

Matthew's Remembering

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Introduction

I love to repeat the fact that we have the privilege to meet here in the Lord's house, on the Lord's day for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Some *introductory remarks* will help us focus our thoughts. First, emphasis should be placed on remembering – remembering the Lord Jesus. That means that self-examination is not the key to communion. It is a natural by-product of course.

Self-examination is a daily Christian responsibility; it is not distinctively a communion responsibility. Second, we remember Him according to the remembrances – the Gospels with the rest of Scripture. Thus we do not seek to excogitate recollections to reach some kind of emotional high. We are to remember Him along the lines of God's reminding. That is why we call communion a preaching rite. As Calvin put it, the minister is to point the people to that which is pictured by the bread and the wine: to the Lord Jesus as life-giver, as life giving nourishment. Third, we can thus look to all of Scripture for its testimony to Christ. But there is so much and the treasures are many. So we have to take different perspectives (OT, NT, Paul, Hebrews). But the center of our remembering has to be that ½ of the NT that we have in the Gospels. There we have the history of Jesus from His birth to His ascension. I have often thought of doing a series on communion where I saturate myself with one Gospel writer's perspective at a time. The Lord willing I will do so beginning this morning with *Matthew's remembering*. I will have the other Gospels in mind but I want to see through Matthew's eyes distinctively. Perhaps after treating all four Gospels separately, we can then put them together on one canvas with accents on how the picture is enhanced by the diverse perspectives.

So, I am ready to accent Matthew's remembering. How did I get here? I began by reading the Gospel through from beginning to end in one sitting – reading quickly for overall impressions and marking in yellow as I went along.

I looked for 1) major breaks in the presentation regarding how the story unfolds, and 2) significant impressions looking back. But then I became aware that someone is reporting these things and I had to read the 28 chapters again. So I want to consider two things: the writer's perspective and the writer's story.

1A. The writer's perspective

That the apostle, Matthew, is the author of this account is based on very good extra-biblical sources. But nowhere in the book does the author identify himself not even when the call of Matthew is recorded (9:9). Another interesting thing about the writer is that he uses very little of his own words to tell the gospel story. Most of the time he quotes the words of Jesus and others. Loosely put we can say that the words of the book fit into three categories: 1) the words of Jesus –which is the largest category, 2) the words of people in dialogue with Jesus or in reaction to Him, and 3) the words of the narrator - the smallest category.

But most interesting to me is the fact that the narrator's perspective on the events is rarely given (it is rarely given explicitly, that is). He tends to present his view through the words of others. For example, note how Matthew's view of the Lord Jesus is not stated directly in **14:25-33**. But a perspective is given, that of those in the boat, and we detect in the flow of the Gospel as a whole that this is Matthew's view of Christ: truly He is the Son of God (which is God the Son, Immanuel, **1:23**). Most of the time Matthew, *as narrator*, is heard in straightforward reporting (**1:1; 1:18; 3:1, 13; 4:1, 12**) and in transitional statements (**3:14-15**; "John tried to deter him saying...Jesus replied...Then John consented). For another example consider the Sermon on the Mount (**5-7**). The red-letter editions of the NT show **5:1-2** in dark print and the rest of the Sermon in red print. Now turn to **7:28**. The crowd's view is presented: they were amazed (so is Matthew, so are we as readers). But note the view that is given in **7:29**. There is no quotation. Matthew simply explains. This is a brief commentary. Contrast this with the amazement that is explained by quotation in **8:27**. Here we have no comment by Matthew but we know this is his memory of the Lord Jesus (we stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder).

As has been said often, Matthew gives accurate history but he is not a historian. He is an Evangelist who gives gospel proclamation. This is theological or doctrinal history. What he includes and what he omits serve to bring out the gospel message. A pure historian doing a biography would not pass over thirty years in silence (as happens between chapter 2 and 3).

One final thing about the writer's way of remembering: He will cause us to remember Jesus in terms of our Lord's own words and works with very little commentary (Matthew recedes to the margins). I recommend that you read the Gospels looking for the narrator's perspective; this makes for interesting reading and opens the way to some of the richness of the accounts.

2A. How the story unfolds

It begins with a prelude. There we have a genealogy and matters associated with the birth of Christ. His name sets the tone of what is to come: *Jesus*, "because He will save His people from their sins" (**1:21**). Remarkably, *this child has a people* that belong to Him. He has come to save them. What child is this? He is God, Immanuel, God with us (**1:23**), the virgin born descendent of David in line with the covenant with Abraham (**1:1**). Thus Matthew indicates from the start that He intends to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah-king who will bring sinners back from the fall, rebellion and asserted autonomy to a place of submission to God as king over their hearts. In keeping with this, he gives some *critical commentary* on how matters associated with the birth and childhood of Christ fulfilled Scripture (**1:22; 2:17, 23**). He *is* the Son of David. He *is* the Son of Abraham. He *is* the Son of God. Matthew's Gospel is designed to show this to be the case. He is the one through whom remedy will come to sin and exile (deportation, 1.11-12).

In *another critical commentary*, Matthew reveals what he is doing in the Gospel. The main body of the book recounts the ministry of Christ in preaching, teaching and healing (**4:23-25, 9:35-38**). The Gospel gives detailed specifics regarding this preaching, teaching and healing by citing quotations, reactions, questions, and dialogues. He shows us the anointed one who has compassion for the broken and smoldering (**12:20-21**). He will lead justice to victory. So, from the time of John's imprisonment, Jesus began to preach repentance and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Who enter this kingdom? The poor in spirit – those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (**5:3**). We see Jesus on the mountainsides with clear blue skies above and we hear the answer to the problem of worry. Are you concerned

about what you shall eat and drink? He explains that life is much more. Life, your life, refers to the safety of your entire existence body and soul, for now and forever secure in your Heavenly Father's love. This is His gospel in word and deed.

The very miracles are gospel. They are enacted parables of restoration from the fall. Jesus has come to save His people, soul and body.

So His fame is spread and the crowds followed. However, the hardness of the human heart was revealed in unbelief in the presence of miracles (**Matt. 11:20**). How can someone see these miracles before his eyes and not see who Jesus is? The blind are in darkness while standing in the blazing light of the noonday sun. Jesus is the true sun and light of truth and love but fallen sinners cannot see Him.

But thankfully there is a harvest-don't pray that there be one, pray for laborers into the harvest! (**9:37**). This is a harvest of souls, of kingdom subjects. These are the people to whom Jesus chooses to reveal the Father (**Matt. 11:27**). The disciples make up the nucleus of this harvest as shown in the reason for the parables (**Matt. 13:13-17**, to reveal and to conceal). This is how the sinner, Peter, came to know Christ (**Matt. 16:13-17**). Without this grace Peter would go the way of all who stumble in their rejection of Christ (**22:42-44**). As is expressed poetically: without this grace, "we would have refused to taste and perished in our sin." That would be our response to the great gospel feast.

Therefore as Jesus radiated more light He stirred up more resistance to the gospel of the kingdom. Thus, dark clouds begin to dot the skyline (**Matt. 16:21**). Then Matthew takes us quickly to the stirring farewell to Jerusalem at the end of chapter 23 (**37-39**) and the institution of the Lord's Supper in the night in which He was betrayed (**26:26-30**). They sang a hymn, went out to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus committed Himself to the Father's will (**26:36-39**). Betrayal marked the end of His ministry (**26:46**). The great crowds who followed eagerly have been reduced to a few disciples, *then they all fled* (**26:56**; friends through fear His cause disowning).

Next we have the account of His death brought about by an unjust trial, political pragmatism, mockery, and crucifixion (**26:57-27:44**). Still what is most remarkable is that He was forsaken by the Father! (**27:46**). What can this mean? It can only mean that He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin that He might bring us to God. It is the *blood of the new covenant* poured out for the forgiveness of sins (**26:28**). He came to save His people from their sins. Here He sealed our salvation by taking the eternal punishment we deserve. He bore our sins in His own body on the cross.

But the one who died, this one who died giving His life for others, was also raised from the dead. Matthew recalls His words to the women who came to the tomb (**28:8-10**).

Finally Matthew concludes the book by quotation of our Lord (**28:16-20**, the Great Commission). The book opens looking back historically to the covenant with Abraham and David. It ends looking forward to the end of the age. We have in this book a virtual philosophy of history. History is the unfolding of the covenant purposes of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That covenant is realized, brought to earth, manifested and fulfilled through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and King.

Final thoughts

1) Our worship of Him may be mixed with doubt like the disciples. But our assurance of purpose, *meaning and value for our time on earth* is found in this perspective on history. He has all authority in heaven and earth given to Him and He promises to be with us to the end. He is the risen Lord of the covenant.

2) Therefore we have a commission –as a people across the ages in step with the labors of the apostles. We are encouraged to go and make disciples- to call people to be learners at the feet of Christ. To give out a general call which is the context in which He brings forth the harvest. He will build His church. As He builds, we are to do two things: baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teach commandment keeping. What is the sum of the Christian life? It is the same as the summary of the value and meaning of life: to bow at the feet of our sovereign Lord Jesus *to learn* from Him in order *to obediently live* for Him.

3) Matthew remembers Him as Immanuel, God with us, the virgin born king in the lineage of David who brought the kingdom to realization in word and in deed. He is the fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham. He is the giver of good news by His message, His life, His death, His resurrection and His Commission.

Now we know *why we are not to worry* about our past, present, or future even beyond the grave. It is because *Jesus is our risen sovereign*. He conquered death for us to make us more than conquerors. He gave His body and blood away in sacrifice for sin in order to nourish us and give us eternal life. He came to save His people from their sins and save them He will.

Amen to Matthew's remembering of Jesus.