

Matt. 3: 11

John already knew that in fact he was mightier, and that he himself was not worthy even to do the lowest slave's task for this 'disciple' [Jesus]. A Rabbi's disciple was expected to act virtually as his master's slave, but to remove his shoes was too low a task even for a disciple.

Matt. 6: 9-13 (Lord's Prayer)

Lord's Prayer is seen as primarily eschatological, concerned with the disciple's longing for and preparation for the consummation of God's kingdom. Practically every clause can be interested this way. But the fact that Christians have used the prayer throughout the centuries without a specifically eschatological intention suggests that it also has an application to the disciple's daily concerns (which should of course *include* the looking forward to God's victory), even that this application is the primary one. It is a prayer for *disciples*, who alone can call God 'Father'. It is also a prayer for disciples *as a group*. This does not exclude, however, its use also as a summary or model for our own prayer, both corporate and private. ¹

6: 11: *our daily bread*: The three clauses of prayer for Gods' glory are now balanced by three petitions for the disciples' needs. Material needs are represented by *our daily bread*, but the meaning of *daily* is uncertain. But three possible translations; a) daily possibly with a reminiscence of the daily provision of manna in the wilderness. b) Necessary for survival, cf. Proverbs 30:8, 'feed me with the food that is needful for me; c) For the coming day, which is currently the most favored translation. a) and b) come to much the same thing, a prayer for the day's material needs to be met. c) Could either carry a similar meaning, asking for tomorrow's food to be provided, or an eschatological sense 'food for the Coming Day,' with reference to the expected Messianic banquet. If the whole prayer is taken eschatologically, this last meaning seems required. But the fact that this bread is required *today* suggests that the thought is of daily provision, and if so it makes little difference whether the request is for today's or tomorrow's bread.²

6:12: *Debts* represents the regular Aramaic terms for sin, which literally denotes money debts, here literally put into Greek (Luke has the more ordinary term for 'sins,' but retains the idea of debt in the second clause). The thought of sin in general, as the explanation in vv. 14-15, using the very general term trespass makes clear. *Have forgiven* seems clearly to be the correct text in Matthew... The point lies, as vv. 14-15 will explain, in the insincerity of a prayer for forgiveness from an unforgiving disciple. ³

6:13: Temptation

God, while he does not 'tempt' men to do evil (Jas. 1:13), does allow his children to pass through period of testing. But disciples, aware of their weakness, should not desire such testing, and should pray to be spared exposure to situation in which they are vulnerable. If they do find themselves in such a situation however, they must pray to be *delivered from evil*. The stress in both clauses is on the vulnerability of disciples and their consequence

¹ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 133.

² R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 135.

³ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 136.

dependence on /god for avoiding sin, though the ultimate threat of the eschatological conflict cannot be excluded from the prayer's perspective.⁴

6: 14-15: Forgiveness: The point is not so much that forgiving is a prior condition of being forgiven, but that forgiveness cannot be one-way process. Like all God's gifts it brings responsibility; it must be passed on. To ask for forgiveness on any other basis is hypocrisy.⁵

(Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23): John's question:

*When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'*⁴ **Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'**

John, as his question shows, was not yet ready to be so positive, though he would have liked to be. His hesitation was probably due (as vo. 6 suggests) to a discrepancy between his expectations for 'the coming one' (i.e. the one he had predicted in 3:11; 'the coming one' was not a recognized Messianic title in Judaism) and what he actually heard about Jesus. The ministry so far recorded does not match up with the expectations of 3:11-12, and the miracles which are its most obvious feature were not a part of the common Messianic expectation. John many also have found it difficult to accept a Jewish 'Messiah' who failed to fast as his own followers did (9:9 ff), and who kept the sort of company which a careful Jew would avoid (9:9ff).⁶

3: 11-12: John's expectation of Messiah image. *I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'*

6:4-5 : The evidence to which Jesus points is not immediately conclusive, as it does not chime in with the popular (and probably John's) idea of the Messiah's work. But his words are an unmistakable allusion to passages in Isaiah which describe God's saving work (Is. 35: 5-6; cf. 29:18), and the mission of his anointed servant (Is. 61:1).⁷

*Is. 35:5-6: Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'*⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;*

29:18: ¹⁸ On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

In Jesus' own understanding of his mission, Isaiah 61:1-2 looms large (Lk. 4:18ff; and cf. above on 53: 3-4). The relief of suffering, literally fulfilled in his healing miracles recorded in chapter 8-9 (though lame and deaf are not included there), reaches its climax in *good news to the poor*, the godly minority described in the beatitudes of chapter 5. If this is too gentle a mission for John's Messianic hopes he has missed the biblical pattern on which Jesus mission is founded.

⁴ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 136.

⁵ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 137.

⁶ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 192.

⁷ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 192.

V. 6: take offence; many were 'put off' by Jesus, when his style of ministry failed to tally with their expectations, and even offended against accepted conventions. 'Good news to the poor' was an offence to the establishment, which a mission of the relief of suffering and the restoration of sinners would be at best irrelevant to those who fought for national liberation. It took spiritual discernment not to be 'put off' by Jesus, and such perception was enviable.⁸

Matt. 25" 31-46: Last judgment:

- (a) The Son of man himself is at the center, both as judge and as the one to whom we must respond in order to be pronounced 'blessed' (v. 34); (b) 'all the nations are judged, not only the Gentiles; (c) the criterion of judgment is not their attitude to Israel, or even to God's law, but their treatment of Jesus' 'little brothers.' Until fairly recently it was generally assumed that this passage grounded eternal salvation on works of kindness to all in need, and that therefore, its message was a sort of humanitarian ethic, with no specifically Christian content. As such, it was an embarrassment to those who based their understanding of the gospel on Paul's teaching that one is justified by faith in Christ and not by 'good works.' Was Matthew (or Jesus) silent against Paul? More recent interpreters have insisted, however, that such an interpretation does not do justice to the description of those in need as Jesus' *brothers*, nor to the use elsewhere in Matthew of language about 'these little ones.' It is therefore increasingly accepted that the criterion of judgment is not kindness to the needy in general, but the response of the nations to *disciples* in need. Opinions vary as to whether Jesus had in mind specifically Christian *missionaries* or pastors and teachers, or some other special group within the number of disciples. But on any of these views the criterion of judgment becomes not mere philanthropy, but men's response to the kingdom of heaven as it is presented to them in the person of Jesus' 'brothers.' It is, therefore, as in 7:21-23, ultimately a question of their relationship to Jesus himself.⁹

⁸ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 193.

⁹ R.T. France. *Tynbdale New Testament Commentaries on Matthew*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Pub. Co., 1985), 355.