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Jonah and the gourd. The Beatitudes.

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Transcript

Jonah chapter 4. angry. Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city.

Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

When the sun rose God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.

And the Lord said, You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand

persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? The book of Jonah is a two-paneled book. Chapters 1 and 2 map on to chapters 3 and 4. There are two calls of Jonah, one in chapter 1 and one in chapter 3, two cases of pagans repenting at his teaching, in chapter 1 with the pagan sailors and in chapter 3 with the Ninevites.

And then in chapters 2 and 4, Jonah speaks with the Lord. As we read the book of Jonah, there should be a number of questions that are in the back of our minds at this point that have not yet been answered by the text. The big question at the beginning is, why does Jonah run away? What is he hoping to achieve by this? It seems to be a futile endeavor to flee from the Lord, who is the creator of the heavens and the earth.

Various suggestions have been proposed for this. Perhaps Jonah is a selfish nationalist and does not want to see the word of God going to a pagan nation. Perhaps he is worried that the pagan nation will show up his compatriots for their failure to respond to the prophetic word.

Rabbi David Foreman makes the convincing argument that the real issue for Jonah is the apparent failure of the Lord's justice, something that comes to the foreground in verses 2 and 3. O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. It is important here to notice the verses behind Jonah's statement.

In Exodus chapter 34 verses 6-7, after the events with the golden calf, the Lord appeared to Moses and declared his name. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. We see this passage from Exodus chapter 34 also used in Nahum chapter 1 verses 2-3.

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. We should here note the contrast between the statement that Jonah makes and the Lord's initial declaration, and also the differences between Jonah's statement and that of the book of Nahum. While the original statement speaks of the Lord's faithfulness or truth, that element is dropped from Jonah's words.

Furthermore, in Jonah's statement, the reference to God not clearing the guilty and visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children is not

mentioned. Instead, the Lord relents from disaster. This again contrasts with Nahum's statement, where Nahum emphasises those elements of the original statement that have to do with the Lord's justice and punishment.

For Jonah, then, the problem seems to be a theological one. His issue seems to be that in holding out this possibility of easy repentance to this nation, after all of its violence, evil and cruelty, the Lord is simply jettisoning his justice. Once we appreciate this, a number of the other elements of the book start to make more sense.

Jonah, in chapter 1, was not just fleeing his mission. He was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. If God was going to offer repentance to this city of Nineveh, Jonah simply wasn't interested in being in a moral universe that operated according to such divine laws.

Where's the justice? As Rabbi Foreman observes, this helps us to understand Jonah's actions. When he's fleeing, he's fleeing from the Lord's presence. He goes down into the inside of the boat and tries to fall asleep.

When he's singled out in the casting of lots, he's quite prepared to be cast into the sea. He's seeking to escape from God in any way that he can, whether that's running away from the realm of the Lord's special dealings, whether it's a matter of going into the insensibility of sleep, or even of going to death in being thrown into the water. Jonah simply isn't interested in operating in a world where there seems to be no justice.

Here we might think back to the reference to Jonah's prophecy in 2 Kings chapter 14 verse 25, where Jonah prophesied about the extension of the territory of Israel during a time of incredible evil. As a prophet, Jonah seems to be doomed to deliver messages that lead to blessing upon wicked people. As we read the account of Jonah here, we should also be thinking about some of the other texts that lie in the background.

We've noted the story of the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32 to 34. There Moses intercedes for the people. Indeed, he goes so far as to offer to be blotted out of the Lord's book in order that the people might be saved.

The Lord there relents of the disaster that he was going to bring upon the people, even though they are still judged. There is a contrast that we can draw between Jonah and Moses. Moses wants to give up his life, but wants to give up his life to save the people.

He's interceding for the people in order that the Lord might relent from the disaster that he was going to bring upon them. Jonah also wants to give up his life, but he wants to give up his life because it seems to him that the Lord's justice has been extinguished for the sake of his compassion. He does not intercede for the city of Nineveh, hoping that the Lord might relent from the disaster that he was going to bring upon it.

Rather, he intercedes, as it were, that the Lord might relent from his relenting. Kevin

Youngblood observes another significant set of parallels and contrasts in 1 Kings chapter 19 in the story of Elijah. There another prophet flees to the desert, sits under a tree, is despondent and seeks death, and the Lord asks him the same question twice, just as the Lord asks Jonah here about his anger.

There the Lord asks Elijah, what are you doing here Elijah? And then as the Lord does to Jonah here, the Lord delivers a message to Elijah through nature. The contrast between Elijah and Jonah should stand out to us. Elijah laments his failure, Jonah his success.

Another curious intertext with the story of Jonah is found in Genesis chapter 4 in the story of Cain. In Jonah chapter 4 the Lord asks Jonah about his anger. The Lord does the same in the story of Cain.

When his brother Abel's sacrifice is accepted, but his is not, Cain's response is to be angry. And the Lord speaks to Cain concerning this. Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.

Cain, of course, ends up killing his brother, and he is cursed from the ground as a result. The ground would no longer yield to Cain its strength, just as Jonah's gourd withered, so Cain would find that his working of the ground was futile. Cain had gone away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden, in verse 16 of chapter 4 of Genesis.

Like Cain, in chapter 1 Jonah had fled from the presence of the Lord, and now he has gone out towards the east, much as Cain was a marked man by the Lord, Jonah was a marked man by the Lord. Chapter 1 is a great pursuit narrative, the Lord chasing down the fleeing Jonah as his quarry. Perhaps in paralleling Jonah with Cain, the original murderer, we're seeing something of Jonah's willingness to take the lives of others into his own hands.

He wants to be the means of destruction upon the Ninevites, and when the Lord relents from destroying them, he will intercede for their destruction, apparently hoping that the Lord would register and act in terms of his displeasure at the sparing of the Ninevites. Jonah goes out towards the east of the city and makes a booth for himself, sitting there under its shade, hoping that the Lord would change his mind again and destroy the city. Perhaps we could see some similarity between Jonah's booth and the city that Cain builds when he leaves the presence of the Lord and goes towards the east.

The Lord does not give a direct verbal response to Jonah, rather he gives him a sort of physical parable and a sign. The sign takes the form of a plant, we don't know exactly the kind of plant, but it's most likely a gourd. Jonah already had some shade in his booth, but the plant gives him some shade outside.

Rabbi Foreman draws our attention to the way that this gourd is described. It is literally there to save him from his evil. Rabbi Foreman observes a chain of the uses of the word for evil throughout the book of Jonah.

In chapter 1 verse 2, Nineveh's evil. In chapter 1 verse 8, the evil of the storm. In chapter 3 verse 8, the repenting of Nineveh's evil ways.

In chapter 3 verse 10, the Lord repenting of the evil that he was going to bring upon the city. In chapter 4 verse 1, Jonah feels a terrible evil. The evil that he feels is seen in verse 2, the fact that the Lord renounced the evil that he was going to do to the city.

And then in verse 6, the Lord grants Jonah this plant to save him from his evil. While we can see the plant as just providing Jonah with shade, it's quite likely there's something more going on here. The plant is a lesson that's being given to Jonah, and it will be through that lesson that he'll be saved from his evil.

What is his evil? It's his sense of deep displeasure at the Lord's sparing of Nineveh, the Lord's relenting from the evil that he was about to bring upon the city. The plant seems to be almost miraculous. It grows up very suddenly to the point that it's able to provide Jonah with ample shade.

But at the arrival of the dawn the next day, a single worm attacks the plant, and the whole plant withers. The whole narrative of Jonah seems to be set in the world of Genesis chapter 1 and 2 in particular. There are elementary things.

There's the winds, there's the waters, there's the deep, man and beast, the sea creatures, the worm. And the Lord is sovereign over these forces. The Lord appoints the big fish, the Lord appoints the plant, the Lord appoints the worm, and the Lord appoints the scorching east wind.

All of these forces, from the great force of the east wind to the smallest creature like the worm, has an orchestrated part to play within the Lord's purpose. There are no rogue forces in God's universe. We might see the worm here perhaps as a sort of miniature serpent.

The worm eats the dust, the worm is a bringer of death, it's associated with the eating of dead bodies. And of course, like the serpent, it crawls upon its belly. The east wind is used on a number of occasions in the prophetic literature as a symbol of destruction that comes upon people and nations.

Hosea chapter 13 verse 15, Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the Lord, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched, it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing. Ezekiel chapter 17 verse 10, Behold, it is planted. Will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it? Wither away on the bed where it sprouted.

Or chapter 19 verse 12, But the vine was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground. The east wind dried up its fruit. They were stripped off and withered.

As for its strong stem, fire consumed it. People fainting under the scorching heat of the sun, also an image of the Lord's judgment elsewhere in scripture. The connection of this with the sun rising and the dawn coming might also evoke some of the images of the day of the Lord as a day of judgment and destruction.

The day of the Lord is of course the recurring image within the book of the twelve. One can imagine that Jonah would have taken the miraculous flourishing of the plant and its granting of shade to him as a sign of the Lord's favor towards him and the fact that maybe the Lord did see things his way and if he just waited long enough and the shade of the gourd would help him in this, he would see the destruction of the city, likely within the original timeline of 40 days. When the plant was suddenly destroyed, one can imagine his hopes being dashed.

Once more he expresses his desire to die. It would be better for him to die than to live. The Lord here speaks to Jonah again and he asks him pretty much the same question as he asked back in verse 4. Do you do well to be angry for This creates a parallel between the plant and Nineveh.

This provides a basis for the Lord teaching Jonah a lesson concerning his compassion and perhaps provides us with a way to reconcile the Lord's seemingly contrary attributes that are mentioned in Exodus chapter 34. How can the Lord relent from evil and also be the one who does not spare the guilty and visits people's iniquity upon them? Jonah has been thinking in terms of justice. As Rabbi Forman observes, however, the plant does not have any right to its existence.

By sheer justice, it will be removed from existence and when it is destroyed by the worm, on the grounds of justice, it would seem that no one has any right to complain. The gourd is merely a gratuitous act of God's goodness, a creation out of nothing that gives the blessing of shade. Its existence is a good and positive thing, something for which Jonah himself is immensely grateful.

Jonah has no claim over the plant. He did not create it. He did not work for it.

It is God's creature and he has the freedom to dispose of it as he wishes. Nevertheless, Jonah rightly realizes that there is a goodness to its existence in its time. Jonah has been thinking in terms of strict justice, but now the Lord provides Jonah with a different way of looking at things, a way of looking at things in terms of the gratuity of their existence.

As Rabbi Forman observes, from this perspective, the key question is not what are you entitled to, what consequences should you face for your acts? The question from this perspective is what could it become? What good could be realized through this creature?

God is the God of justice, but he is also a God who sees things in categories beyond those of strict justice. He sees his creatures in terms of their goodness in their time and what could be realized through them. Nineveh isn't merely a city filled with violence and evil.

It is a city with more than 12 myriads of people who do not know their right hand from their left and many cattle. The final verse of the book of Jonah is typically read as a rhetorical question, leaving Jonah and the hearer with a challenge to their typical way of viewing things, as if the Lord is inviting Jonah to see things from his perspective, to see the city of Nineveh, not so much in terms of its evil that it has done, but in terms of its sheer existence. Think a bit more carefully before wishing for such a great city to be snuffed out.

More recently, however, a number of commentators have argued that the final verse of the book of Jonah should not be read as a rhetorical question, but as a statement. Amy Erickson translates it as follows, But as for me, I will not pity Nineveh, the great city, which has in it more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left and many animals. The message then would be symbolized by the gourd, just as the gourd was made to flourish for a time.

So Nineveh was given time in which to flourish, and when its time was up, it would be destroyed. This destruction of Nineveh is proclaimed in the books of Nahum and Zephaniah. Understood this way, the compassion of God is not denied.

He really does spare Nineveh when it repents, but that compassion is not at the expense of his justice. The time will come when Nineveh returns to its sins, and it will be destroyed, as the Lord had originally declared. It has had a stay of its execution.

It has not escaped God's justice. Why the reference to 120,000 persons? It seems to be a strange detail in the context. Although historically plausible, as the city of Nineveh was of that sort of size at the time, it is oddly specific.

We can read in English the number as 120,000 persons. The actual Hebrew, however, will be better translated as something like 12 myriads. Speaking of 12 myriads might make us think of Israel itself, and here we can see something more of the message that's been delivered through the gourd and through the events at Nineveh.

This is not merely a story of the word of the Lord going to a pagan nation. It's a story for Israel. Israel is supposed to recognize itself in this great city.

Nineveh's 12 myriads should remind us of Israel's 12 tribes. Through the message of Jonah, the Lord might be inviting his people to see in Nineveh a mirror of themselves. The Lord looks at them as he looks at Nineveh.

He values their very existence. Of course, Nineveh repented, but they did not. The other

thing that we should recognize in this chapter is a symbol of the Lord's dealings with the forces of the geopolitical situation.

The story provides a symbol for all of that. There is an unfaithful Israelite prophet who's gone away from the presence of the Lord. He's in his booth, which we might think of as the city or perhaps the temple, and then the Lord causes this great gourd to spring up, a gourd that shades him from the heat of the sun.

This gourd, as we have already seen, is associated with Nineveh and the Assyrians. The Assyrians, as they rise up, are a means by which Israel is sheltered from the Arameans so that their territory could expand as it did according to the prophecy of Jonah during the reign of Jeroboam II. It is also a shelter from the burning heat of the sun, in which James Bajon has suggested we should see the figure of Babylon.

The scorching heat of Babylon would come upon the nation when the Assyrians were removed. Babylon, of course, is also the big fish of chapter 1 and 2. The Lord appointed the big fish, the Lord appointed the plant, the Lord appointed the worm, and the Lord appoints the scorching east wind. The plant of Nineveh would be short-lived, but the Lord had a good purpose for it while it flourished.

Just as the Lord pursued and taught his wayward prophet, so the Lord, through the message of the prophet, was going to pursue and to teach his wayward people Israel. When thrown into the deep of the nations, or when facing the scorching east wind and the burning sun of Babylon, they should not be afraid. The Lord is the master of all of these forces.

A question to consider, how might reading the story of Jonah alongside the story of Noah and his ark help us to see even further lessons for Israel beyond those already mentioned? Matthew chapter 5 verses 1 to 20. Matthew chapter 5 verses 1 to 20. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever relaxes 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5 is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the first of five great bodies of teaching that we find within the book of Matthew.

Matthew particularly foregrounds Jesus' teaching. Mark foregrounds Jesus' acts of power, Luke Jesus traveling on a mission and his prophetic ministry. A number of people have seen in Matthew's five speeches a similarity with Moses' five speeches in the book of Deuteronomy.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with eight beatitudes and these are mirrored on the other side of the book with eight woes that are given in chapter 23. As I hope we're beginning to see, Matthew structures his book very carefully and this development from blessings at the beginning to woes at the end is drawing upon patterns that we see in the Old Testament as well. The book of Deuteronomy, for instance, is framed by the choice between blessings and woes.

The book of Psalms begins with a beatitude, blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and then speaks about the woes of the wicked. The book of Proverbs has a similar structure, the first nine chapters preparing you and then that choice between wisdom and folly, the blessing of the person who chooses wisdom and the woe of the person who chooses folly. This then is a structure that we've seen elsewhere in scripture, a moral structure for a body of teaching.

The beatitudes themselves were probably designed to be memorised. Peter Williams has observed that the first four beatitudes all involve alliteration on the letter pi, the sixth alliterates using kappa alpha and the fourth alliterates using delta iota. So these different Greek letters are all being used in a way that serve the task of memory.

There are other parts of the Sermon on the Mount that seem to have a similar purpose. The Lord's Prayer has poetic elements that once again seem to be designed for memorisation and repetition. There are affinities between Jesus as he's portrayed in Matthew and Moses in the law.

Jesus goes up on a mountain, he's teaching from a mountain, he's teaching concerning the law, much as Moses was associated with Mount Sinai and the various events upon it. Jesus ascends a mountain on various important occasions in the gospel, in the temptation account, in the feeding of the five thousand, the mount of transfiguration, the Olivet Discourse, the Great Commission. On each of these occasions Jesus is associated with a mountain as the site on which he's delivering a body of teaching or some significant event is happening.

Another thing we might notice is that there is a movement through Israel's history in the story of Matthew. Peter Lighthouse has argued that Matthew works through the entirety

of the Old Testament recapitulating, playing out again the story of Israel step by step, begins with the patriarchal era, with Abraham, with the story of Joseph leading them down into Egypt and his dreams, then the exodus from Egypt, now Sinai and then there's wilderness wanderings, the 40-day period, there's the entrance into the land, the early kingdom, Solomon and the parables of the kingdom, Elijah and Elisha, Joash, Jehu, the later monarchy, Jeremiah and the prophecies that he gives, the new covenant and the resurrection of Israel and then finally return from exile. All of these themes are playing out in the story of Christ.

Christ holds Israel within himself. So Matthew is a very carefully structured book for this reason. We also notice things that bookend the entire narrative.

So it begins with a reference to the very beginning of Genesis or to the very beginning of 1 Chronicles and ends with the final verse of 2 Chronicles being alluded to. And then there are bookended themes on either side of the book as well. Jesus as the king of the Jews and the son of God at both ends of the book.

Jesus and the Gentiles, angels and women present, Joseph and Mary at both ends, new tomb, a virgin's womb, dreams and warnings, all of these things bookend the account of Matthew. I will also see the way that these beatitudes mirror the woes that we find later in the book. The beatitudes themselves may be alluding back to passages such as Isaiah chapter 61 which is a programmatic statement for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke for instance.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations, they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations.

The first of the Beatitudes ends with the words, theirs is the kingdom of heaven and then the last of the Beatitudes in verse 10 ends with, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. These Beatitudes ultimately are about the reception of the kingdom and they divide into two sets of four with 36 words in both sets. There's a structure to them as well as we go through we might be able to see.

It's important not to detach these from the historical context. The people to be blessed are not blessed because these things are effective in themselves, rather they're blessed because God is going to act on their behalf. We should be careful not to read the Beatitudes as if they were an implicit set of imperatives too.

God isn't just saying do these sorts of things. Note the presence of persecution for instance. Rather the point is that these are the things that characterize those people that God is going to act on behalf of.

God has visited his people in Jesus Christ and now it's a time in which the redemption and the salvation of these people is dawning and they can take comfort and assurance knowing that these situations that they've wrestled with, these troubles that they've experienced, these ways in which they've been persecuted and experienced all these things against them, that these things are going to be overcome. That the kingdom of God is about to dawn in their context. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The in spirit is a sort of qualifying phrase but there is a connection between material poverty and spiritual neediness. A connection that is clearer within the gospel of Luke but it's important here as well. Those people who are actually materially poor are better able to see their dependence upon God and God's goodness towards them.

This may be quoting in part or alluding in part to Isaiah chapter 66 verse 2. This is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. There's the force of the present tense to this.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is anticipating what will be given to them but it has the surety of them already possessing it now. Later on in chapter 23 Jesus will speak about those who shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces and this is characteristic of the scribes and the pharisees.

It's the first woe and they do not have the kingdom of heaven and they keep other people out. The next beatitude is those who mourn that they will be comforted and the emphasis upon mourning is something we've already seen in Isaiah chapter 61 that God will comfort those who mourn. Those who mourn the sins of Zion, those who mourn its state of being alienated from God's blessing and presence and in contrast to this we can see the characters of the scribes and the pharisees in chapter 23.

They devour widows houses so not only do they not mourn they destroy and feed and prey upon the mourners. The next one the meek shall inherit the earth. Once again Jesus is alluding to the old testament in psalm 37 verse 11 but the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

This contrasts to kingdoms obtained through force of arms and it also contrasts with the corresponding woe in chapter 23. The scribes and pharisees travel on sea and land to make converts and they make him a child of hell so rather than inheriting the earth he's become a child of hell one who will inherit hell itself. The next beatitude those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied.

Righteousness here I think is deliverance or salvation or God's will more generally. It includes personal obedience but I think it's more than that it's also referring to God's action in history. It's about God setting things right.

It's about God coming on the scene and justice being established. Not just justice against our enemies but justice in our own lives that we would have holiness and righteousness that would be people that conform to his desire for our lives and the contrast with this is in the scribes and the pharisees they're swearing by the temple and the altar and seeing those things as less than the gift upon it. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy and the contrast again with the scribes and pharisees they tithe mint anise and cumin but they forget the weightier matters of the law justice mercy and faithfulness and the people who understand these weighty matters of the law who show mercy to others who are those who forgive others they will receive forgiveness and this theme is important within Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Those who forgive will be forgiven. Those who are merciful will obtain mercy. The sixth beatitude the pure in heart shall see God.

Again these are words taken from the Old Testament. Psalm 24 verses 3 to 6. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in his holy place he who has clean hands and a pure heart who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully he will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation such is the generation of those who seek him who seek the face of the God of Jacob. There is a contrast here between true purity which is inward a purity of the heart and mere outward purity a purity that is just covering up what is truly inside and this again contrasts with the behaviour of the scribes and the pharisees and the woe that corresponds to that is that they are people who cleanse the outside of the dish only they do not deal with the inside they do not deal with the situation of the heart.

The seventh beatitude blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God and sons of it means they are people who reflect God's own character and this is also something that's anticipating something in the future they will be called sons of God. God will mark them out as his own children on that great day to come. The contrast of course is with the scribes and the pharisees who appear beautiful on the outside but inside they're full of dead men's bones and uncleanness rather than being heirs of the resurrection people who will be marked out as the sons of God they are people who are marked out by death rather than by life and the eighth beatitude those who are persecuted for righteousness sake theirs is the kingdom of heaven they seek God's will on earth and those who do so will face persecution in an unjust society and here once again we see a clear contrast with the scribes and the pharisees in the corresponding woe they are the sons of those who persecuted the prophets and there's a shift in the final beatitude to address it to the disciples more directly assuring them of the fact that they will be persecuted it's a repetition and an expansion of the eighth beatitude it's no

longer in the third person and Luke has all of the beatitudes in the second person but this is in the second person note the implicit parallel between for righteousness sake and on my account this is what it means to be a person of the kingdom is to suffer not just for righteousness sake in general but on the account of Christ and this connection is a connection with Jesus and his disciples and the prophetic tradition they persecuted the prophets like this they're going to persecute the followers of Christ like this and again in chapters 23 and 25 there are associations between the disciples and the prophets the disciples are told that they are and light in the world they're told that they are these things not how to become them and the strength of the statement is important you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world this is the calling that was given to Israel and it is being fulfilled in them as the true Israel the children of Abraham were to be like sand and like stars and now they are like salt and light corresponding things many people have wondered what the salt means here some have pointed to the fact that salt preserves things others have pointed out the way that salt can be a way of destroying land as we see in places like Deuteronomy chapter 29 verses 22 to 23 salt is also associated with sacrifice in Leviticus 2 13 and mark 9 salt gives savor like a sort of solid fire that we feel upon our lips and we're told in Colossians 4 verse 5 to have speech seasoned with salt and the contrast is between tasteless salt and salt with saltiness salt can't salt itself salt is salt for something else and there's a vision of righteousness here i think there's a righteousness that is redemptive and outgoing rather than just a self-focused righteousness a righteousness that is just about our personal standing without concern for others this is something that we see throughout the sermon on the mount true righteousness is not self-focused it's a righteousness that goes out into the world that seeks to serve and to bless others salt has numerous purposes and perhaps what we're supposed to see here is something of those multitude of purposes represented in the calling of the people of God the danger however is if we lose this if we neglect it we will risk being trampled underfoot Israel as it rejects Christ becomes like salt that lost its savor and the result is being trampled underfoot that language i think alluding in part perhaps to military occupation that later occurs once again Jesus is drawing upon the language of the Old Testament these are things that we see in the book of Isaiah in chapter 42 verse 6 and then in chapter 49 verse 6 these are the people in whom God is working out his purpose in the world in the preceding chapter we've had a description of Christ as a light dawning and here we see that theme applied to the church in its calling Jerusalem was the city set on the hill we are supposed to be like a city set on the hill as Christ's disciples the lamp may be connected to that of the temple as well the disciples are to display light to the world they bring things to light they also cause people to glorify God much of the rest of the sermon on the mount will be concerned with the status and the keeping of the Torah the law and Christ begins by insisting upon his fulfillment rather than abolition of the law of the prophets the law and the prophets refer to the entirety of the Old Testament scriptures Christ fulfills the prophetic intent and the content of the law and the prophets realizing what the law itself did not yet achieve the law and the prophets are not abolished but fulfilled and accomplished they reach their

intended destination they're not merely reaffirmed or reissued the truth and the divine authority of the law and the prophets are underlined but in a way that reveals them to be transfigured in Christ their fulfillment is not just their perpetual continuance but about their arrival at the intended destination and his statement makes clear that the law and prophets were never a static and timeless body of revelation but were always straining forward towards something yet to be revealed and fulfilled the written law is a creation but even its smallest elements have the same sort of continuance as heaven and earth themselves note the parallels between heaven and earth and the law in places such as psalm 19 the fulfillment of the law can then lead to a transformed relationship with and way of living out the law we can see indications of this within Jesus teaching that follows the mission of the law is fulfilled in Christ the law dies and rises again and then the law can be lived out in a new way the law retains authority in the kingdom as we see in verse 19 this presumes that the law remains in force in some sense in the time of the kingdom there's a symmetry between the way that teachers handle the law and the way that they will be treated in the kingdom Jesus project then is not a liberalizing one but one that places immense weight upon the authority of the word of the law and Jesus here discusses greatness in the kingdom the next verse he speaks of entrance into the kingdom which will only be enjoyed by those whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the pharisees and the righteousness in view here i don't think is the righteousness of Christ imputed to our account but concrete conduct that contrasts with the hypocrisy of the scribes and the pharisees as Jesus teaching continues we will see what this transformed behavior looks like what it looks like to fulfill the law in the proper way and how Christ has made this possible a question to consider Jesus uses the expression here i have come and this is found elsewhere in the gospels it's found also in reference to other figures that speak of their having come to do this or that or the other a number of people have seen in this terminology an expression of Christ's pre-existence that he has come not just as a prophet not just as someone who has a particular limited mission but as one who has come from heaven itself how might we find support for that position within the gospels more generally and in other instances of this expression