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February 19th: Genesis 49 & Matthew 7

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Jacob blesses his sons. The warnings of the Sermon on the Mount.

Deuteronomy 33 (the Song of Moses); 2 Samuel 22 (David's Song of Deliverance); Judges 5 (the Song of Deborah); Genesis 29-30 (the birth and naming of the sons); Genesis 35:22 (Reuben's sin); Genesis 9:20-27 (the sin of Ham); Genesis 34 (the vengeance of Simeon and Levi); Genesis 34:30 (possibly alluded to in the hamstringing of the ox); Numbers 1:23/26:14 (the decrease in the numbers of Simeon); Joshua 19:1-9 (Simeon assigned an enclave); Joshua 13:14 (Levi's dispersal); Numbers 25 & 31 (Phinehas the Levite kills Zimri the Simeonite and the aftermath); Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar); Zechariah 9:9 (the Messiah and the ass/colt); Deuteronomy 33:18 (Zebulun and Issachar in the Song of Moses); Josephus, Antiquities 5.1.22 (statements concerning Zebulun's territory); Genesis 3:15 (the serpent and the heel); Judges 17-18 (the Danites migrating).

Matthew 5:7, 6:14-15 (the measure you measure being measured to you); Luke 6:37-38 (Luke's version); Romans 2:1 (the challenge to the hypocritical judge); Deuteronomy 19:18-21 (judging hostile witnesses); 2 Samuel 12:1-15 (Nathan's judgment of David through his judgment); James 2:12-13 (judging as those to be judged by the law of liberty); Luke 11:9-13 (asking and receiving the gift of the Spirit); Tobit 4:15 (another example of the Golden Rule); Leviticus 19:18 (Golden Rule in the Old Testament); John 14:6 (Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life); Matthew 10:16 (lambs in the midst of wolves); Matthew 24 (warnings of false prophets); Deuteronomy 13, 18:21-22 (marks of false prophets); Psalm 6:8 ('depart from me'); Proverbs 9 (wisdom and folly contrast); Psalm 1 (contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous man); Proverbs 24:3 (building a house by wisdom).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis 49 I am a man of my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife.

And there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites. When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 49 is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the whole Bible. There are so many different words and expressions in here whose meaning is unclear that many of our remarks upon the passage will have to be speculative. Jacob is here at the end of his life, pronouncing in a poetic form judgments and blessings upon his children.

This pattern of a poetic testament is also found in the story of Moses and in David. David ends his life with a poetic statement concerning his legacy in 2 Samuel 22, and Moses does the same in Deuteronomy 33. We also see poetic judgments concerning the tribes in Judges 5, in the song of Deborah.

And Noah has something similar in his judgments upon his sons in Genesis 9. There's a foreshadowing of the future. This is the seed of the national destiny. And there's a prophetic significance to what he's declaring.

This is what will befall you in the latter days. The judgments that he casts seem to be effective concerning them too. There's a summons to here.

Not just Jacob the individual father, but also Israel, the official father of the nation. This is Israel speaking as a people, as the representative of the whole nation and its destiny. The tribes are ordered as follows.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, and then Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, and finally Joseph and Benjamin. The order here is Leah, followed by the handmaids, followed by Rachel. The one interesting detail is that Zebulun and Issachar are switched in order.

Dan and Naphtali are both sons of Bilhah, yet occur on either side of the sons of Zilpah. Incidentally, they also frame two brothers from a different mother in 1 Chronicles 2, verse 2, where they are found on either side of Joseph and Benjamin. There's a great deal of wordplay in this chapter, but also lots of uncertain and unusual words and expressions.

Four sons are particularly focused upon. Reuben, Simeon, paired with Levi, Judah and Joseph. These five sons are associated with the name of Yahweh in Genesis 29-30, where we read about the birth of the sons and the names that are given to them and the meanings attached.

The destiny of the people hang on these four or five sons in particular. But of these sons, Judah and Joseph are particularly singled out. Judah will be the dominant tribe of the nation in the south.

Joseph, represented by Ephraim and Manasseh, will be the dominant tribe in the north. Notice the way that the two are juxtaposed, both in the contents of the blessings concerning them and just in the space that is given to them, and the ways that they frame the chapter more generally. This is not the first time that they have been juxtaposed.

We saw this also in places like chapter 38 compared with chapter 37 and 39. There is a structure to be observed here. There are three disqualified sons, as it were, the three firstborn, Reuben, Simeon and Levi.

And then there are the other sons. And those sons appear in a bookended structure. So it begins with royal Judah, who is the king who tears prey, and it ends with royal Benjamin, who is the king who tears prey.

Next it speaks of Judah as associated with donkeys and sons. And then it has royal Joseph at the other end, associated with themes of a warrior donkey. Then there is Zebulun, the animal that lies down and has dominion.

On the other side there is Naphtali, the active animal. Issachar, then, good land for food. Asher, good land for food at the other end.

Then there is Dan, getting into the centre. There is the serpent biting the heels. And on the other side there is Gad, the goads at the heels.

And in the very middle of this whole pattern is that statement, I wait for your salvation, O Lord. It sums up something greater that is going on here. Going through the blessings one by one, it begins with Reuben.

And there are ten statements which refer back to Reuben's sin in Genesis chapter 35. He loses his birthright on account of this, something that is referenced in 1st Chronicles

chapter 5. It's described as frothy like water. There is a shift also to he.

So it begins by addressing Reuben directly, but then shifts to addressing the larger group, telling them what Reuben has done. There is no mention of this previously in a public discussion. Nothing has been said about what Reuben did.

But now his father is revealing his crime to others. And there is something similar to the judgement upon Ham here perhaps. At his deathbed, Jacob is making clear that this son has been disqualified.

There are devastating consequences of the attack that he made upon his father. He lacks all prominence afterwards. No judges, kings or prophets come from the tribe of Reuben, despite Reuben being the firstborn.

Moves on to Simeon and Levi and there are ten more statements. In this case it's talking about them rather than to them. They're spoken of as confederates.

They belong together. But there are a lot of uncertainties about the words used here. Some have wondered whether it refers to swords or circumcision swords or trade or wedding feast.

It's not entirely clear. The statement about them hamstringing an ox might refer back to chapter 34 verse 30, being a play upon the sound and word of Akal. In that earlier chapter it's that statement, You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land.

The tribes of Simeon and Levi are detached from each other. They're separated. And Simeon ends up becoming the smallest tribe at the end of the book of Numbers.

They decrease from 59,300 to 22,200 between Numbers chapter 1 verse 23 and Numbers chapter 26 verse 14. In Joshua chapter 19 verses 1 to 9, Simeon is assigned an enclave. And they're excluded from the blessing in Deuteronomy chapter 33.

Levi in Joshua chapter 13 verses 14 are dispersed to 48 cities. Both of them are scattered. And yet they're scattered in different ways.

Levi ends up being the priestly tribe. Their scattering becomes a good thing. Whereas on the other hand, Simeon's scattering is an enervation of their power as a tribe.

The Levite tendency to violence is harnessed for good. Later on in the story of the Exodus, Levi is the leading tribe. They are the ones that bring forward zeal as that great trait.

They are the ones that are involved at the forefront of the deliverance. And that zeal sets them apart as fitting priests. The sort of people that will exercise zeal on God's account.

There's no such redemption for Simeon. The Levite Phinehas ends up killing Zimri, a leading Simeonite, in Numbers chapter 25. And there seem to be parallels between Genesis chapter 34 and Numbers chapter 25 and 31.

Move on to the blessing upon Judah. There's a play upon the name of Judah and its meaning. Judah your brothers shall praise you.

Judah's name means praise. And there are other plays upon the words around that, playing upon the sound of his name. Judah is the lion.

He's triumphed and now has the prey between his legs. No one dare touch it. There's a military success being suggested here.

The lion of the tribe of Judah. The king of the beasts. Judah is like Joseph here as well.

Joseph is the one that the brothers bow down to. And here the father's sons bow down before Judah. He is the one who has become the leader of the people.

Again something that we see in 1 Chronicles chapter 5. Note the statements that are made both to Judah and to the brothers. They are to regard him in the light of this and treat him like the lion that he is. A descendant of Judah will always be the king.

He's a young lion. He's also a mature lion. And the scepter won't depart from him, between his feet.

It's the realm of generation. He's the one who will give birth to the kings. Until Shiloh comes, or until tribute is brought to him, until he comes, whose it is, we're not sure what that word means.

And some have suggested that there's a connection maybe with Shelah. Or others have with Shlomo, that this is Solomon. The rule over the peoples, is this referring to the Gentiles? Note the way that Judah stands for the entirety of the people.

We can see this in Balaam's prophecy as well. That Judah is the one that will ultimately give his name to the entire nation. He is the one that stands as the head of the nation.

And we'll later on refer to the Judahites as the Jews. That is the name that they take on because Judah is the leading tribe. Note the reference back to the preceding narrative.

The staff and the sons might recall chapter 38. The scepter, or the staff, had departed from him until the kid was sent. Does this suggest a connection between Shiloh, that strange word used here, and Shelah, the son that is not given, in chapter 38? Some have suggested so and seen within these statements a subtle reference back to the events of that chapter and the chapter preceding.

Washing garments with wine, a wine connected with blood. That might remind you of the

fact that Judah was the leader of his brothers in placing the blood upon the robes of Joseph to disguise the fact that he had gone. And there are also parallels between Ur, his name connected with donkey, and the name Onan with the expression the son of a Shias.

There is much more that could be explored about the details of the blessing given to Judah. Is the vine connected with Tamar? Is the Shias the daughter of the Canaanite Shua? It's something that we can speculate about. But even if there are references back to the events of chapter 38, I think they've given us positive spin here.

This is fundamentally a blessing. Later on in Zechariah 9, verse 9, for instance, we can see an association between the king and the Assyl cult. We might also see references to the land being blessed with wine and milk and the beauty of the king.

Some of the imagery that we find in the Song of Songs. The blessing of Zebulun is interesting because there's a reversal of the order between Zebulun and Issachar. We see a similar thing in Deuteronomy chapter 33, verse 18.

Zebulun's name is connected with the theme of dwelling and there seems to be a play upon that meaning here. Even if it's not the same word, it's a synonym of the meaning of his name. There are questions here about the territory that Zebulun is going to live in though.

Zebulun seems to have inland rather than coastal territory in Joshua chapter 19, verses 10 to 16. Also see the same sort of thing in Deuteronomy 33, 18 to 20. Sidon needn't necessarily refer to the city itself but to the Phoenicians.

Is this a reference to the living by the Sea of Galilee? To sea trade there? The territory of Zebulun is not necessarily set as sharply as we might suppose. Josephus in his Antiquities writes, The tribe of Zebulun's lot included the land which lay as far as the lake of Gennesareth, and that which belonged to Carmel and the sea. So it seems to bear out some of the ways that they're being described here.

Issachar comes beneath Zebulun even though that reverses the birth order. He's again being described as a strong animal. He settles in a fertile land.

And maybe there's an ironic play upon his name, meaning wage or hire, in that he's described as a slave or serfs on good land. That's the status that they have in the land that they finally settle. Dan comes next, again playing upon the meaning of the name, meaning judge.

Dan shall judge his people. Again it's not entirely clear what this refers to. Could it be with reference to Samson? He's described as a serpent by the way, biting the heel.

Maybe think back to Genesis 3.15. There's a wisdom of the serpent, a sneak attack of a

smaller tribe that still holds its own. Dan is associated later with guerrilla warfare, and they migrate north in Judges 17-18. In the central statement of this bookended section, it speaks of waiting for God's salvation.

Maybe this is referring to the precarious state of the Danites. But it's the central statement in that order. Gad comes next.

He's playing upon the meaning of his name, a troopshel tramp. Once again there's a reference to the heels. They're skilful warriors.

Asher, like Issachar, is associated with good food. While Issachar is associated with service however, Asher is associated with riches. Naphtali comes next.

He's a doe let loose, giving birth to fawns of the fold. Finally, the penultimate in the list, but paired with Benjamin who comes next, as both sons of Rachel, and paralleled with Judah on the other end, you have Joseph. Joseph is compared to a vine or maybe a wild donkey.

Some have read it like Wenham. Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass beside a spring, his wild colts beside the wall. Parallels there in that reading with Judah, a son of a wild she-ass, the whelp of a lion.

The word play upon Ephraim, with the reference to fruitfulness. What is the reference to the archers about? Well, we can think of the archer that's been mentioned previously, which is Ishmael. Ishmael goes down into Egypt and becomes an archer.

He's left at a distance of a bow shot from his mother, and those things are probably connected together. Joseph's story is also spoken of in terms of archers. He's been shot at by his brothers, by all these other forces that have been attacking him, and yet his bow has remained firm.

What does this mean? That he's been shot at, but he hasn't released his arrows at anyone. He's held back. How has he done that? He's done it because the God of Jacob has made his arm strong.

He's able to resist vengeance. He's able to resist answering violence with violence, giving back what he has been given. He is in a position of considerable authority.

He has all the resources of Egypt at his disposal, and his brothers come and kneel before him, and he has complete power over them. But he holds that arrow and does not let it fly at them. He does not attack them and do to them what they did to him.

He has all the power. He shows that he has the power in the ways that he sets up the situation, but he does not take vengeance. And that, I think, is the way in which we're supposed to understand the archer's imagery there.

His bow remains firm. Here Jacob refers to Joseph's relationship with the mighty one of Jacob. Again, speaks of the shepherd and the stone of Israel.

This language is referring to Jacob's own life and his experience of God, and he relates his own experience of God to Joseph's experience of and relationship to God. He sees in his son something of a continuation of his relationship with God and his journey. The God of Jacob has been made known in the story and life of Joseph too.

The blessings that are made to Joseph are also noteworthy. They're associated with fertility and fruitfulness and blessing and life. It refers to the parallels between the creation and the woman's body.

So the blessing of heavens above, paralleled with the blessings of the breasts, and then there's the blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, and then the blessings of the womb. And there's a play upon these words in the Hebrew too, their sounds. Finally, we have Benjamin.

He's described as like a ravenous creature. He's like Judah in this respect. He's reminiscent of Judah's blessing.

Again, this is a kingly tribe. He is a tribe that will lead the people in Saul. The conclusion of this chapter is the first mention that we find in the whole book of Genesis and in the Bible more generally, of twelve tribes.

These are not just twelve sons now. They're twelve tribes with destinies set out before them. Once again, there's a reference to the son's duty to bury Jacob in Canaan.

There's also the first reference that we see to the death of Rebecca, that she died and was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Jacob gathers his sons together at the beginning of this chapter, and at the end, he is gathered to his people. In chapter 47, verse 28, we learn of the years of his life.

This is the sort of thing we'd expect to find in the final statement, just before someone dies or after they have died. But two whole chapters intervene between that statement and the final end of Jacob's life. All of this is playing out the significance of his death and what his legacy is.

And what we see clearly at the end is that his legacy is Israel itself, the twelve tribes. The destiny set before them is a destiny set before them by Israel, the forefather, Jacob, the man who has gone through this wrestling with God and man and has prevailed. A question to consider.

If you compare this passage to Genesis chapter 29 and 30, the names given to the children as they are born and the meanings assigned to them, and Deuteronomy chapter 33, as Moses blesses the different tribes, what are some of the similarities and contrasts

and connections that you notice? Matthew chapter 7. Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him? So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them that you would give to them.

For this is the law and the prophets. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it. When Jesus finished these sayings the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

Matthew chapter 7 concludes the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with a warning against judgement. Judge not lest you be judged and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

This draws our attention back immediately to earlier statements within the Sermon on

the Mount. For instance in verse 7 of chapter 5 Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy and in chapter 6 verses 14 to 15 for if you forgive others their trespasses you are heavenly hosts and your heavenly Father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive others their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. There is another form of this statement found in Luke chapter 7 verses 37 and 38.

Judge not and you will not be judged condemn not and you will not be condemned forgive and you will be forgiven give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together running over will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

This statement might make us think of other parts of Scripture. For instance Deuteronomy chapter 19 verses 18 to 21 concerning hostile false witnesses. The judges shall inquire diligently and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother so you shall purge the evil from your midst and the rest shall hear and fear and shall never again commit any such evil among you.

Your eye shall not pity it shall be life for life, eye for eye tooth for tooth, hand for hand foot for foot. With the measure you meet it shall be measured to you. We might also be put in mind of Romans chapter 2 verse 1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man every one of you who judges for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you, the judge practiced the very same things.

The point of Jesus teaching here is not that we should not make moral judgments but that we should not play the judge because in so doing we are taking God's place. And in James chapter 2 verses 12 to 13 we see it's referring to condemnation in particular that act of casting sentence upon someone else. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy mercy triumphs over judgment.

Judgment must ultimately wait until the final end. Vengeance and judgment in their final forms belong to God, not to us. And when we assume the task of condemning others and judging others we put ourselves in God's place.

And there's a highlighting of hypocrisy here as well. It's emphasised that the person who is judging is guilty of the same things that they are judging in others. We might think of the story of Nathan and David after the sin of David with Bathsheba.

You are the man. You are condemning in this other person what is actually in yourself. It focuses upon the eye.

The prominence of the eye in the body is important. It's a means of perception and it's a means of judgment. And Jesus teaches about the danger of those without perception

leading others.

The blind leading the blind. It seems to me that Jesus is primarily referring to relationships among his own disciples. That this is not the way that we should relate to others.

Placing ourselves in the position of the judge over them. They belong to another master, not to us. And they will be accountable to that master.

That doesn't mean we don't make moral judgments. We just don't place ourselves in the position of the judge over other people. We must also sort out our own lives first.

There's a danger when we become people who are always blaming some other parties. Always pointing the finger. Always saying you are guilty of this or that or the other.

That accusatory you can often be a way of displacing our own responsibility. That we blame upon others what we fail to address in ourselves. And by pointing outwards and by judging others we avoid reckoning with our own sins.

We try and place other people's sins in the worst possible light so that we feel better about the unaddressed sins in our own lives. The teaching that Jesus moves onto from this is a particularly difficult one. What is meant by not giving dogs what is holy and not throwing your pearls before pigs? It's a very strange statement.

It seems to me however that it's referring primarily to Israel's relationship with the Gentiles. The dogs are the unclean animals. They're related to the Gentiles.

And the pigs likewise. They're throwing holy things before these animals that represent the Gentiles. And I think that refers particularly to the way that Israel was tempted at that point in history to put its trust and its faith in the Romans.

To look to them for security. And by keeping on their right side to find strength and ability to stand against whatever is assaulting them. In the book of John we see this quite clearly as they're afraid that the Romans will take away their place and their nationhood and will occupy them in a far more brutal and immediate fashion.

And then they're also very concerned that they not be seen as rebels against Caesar. We have no king but Caesar. And they end up throwing before the Romans those things that are most precious.

They throw before the Romans their status as the people of God. They throw before the Romans all these pearls. And yet what do they find? They end up being trampled underfoot.

In AD 70 Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed. They have cast before the Romans all these things. And they end up finding that they are trampled underfoot.

What is the alternative to this? Ask, seek and knock. You will receive not principally because of your persistence but because of God's character as a loving and a good father. Where do you place your faith when things are difficult in the world? In the powers and the principalities and the rulers of this age? In the halls of power? No.

In our heavenly father. He is the one you look to. And when you put your faith in the rulers of this age you will find that you end up throwing before them those things that are most precious.

Your faithfulness to God. Your status as his people. And you'll find out in time that they will trample those things underfoot.

That they will be destroyed. That you'll end up finding security in a source that there is no security to be found in. Where do we look to? We look to our father who is good to us, who hears us, who knows what we need.

In Luke's parallel account in Luke chapter 11 he focuses upon the father who gives the gift of his Holy Spirit to those who ask. He gives us what we need. He gives us what is good.

This is the power to live out the way of the kingdom. And it's the true alternative to the church. In verse 12 we see the whole central section of the sermon reaching its completion.

The fulfilment of the law and the prophets. And this is a bookend as it were that takes us back to verse 17 of chapter 5 which also refers to the fulfilment of the law of the prophets. This is the whole theme of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount has a there and back again structure. So we're going all this way through ourselves going back to where we started. Although now we're going to be focusing upon woes in contrast to the blessings with which we began.

The law and the prophets are fulfilled as follows. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. This isn't something that's original to Christ's teaching.

We encounter it elsewhere from previous sources. In Tobit 4:15, 3rd century BC what you hate, do to no one. This is a generation before Jesus.

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. And this is also a restatement of Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

I am the Lord. We might note that in contrast to some of the other forms, Leviticus and Christ adopt a positive way of expressing The truth and authority of Jesus' teaching does not depend upon its novelty here. Part of the importance of wisdom is in its relationship

with natural law, with the grain of the universe.

This is not some novel teaching that has no relationship with the way the world is. To those who have learnt to act in the way that the world is created, this principle will ring true between the teaching that we find in other books of scripture where there is a choice between blessing and cursing or between two invitations or between two different modes of life. We might think about Proverbs or Psalms.

In Proverbs chapter 9, there is the call of Lady Wisdom corresponding with the call to be born again in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of scoffers. Here the choice is between a narrow way and a broad way. One that leads to life and the other that leads to destruction.

We shouldn't necessarily presume that these are timeless statements. Jesus I think is primarily referring to his own day and age and to the choice that faces the people in that situation. Are they going to respond to his words? Are they going to live out the vocation of Israel? Because this is what Jesus is addressing.

Jesus is speaking to these people who have been called as a nation to be the light of the world. And at this moment in their history, they face a decisive choice about the sort of people that they're going to be with huge consequences. Are they going to follow Christ the narrow way? Or are they going to reject him in a way that leads to them being trampled underfoot by the dogs and the pigs? We should note that the language of the way was important for early Christianity to the point of being the name for the entire movement.

In the book of Acts it's referred to as the way. We can talk about Christianity or the church and they would often talk about the way as something that defined the disciples of Christ. You might also think about Jesus' statements concerning himself in John chapter 14.

He is the way, the truth and the life. He's the door. He's the way.

From this warning Jesus moves on to speak about the danger of false teachers within the church. Wolves in sheep's clothing. There's a proverbial contrast between sheep who are tame and docile and ravenous wolves who are bloodthirsty and cruel and untamed.

In chapter 10 verse 16 Jesus' disciples will be sent out as like lambs in the midst of war. will be like wolves. This I think refers to in part false teachers in the church here.

And there are later warnings in chapter 24 about people who will be false messiahs that will lead others after them. And these people are to be recognised by their fruit. In the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter 13 or in chapter 18 of Deuteronomy verses 21 to 22 the false prophet is recognised by two things.

They lead the people away from God or their prophecies fail. They lead the people away from God. The manner of their life and the manner of their teaching are both seen to be unsound.

And we can also see the longer term effects of what they do. Is the fruit that they produce good? Are they producing something within their own lives that bears witness to the truth of their teaching? This is one of the ways that we recognise authority. If you want to recognise someone as a good teacher you want to see in them some of the things that you want to be developed in you through their teaching.

If someone is claiming to teach you how to play a musical instrument and they can't play a single note then they're probably not the person to look to. But if you see someone who's a virtuoso who's able to play with great skill they have something in that that testifies to them being someone whose example is to be followed. Whose teaching can be learned from.

Jesus repeats the warning of John the Baptist here. The axe is laid to the root of the trees and whatever tree does not bear good fruit is about to be cut down. He goes on to speak about those who will be judged on the last day as those who never knew him.

Important to recognise Jesus is presenting himself as the eschatological judge. The one who is not just a teacher a rabbi some great sage. He is the one who will judge all men on that last day.

And there are some people who will say that they did many great things in Christ's name. They prophesied in his name. They cast out demons in his name.

They did mighty works in his name. And he will declare he never knew them. Depart from me you workers of wickedness.

This is referring back to Psalm 6 verse 8. And there are people within the church who have done great and wonderful things and yet are not true members of Christ. They have no living connection with him. Matthew's church that he speaks about here is not a pure church where there are no unbelievers present.

There are people who are genuinely performing miraculous acts within that church and yet will prove not to be of Christ at all. Jesus concludes with an illustration of a house being built. A house being built upon a rock and then a house being built upon sand.

There's a contrast between wisdom and folly in the book of Proverbs. And the choice here is between a wise and a foolish man. It's not just between good and evil.

It's between wisdom and folly which is a more developed contrast than that which we find in the law itself. The law focuses very much upon obedient and disobedient or faithful and unfaithful. Here the contrast is between wise and foolish.

And that I think takes us back to the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 24 verse 3 we read By wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established. Jesus wants us to be alert to the foundation that we are building upon.

And here he emphasizes hearing and doing. Not just hearing the word but actually putting it into effect in our lives. And his warning at the beginning of his ministry and at the very end of his ministry is of a falling building.

The falling building here of the person who does not build their life upon the teaching of Christ and at the end of his ministry the falling temple. Not one stone left upon another. The first question to consider within this sermon Jesus speaks not just to individuals but to Israel as a nation.

What are some of the ways in which Israel more particularly could recognize itself as being addressed within this teaching? A second question to consider within the sermon Jesus implicitly presents himself as a particular sort of person and by the end the people marvel not just at his teaching wise words but by his very manner of teaching he stands out from the scribes and the Pharisees. What implicit claims are being made by Christ concerning himself within the sermon on the mount?