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September 6th: Micah 4 & Matthew 7

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Nations gathering to the mountain of the Lord. The end of the Sermon on the Mount.

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Transcript

Micah chapter 4. The Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its God. But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame, and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted. And the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off a strong nation. And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion, from this time forth and forevermore.

And you, O Tower of the Flock, Hill of the Daughter of Zion, to you shall it come. The former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem. Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counsellor perished, that pain seized you like a woman in labour? Writhe and groan, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour.

For now you shall go out from the city, and dwell in the open country. You shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued.

There the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. Now many nations are

assembled against you, saying, Let her be defiled, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion. But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord.

They do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion. For I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze.

And you shall beat in pieces many peoples, and shall devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, and they spoke to many of the same social and political realities. However, in Micah chapter 4 verses 1 to 5, we encounter a passage that raises more immediate questions about the relationship between the two prophets.

This is because the exact same prophecy is found in Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 to 4, with the absence of Micah chapter 4 verse 4, and the truncated form of the material of verse 5 in Isaiah's version being the chief divergences. While there are various other occasions where we see similarities between prophetic books, one prophetic book citing another, or even common sources, such extensive common material is a unique occurrence in the prophetic literature. There are various ways that we might understand the presence of this prophecy in two different books.

We could conceivably argue that both were independently inspired to make a largely identical prophecy. This is definitely possible, although it isn't a popular position, and we should consider the ramifications that it might have for our understanding of prophetic inspiration. Other more popular approaches include the positions that it is later material that was inserted into the text of one or both of the prophets, that one of the two was quoting a prophecy of the other, or had part of the other inserted into their text, or that both were using the same earlier material.

There are various considerations that should inform our final judgement on this question. Some commentators adduce the greater prominence of Zion within the theology of Isaiah as evidence that this prophecy most likely originates with him. On the other hand, the omission of verse 4 of Micah's version in Isaiah's version might suggest that Micah's is the original, or, alternatively, that he more fully quotes the original source.

Then there are stylistic features. For instance, while Micah chapter 4 verse 4 is only found in Micah's version, the expression, For the mouth of the Lord has spoken, is quite Isaianic in its style, found in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 20, 40 verse 5, and 58 verse 14, but not really found elsewhere in scripture. Isaiah's account begins with The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which adds weight to the argument for the originality of the prophecy with Isaiah.

However, one could take the introductory formula in Isaiah as referring to something that Isaiah read in Micah or elsewhere. Just as we see Daniel reflecting upon the

prophecy of Jeremiah's 70 years in Daniel chapter 9, so Isaiah might be reflecting upon the meaning of his contemporary Micah's prophecy. There are various examples of cross-fertilization among the prophets elsewhere, and as Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries, who almost certainly knew each other in person, we should probably beware of thinking of their ministries as hermetically sealed from each other.

The two prophets used the common material in different ways in their respective books. In Micah, for instance, the material opens up a new section of the book. Some have suggested tension between the vision of the two prophets based on the question of whether the nations would still worship false gods in the latter days or not.

This is a question that is raised by Micah chapter 4 verse 5 and pressed by Marvin Sweeney. Such textual questions are challenging, not least when we bring Qumran's scrolls with different forms of the text of Isaiah into the picture. We should also consider the various hands that were involved in the reception, recording, compilation, transmission and ordering of Micah and Isaiah's prophecy during their lives and afterwards.

It is not unlikely that the same group was involved in shaping both. At points like this, we might be seeing tantalizing indications of various unknown fingerprints upon the text or indications of richer interactions between the authors and editors of these two prophetic books. Perhaps Micah and Isaiah, both the men and the books, were informative interaction from the time of their initial oral ministries to the final form of their respective texts.

Mark J. Lett, following Brevard Child's canonical approach, cautions about resting too much upon the question of which was the original. What matters far more is the literary form in which they have come down to us in the canon. The previous chapter ended with a pronouncement of doom upon Jerusalem.

Therefore, because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. Chapter 4 begins with a sharply contrasting vision concerning the mountain of the house, terminology that connects these two prophecies. Within this prophecy we can hear the themes of like the earlier traditions, such as the Songs of Zion in the Psalms, within which Mount Zion comes to assume great significance.

Psalms 46 or 48 or 76 are all referenced by some commentators in this context. Psalm 46 verses 4 to 10, for instance, There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

God will help her when morning dawns, the nations rage, the kingdoms totter. He utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.

He burns the chariots with fire. Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

Mount Zion is a very modest elevation. It isn't even in the top 100 tallest mountain peaks in Israel, only being around 2500 ft tall. However, as the site of the temple, it is the mountain of the Lord.

And according to this prophecy, it will function as the cosmic mountain. The mountain to which the whole world will gather, the mountain that will join heaven to earth. We see Zion set over the other mountains in places like Psalm 68 verses 14-18 as well.

When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalmon, O mountain of God. Mountain of Bashan, O many peaked mountain. Mountain of Bashan, why do you look with hatred, O many peaked mountain.

At the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, where the Lord will dwell forever. The chariots of God are twice 10,000, thousands upon thousands. The Lord is among them.

Sinai is now in the sanctuary. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train, and receiving gifts among men. Even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Mount Zion will become like Eden, the beating heart of the world. The place from which all life flows, and the place to which it will all return. Elsewhere in scripture, water flows out of the temple in Zion, in places like Ezekiel chapter 47 and Joel chapter 3. But here the stream is of nations flowing up to Zion in pilgrimage.

An image that we also see at the end of Zechariah chapter 14, which brings the two images together. Living waters flowing out from Jerusalem, and the nations flowing up into her. This would be a fulfillment of the Lord's purpose for his people, as a means of bringing his blessing to the nations.

The nations come to Zion to learn the law and the ways of the Lord. And the law and the word of the Lord also come out from Jerusalem, as their principles start to inform life elsewhere. The Lord's justice will be known on earth, as he would judge between peoples and nations, settling disputes and establishing justice.

The outcome of the rule of the Lord among the nations would be peace. Illustrated by the refashioning of weapons of war into tools of cultivation. The freedom to abandon the practice and the learning of conflict.

Joel chapter 3 verse 10 uses the same imagery, but moves it in the different direction.

Where people must fashion weapons of war out of their agricultural tools. Micah's day, as we have seen, was one of international conflict.

But it was also one of predatory injustice at home. With rich landowners accumulating property and dispossessing the poor, who were left landless. The vision that Micah relates here is not merely of the cessation of international conflict.

It's also one of good relations at home. Where every man sits under his own vine or fig tree. Everyone with his own vine and fig tree is an image of the fruitfulness of the land.

And the participation of every single person within that fruitfulness. No one is left landless. Everyone enjoys access to literally fruitful means of production.

Means of production that are fruitful enough that they are able to rest in their labors. The same language is found in 1 Kings chapter 4 verse 25. Describing the situation of Israel at the height of Solomon's reign.

The greatest period of the nation's glory was seen in every single person enjoying his own land. And having fruitfulness within it. Zechariah chapter 3 verse 10 also uses that imagery.

Ginnilet pushes against the readings of such a Sweeney. Who on the grounds of verse 5 pit Micah against Isaiah. Rather he argues, we might read verse 5 as bringing the hero's eyes back down into the immediate present.

From the future horizon laid out by the prophecy of the first four verses. This invites them to live in the present. In a way informed by the eschatological hope that has just been set forth.

While the other nations might at this time in history live in terms of their gods. Israel trusts in the Lord knowing that this is the future that they are looking forward to. However the movement from the people's current beleaguered position.

To the glorious future that has been promised to them is not an easy one. The oracle that follows in verses 6 to 8 gives some sense of how that movement will take place. The Lord will gather the scattered flock.

All the lame and the wounded will be gathered as a remnant. And those who had been cast off in judgment would be made into a strong nation. The Lord would once more be in their midst as their shepherd.

As the one leading them and protecting them. A nation that had been stripped of its sovereignty would enjoy it once more. The stronghold of the flock, the hill of Zion in which they were protected from adversaries.

Would be built up once again and they would be safe. The reference to the tower of the

flock in verse 8 might be an allusion back to something in Genesis chapter 35. In Genesis chapter 35 Rachel dies in childbirth on the way to Bethlehem.

Verses 19 to 21 of that chapter. So Rachel died and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb.

It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb which is there to this day. Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Edah. This tower of Edah or tower of the flock then would recall the story of Rachel and the tragic manner of her death.

It was in the context of Genesis chapter 35 that Jacob first received the promise that kings would come from his loins. Reading the verses that follow in verses 9 to 10 we might see the prophet taking up some of these themes and developing them. The woman crying in labor would recall Rachel.

Likewise the lack of a king might refer to the woman struggling and failing seemingly to give birth to the king that is expected. The birth pangs that are described are painful birth pangs. Pangs of suffering which will involve going into exile itself.

At this point Babylon was not the major power of the region, it was Assyria. Perhaps the first heroes of the prophecy in verse 10 would have imagined Assyria taking them captive and bringing them into the land of Babylon and resettling them there. However the actual exile would take place under the rule of Babylon itself.

Rachel had died in giving birth and Zion would also have to die in giving birth. They would go off into the death of exile but they would be brought up from that grave as the Lord would redeem them from their captivity. Gignoliette comments upon the way that the stories of Jacob are being used in this passage.

The echoes of the story of Rachel and her tragic death and the birth of Benjamin, the tribe from which the first king would arise, are presenting Israel with a way of thinking of its future in terms of its past. He writes, The narratives of Judah's patriarch are no mere rehearsal of events long lost and lapsed. Rather the narratives are present and inhabitable memories in the figural patterns set out by scripture's traditions and narratives.

When Judah enters into exile her labor pains are mimetically related to Rachel's, devastating as they are. Yet Judah enters into this frown of providence in the assured hope of a future promise. There the Lord will redeem them.

The chapter ends with an image of many nations coming up against Zion. Likely this is an image of Assyria and its tributaries gathering together against Jerusalem in 701 BC. As Joanna Hoyt observes, The gloating of the nations here very much tallies with the way that the Assyrians and their allies under Sennacherib are described.

In 2nd Chronicles chapter 32, Sennacherib and his people think that they have beaten Jerusalem, that there is no hope for the people of the Lord. Yet Sennacherib and his men do not know the plans of the Lord and they will be threshed like sheaves on the threshing floor. We might see some initial token of the fulfillment of these prophecies in this chapter in the story of 2nd Chronicles chapter 32.

In verses 22 to 23 of that chapter, So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side. And many brought gifts to the Lord to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward. A question to consider, how might we see the opening verses of this chapter being fulfilled in the new covenant? Matthew chapter 7 Judge not, that you be not judged.

For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 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. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.

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, 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 judgment.

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, 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, practice 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're 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.

For 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 and 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 will find out in time that they will trample those things underfoot. That they will be destroyed.

That you will end up finding that you have nothing. That you have given up those things that were most precious to find 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 paralleled 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 trusting in the Gentiles and the rulers of this age. 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 these patterns of how the law and the prophets are fulfilled. And now we're finding 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.

Or Hillel in the Talmud, 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 this statement. Aristotle and Confucius both have some form of the golden rule.

But 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 to them. Jesus concludes with a number of warnings. First of all, he speaks of the narrow way.

There's a choice between two ways. This is something that we find in other books of scripture, where there's 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 9, there's the call of Lady Wisdom corresponding with the call of Lady Folly, both of them inviting the simpleton in to eat their fare in their house. And in Psalms, in the first Psalm, we have this contrast between the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand 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 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.

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.

It's important to recognise Jesus 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. He will say, 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, Jesus wants us to be alert to the foundation that we are building upon. And here he emphasises 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 recognise 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?