

Meeting Matthew 5, 7, 12

These studies are based on the readings from the Gospel according to Matthew chosen in part for the revised Common Lectionary Year A, but designed to be used at any time.

1. Matthew 5:1-16 – The “Be” Attitudes
2. Matthew 5:17-48 – The Law’s Weighty Matters
3. Matthew 7:15-29 – Show me the Fruit
4. Matthew 11:28-30; 12:1-8 – Easy or Hard?

You can do all four studies or pick only those which interest you.

Each study asks you to read a passage from Luke, offers you a commentary which brings today’s thinking into dialogue with the text, and some open-ended questions for you to use as springboards for your own discussion and action. The questions are deliberately very open, so you can have space to bring your own experience and questions to the text and take it where you need to go, which may differ from group to group.

If you are coming together as a group, make sure

- everyone can see everyone else
- everyone is included and is encouraged to participate as they would like
- there is room for people to agree, differ, be clear or confused, and be accepted
- people are encouraged to value each other’s input, to listen without using that time to work out what you are going to say and without interrupting, and when discussing a question to keep the focus on the question

You will need at least one Bible translation. NRSV is probably best, but others might include NIV or some other new translation.

The sessions are designed to last around 60 minutes and encourage you to explore not only what the texts meant on the basis of the latest historical research but also what they might mean for living today.

Making these studies work for you and your group.

Adapt them to suit your group and its preferences. For instance, you can read the gospel passage and the commentary and then look at the questions *or* you could first read the passage and note anything which popped out for you and then read the commentary, section by section, stopping to talk about anything that arises, before going right through to the end and looking at the questions *or* you could start with a general question on the topic before doing one of the above *or* you may want to circulate the studies in advance, so that people have already read the passage and commentary before they come. Then go through it when you come together in one of the ways mentioned above.

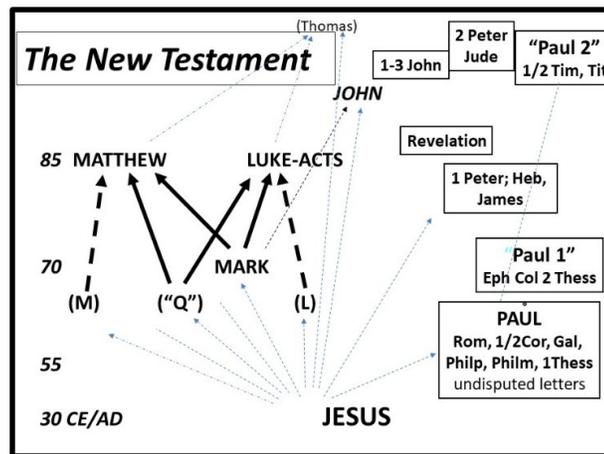
... whatever makes the studies work best for you!

Before we start:

Meet Matthew!

Like the other gospels, Matthew contains no information about the author. When we move beyond what it actually says to ask when it was written and who wrote it, we are on shaky ground. Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples, also called Levi. He may well have had a major influence in the region where Matthew was written and perhaps even been their founder. This may be why this gospel later came to be attributed to him.

Its actual author appears not to rely on personal memory, as the disciple Matthew could have done, but, like Luke, is heavily dependent on Mark's gospel, which he supplements with additional material. Both Matthew and Luke apparently also had another common source which has not survived (called "Q"), but which contained, among other things, the Lord's Prayer and the core of the Sermon on the Mount. Beside that, the author also had sources not shared by the others (M). Matthew wrote his gospel probably some 10-15 years after Mark wrote his, so some time in the 80s.



What we have for sure is what he wrote and in that he challenged the people of his day and challenges us. That is our starting point.

For further information about Matthew, see <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/matt.html> and: <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MatthewRecentResearch.pdf>
For weekly commentaries on the revised Common Lectionary readings from the gospels, see my website: <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/lectionaryindex.html>

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Images are Bill's own photos, including mountain near Innsbruck, ancient Babylonian boxing scene, tomatoes, and Vladimir Putin depicted in a wheatfield in a Russian Orthodox hotel foyer

Session One

Matthew 5:1-16 – The “Be” Attitudes

Traditionally, the nine statements in this passage which each begin with “blessed” or “happy” are known as the “beatitudes”. The title above plays on the word to suggest that they are really about how to “be” and what “attitude” to have. They are the opening statements in the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the five main speeches into which Matthew gathered sayings of Jesus.

Luke also has the same outline of sayings found in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20-49), but probably in an earlier form (see the appended list) and much shorter. We can see, however, the same structure in the same order: beatitudes, teachings about loving enemies and retaliation, not judging, hypocrisy, and bearing good fruit, concluding similarly with the image of building not on sand but on a rock. In contrast to Matthew, Luke has the speech given by Jesus after he came down from the mountain where, according to Mark, Jesus appointed his inner group of twelve disciples (3:13).



The gospel writers had to exercise freedom and sensitivity in assembling their sources and that included how they placed them. Matthew has a strong emphasis on the Law, given to Moses, so it is not surprising that he has Jesus expound the Law while still up on the mountain. For Jesus is like Moses in Matthew. Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” is much longer than Luke’s, almost certainly because it had been expanded well before Matthew’s time. It is also likely that Matthew has brought material into it which, as in Luke, was originally reported separately.

The expansions are very evident in the beatitudes. Luke has only four (6:20-23). Matthew has nine (5:3-12) (See the appended list at the end of this study). At least the first three in Luke very likely go back to Jesus, himself. In them Jesus promises the poor, the hungry, and the distressed that the kingdom of God when it comes will bring them relief. Being good news for the poor was one of Jesus’ major themes. He not only held it out as hope. He acted on it, reaching out to a wide range of people who came into the category of the poor.

These included not only those with few resources, but also people with illnesses and disabilities who were bound to be also literally poor, people who were being marginalised because of their race or behaviour, including those who had marginalised themselves, as well as corrupt rich people like Zacchaeus. To be good news for the poor It remains a challenge for all who claim to follow Jesus.

Matthew’s expanded beatitudes also show some broadening of what we find in Luke. The “poor in spirit” is best read as the dispirited poor, rather than referring to people who try to act in a humble way, as many have understood it. Clearly the hungry now refers to people who hunger after justice or righteousness. It will include those hungering after justice for themselves but also those who do so in solidarity with others. The “meek” or “lowly” was another way of talking of the dispirited and reflects the influence of Psalm 37:11 (“the meek shall inherit the land”). The reference to those who mourn, reflects Isaiah 61:2 with its promise “to comfort all who mourn”.

Matthew’s expansions probably reflect the use of the beatitudes in worship where Psalms were always prominent. The reference to the “pure in heart” is also from the Psalms (Those who have clean hands and pure hearts” 24:4). The promise to the persecuted, present in Luke, but now

doubled in Matthew will have come into the collection early in the light of people's experiences of rejection in ministry and mission.

At a literary level we can detect some development. At some stage before Matthew there were just eight beatitudes, two groups of four, with the first and the eighth referring to the kingdom of heaven and the fourth and the eighth referring to "righteousness" or "justice". By adding a ninth Matthew follows another favourite literary practice of grouping sayings in threes.

In Matthew the beatitudes now address two different target audiences: those in need, the original focus of the beatitudes, and those who can help them. The latter emphasis comes through in the promised blessing to the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who thirst for justice for others. In this way Matthew is already setting the emphasis for what follows. Mercy, love and compassion matter most in interpreting biblical Law.

That emphasis fits well with the focus on those in need. Indeed, those who follow Jesus will make the poor blessed, because their purity of heart or singleness of aim will be to be caring and merciful, to be agents of reconciliation, and to embrace the challenge to ensure that people live in a just society. What is right or righteous is measured not by keeping commandments and rules, but by the degree to which people are valued and community is structured to ensure no one is disadvantaged or damaged by its systems, and all are encouraged and enabled to live healthy and helpful lives.

These are the "attitudes" that need to characterise how we are to 'be' in the world, in that sense, the "be attitudes". Immediately following the beatitudes, Matthew brings the sayings about salt and light and being a city. They are all about how to 'be' and that to 'be' in this way is designed to bring benefit. Matthew does not reduce the Christian life to a set of rules and commands. He assumes that it is a way of being not just a pattern of doing and has Jesus lay down the challenge to his listeners not to let this be diluted or hidden away. Faith is not to be self-indulgent, seeking benefit for one's own sake, and keeping it to oneself, but has love and light to share. Let it be!

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. If Luke's version of the beatitudes is closer to what Jesus would have said, why do you think Matthew expanded it?
3. If the challenge is to *be* good news, how can we *be* good news in our community and our world?

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5 – 7	The Sermon on the Plain – Luke 6:20-49
Beatitudes 5:3-12 Salt/light/city 13-16 Law/prophets 17-20 Murder/adultery 21-30 Divorce/oaths 31-37 Retaliation/love enemy 38-48 Piety 6:1-18 Trust 19-34 Judge not 7:1-2 Hypocrisy 3-5 Holy 6; ask 7-11 Golden rule 12 Narrow gate 13-14 Good fruit 15-20 “Lord, Lord” 21-23 Building 24-27	Beatitudes (Woes) 20-26 (Luke 16:16-17) (Luke 12:57-58) (Luke 16:18) Love enemy/Retaliation 27-36 (Luke 11:1-4) (Luke 12:22-34; 11:34-36) Judge not 37-38 Blind guide 39-40 Hypocrisy 41-42 (Luke 13:23-24) Good fruit 43-45 Building 46-49
Matthew’s Beatitudes: 5:3-12	Luke’s Beatitudes: 6:20-23
3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth/land. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.	Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

NRSV alt.

Session Two

Matthew 5:17-48 – The Law's Weighty Matters

Matthew leaves us in no doubt as to what he sees as Jesus' attitude towards biblical Law. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil" (5:17). "Fulfil" here means something like "uphold, keep". It does not mean fulfil its intention and so cease to keep it.

This is very clear when he goes on to say: "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (5:18). "Accomplished" here does not mean that with Jesus it is accomplished and can now be ignored and left behind.

Again, what follows makes that very clear: "Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (5:19). In other words, every stroke of the Law remains in effect. None of it is to be set aside. What is more, believers must make a much better effort in keeping it than the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).

Why such an emphasis? Probably because there were some streams of the Jesus movement which saw things quite differently and indeed saw Jesus replacing the Law with his own commands. This is true of Paul ("you are not under law but under grace" Rom 6:14) and also of the gospel of John ("one gift in place of another. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" 1:16-17), and to a lesser degree, the Gospel of Mark ("declaring all foods clean" 7:19). Luke agrees with Matthew, sharing the same saying in a variant form: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped" (16:17).

Matthew's strict approach is evident in 23:23, where he has Jesus declare: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others." Two things are noteworthy here. Matthew prioritises "justice and mercy and faith", but at the same time insists on keeping the laws about tithing, even such insignificant products as "mint, dill, and cumin", probably even exceeding the Law's requirements.

Attitudes towards scripture divided the early Jesus movement. Luke, who sounds like Matthew, allows an exception to which most agreed: they would not insist that non-Jewish males keep the biblical command in Genesis 17 that they be circumcised and they were less strict about having Jews and non-Jews mix, though that led to further splits, as Paul tells us, between himself and Peter and James (Gal 2:11-14). It is possible that Matthew also allows the exception with regard to circumcision, but we cannot tell. He certainly did not share Mark's view that Jesus treated the food and purity laws as making no sense (Mark 7:15-20).

On the other hand, Matthew is far from treating every stroke of the Law as equally important. The beatitudes already show where he saw Jesus' emphasis and the same is true of the six examples which Matthew has Jesus treat in 5:21-48. "You have heard that it was said, but I say" did not mean: I am replacing the Law. It meant: you heard it this way, but let me tell you what it really means. In this, Matthew's Jesus echoes the best Jewish teaching of his day.

Thus, he begins with the command not to murder and immediately shifts the focus to attitude. The natural feeling of anger in itself is not bad. Jesus, too, was angry at times. Rather, anger harboured and hateful is murderous and to be rejected. Instead, people should be peacemakers and seek reconciliation. There can be no room for hate for those who, like Matthew's Jesus, see God as a God of love. This first example is matched by the fifth and sixth, which forbid vengeance and retaliation and encourage people to love and respect their enemies not hate them. This is not about abolishing the need to protect others from violence and abuse, for which, indeed, one needs a police force, but it is about personal retaliation and hate.



The instruction about adultery follows the same line as the one about murder. Attitude matters. Men who lust after others' wives, whether it comes to adultery or not, are guilty of adultery in their minds. This particular instruction has been seriously misread to the effect that if a man finds a woman attractive and as a result his sexual feelings are stirred, then he is an adulterer. Sexual feelings are not, however, bad, in themselves, just as anger feelings are not bad. The issue is what you do with them. Following them into intent makes them sinful.

Unfortunately the misreading has in the past led many to feel guilty just for having sexual feelings and then to see women as dangerous for men because they make them have such feelings and so to feel the need to control women, cover them up, render them less dangerous. This has been oppressive and destructive both for women and for men.

Divorce is an issue worthy of extensive discussion. In brief, it became problematic when polygyny (having more than one wife) ceased to be acceptable, thus removing one option for dealing with marital disharmony, namely, adding another wife. Divorce was the other option, but what grounds justified it – bad cooking, trivial matters? Surely not, but it was debated and Jesus responded to the debate by declaring that it was never meant to be. No divorce. There was an exception, reflecting common Law in Judaism and in the Roman world, namely: divorce must follow if adultery occurs, reflected in Matthew's instruction here.

Corresponding to Jesus' own approach to applying the Law, many churches in their wisdom have brought this prohibition into dialogue with the command to act with love and healing and concluded that it would be contrary to Jesus' priorities and to common sense to insist, for instance, that people must remain in abusive marriages. Each situation is different, but there are occasions where the most caring way forward is for the marriage to end and thus free people to remarry.

The instruction about oaths also reflects a stricter view. Again, the focus is not so much words, but attitudes. There should be no room for manipulative speech. People should simply tell the truth and have no need for oaths.

Matthew's exposition of Jesus' approach to biblical Law is far from being legalistic or finicky about rules. "Justice and mercy and faith" matter most, hence the six topics he has Jesus address. They are about human relations. His stance is conservative in insisting all be kept and in this he probably represents Jesus' own position, whose mission to his fellow Jews did not mean he would need to face issues like circumcision where more radical decisions were required. The trend of love,

however, already embedded in Matthew's approach, would lead, as required, to a more radical grappling with the issue of approaching biblical Law, inevitably with greater controversy.

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. Not all commandments carry the same weight – why not?
3. How do you see the different attitudes towards biblical law playing themselves out in today's world and what do you see as the most useful way ahead?

Matthew 7:12-29 – Show Me the Fruit

Matthew brings his first account of Jesus' teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, to a close with summaries and warnings. The so-called "golden rule", to treat others the way you, yourself, want to be treated (7:12) is foundational for many cultures. It makes community possible. Shared with surrounding cultures, it was also good Judaism, hence the addition: "for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7:12). This recalls the earlier statement: "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets" (5:17) and it also underlines how to interpret them. Good and caring relationships matter most, more than rituals and rules about ceremonial purity, sacred days and sacred spaces.

The warnings begin with a further image shared with other Jewish teachers of the time: choosing between competing ways (7:13-14). Without giving detail, the warning assumes that the way of the majority leads to destruction. The detail would point to behaviour which does not treat others the way you want to be treated, but treats them badly and uses them to your own advantage. Look after yourself first! It is as popular now as it was then and appears to make sense: you will be happy if you make your highest priority your own comfort and pleasure. People with mean life experiences will often see no alternative and those treating them meanly become their models and mentors. Love can break through what meanness does.

The warnings about false prophets (7:15-20) echo warnings of Old Testament prophets, but for Matthew they are Jesus' warnings to people in Matthew's own world. They are not about pagans or unbelievers, but about would-be believers. Those whom Matthew labels as fake Christians would surely not have labelled themselves that way. They may have even included some whom we would call respectable, but with whom Matthew disagreed over their approach to the Bible.

More likely they were the kinds of people Paul also talked about and later writers warned against, namely travelling preachers who claimed to be acting on apostolic authority and therefore claimed accommodation and upkeep from the congregations they visited. Such money-making tours were not uncommon in the wider world among travelling teachers.

The razzle-dazzle of great oratory combined with claims to magic and miracle to seduce the gullible, and they still do. Matthew has Jesus say more about this in the section which follows where he challenges those who cry, "Lord, Lord" (7:21-23). They may point to their achievements preaching in Jesus' name, performing miracles and exorcisms, but Matthew and Matthew's Jesus will not have a bar of it.

Like Paul, Matthew recognises that the evidence of the Spirit, the fruit of the spirit, is love and where that is not in evidence, claims to spirituality are spurious. Matthew has Jesus re-use a saying which he found first on the lips of John the Baptist: "every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:10 = 7:19), expanding it to put the focus on the importance of addressing the health of the tree: "every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (7:17-18).



This simple image contains a profound truth. The way to help people do good and be caring is not to impose commandments on them, telling them what they should do. It is rather to help them undergo changes in their inner being, so that their behaviour is an outcome of their inner attitudes. Love makes this possible, because as people allow God's love into their lives and learn to love themselves, this deals with their guilt and fears and frees them both to have energy left over for others and frees them from the need to manipulate others to make up for their own low self-esteem. Rules and guidelines help, but are secondary, because the impulse to be loving and caring towards others is the result of themselves becoming healthy – feeling loved and cared for.

This means that when we read the Sermon on the Mount we misunderstand it if we think it is about a new set of commandments or a reinterpretation of older commandments. It does include a reaffirmation of God's Law, but on the basis that this is all possible because God can do something about the tree. Trying to hang good fruit on a sick tree simply does not work!

The image changes in the closing words, but the message is similar. Build on a solid foundation, not on sand. Again, the focus is not on keeping so many commandments as much as being firmly grounded. That firm ground is, of course, "all of the above", as Matthew indicates, namely an understanding of scripture and the commandments based on approaching them with love at the centre.

In the concluding words of the chapter Matthew takes up something which Mark had said about Jesus' teaching in the Capernaum synagogue: "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (1:22). Matthew tweaks it to read: "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as *their* scribes" (7:28-29). The difference is subtle which I have emphasised with italics. Matthew sees himself and Jesus as also a scribe, namely an interpreter of scripture. Later he will speak of scribes who are trained to serve the gospel (13:52) and who are sent out in mission (23:34).

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. To what degree do you see Matthew's false prophets and their followers in today's world?
3. What is your experience in parenting or teaching of what helps produce good and caring outcomes in people?

Session Four

Matthew 11:28-30; 12:1-8 – Easy or Hard?

In Matthew's day a yoke was a positive image. Perhaps for us it is not. We might say, 'What's that hanging on my shoulders', but if we can change our feeling, we can see that they saw it as giving a sense of belonging, especially belonging together – like two oxen pulling a plough. The better image is of two people yoked together in marriage. Yoking was a common image for marriage.

A yoke was meant to sit comfortably, but it could also be the opposite, rubbing, causing blisters, feeling heavy and hard to bear and oppressive – the yoke of slavery, for instance. Matthew knows that sometimes people's religion can make them feel like that. He portrays Jesus as very critical of synagogue leaders who, he says, "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them" (23:4). This reflects the bitter conflicts of Matthew's day with fellow Jews.

Christians have also been very good at turning their faith into something oppressive, making people feel guilty and inadequate. When Jesus speaks of the yoke he offers, he is picking up an image of God's Law used in Jewish writings, for instance, in the book, Ben Sira, found in the apocrypha. It writes of God's Law as wisdom:

Draw near to me, you who are uneducated, and lodge in the house of instruction. ... Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money. ²⁶ Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by. (51:23, 25-26)

The Psalms often praise the Law as something positive and renewing:

*Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.
If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my misery. (Psalm 119:66, 92)*

As Jesus expounds the Law, he sees it is as not something chaffing and oppressive, but something liberating, because he identifies the heart of it as love. Easy? In the sense of not being a heavy burden. Easy? But sometimes leading to conflict and suffering, as Jesus himself illustrates.

The positive spin on the Law is evident in the episode which follows, which Matthew has taken over from Mark (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; see the two accounts appended to this study). It seems a rather trivial issue, but some Pharisees see their plucking the grain as breaking the law, not to work on the sabbath. From what we know this would have been a rather extreme group and would not reflect what most thought. Luke adds that they rubbed the grain – even more work!



Jesus' original response is probably what only Mark brings, namely: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath" (2:27). It fits what we know of Jesus' priorities elsewhere and is typical of his pithy two-liner responses. Both Matthew and Luke must have sensed

that this might be read as disrespect for the Law and so leave it out, but they keep the claim about Jesus as the Son of Man.

As a little earlier Mark reported that the Son of Man had authority to declare God's forgiveness of sins (2:10), so here he is shown as "lord also of the sabbath" (2:28), with authority to interpret what is and what is not appropriate behaviour on the sabbath. In Jewish tradition the Son of Man was the figure expected to be the judge at the last judgement.

Mark has Jesus offer another argument, namely that there was good precedent for breaking the rules to help the hungry: David and his men taking the sacred bread preserved only for priests and eating it (1 Sam 21:1-7). Whoever added this argument to the original story made a mistake in referring to Abiathar as the high priest at the time. Both Matthew and Luke recognise this and so leave out the reference to Abiathar, who was not the high priest at that time.

Matthew prefers to portray Jesus as operating more like a scribe, so adds another argument from within the law, namely that priests have to work on the sabbath. It would probably not have convinced the critics. Much more significant is the other addition which Matthew brings and which reconnects with the emphasis of Jesus. He quotes the first half of Hosea 6:6.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Matthew had already inserted this as an addition into his retelling of the story of Jesus' eating with tax collectors and a sinner (9:13). "Steadfast love, mercy, compassion" is what matters most. This was never meant as an either-or. Sacrifices and burnt offerings continued, but love and caring mattered much more. This is exactly Matthew's perspective and will also have been the focus of the historical Jesus. It reflects the best Jewish understanding of how to approach the Law and scripture.

Paul and Mark, of course, and later, the fourth evangelist, push beyond this. They argue that not only is love the high priority, but in new situations it will lead, indeed, to abandoning much of the Law and replacing it with new perspectives. They do this, for instance, to make room for non-Jews to belong and Jews to relate without scruples to them. Daringly, they assert that Jesus, himself, and his body the church, is the new temple and his sacrificial death as marking the end of the sacrificial system.

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. The gospel writers freely edited and expanded the stories of Jesus: why and on what basis? Should they have?
3. What is your experience of people making rules the basis for living a Christian life?

Matthew 12:1-8	Mark 2:23-28	Luke 5
<p>At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.</p> <p>²When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.'</p> <p>³He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?'</p> <p>⁴He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests.</p> <p>⁵Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? ⁶I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'</p>	<p>23 One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.</p> <p>²⁴The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?'</p> <p>²⁵And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?'</p> <p>²⁶He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.'</p> <p>²⁷Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath;'</p> <p>²⁸so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'</p>	<p>One sabbath while Jesus was going through the cornfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them.</p> <p>²But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?'</p> <p>³Jesus answered, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?'</p> <p>⁴He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?'</p> <p>⁵Then he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NRSV</p>