate context the reader learns that Jesus’ negative evaluation of the leadership does not flow from a difference of opinion over what the standard of godliness is. In that case it would have been easy to reject Jesus as a heretic. But Jesus agrees with the leadership of His day that the Old Testament Law is the correct standard.

Jesus’ point, then, has to be that the scribes and Pharisees fail significantly in keeping the Law, the agreed upon standard. The broader context of the case laws discussion in chapter five shows that a massive disconnect between the Pharisees’ external behavior and internal attitude was a major problem from Jesus’ point of view. This disconnect had led to rampant hypocrisy as the Pharisees had become comfortable with a thought life that did not exhibit godliness, and it had led to a rampant pride as the Pharisees measured themselves and others by standards comfortable to the Pharisees but foreign to the Law.

Admittedly, in Matthew’s development of the life and ministry of Jesus the issues of “class discrimination” and oppression of the downtrodden by the Pharisees is very much in the background. As with John the Baptist in chapters three and four, there

---

<sup>36</sup>*New American Standard Bible*, Mt 5:20-21.

are hints of a non-elitist approach to the disenfranchised on the part of Jesus versus the religious leadership.

One hint of a “pro-disenfranchised” stance from Jesus is nonverbal, and comes from the choice of disciples who are surrounding Him for example during the Sermon. With the makeup of His entourage being Galileans, middle or lower class, and including women, Jesus in His selection has evidenced a blindness to class differences that have surely hurt His standing in the eyes of a class-sensitive, religious elite. It would seem that in their eyes, with all the class-based disadvantages under which Jesus Himself labored, He really needed to be “trading up” in terms of class distinctions as He picked those with which to surround Himself.

The second hint comes from Matthew and Jesus in the form of several exhortations within the sermon that involve anti-elitism on the part of any who would follow Jesus. The list of comments from the Sermon include:

“Blessed are <sup>a</sup>the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (5:7)<sup>37</sup>

“...whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.” (5:22)<sup>38</sup>

“I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.” (5:32)<sup>39</sup>

“Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ *or* ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.” (5:36-37)<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>*New American Standard Bible, Mt 5:7.*

<sup>38</sup>*New American Standard Bible, Mt 5:22.*

<sup>39</sup>*New American Standard Bible, Mt 5:32.*

<sup>40</sup>*New American Standard Bible, Mt 5:36-37.*

“If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, <sup>a</sup>love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may <sup>1</sup>be <sup>a</sup>sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (5:40-45)<sup>41</sup>

“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (5:46-47)<sup>42</sup>

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (6:14-16)<sup>43</sup>

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and <sup>1a</sup>by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” (7:1,2)<sup>44</sup>

Again, there is a cumulative affect to these teachings relative to the disenfranchised. While there is little or no explicit teaching to reject class distinctions or to reach out to the disenfranchised within the Sermon, it includes principles that will lead the follower of Jesus to treat others with respect and care, taking one in the direction of “class blindness.” More explicit teaching regarding Jesus’ affection for the disenfranchised will come later in the Gospel (such as “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest...<sup>45</sup>)

---

<sup>41</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 5:39-45.

<sup>42</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 5:46-47.

<sup>43</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 6:14-16.

<sup>44</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 7:1-2.

<sup>45</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 11:28.

The final quote listed, 7:1-2, may well however be explicit teaching regarding making class distinctions. Carson asserts, “The rigor of the disciple’s commitment to God’s kingdom and righteousness demanded of them do not authorize them to adopt a judgmental attitude. Those who ‘judge’ like this will in turn be ‘judged,’ not by men (which would be of little consequence), but by God (which fits the solemn tone of the discourse). The disciple who takes it on himself to be the judge of what another does usurps the place of God (Rom. 14:10)...”<sup>46</sup> Hagner adds, “The meaning here, accordingly, is that unfair or uncharitable judgments should be avoided. A note of *humility* (emphasis mine) is suggested too by the immediate context (vv 3-5): one should not judge others more harshly or by a different standard than one judges oneself.”<sup>47</sup>

(Even in extreme situations where Jesus teaches the need for discriminating judgments and distinctions to be made and for behavior to be discriminating in some way, there is a clear absence of haughtiness or recrimination. So for example, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (7:6)<sup>48</sup>)

On the other hand, one could argue that the clarity of the application of Jesus’ words in 7:1,2 to the kind of class discrimination the religious leaders of the day acted out has been overestimated two paragraphs above. Given that Jesus did support a kind of moral, non-hypocritical discrimination via His reference to dogs and swine<sup>49</sup>, the religious leaders may have felt quite comfortable with his words and quite justified in

---

<sup>46</sup> Carson, p. 183.

<sup>47</sup> Hagner, p. 169.

<sup>48</sup> *New American Standard Bible*, Mt 7:6-7.

their anti-disenfranchised behavior. Until Jesus in further ministry was to make it clear that women, Gentiles, the poor, Galilean Jews, Samaritans, etc. are not morally inferior, and do not fit the categories of “dogs” and “swine,” the logical basis that could lead the religious leaders to recognize their kind of class discrimination as being ungodly is missing. Until that logical groundwork has been laid via the preaching and practice of Jesus, the religious leaders may be quite comfortable feeling that everyone around them are swine and dogs to varying degrees, so that their class discrimination is godly and appropriate.

Regardless however, the Sermon lays the clear groundwork for a caring respect towards any and every class of person to be further developed in Jesus preaching and practice.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Matthew has in his Gospel highlighted the fact that a significant element of the character of God the Father, Jesus, and men and women that God honors, is a genuine affection for the disenfranchised – those that are alien ethnically, geographically, culturally, or are in some other way at a disadvantage in the world in which they live, or at least in the eyes of the Jewish male residing in Palestine soon after Christ. The need for this emphasis on the part of Matthew is the generally accepted understanding that the originally intended reader, the Jew living either within or without the primitive church soon after Christ, is vulnerable to clinging to and living out the “caste differences” assigned to all the ethnic and socioeconomic variations mentioned above by the religious leaders within the Jewish faith of his day.

With Jesus bent on undermining those caste differences, this paper holds that it was a necessity on the part of Matthew to highlight consistently this agenda from the very first chapter of his Gospel. Thus Matthew begins with highlighting the disenfranchised women within Jesus’ genealogy, including His mother Mary. The magi in the next chapter provide an interesting study into God’s evaluation of the disenfranchised, because the magi both show caring respect for the disenfranchised Nazarene commoners, and receive care and support from God while they themselves are disenfranchised (at least from the perspective of the originally intended reader defined above).

This paper also suggests that there is a direct application to the comfortable American Christian of today, in that his and her energies devoted toward those less fortunate in terms of people group, geography, religion, etc is stunted in comparison to Jesus and God the Father. While the American Christian has very different reasons for

this lack of interest in comparison to the Jewish reader of Matthew, the behavioral outcome is similar.

American Christians can be challenged with this question from Matthew, “In what way do you model Jesus’ behavior and attitudes towards the disenfranchised around Him?”

I suggest that among even committed Christians the unspoken attitude behind unconscious behaviors is, “we have to love foreigners and others different than us because of the Great Commission, but we don’t have to like them. We’ll focus on them every Missions Sunday.” Again, this contrasts to Jesus as explained by Matthew, who shows that Jesus had and has an abiding, warm affection for the disenfranchised that “leaked out” in daily behavior during His earthly ministry, and was highlighted in events even prior to His earthly ministry in Matthew’s Gospel.

## Bibliography

- Brown, Ramond, *The Birth of the Messiah*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977.
- Carson, D.A., *Matthew*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- de Chazal, Nancy, "The Women in Jesus' Family Tree," *Theology*. 97 (1994).
- Freed, Edwin D., "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 29 (1987).
- Hagner, Donald A., *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*. Dallas: Word Books Inc., 1993.
- Hastings, James, ed., *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1907.
- Huchison, John C., "Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy," *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 158:630 (Apr 01).
- Maalouf, Tony T., "Were the Magi From Persia or Arabia?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 156:624 (Oct 99).
- Milton, Helen, "The Structure of the Prologue to St. Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 81 (1962).
- Pentecost, J. Dwight, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Toussaint, Stanley, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*. Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980.
- Weren, J.C., "The Five Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 59 (April 1997).