



# First Things First

## *Bible Reading Plan for the Gospel of Matthew*

Welcome to the First Things First Initiative of Greater New Missionary Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church family would grow in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ by dedicating the first 15 minutes of everyday to prayer and bible reading. This reading plan provides suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

### **Introduction to Matthew**

The gospel of Matthew is attributed to a tax collector named Matthew; in fact, he's the same tax collector who Jesus calls to follow Him in Matthew 9:9. Matthew was a Jew from Galilee whose life was forever changed on the fateful day when he met Christ. Because he was a tax collector, he would have been trained to write and had the abilities to record this firsthand account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Matthew's focus in his gospel shows us Jesus as the true King of the Jews, the One who came to fulfill the messianic prophecies of old. Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy tracking Jesus' lineage back to both David and Abraham, reminding us of Christ's Jewish roots. But even as he traces back, he also points forward to the story of a new King, Jesus, who has come to save His people from their sin. As we continue to read in Matthew, we will begin to understand that "His people" doesn't just refer to the lost sheep of Israel, the Jews, but will expand to include the Gentiles, the nations.

Thus, Matthew's gospel speaks to the Jew, beseeching him to trust in Christ as the true Messiah, while also speaking to the Gentiles proclaiming the good news of the gospel, that salvation is offered to all who believe, regardless of ethnicity.

## WEEK TWO: MATTHEW 1-4

**Monday, January 14 | Matthew 5:1-12**

### “What’s In A Name?”

In chapter five we read what is called The Beatitudes, where Jesus speaks blessings over the crowds. In my red letter version of the Bible, it is easy for me to skim over verses one and two because I see lots of red coming in verse three (meaning Jesus is directly speaking). But the first phrase of verse one is worth contemplating. It says, “Now when Jesus saw the crowds...”.

As Jesus looks at the people who gathered, I don’t believe He sees them as a big crowd who needed to be corralled but as individuals with stories and struggles and past disappointments and hearts that needed the leading of a gentle shepherd.

And so He begins to speak blessings over them. His words are filled with comfort for those who know they are spiritually bankrupt or are experiencing persecution (Matthew 5:3,10), words of encouragement for those who turn over the reigns of life to God (Matthew 5:5), words of hope for those who seek to do what is right (Matthew 5:6, 11-12), and words that reveal great expectations for those who desire to take every thought captive and make it obedient to the Lord (Matthew 5:6-9).

They are words spoken to real live people to bring hope. Jesus saw the crowds, and we have the opportunity to see them too. We see them next door, a neighbor in need of a kind word or a helping hand. We see them at the grocery store or restaurant or gas station: a bag boy we can invite to church, a waiter we can encourage with a kind tip and a sincere prayer, and an attendant whom we can look in the eyes and ask for God’s compassion and understanding about their circumstances. We see them at work, yes...even those with whom we have difficulty, we have an opportunity to bless through peaceful speech and by avoiding the judgment of their thoughts! We see them at the sports field, where we can be strategically praying and engaging with those whom God is placing in our path. We see them everywhere if we ... just ... will.

Ours can be a life filled with blessing others. We must see that as our mission and follow the example of our Savior. As we seek to bless others, Lord, we pray that the most needed blessing

of all - saving knowledge of You - will be realized in the lives of those we encounter and encourage today.

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**Tuesday, January 15 | Matthew 5:13-16**

### **“Salt and Light”**

Jesus identifies Himself with Yahweh in the Sermon on the Mount when He compares His disciples to the persecuted prophets of old (Matt. 5:11–12; Jer. 37–38). The disciples who speak for Jesus are like the prophets who spoke for the Lord of the covenant; therefore, Christ implies His divine sovereignty.

The prophets carried out their ministries in full view of the people of Israel, and so we are not surprised to see that their successors, the disciples of Jesus, do not build the kingdom of God in secret. This is the point of today’s passage. Our Savior calls His disciples the “salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13) and the “light of the world” (v. 14), two substances that permeate and transform the food, or the darkness, in which they are found. Like salt and light, the church is to have a transformative effect on the surrounding society.

Salt is often produced as tiny grains and is not expensive given its prevalence. Yet its value far outweighs its apparent insignificance. Christians are to be like salt and have a positive impact on the culture far beyond what is expected from the powerless. The meaning of Jesus’ metaphor is probably not limited to any single benefit we get from salt, but we will highlight its preservative quality. The church must have a preserving effect on society and by its influence prevent the world from rushing headlong toward ungodliness. Christianity has fulfilled this role historically, leading the way in the advance of human rights. But take note that we are salt only if we maintain our difference from the world around us. In the Near East, salt can be found mixed with gypsum or sand, diluting its “saltiness” and worth. The same fate can befall us if we bend over backward to show the world how much we are like them (v. 13; 1 Peter 1:14–16).

Rural communities like the one Jesus addresses in Matthew 5 well know how blinding darkness can be. Yet the glow of a city in the distance can give those living in the pitch black of

night a sense of direction and bearing. Just as walking around the camp at night is dangerous without a lighted torch, Jesus calls us to be the light of the world, to live as those transformed by the Spirit so that the world will take notice and be led to glorify the Father (vv. 14–16).

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**Wednesday, January 16 | Matthew 5:17-26**

### **“The Fulfillment of the Law”**

We come today to one of Jesus’ most complex teachings as it discusses the life and role of the old covenant Law. This is a much-debated topic, and thus we will carefully draw conclusions that harmonize well with the entirety of Scripture.

Jesus discusses the Mosaic law at this point in the Sermon on the Mount to prevent His disciples from misunderstanding the teaching that follows. Our Lord is about to correct the interpretations of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:21–48), who are beloved by the common man. The people equate these traditions with the Law itself, and to correct them is to violate God’s Word in the eyes of the people unless Christ makes His intention clear beforehand.

Verses 17–20 tell us that breaking our Father’s commands is far from Jesus’ mind. His work is not “to abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill them” (v. 17). The Messiah’s coming does not render the Old Testament outdated. “To fulfill” is not to dissolve the authority and application of the old covenant revelation; rather, “to fulfill” means to fill up the Law’s intent and show the goal to which it leads. Jesus is saying that He achieves the purpose of the Law and the Prophets in the inauguration of the kingdom in His life and ministry and in its consummation at His return. The Law is valid under the new covenant when used “lawfully” (1 Tim. 1:8), but it cannot be followed rightly apart from Christ.

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**Thursday, January 17 | Matthew 5:27-32**

### **“Adultery of the Heart”**

What we find in the Sermon on the Mount is that all sins are not equal in degree. For example, ungodly anger and the act of murder both violate the intent of Exodus 20:13 (Matt. 5:21–22), but the hot-head and the murderer do not get the same punishment (Num. 35:9–29). Both sins make men guilty before our Creator and bring eternal death if there is no repentance (Rom. 3:23). Nevertheless, God punishes sinners in hell in proportion to the gravity of their sin and what has been revealed to them (Matt. 11:20–24).

Furthermore, Christ’s teaching on anger also shows us that we must not only refrain from forbidden acts, we must do all we can to do the opposite. It is not enough to keep from being angry unjustly with a Christian brother or sister; we must do all we can to ensure that they have no cause to be angry with us. We must pursue reconciliation and loving relationships as far as we are able (5:23–26).

According to this principle, a thorough exegesis (interpretation) of today’s passage tells us we must also encourage chastity in the church and the world in addition to refraining from lustful intent in the heart (Matt. 5:27–28). In fact, the apostles elsewhere give us this precise command (1 Tim. 2:8–10; Heb. 13:4). Male and female alike, we violate the command against adultery and do not love our brothers and sisters in Christ if we act and dress in a manner that might provoke another to stumble into lust (Rom. 14:13–23; 1 John 4:21).

Jesus is teaching us the end to which the command against adultery points. Since, as the church father Jerome said, “what we conceive in the mind, we might complete with an act” (*Commentary on Matthew*, 1.5.29), it is not enough to refrain from the physical act of fornication (Matt. 5:27–28). God’s law, our Savior shows us, has a pure heart as its final goal. The pursuit of this purity is to be among our most urgent tasks, and we must do whatever it takes to keep our minds free from lust’s pollution (vv. 29–30).

This point helps us understand today’s passage. Jesus does not give every possible ground for divorce when He allows it for “sexual immorality” (Matt. 5:31–32); desertion by an unbelieving spouse also makes divorce permissible (1 Cor. 7:12–16). Moreover, the Greek word

for “sexual immorality” in today’s passage (*porneia*) covers all types of sexual misconduct, implying that some sexual sins besides extramarital affairs can be legitimate grounds for divorce. Yet Jesus is not allowing divorce for any instance of lust or sexual indiscretion. Otherwise, every lewd thought is just cause for divorce. Since no sinner has been fully pure in this area, every marriage would then be dissolvable, which clearly violates our Lord’s high view of holy matrimony (Matt. 19:1–12).

Divorce is often easier than working through marital problems and is appealing to our fallen nature. We must recognize this so as not to adopt the world’s practice of sanctioning divorces for reasons other than those God has given.

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**Friday, January 18 | Matthew 5:33-48**

### **“Vows and Retaliation”**

As we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we must again be clear that we may not read Jesus in a way that contradicts the Old Testament. He comes to fulfill the Father’s purposes and promises and to show Himself as the goal of the old covenant revelation (Matt. 1:18–25; 4:12–17; 5:17–20). Dr. Sinclair Ferguson comments, “What at first appears to be a contrast [between Christ’s teaching and the Old Testament] is really Jesus’ proper explanation and application [of the Old Testament]” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 95).

Therefore, it would be a mistake to abolish oaths and vows altogether based on today’s passage. Matthew 5:33–37 has little bearing on the swearing of oaths in a solemn setting, such as when we testify in a court or enter the marriage covenant. Any vow we make, even if sworn by something besides God, is made in His presence (Matt. 5:33–36), and we cannot get around our commitments through endless qualifications. We should affirm something only if we are true to it; alternately, we ought to say no if we have any doubt that we can follow through. Our yes must be yes and our no, no (v. 37).

One of the best helps for interpreting the Sermon on the Mount properly is to remember that Jesus’ stipulations deal directly with interpersonal relationships within the spiritual

community and, secondarily, with those outside the church. Consider that when reading when Jesus discusses the Law's "eye-for-an-eye" justice (Matt. 5:38–42; see Ex. 21:23–25).

Eye-for-an-eye justice was given to the courts in Israel to ensure that victims received adequate restitution. However, it was never intended to justify retaliation for everyday, personal offenses. This is what Jesus is talking about in the passage. A slap on the "right cheek," which basically amounts to a personal insult, must not be returned in kind (Matt. 5:39). Believers give up their law-given right to keep their outer cloak (5:40; see Ex. 22:26–27), that is, we may not appeal to our legal rights every time we are wronged. The law restrains vengeance to help us cultivate a generous heart that overlooks personal offenses and forgives for the kingdom's sake.

We are to endure insults and offenses meekly, doing extra even for those who do not deserve it (Matt. 5:41). When someone asks you for a favor, volunteer to go above and beyond their request.

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**Saturday, January 19-Sunday, January 20 | Matthew 5**

Reread Matthew 5 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.