“Five Discourses of Matthew”

Matthew includes five major sermons or discourses in his gospel: discourse on ethics (ch. 5-7); discourse on missions (ch. 10); discourse on the kingdom (ch. 13); discourse on community life (ch. 18); and discourse on judgment (ch. 23-25). These five discourses have been arguably said to correspond with the Pentateuch. Matthew’s original intent in his composition of the gospel was to demonstrate Jesus’ messianic identity, his inheritance of the Davidic kingship over Israel, and his fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. The writer’s goal is to present Jesus, the rejected Messiah of Israel, as the divine Son of God having all authority to establish his rule. Matthew uses a set formula before moving back into the narrative to signal the finish of a major discourse (“when Jesus had finished these sayings” [7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1]).

Discourse on ethics (ch. 5-7)

Large crowds began to flock to Jesus for guidance (5:1) so the teacher decided to take the opportunity to educate the new inaugurated yet-not-fully realized kingdom’s ethics. Jesus is representing Moses when He came down from the mountain with teaching from the Father. Jesus has all authority to instruct the people on how to please God. His system of ethics are meant for neither the individual nor the state, but more for the Christian community (it does have individualistic implications). The structure of the discourse is a triad of teachings: Jesus fulfills the Torah (ch. 5), true vs. hypocritical piety (ch. 6:1-18), and social issues (ch. 6:19-7). Jesus opens his discourse with kingdom blessings (vv. 2-12) and metaphors of salt and light (vv. 13-16). Verses 17-20 answer the question of Jesus’ relationship towards the Torah. He by no means came to abolish the law, but he is not preserving all things as they were. He came to fulfill the law (vv.
17-19). Verses 21-48 contain six antitheses. He presents himself as the sovereign interpreter of the Torah, explaining how it applies in his new age. Each antithesis begins with the phrase or similar phrase “You have heard that it was said (vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).” Jesus as the supreme lawgiver has the authority to interpret the law compared to the jaded religious figures of the day.

The next section of the discourse deals with the religious hypocrisy found in the leaders. He gives three examples that illustrate the desire for the kind of righteousness that the new age demands, internal righteousness that’s produces almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The new age commands good works done out of internal righteousness. Ch. 6:19-7:1-12 concern social issues that deal with wealth and how to treat others. Jesus closes his sermon with the conclusion that there is two ways of living. Three illustrations emphasize the unified options to Christ’s new teaching: be for Jesus or be against Jesus. The crowd reacted with utter amazement at the authority of Jesus (7:28-29). Religious leaders of the day quoted Scripture and various teachers and commentators of the Torah whereas Jesus spoke freely from his own didactic prerogatives and knowledge.

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus expounds the reality of discipleship lived in the presence and power of the kingdom of God but within the everyday world. He speaks authoritatively and ethically concerning the issues that the church would face. Throughout the first discourse, one can see that Jesus is the new lawgiver and/or is presented as a new Moses. However, Jesus’ teaching is considerably different from pure “Law” for Matthew; it is a higher-order “righteousness” (5:20), which brings rest rather than burden (11:28-30). The Messiah was to come in power and authority inaugurating a new kingdom (Dan. 2:44; 7:27; Isa. 2:2-4). Jesus clearly fulfills this messianic implication.
Discourse on missions (ch. 10)

This second major discourse of Jesus focuses on the disciples’ mission to Israel (vv. 1–15), preparation for a worldwide mission among the Gentiles (vv. 16–23), and characteristics that Jesus' disciples will need to embody as they carry out that mission (vv. 24–42). The discourse falls into two main categories: instructions for missions during Jesus’ lifetime (vv. 10:1-16) and instructions for missions in the midst of persecution and circumstances after his death, burial, and resurrection (vv. 17-42). Jesus sends his missionary apostles out to the Jews first. The restriction may be for practical reasons (lack of Gentile missionary mindset) or for theological reasons (Jews had preeminence because of the covenants). Whatever the reason was, the restriction was not permanent (Matt. 28:18-20). The kingdom is not limited to one ethnic group. Jesus sent the apostles out with a message to preach (the Kingdom is at hand), an authority to minister (heal, preach, raise the dead, ect.), travel instructions, and instructions for how to receive various towns. The kingdom is set to advance through and by men but not without suffering and persecution (vv. 16-23). All throughout this discourse, Jesus is talking both immediately and in a futuristic tone. The kingdom comes in stages. Once the ethics of the messiah’s kingdom have been espoused (Matt. 5:-7), the king’s servants need a mission (ch. 10).

Discourse on the kingdom (ch. 13)

The third of Jesus' five major discourses is called the Parabolic Discourse because of its collection of parables. Jesus gives the parable of the sower and soils (vv. 3b–9), explains his purpose in speaking in parables (vv. 10–17), then interprets the parable (vv. 18–23). He explains the parable of the wheat and weeds (vv. 36–43) and then gives the disciples the parables of the
hidden treasure (v. 44), the costly pearl (vv. 45–46), the dragnet (vv. 47–48), and the
householder's treasure (vv. 51–52). The interpretation behind each parable is as follows: the
sower (This is a parable on how people will receive the message of the kingdom.); the wheat and
darnel and the dragnet (God’s kingdom will advance despite the seemingly indistinguishability
of his people from the enemies.); the Treasure and the Pearl (There is immense value in the
kingdom and immense sacrifice is required.); and the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (The
kingdom will break out of it’s shell one day.). Using parables, Jesus is revealing secrets about his
kingdom not previously understood about God’s plans for his people. The “mystery” of the
kingdom is best defined as the fact that God’s reign is present but not with irresistible power.
The messiah was prophesied to speak in parables (Psa. 78:2; Matt. 13:34-36). The discourse on
the kingdom shows that Jesus has the authority to teach on the kingdom of God.

**Discourse on community life (ch. 18)**

As his earthly ministry draws to a close, Jesus has spent considerable time clarifying his
identity and mission (chs. 14–17). He instructs his disciples on the nature of his covenant
community, explaining the kingdom community's characteristics (18:1–35). This discourse again
is aimed only for the believing community. Jesus’ discourse falls into two main discourses:
teaching on humility (vv. 1-14) and forgiveness (vv. 15-35). In the beginning verses, Jesus is
rejecting what the disciples are arguing about. Disciples are not called to be on rank. In vv. 6-9,
Jesus warns about causing “little ones” to sin. "Little ones" is an idiomatic expression for
brothers and sisters in Christ. He teaches the disciples about humility within the context of the
community using a parable about a lost sheep (vv. 10-14). In contrast to Luke’s mention of the
parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15), the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18 is about one of
Christ's sheep caught up in sin and you as a brother and/or sister going out to get and restore them. The rest of the passage deals with how to respond to a sinning believer within the community (church discipline) and how much to forgive. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, Matthew links unforgiveness with the lack of a regenerated heart and promises subsequent judgment in response to the lack of forgiveness. Christ’s

**Discourse on judgment (ch. 24-25)**

The fifth discourse seeks to give his followers a prophetic overview of the events to transpire in both the near and distant future. Matthew’s Olivet Discourse is composed around answering two questions: When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign of your coming and close of the age (v. 3)? Without trying to date the second coming, Jesus gives numerous signs that will precede his second advent. He says the temple will be destroyed, false christs will appear, famine and pestilence will occur, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and cosmic signs, and the gospel will go out to all nations. The focus is not so much of predicting the exact time of his coming (v. 36). What is a believer’s response to all the signs preceding his coming? Believers are told to eagerly watch for his coming. Jesus gives four parables to explain to his disciples how and why they should be prepared for his coming: the homeowner and the thief (24:42–44); the good and wicked servants (24:45–51); the ten virgins (25:1–13); and the talents (25:14–30). The goal of this discourse is to show that Christ has the authority to carry out the last eschatological judgment upon the nations.

**Conclusion**

Matthew’s five discourses concern the law of the kingdom, the preaching of the kingdom, the growth of the kingdom, the fellowship of the kingdom, and the full consummation of the kingdom. Matthew presents Jesus as the messianic Son of God/David who has all authority to set
up his kingdom, teach, preach, heal, and judge. Matthew’s five discourses add to this intent.