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February 15th: Genesis 45 & Matthew 5:1-20

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Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. The Beatitudes; Jesus fulfilling the Law.

Some passages referenced:

Matthew 23 (woes corresponding with the Beatitudes); Isaiah 61:1-4 (Isaiah's prophecy of the kingdom); Isaiah 66:2 (God dealing with the contrite in spirit); Psalm 37:11 (the meek inheriting the earth); Psalm 24:3-6 (the pure in heart seeing God); Deuteronomy 29:22-23 (salt as a means of destroying land); Leviticus 2:13, Mark 9 (salt associated with fire and sacrifice); Colossians 4:5 (speech seasoned with salt); Isaiah 42:6, 49:6 (the light of the nations); Psalm 19 (Law and heaven and earth related).

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

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 45 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, Make everyone go out from me. So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard

it. And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please. And they came near. And he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt, and now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry, and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me.

Do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children, and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty.

And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honour in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.

Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck, and he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, Joseph's brothers have come.

It pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Say to your brothers, Do this, load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat of the fat of the land. And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, Do this, take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.

Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours. The sons of Israel did so, and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes.

To his father he sent as follows, ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey.

Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed he said to them, Do not quarrel on the way. So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.

And they told him, Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, It is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go down and see him before I die.

It is hard to think of many more emotionally powerful passages in scripture than Genesis chapter 45. Joseph finally discloses himself to his brothers. He weeps aloud.

There are a number of key events of weeping in the book of Genesis at critical junctures. Esau weeping at the loss of the blessing. Jacob weeping when he meets Rachel.

And Jacob and Esau weeping together later on when they are finally reconciled. Joseph's concern throughout his speech is upon his father. Is his father still alive? He is eager to bring his father down to Egypt so he can finally be reunited with him.

After all this time apart and all the pain on both sides. The brothers themselves are unsure of how to react to this. The first time Joseph speaks they are nonplussed.

They don't know what to make of it. Could this really be him? Joseph has to speak to them again to insist it is I. It is Joseph. They had been shown remarkable favour on their previous trip.

And then it all seemed to go against them as they were pursued and Benjamin was found in the possession of the cup. Then Judah interceded and now the man who they have been dealing with to this point who has been causing them all sorts of concern turns out to be Joseph. A brother presumed dead.

Joseph stresses in his response to them that this is a matter of divine orchestration. Joseph can see clearly now that divine design was behind all of the things that happened to him. And he makes a fourfold statement on this front.

First of all, do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life. And then, and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors.

Again, so it was not you who sent me here but God. And then finally, thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me.

Do not tarry. In each of these statements, Joseph is hammering a point home. It is God

that is behind all of these things.

Joseph has a profound sense of God's action in his life. Now, compare the story of Joseph to stories that we've read to this point in the book of Genesis. The Joseph story is not one of great miracles.

It's not one with a fantastic flood or anything like that. God doesn't appear directly to him as he appeared to Abraham or to his father Jacob. God doesn't even speak directly to him.

In all of these ways, it might seem that God has disappeared from the scene but not to Joseph. Joseph has a deeper understanding of God's involvement in history. God speaks to Joseph through his ordering of his life.

And as Joseph looks back upon his life, he can see the way that God's hand is revealed. And it's this recognition that allows him to forgive his brothers. A strong belief in providence makes it easier to forgive people and not to hold grudges.

The course of our lives is ultimately in the hands of God, not in the hands of other human beings. This belief is the belief that God acts in human history. God isn't always on the surface of the story.

Yet all of the story is about God. And as we've read through Genesis, there have been many points where you might wonder, where is God? And at this point we're beginning to see where God is. God is acting in all of these events.

There may be many different actors on the surface of the story. But there's one actor holding all of the story together beneath the surface. This is actually one of the reasons why typology matters.

Because one of the things we see in typology are traces of another hand at work. It isn't just chance, it's not human intent, it's not just Joseph's contrivance in some of these events. In every single one of these events, God is ultimately at work.

God is bringing about his purpose in history. And this challenges us to read the entire story of Genesis on a deeper level. As Joseph and the brothers reread their life stories as ones in which God is the primary actor, it changes the way that they view things.

Joseph, as he's reunited with the brothers, first weeps with Benjamin. Benjamin is the bridge to the other brothers. And then he weeps with each of the other brothers.

The meeting at this point is reminiscent of the meeting between Esau and Jacob in chapter 33. After they've greeted and wept together, they talk to him. Now this might seem a bit anticlimactic.

After all the drama and the emotion of this chapter, they just talk together. But chapter

37 presents the failure to be able to speak peaceably to each other as the beginning of the story. And now they can speak.

There's the resolution of the underlying problem. Pharaoh instructs them to come back to the land with their father. So they return to Canaan with the joyful news to tell their father that they have found Joseph, that he is still alive, and that he wants to see his father down in Egypt.

And when Jacob hears, his heart stands still. He can't process the news. He can't believe it.

It's too wonderful. It's too unbelievable. And yet, when he's persuaded, when he sees the gifts that are sent ahead, he knows that it is in fact true.

And his response, it is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.

Notice the similarity with this and the earlier statement that he made when he heard the message of Joseph's death. I shall go down to Sheol to my son mourning. Now he's again talking about going down to his son and about death, but it's different this time.

He's going to go down and find resolution for all these things in his life that have seemed tragic and beyond repair. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go down and see him before I die.

And we could read the entire story of Joseph going down into Egypt and then up to this point as a great binding of Isaac's story. Jacob has sent away his son. It seems as if the son was lost for good.

And then the son is restored to him as if from the dead. And at this point, Jacob himself revives. It seems as if he's been like a living dead person for almost 20 years.

His son has gone down to death. And now that son has come up from the grave. He's still alive.

And his spirit comes to him again. This chapter then is one of the most powerful ones that shows how God's secret providence exceeds human design. God is restoring history that seemed broken.

Lives shattered beyond repair. Families torn apart. Things lost beyond recovery.

And this is all a foreshadowing and picture of God's greater work in history. God is going to wipe away every tear from our eyes. God is going to make all things new.

God is going to restore the things that were broken. To recover the things that were lost. And in the dramatic and emotional moment of Joseph meeting with his brothers and

finally seeing in his life God's hand leading him and them to this point.

We will see a glimpse of what awaits us. Of God's greater purpose in history. A question to consider.

Looking through the book of Genesis and the changing ways in which God reveals his presence to his people and his action to his people. Are there any particular lessons that we can learn for discerning God's action and presence in our own lives? Especially in those times when he feels absent. Matthew chapter 5 verses 1 to 20.

Seeing the crowds he went up on the mountain and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 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's 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 memorized. 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 memorization 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 end of the book. Jesus and the Gentiles, angels and women present, Joseph and Mary's 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 brokenhearted, 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 favour 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 their 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 and the contrast with this is in the scribes and the pharisees they're swearing by the temple or 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 behavior 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 salt 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 purpose 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 i am the lord i have called you in righteousness i will take you by the hand and keep you i will give you as a covenant for the people a light for the nations and then in chapter 49 verse 6 is it too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel i will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth 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