



Journey On.

Devotional Articles Based On The Gospel Of Matthew

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- Thanks to the great contributors to this project.
- Thanks to the disciple of Jesus named Matthew who recorded an account of the life of Christ that to this day convicts, encourages, and comforts.
- Thanks to Jesus: the Center, Foundation, Savior of our souls and Shepherd of our hearts. This is all from You and for You.

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Broken Silence (Matt. 1)

By Robert Myrick

What is it about silence that causes such an uneasy feeling? The absence of sound seems almost unnatural to the human ear and causes one to almost wince in pain. Everyone has experienced this awkward moment in a group of people. The conversation suddenly dies; eyes dart right and left; feet shuffle back and forth and finally someone blurts out something. Anything! The idea that you can become so aware and conscience of silence can be very unnerving. If a moment of silence can cause such discomfort then what about 400 years of silence?

The last words spoken by God in the Old Testament were, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:4-6) After God spoke these words through the prophet Malachi, God went silent and did not utter another word.

I do not know about you, but it is nice to escape your family once in a while. When you have five kids, the noise level in the house can be quite astronomical and cause you to wish for quieter days of yester years. But, when your wish does come true, it is amazing how quickly the absence of children, laughing, running, talking, and playing can draw your heart back to your loved ones. I often wonder if that was not one of the major reasons for the silence of God.

The 400 years between Malachi and Matthew was a time of great turmoil for the Jews. In this period, they were subjugated by the Persians, the Greeks, gained their freedom for about a

hundred years and finally crushed by the Romans. The Jews chafed under the heavy yoke of their rulers and started to turn to scriptures that foretold of a coming messiah that would establish his kingdom on earth. Would this hunger for the word of God been possible without God going silent? Was this not a way to ready and draw the hearts of his people to a yearning for broken silence?

You would think that Matthew as an author would know how to write a more exciting opening to a book. For example, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. (Charles Dickens, A tale of two cities) Now that is an opening, but what do we get after 400 years of build up? We get a genealogy. Yes, that's right a genealogy! Here is a riveting excerpt. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and ect.... I do not know about you, but I was deeply and emotionally moved.

The genealogy may not interest the average reader, but it was of the greatest importance to the Jews. The book of Matthew was written with the Jews in mind and every Jew knew that the scriptures prophesied that the Messiah would come through the line of Abraham and David. In order for Jesus to have a legitimate claim as the Messiah, His blood line had to be traced through the proper family tree. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ. (Matthew 1:17)

There is another way of looking at the genealogy. God may have gone silent in word, but was not silent in deed. Just

because God is not speaking does not mean that his hands are not at work. The genealogy is more than a group of names; each name represents a person's life and the piece they played in God's grand scheme. During this period of silence God was orchestrating the political, cultural, and religious settings that would culminate in the perfect situation for the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom message. The last fourteen generations from the exile of the Jews to the birth of Christ would live ordinary lives in turbulent times. Each one playing their part not knowing that they were helping set the stage for the awaking of God's voice.

Matthew 1:18-25 is a simple explanation of the birth of Jesus, but profound in its implications. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23) God with us? Yes, God in flesh and blood. How profound that at the end of Matthew chapter 1 that silence is broken by the cry of a baby.

God, What Have You Done For Me Lately? (Matt. 4:8-11)

By Corey Yake



Matt. 4:8-11: Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

I like to read the part about Angels coming to Jesus and attending him and then get excited about the possibility of that happening for me. Wouldn't that be great! Angels coming and

taking care of me! But the part I forget about is that they came to Jesus after the fact. What I mean is this; Jesus first went into the desert and fasted for 40 days and nights; and then following that intensely uncomfortable experience he was tempted by the devil in all the areas he would have been most weak in! I forget that the Angels only came to him after he had been severely tested and weakened. I forget that the only reason Angels did take care of him was that he underwent intense physical and emotional trauma, trial and testing.

It is amazing to me that angels came directly to Jesus and took care of him. Literally "gave him food to eat"; The God of the universe apparently needed the assistance of angels...

Trials come... they always will. In Luke 4:13; also referring to the temptation of Jesus; he says that the devil left him until an "opportune time"; Meaning that Jesus would face further tempting. Jesus was not exempted from trials, temptation and struggle; so I'm not sure what makes me think I am?

I know the bible says to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well, but I have to shamefully admit that I've spent most of my prayer time asking God to take care of me and seeking stuff; instead of seeking God himself. My prayers have been more like that old Janet Jackson song "God; What have you done for me lately?"

Fortunately God is patient when exposing the evil in my heart; greed, envy, pride, self absorption, arrogance, etc. And he does this primarily through trials and testing..



Conserving the Light?? (Matt. 5:14-16)

By Renee Butler

As I was getting ready this morning, I opened my bathroom window and looked out. It was nice and cool, but very dark. The only light came from our front porch (it's dark at 4am!). I looked to the very edge of our front yard and could barely see the road.

I thought, "It sure is dark out there."

God was speaking to my heart at the same time I thought those words.

The world is a very dark place, and we, as those who love and follow God, light up that dark place.

But why only so little?

That made me smile... I know in our home we are always trying to conserve... trying to save money. Because it's costs us something to have the lights on. It also shows me the places in my house that are in need of cleaning or repair, and sometimes I'm just so tired from the busyness of life that I don't want to deal with it.

And I thought, do I do that with the Light God has placed in me? Do I "conserve" ... not letting it shine as brightly as it could (as it was designed to)? Why? Why have I been conserving that Light?

Because it costs me something.

It costs me something to have the lights on, all the time, in the darkness.

It also exposes things inside me that are in need or cleaning or repair.

But what is all this Light for? For us, yes.... but it's for SO much more! It's like that Bible verse...

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let you light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-16)

Driving to work this morning (in the dark), I noticed all the lights from the homes and cars. I thought, "Man! If all the people who live on this road turned on their lights and all the cars (so, okay, there aren't many cars out at 4:45am) turned their bright lights on... Wow! This place would really be lit up! People would wonder what's going on!"



Reality (Matt. 6:25-34)

By Shawn Murinko

Today's world is one where diseases are being cured like never before. Today's world gives us access to information with just a click of a mouse.

If we are hungry, we no longer have to scour the plains in search of tonight's dinner. Some count these advancements as progress in the sense that our lives are more safe and convenient. However, caught somewhere in the shuffle of the "dot-coms" and the next iPhone, there is Jesus. No modern advancement can take away the realities of everyday. No surgical scalpel can heal the pain inside of my heart. When the check register bleeds red, a financial guru can't put me back in the black. The truth is that many sleepless nights marched through twilight, as I played my own winning scenarios just like a football coach does when

his team is down by a touchdown at the end of the fourth quarter. In essence, I want to call my own shots, be my own hero and lead “Team Shawn” to victory. In doing so, I have given into the very thing that Jesus asks me not to: worry.

Sometimes I forget exactly how much Jesus cares about me and admitting this makes me feel strange. It’s almost as though I exchange the image of the Jesus I know, the man who healed the sick, the man who defied Satan’s temptation and most importantly, the man who saved me from my sin – for a Jesus far different. I instead conjure up an image of some Charlton Heston-type Jesus, angry, aloof and far too busy with the imponderables of world peace and human suffering to concern himself with little, insignificant me.

Thankfully, this passage calls me back to reality. I am reminded of how intimate our Father is and how no detail is too small. The man who breathed all creation into existence does indeed sweat the small stuff; He’s even concerned how the lilies grow! So, the question remains: why do I get consumed with worry at times? Worry is a symptom of the human condition, but the Bible reminds me it is not the cure for my problems –Jesus is.



Seek (Matt. 7:7-8)

By Joel Pettit

Sometimes it is very easy to find a specific passage in scripture on focus on that. But we must remember that every passage is surrounded by other pieces of information that put it in perspective. One of the places in Matthew we might see this is in what we often hear referred to as “The Sermon On the Mount.” Jesus, in Mathew 7:7-8 says “Keep asking and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who keeps asking will

receive, and the person who keeps searching will find, and the person who keeps knocking will have the door opened.” Jesus tells us here that if we seek (search), we will find. But what will we find? Will we always find truth?

Only if we search for it.

Fortunately, Jesus also told us what to search for. He told us that very thing in the very same conversation.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says “But first be concerned about God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all of these things will be provided for you as well.” The world “concerned” means, in Greek, “seek.” It seems that Jesus is telling us that, if we seek God, His Kingdom, and righteousness, we will surely find it.

If we are really looking for Truth, and really looking for God’s will, His plan, and His desires for our heart, we will find it. Jesus has already promised us that. But Truth is sometimes a little scary, and hard to seek. We don’t always want it. But if it is Truth we want, it is Truth we will find. God cannot lie. Give it a try. Look for Truth.



A Funnel... (Matt. 7:13-14)

By Renee Butler

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

We’re all going somewhere... we’re all walking on a path to something.

I heard someone once say that it’s like a big funnel...

If you go through the wide end, it's huge with seemingly so much to do, see and experience. But the further you walk, the tighter and more confining it gets, until there's no room to move and it leads to death.

But if you find the small end and enter it, it feels so confining at first (with reason and purpose – to refine you). The further you walk, the larger the opening and view and possibilities become... until it expands into unending openness!

It makes me think of some of the hikes I've been on... the lower part of the trails being wide and paved and full of people, with the paths to the upper trail not easily seen, and most people just passing them by, choosing to stay on the easier path lower down.

Paths to the upper places are always less travelled and much more difficult. You are often confined to a narrow trail between the tall, view-blocking and dense trees. Yet there is amazing beauty there, if you look!

And as you hike further along, it begins to become lighter and you can see open sky up ahead. Then you break out of the tree line and into the open! That's when your perspective changes. Depending on where you happen to be hiking, you can look down on freeways, on cities, or on forests. From the top of a mountain, nothing stops your view... for as far as the eye can see, in every direction!

It's a funny feeling... having followed a narrow and difficult path to reach the top of a mountain. Not superior, but an amazed awe. Realizing how small I really am and how unfathomably big God is! It always seems to put things back into proper perspective for me! To get there is hard work, and just like verse 14 says, "... only a few find it." I only have a

handful of friends and family that could or would be willing to go on that kind of hike.

If you are willing to follow the narrow, more difficult path... allowing God to refine you as He is stretching and growing your muscles, your view of God will become endless... in every direction of your life... for as far as the eye can see!



“I Desire Mercy Not Sacrifice”

(Matt. 9)

By Corey Yake

In Matthew 9 Jesus is walking along and sees a guys working at his job and he doesn't have just any job; oh no! He works for the IRS! One of the most despised occupations in the county... and for some reason He asks him to be his disciple; his follower, Jesus actually asks Matthew to be a part of his inner circle!

After this Jesus went to Matthew's house for a party. While he was there some of the Pharisee's came and saw him eating with all of these IRS employees and other apparently notorious sinner, undesirable smelly types. And the Pharisees were shocked that he would associate with anyone like that. When Jesus heard what they said he made some seemingly obvious medical comment about only sick people needing a doctor not healthy people? But what he said next the Pharisees found really offensive. (You see the Pharisees had spent most of their lives studying the scripture)

“Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

Later in Matthew chapter 12 Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field on the Sabbath day. His disciples are hungry so they pick some of the grain and eat it and the Pharisees show up again and scold his disciples for “working” on the Sabbath. (The Pharisees are kind of like paparazzi chasing a rock star in this story). Jesus again makes a statement using scripture to teach them:

“You would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ 8 For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!”

Two things that I have come to realize about myself, the first is that I used to love it when Jesus was giving it to the religious types like the Pharisees. But after I had been a Christian for a long time I found that I had a tendency to start acting like one of the Pharisees. I would look down my nose at homeless “bums” when they walked by or I would condemn people around me who were struggling with sin or what I considered “self imposed” problems. The second thing that I realized after I had been a Christian for a while and had gotten to know the bible pretty well is that I became settled and arrogant in my faith. I worked really hard to be a “good person” and avoid sin and sinners at all cost. I felt and acted like I had all the right beliefs and knew all I needed to know. And thus just like the Pharisees I became unteachable and unloving. One day I woke up and realized that I had wandered over into their camp... in opposition to Jesus and his teaching... the very person I claimed to serve. But fortunately Jesus does indeed desire Mercy, and by his grace I have found and am finding my way back to Him. The Pharisees want to be good people, I really believe that, but the problem was that they wanted to be good in their own strength more than they wanted God. So when God came they missed him. So let us all take a lesson from the Pharisees. Don't miss Jesus; he will likely show up in a way you are least expecting.



Compassion: Empathy With Feet (Matthew 14:6-14)

By Sean Boyd

I'm always amazed at Jesus. Scripture shows us chapter by chapter the incarnate (in the flesh) side of Jesus: struggling with loss and betrayal; finding joy in celebrations and human discoveries; processing anger and resisting anxiety. Jesus was filled with compassion, sorrow, joy, and frustration.

Jesus experienced our stuff.

In Matthew 14:6-14 we find out that John the Baptist was murdered by Herod. John was Jesus' cousin, just three months apart. He was also the forerunner for Jesus, announcing that the Messiah/Savior was here, and to get ready. Kind of like a living announcement for the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus finds out that John was murdered, He goes off to be alone, and deal with the heavy amount of grief He was experiencing. The crowds that followed Jesus found out where He was off to, and went after Him for help, healing, and teaching. When Jesus saw them coming, it says that He was filled with compassion, and healed them, even performing a miracle to feed them all!

Now, wait. I can barely handle when I'm having a bad morning, and yet at one of the certifiably real difficult moments of Jesus' life, He's responding to other people's needs. Yikes.

But maybe therein lays the secret: our own personal loss and pain isn't disconnected to the way we can serve others. Jesus didn't let pain prevent His reaching out; instead, it fueled it. He connected to their loss through His own pain, and it motivated His service.

Compassion: empathy with feet.

God, never let me become isolated in my own pain to the exclusion of who you're bringing my way.



Mommas Boys (Matt. 20:20-28)

By Kristy Boyd

Here is a mom setting things up for her boys. I wonder what happened before this. Did the brothers ask her to do it? Did she take matters into her own hands? They must have felt they were doing pretty well as disciples to make such a request. Jesus gently instructs them. He does not embarrass them, but simply tells them the answer. His reply is not quite what they were hoping for. This seems to be the way of Jesus. The mother's request causes some grumbling among the disciples. They probably were mad that the brothers got to him first. Nothing like a mamma looking out for her boys!

I love the paradox that is Jesus. He is both: king and servant, lion and the lamb, merciful and just. It strikes my heart every time to think of him as a servant. That he, as a king, came with a mission to serve. He, giving everything on our behalf, even his life.

In our world today we give honor to the talented, beautiful, smart, or strong. Jesus on the other hand gives honor to humility. It is against our very nature to let others go first. We want the attention, the ease, the clamor. What we need is to know God's love for us and others.

So Jesus gives us a lesson on how to be great. Serve. Don't sit back and be served, but rather get up and serve. Too often our first thought is, "What's in this for me?" Maybe that isn't our first initial thought, but it is an underlying one.

Sean and I went out to dinner the other night, and what impressed me more than the food was the service. After our meal the server offered to watch my leftovers, while I used the restroom. She made a point to open the door for us as we were leaving, and she had a joyful smile that was contagious. She could've easily stood behind her cash register and said goodnight, but she took extra effort to accommodate us. It seems like a small thing, but it made us want to return to a place that has such kind employees.

Who is God placing in your path today? What seat can you give up? What encouraging word can you share? What phone call can be made? Who needs a coat, shoes, or food?

As I write this I can visualize Jesus picking up the towel and taking the most humble of positions as foot washer. The strong and gentle King wipes those sweaty, dirty feet of fickle people and shows us how to live.



Sheep & Goats (Matt. 25)

By Joel Pettit

As I write this I cannot help but stare into my laptop screen as if it were a mirror. I debated within my own mind whether or not to write on this specific topic - it is deep, convicting, and pointed. But I would be wrong - I believe - to not write it.

I speak of Matthew 25:31-46. I suggest you take a moment to read it. Don't take my word for it. I truly believe this is one of the - if not the - focal passages in Matthew.

Here Jesus tells us that, when he returns, all people will be gathered to him. Some will go to eternal life and some to eternal punishment. We must ask ourselves, "What is the

difference between these two groups - the sheep and the goats." Jesus tells us that the difference between the two groups is how they treat Him. And how will we know it's Him?

We won't.

Jesus is the next door neighbor. Jesus is the bum on the street. Jesus is the stranger in the store. Jesus is the server at the restaurant. The way we treat other is exactly how we are treating Jesus. How do I know? He told me so, right there in Matthew. The amazing thing is how consistent Jesus is. When He tells us this toward the end of his ministry, He is telling us exactly what He did at the beginning of His ministry in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who keeps saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom of heaven, but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven."

It seems our choice to follow Christ is demonstrated in our attitude, and Jesus has told us what attitude He requires of us in Matthew 5. I sometimes wonder how I'm doing, how we're doing, how the Church is doing.

- The poor in spirit inherit the kingdom of God but we refuse the beggar on the corner a dollar because "he'd just spend it on booze, anyhow."
- Those who mourn will be given comfort, but we ignore the hurting around us.
- The meek will inherit the earth, but we'll step on anyone for our 15 minutes of fame.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled, but we leave our Bibles on the shelf and let any radio show, TV program, or blog tell us what righteousness should look like.

- Those who are merciful (which, by the way, means "actively compassionate) will receive mercy but we rail against helping others with the tired classic "why should my hard work go to help someone else?"
- The pure in heart will see God, but we revel in broadcasting that celebrates the cruelty of others.
- The peacemakers shall be called sons of God, but we fight amongst ourselves over trivial, unspiritual matters.
- The persecuted inherit the kingdom of heaven, but we justify our persecutions of those who don't think like we do.

Jesus is quite clear throughout the book of Matthew: our love for Him is demonstrated in our love for others. How are we doing?



Hangin' At Macy's With Jesus

(Matt. 26:6-13)

By Sean Boyd

Have you ever walked through the perfume area at Macy's? Whenever I do, I think two things:

1. Will I make it through here without passing out?
2. Why do these perfume gals wear lab coats? Are they perfume scientists?

If you've ever been in a space where just a little perfume has been in the air, you know it. A small dab will linger. So imagine a whole jar! As a woman poured out her perfume on Jesus, the disciples were furious! It should have been used for this, or for that!

Jesus rebukes them. This woman was doing something beautiful and significant to Jesus: anointing Him for His burial. Which

meant that this woman recognized the sacrifice that was coming, and was offering worship to Him.

Does this still happen today? Could it be that when we judge others for what they are doing (or not doing) for God, that we are putting ourselves in the same place as the disciples? The biggest problem the disciples had wasn't their focus (helping others), but idolatry. Their own deeds were the point, not Jesus. And because of that, the power behind their service would be impotent, because it would be self-fueled and self-serving.

When we self-righteously judge our service as superior to others, we've missed it. Our good deeds have become our god. And that's the real waste.

God can always find another jar of perfume; what he wants is our hearts.



What Jesus Did (Matthew 28:18-20)

By Joel Pettit

As I have said before, I struggled with the whole What Would Jesus Do campaign. I realize the concept is well-intentioned, but the idea is severely flawed. In order for us to decide what Jesus would do, we would need to be Jesus. None of us are. By trying to do what Jesus "would do" we set ourselves up for failure. In truth, there are two things we are required to do.

- We must Do What Jesus Said to Do.
- We must Do What Jesus Did.

Jesus himself told us these things. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus says, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continually."

In Matthew 28:18-20 He says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, as you go, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you each and every day until the end of the age."

It is actually a wonderful relief to know that we don't need to figure out Jesus would do. It is enough to know that he told us what to. And he led by example. He asked nothing of us that he did not do Himself.

- Jesus told us to humble ourselves; then he walked to the cross.
- Jesus told us to love our neighbor; then he gave his life for each of us.
- Jesus told us to forgive those who sin against us; then he asked His father to forgive the very people who crucified him.
- Jesus told us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him; then he made that journey first.

If we concern ourselves with doing what Jesus did and what He told us to do, I cannot help but think we will be far too preoccupied to worry about what he would do.