

I

Introduction

Worship in the Gospel of Matthew

ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN brief treatments of the theme of worship in the Gospel of Matthew, a full scale comprehensive treatment has yet to appear.¹ With this book I intend to offer a new and more comprehensive treatment by considering all of the various aspects and dimensions of worship in Matthew.² According to the biblical tradition worship in its broadest sense includes not only acts of cultic, liturgical, or ritualistic worship but the moral or ethical behavior, the obedient service that God desires, which is a predisposition for and complements the various forms of ritualistic worship.³ In this book, then, I will consider both the liturgical or ritual as well as the moral or ethical dimensions of worship in Matthew, a theme that has not been fully appreciated and remains largely underdeveloped.

Worship in Matthew centers around the person of Jesus Christ, characterized as “God with us” (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 7:14) from the beginning of

1. For some brief treatments of worship in Matthew, see Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 81–93; Powell, *God With Us*, 28–61; Powell, “Worship in the Gospel of Matthew,” 3–17; Borchert, *Worship*, 12–23; Boxall, *Matthew*, 3–4.

2. For my treatments of worship in other NT writings, see Heil, *Letters of Paul*; Heil, *Hebrews*; Heil, *James*; Heil, *1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude*; Heil, *Book of Revelation*; Heil, *1–3 John*; Heil, *Gospel of John*.

3. According to Peterson (*Engaging with God*, 70), “from a scriptural point of view, worship involves specific acts of adoration and submission as well as a lifestyle of obedient service. To make this point, it may be helpful to translate words indicating service to God as ‘worship.’ There is always the danger, however, that readers of the English text will then understand such worship purely in cultic terms! The problem for translation and for theology is that the English word ‘worship’ is generally used too narrowly.”

the Gospel. He is the newborn divine King of the Jews (2:2) who becomes the object of reverential worship (2:11; 14:33; 28:9, 17) as well as supplicatory worship (9:18; 15:25; 20:20). Jesus teaches about prayer (6:5–15), about ritualistic worship such as fasting (6:16–18), and about the ethical worship that complements cultic worship (5:23–24; 9:13; 12:7; 23:23). The miraculous healings Jesus performs are “good deeds” that inspire others to acts of doxological worship of God (5:16; 9:8; 15:31). Jesus institutes and promotes such ritualistic or sacramental forms of worship as the Eucharist (26:26–28) and baptism (28:19). Finally, Jesus himself worships God with prayers of thanksgiving (11:25–26) and supplication (26:36–46; 27:46–53), engages in ritualistic worship (3:13–17; 14:19; 15:36; 26:26–30), and performs ethical worship (9:10–13; 12:1–14).

Preliminary Overview of the Theme of Worship in Matthew

The notion of Jesus as “God with us,” which implies that he is worthy to be an object of divine worship, forms a literary inclusion that embraces the entire Gospel of Matthew. At the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus, before his birth, is designated as one whose name they will call Emmanuel, which means “God with us” (1:23). In the final scene of the Gospel the risen Jesus, after being worshiped by women (28:9) and by his disciples (28:17), declares, “I am with you all days, until the end of the age” (28:20).

Within the Gospel various forms of the divine presence of Jesus are indicated. His divine presence is closely associated with the disciples he sends out: “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me [God]” (10:40). Whoever receives a child in the name of Jesus receives Jesus himself (18:5). Where two or three are gathered together for prayer in Jesus’ name, he is there in the midst of them (18:19–20). Most provocatively, Jesus identifies himself with the least of his brothers, so that whatever is done for one of them is done for him (25:40, 45). Thus one may perform what amounts to ethical worship of Jesus by extending merciful care to those with whom he closely identifies himself.

The divine presence of Jesus as “God with us” resonates with the divine presence of God in the temple of Jerusalem as the central place for cultic worship. With Jesus and his disciples whom he allows to satisfy their hunger with work on the sabbath by exemplifying the mercy God desires as the ethical worship that complements cultic worship (“mercy I desire and not [simply] sacrifice” [12:7; cf. 9:13; Hos 6:6]), “something greater than the temple is here” (12:6). As “God with us,” Jesus is not only worthy to be an object of divine worship, but establishes a new “place” for worship that

surpasses the temple. The “place” he establishes, however, is not a building but the community of his followers with whom he is present when they are gathered for prayer (18:19–20), and who are to practice the ethical worship that complements their cultic worship (5:23–24). They are to be God’s communal household of authentic prayer that the Jerusalem temple failed to be (21:13).⁴

The new form of communal worship that Jesus establishes takes place within a new realm of divine power known as the kingdom or rule of heaven/God in contrast to the kingdom or rule of the devil/Satan. After being worshiped as the newborn divine King of the Jews (2:2, 11), Jesus proved to be God’s faithful royal Son when he was tempted by the devil (4:1–11). He began to actualize the kingdom of heaven as the realm for true worship when he resisted with the scriptural word of God the devil’s temptation to worship him on a very high mountain (4:8–9): “Go, Satan, for it is written, ‘the Lord your God shall you worship and him alone shall you serve’ [Deut 6:13]” (4:10). In continuity with John the Baptist (3:2) Jesus went on to announce that the kingdom of heaven has come near (4:17). In contrast to the temptation to worship the devil on a mountain in Galilee the disciples worshiped the risen Jesus (28:16–17), who is “God with us” (1:23; 28:20). Worship in Matthew, then, is all about the true worship that is to take place within the new realm of the kingdom of heaven established by the divine King.

Methodological Presuppositions

I will treat the topic of worship in Matthew by means of a narrative-critical, audience-oriented exegetical methodology.⁵ The focus will be on the responses expected by the implied or ideal audience members, the audience presupposed by the text, as they hear the narrative unfold and develop. With regard particularly to the topic of worship, the narrative presupposes an audience with knowledge of the OT scriptures and of such Jewish religious institutions as the synagogue, temple, Sabbath observance, ritual cleansings, meal fellowship, the Passover feast, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc.⁶ In addition, it can be expected that, as believers, the members of the audience are familiar with such Christian sacramental worship as baptism (28:19) and the Eucharist (26:26–29). I understand the Gospel of Matthew to have been written sometime in the latter half of the first century for a specific

4. Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 59–61.

5. Powell, “Narrative-Critical,” 341–46; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*.

6. Powell, “Readings of Matthew,” 31–51.

community or communities of Christians located somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean region of the Roman empire, but with a general relevance for all Christian believers.⁷

The structure of the Gospel of Matthew is characterized by five major discourses delivered by Jesus during his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, each of which concludes with the same basic formula: “When Jesus finished these words” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The discourses include the sermon on the mount (5–7), the missionary discourse (9:36–11:1), the parables discourse (13:1–53), the community discourse (17:24–19:1), and the eschatological discourse (24–25). The narrative of the ministry of Jesus is preceded by an infancy narrative (1–2) and concludes with the passion, death, and resurrection narratives (26–28).

Accordingly, this book will trace the theme of worship in the Gospel of Matthew under the following headings, which also serve as the titles for the chapters to follow: worshipping the infant King (1–2); foundation for worship in the kingdom of heaven (3–4); teaching about worship in the kingdom of heaven (5–7); inviting people to worship in the kingdom of heaven (8–10); failures to repent and parables for worship in the kingdom of heaven (11–13); worshipping in the kingdom of heaven (14–18); worship and the coming kingdom of heaven (19–25); worshipping the risen King (26–28).

7. For detailed discussions regarding introductory issues for the Gospel of Matthew, see Morris, *Matthew*, 1–17; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1–43; France, *Matthew*, 1–22; Turner, *Matthew*, 1–51; Osborne, *Matthew*, 21–47; Boxall, *Matthew*, 1–13.