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Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth

Aspects of Matthean Discipleship

Part 1 has established that the first three named women of Matthew's Gospel are characterized within their Hebrew narratives not in terms of their sinfulness or scandalous sexual activity but by their virtues of righteousness, faith, and loyalty. This short chapter will argue that righteousness, faith, and loyalty are three central aspects of the Matthean Jesus' teaching in relation to discipleship. It is therefore significant that these themes first appear in the stories of Tamar (righteousness), Rahab (faith and loyalty), and Ruth (loyalty). The naming of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth in the genealogy highlights and anticipates the importance of these themes as key virtues for Matthew. No attempt will be made to address fully each theme; my purpose is simply to outline the contours of these three virtues in Matthew's Gospel and to demonstrate that all three are key aspects of Matthean discipleship, before drawing conclusions about Matthew's construal of Christian identity. Consequently, it will be shown that there is an intertextual thematic coherence to the readings of the narratives of Tamar, Rahab and Ruth and also to some of Matthew's distinct key themes. Semantically, loyalty translates into the word "mercy" in Greek so the three topics under consideration will be righteousness, faith, and mercy.

Righteousness in Matthew¹

Part 1 chapter 3 established that Tamar's story in Genesis 38 revolves around an exploration of what it is to be righteous. It has been argued that her story demonstrates that to be righteous has primarily ethical rather than forensic dimensions. Tamar is characterized in Genesis 38 as a woman who acted righteously in relation to those with whom she was in kinship relationship. A similar emphasis can be found in the Matthean teaching on righteousness. Her naming in the introductory genealogy is an indication of what it is to be righteous and that the exercise of righteousness as a theme may well be important in the ongoing gospel narrative. In her story the dramatic force of the narrative also revolves around a reversal of expectations of where righteousness is to be found; this is another theme that is picked up in Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount.

What it means to live righteously is a key concept in Matthew's Gospel. Overman comments, "Righteousness' emerges as the all-embracing notion for the actions, behavior, and disposition of the disciples and followers of Jesus."² At first glance, the theme of righteousness, δικαιοσύνη, might not seem of great importance since the term only occurs seven times.³ However, frequency of use does not directly correlate to the importance of the concept for Matthew. On each occasion use of the noun δικαιοσύνη is distinctive to Matthew's Gospel. Before looking at each usage of the noun δικαιοσύνη, mention will be made of the usage of the adjective

1. A full discussion of the theme of righteousness in Matthew is beyond the remit of this thesis. A much fuller treatment is provided by Przybylski in his book *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* where he sets out to establish the meaning of both righteousness and the righteous in Matthew's Gospel. However, he rejects the notion that this thesis is based on, that the Old Testament provides the interpretative key to understanding Matthew. Instead, in order to investigate righteousness terminology, he turns to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the tannaitic literature. He concludes that Matthew's concept of righteousness reflects the contemporary Jewish notion that the righteous are those who live in such a way so as to meet the demands God places on them to live according to the law. His overall argument is unconvincing because it is based on a faulty premise and does not do justice to a number of passages in Matthew, particularly Matt 5:6 and 6:33 in which the righteousness to be hungered for ultimately comes from God and is based on God's righteousness. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*.

2. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*, 92.

3. Matt 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32.

δίκαιος and the verb δικαίω in Matthew's Gospel that together constitute the Matthean righteousness terminology.⁴

The corresponding adjective δίκαιος occurs more frequently (17 times) than the noun. As we have seen, it describes Joseph (Matt 1:19) in connection with his merciful intentions to divorce Mary quietly. It is often used of those who are praised by Jesus for their upright, righteous behavior but in the following examples Jesus does not elaborate on the content of such behavior (Matt 10:41; 13:17; 13:43; 13:49; 23:35). Elsewhere Jesus clarifies the strongly ethical content of what it is to be righteous. To be righteous is to love your enemies (Matt 5:44–45) and to care for those in need (Matt 25:37, 46). It is also used as a term of contrast, those who are righteous are compared to those who are unrighteous (Matt 5:45) or evil (Matt 13:41–43, 49). The verb δικαίω occurs twice (Matt 11:19; 12:37) and in both cases carries the sense of “to justify.” The first example (Matt 11:19, cf. Luke 7:35) is of particular interest. When accused of gluttony, drunkenness, and mixing with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus argues that wisdom is shown to be right, is justified, and vindicated by her deeds. Jesus' act of wisdom in reaching out to those on the margins challenges the conventional wisdom of the religious teachers on what constitutes righteous behavior. However, it is the seven examples of the noun δικαιοσύνη, used exclusively in Matthew's Gospel, that are decisive in determining the contours of Matthew's thought on righteousness.

John the Baptist is described by Jesus as the one “who came to you in [the] way of righteousness” (Matt 21:32). It is clear from John's preaching that his awareness of the coming kingdom of heaven led to his call for repentance and baptism. This would set people on the path of a restored relationship with God resulting in a changed lifestyle, in other words, the way of righteousness. It is John who heralds and prepares the way for Jesus' ministry. The essence of John's message, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt 3:2), is repeated verbatim in Matthew's summary of Jesus' preaching (Matt 4:17). Matthew's presentation of the two men in similar terms emphasizes that they stand in close relationship to one another.⁵ In speaking of John, Jesus speaks of his own ministry. He too will show the way of righteousness.

The first words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel, and therefore of special significance, persuade John to baptize because “it is proper for us

4. The group of words δικαιοσύνη, δίκαιος, δικαίω are the equivalent to the Hebrew terminology עֲדָקָה and צְדָקָה describing righteousness.

5. Further examples are given in Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 289.

in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). The word “fulfill” is fraught with resonance because of its use in the formula quotations and in the key passage of Matthew 5:17–20, where Jesus says he has come to fulfill the law and the prophets. Jesus in his person and actions is bringing to a fulfillment all that was anticipated in the old dispensation of the law and prophets. Implied in his words to John is the notion that righteousness involves obedience to God’s will. In identifying himself with the many Israelites who came seeking a baptism of repentance Jesus fulfills the righteousness to which God calls him. In his relationship with others and in his total obedience to God Jesus, throughout the Gospel, continues to model what it is to live a righteous life. As he goes to his death Jesus is named once again as a “righteous man” (Matt 27:19). Consequently, Jesus’ righteousness is defined initially and at the conclusion and climax of his mission in terms of his willingness to be fully identified with those to whom he ministered in obedience to the will of his Father. Just as he fulfills all righteousness, he in turn calls his disciples to a life of righteousness.

It is in the first set of discourse material, as Jesus addresses his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, that righteousness, as an aspect of discipleship, emerges as a key theme. It is within this sermon that the other instances of δικαιοσύνη all fall.

The fourth beatitude reads, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6). This corresponds to Luke’s second beatitude, “Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied” (Luke 6:21). What is significant is Matthew’s addition of what is to be hungered for—righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). This signals that righteousness is an important and distinctive concept in Matthew. In the same way, whereas the Lukan Jesus instructs his disciples to “seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Luke 12:31), in Matthew the phrase “and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33) is added. All those who are seeking God’s kingdom must above all else seek for his righteousness. The righteous are the merciful (Matt 5:7), the pure in heart (Matt 5:8), and the peacemakers (Matt 5:9). For this and other marks of righteousness Jesus warns his followers they will suffer but in their suffering they will be blessed, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10).

Both of Jesus’ sayings in Matthew 5:6 and 6:33 indicate that God’s righteousness is a gift to be sought for and received. Yet elsewhere in the sermon, notably in Matthew 5:17–20, it is required and demanded of disciples that in following Jesus they must act righteously in keeping with the

commandments of the law (Matt 5:18–19). The tension between the two is maintained by the Matthean Jesus, the virtue of righteousness is both a gift from God and to be lived out in obedience to God's commands. These verses (Matt 5:18–19), which have no parallels in the other Gospels, are foundational for Matthew's understanding of righteousness; Jesus talks about a righteousness that exceeds that of the teachers of the law, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). Although the religious leaders practice a form of righteousness, it is inadequate and misdirected. Fundamental to Jesus' criticism of their righteousness is that it is an outward display, "They do all their deeds to be seen by others" (Matt 23:5). Their hypocrisy lies in the fact that their outward public deeds of righteousness do not match up to their interior life (Matt 23:2, 27–29). The higher righteousness Jesus calls for is an advance on both the text of the Torah and traditional interpretations of it. Each of the six points of the law (or traditional interpretations of it) are to do with human interpersonal relationships: anger and reconciliation (Matt 5:21–26), adultery (Matt 5:27–30), divorce (Matt 5:31–32), speaking with integrity (Matt 5:33–37), retaliation (Matt 5:38–42), love for enemies (Matt 5:43–48). Jesus enumerates how his followers should live *in relation to others* through upholding the Torah but redefines what is asked of the disciple in terms of not only their outward action but also their interior life. Nevertheless it is important to note that "The controlling interest is not 'righteousness' *per se*, but being a disciple, which means above all to 'follow' Jesus."⁶ Barton's insight is an important reminder that all Jesus' teaching on righteousness must be seen in the context of his call to discipleship.

Underlying Jesus' teaching is a call to a loving response to others, spelt out in the final antithesis where disciples are called to love their enemies (Matt 5:44). A righteous life also involves acts of righteousness towards God envisaged in the three traditional elements of Jewish piety: alms giving, prayer, and fasting (Matt 6:1–18). But Jesus warns that one should not practice one's [acts of] righteousness before others in order to be seen by them (Matt 6:1). The higher righteousness to which Jesus calls his disciples can ultimately only be given as a gift from their heavenly Father as disciples enter into a right relationship with him. Yet the practice of righteousness in daily life is something to which they must aspire, seeking to be perfect and complete (τέλειος) as God is perfect (Matt 5:48).

6. Barton, *Discipleship*, 149.

Later in the Gospel, in summarizing the law, Jesus calls his disciples to love God first and foremost, flowing from which comes the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37–39). The importance of the love command to be manifest ethically in the life of the disciple is underlined in the final parable of the fifth and final eschatological discourse (Matt 25:31–46) when those on the king’s right are called righteous (δίκαιος) (Matt 25:37) and are praised for their practical care for the “least of my brothers” in need. Righteousness must be a demonstrable feature of those who believe in Jesus. It must be lived out in human relationships, in generosity towards others.

Tellingly, Jesus warns the chief priests and elders that the tax collectors and prostitutes will lead the way in the kingdom of God, “the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him” (Matt 21:31–32). Not only does Jesus redefine the meaning of righteousness, he turns upside-down expectations of where and in whom righteousness might be found. The inclusion of Tamar in the genealogical annotations recalls for the attentive reader her story; a woman in whom righteousness was found and whose story anticipates this important theme in Matthew’s Gospel.

Faith in Matthew

In his essay “On the essence of being a disciple” Barth highlights faith as one of the virtues “which are essential to the making of a disciple in Matthew.”⁷ The first indication that faith is important to discipleship comes in Jesus’ address to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. In a section on anxiety over the essentials of life—food and clothing, Jesus reprimands them for their lack of faith in God’s ability to take care of them, “you of little faith” (ὀλιγόπιστοι) (Matt 6:30). Worry and anxiety are characteristic among people of little faith. Faith is not intellectual assent to a set of teachings but is defined as a quality of trustfulness that is to be directed towards their heavenly Father. Jesus calls his disciples to put their trust in the provision of their heavenly Father who knows all their needs (Matt 6:32). Faith, in this instance, firstly involves recognition of God’s willingness and ability to provide for their basic needs. Secondly, faith requires

7. Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding,” 105.

placing their trust in their heavenly Father that he will do so. The Father/child relationship is the basis for a life of discipleship.

The issue of faith is not raised again until chapters 8–9. It is in the context of Jesus' ministry to those on the margins that the faith of individuals comes to the fore. In fact, half of all Matthew's references to faith occur in these two chapters where the faith of individuals seeking healing is a key component in the stories as told by Matthew.⁸ The first person to be praised for their faith in Jesus' healing power is not one of the disciples but a Roman centurion whose faith is demonstrated in his request to Jesus, "only speak the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matt 8:8). Jesus is amazed that such faith should be found not within Israel but from an outsider, "In no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Matt 8:10).

The theme of faith in chapters 8–9 continues with the healing of the paralyzed man (Matt 9:1–8). Jesus responds to the man's need of forgiveness having seen the faith of those who brought him (Matt 9:2). In the healing of the two blind men (Matt 9:27–31) Jesus probes them with a question to discover the depth of their faith, on which basis he restores their sight. Sandwiched between these two stories is the story of a ruler who trusts in Jesus to restore life to his daughter (Matt 9:18–19, 23–26) and a woman whose faith has to overcome her understandable reticence to be seen to reach out and touch Jesus (Matt 9:20–22). Jesus recognizes this and responds to her faith with healing, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well" (Matt 9:22). Faith in each case is directed towards Jesus. It is an active reaching out after his mercy and help. In chapters 8–9 those in need, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, consistently demonstrate this kind of faith in their positive response towards Jesus. It is the kind of faith demonstrated by Rahab in the God of Israel and it is the faith for which Jesus seeks in those who would follow him.

It is notable that the one miracle that does not involve healing in these two chapters focuses in particular on the low level of faith among Jesus' disciples in a life threatening situation (Matt 8:23–27). The disciples are identified more specifically as the inner male group of twelve in Matthew 10:1, where a definite distinction is made between "the disciples" and "the crowds" who have also followed Jesus (Matt 4:25) and listened to his teaching (Matt 7:28). Here this inner group of disciples are rebuked by Jesus in the storm. Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

8. In his redactional study of the miracle stories in Matthew, Held has demonstrated that sayings about faith form the statement content and climax to the healing miracles in Matthew. See Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 284–91.

(ὀλιγόπιστοι) (Matt 8:26) before he goes on to demonstrate his authority over the wind and waves. Bornkamm's famous redaction-critical study of this passage notes that, whereas in Mark (Mark 4:35–41) and Luke (Luke 8:22–25) Jesus first calms the storm and then deals with the disciples' lack of faith, in Matthew's account Jesus challenges their lack of faith before he meets their need. "Before the elements are brought to silence, thus in the midst a mortal threat, the word of Jesus goes forth to the disciples and puts them to shame for their little faith."⁹ The disciples' lack of faith then becomes central to the miracle. Bornkamm goes on to note that the expression ὀλιγοπιστία is a favorite word of Matthew's. Apart from one reference in Luke 12:28 he is the only gospel writer to use it (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). Among Jesus' disciples "it always denotes a faith that is too weak, that is paralyzed in the storm (8.26; 14.31) and in anxiety (6.30; 16.8)."¹⁰ The narrative arrangement of the sequence of events in chapters 8–9 ensures that the little faith of the disciples in the storm stands in contrast to the faith of two individuals on the margins. In two pericopes that precede and follow the stilling of the storm Jesus praises the great faith of the centurion (Matt 8:13) and the faith of the hemorrhaging woman (Matt 9:22). Faith, it seems, is not the preserve of the religious insider, in fact quite the opposite. Those on the margins are people of faith, while Jesus' inner group of disciples are "ones of little faith" who, when in need, are unable fully to trust him to save. The surprising reversal of expectations of where and in whom faith is to be found has been foreshadowed in Rahab's story in which can be seen an anticipation of this theme.

Jesus reprimands his disciples for their lack of faith specifically on three more occasions: when Peter attempts to walk on the water (Matt 14:31); when they doubt Jesus' ability to provide bread (Matt 16:8) and when they have been unable to heal (Matt 17:14–20). On this last occasion, Jesus replies that their failure to heal is "Because of your little faith" (Matt 17:20). The disciple's lack of faith is typical of their faithless (ἄπιστος) generation (Matt 17:17), yet, unlike others, they do have faith, they have followed Jesus thus far. Jesus strongly implies that their "little faith" is immature and needs to grow. He goes on to indicate that in comparison to their minuscule faith, only the tiniest amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed, is needed to move mountains (Matt 17:20). A similar saying is attributed to Jesus in Matthew 21:21. Both sayings are again prefaced by the formula that stresses the importance of what Jesus is about to say,

9. Bornkamm, "Stilling of the Storm," 56.

10. Ibid.

“Truly I say to you,” and both deal with the problem of seemingly impossible requests and unanswered prayer. In this case, the image used by Jesus is not simply of moving mountains but complete mountain removal! All things are possible if they have faith and do not doubt (μὴ διακριθῆτε) (Matt 21:21). Here faith is defined in opposition to doubt, the force of the Greek διακριθῆτε in the middle voice is to hesitate or be in two minds rather than a reference to intellectual doubt.¹¹ Consequently, the faith the Matthean Jesus seeks for is single-minded and of clear intent.

Several aspects of what has been observed in connection with the theme of faith converge in the story of the Canaanite woman. She also shows outstanding faith in Jesus when in need and is the only person outside chapters 8–9 whom Jesus praises for their faith. The discussion of her story in chapter 9 will demonstrate the tenacity of her faith, which, it will be suggested, like Rahab’s faith, is in line with the faith of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses in challenging divinity, as well as reflecting the Psalmists’ cry for mercy. As a Gentile, in her manner of faith she behaves like a devout Jew, as Rahab did. In her appeal to Jesus as the Son of David she is “in effect confessing him to be the Messiah sent to Israel.”¹² Her persistent, importunate faith in Jesus ultimately brings healing for her daughter. Read as intertexts the two Canaanite women bring to the fore the exceptional faith of the outsider.

The final reference to faith in Matthew’s Gospel comes when Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting “justice, mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23). Significantly, in the parallel saying in Luke Jesus accuses them of neglecting “justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42) but neither mercy nor faith is mentioned. Carter summarizes the faith that Jesus demands here as an “openness to Jesus which seeks his power, trusting it to overcome obstacles and transform situations of need.”¹³ While this is a good definition of the faith of those supplicating Jesus, in this instance, I concur with France who suggests that here the meaning is more likely to be faithfulness to God’s requirements in line with the justice and mercy required of them.¹⁴ Similarly, Nolland suggests that Micah 6:8 be read as an intertext to this verse, since it also has a list of three items. The first two, justice and mercy parallel Matthew’s list in which case faith would be

11. It is to be distinguished from the verb διατάζω that is elsewhere used of doubt in Matthew’s Gospel (cf. Matt 14:31; 28:17).

12. Kingsbury, “Title ‘Son of David,’” 591.

13. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 459.

14. France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 873–74.

analogous to “walk humbly with your God.”¹⁵ This would support France’s contention and is probably the most helpful reading in this context. Faith here represents a faithfulness that is an ongoing ethical requirement of the disciple in much the same way as the ongoing ethical requirement for a life characterized by justice (which is another aspect of righteousness) and mercy. The call for faithful living points to another aspect of discipleship emphasized in Matthew. Faith is only one side of the equation; faith must be worked out in practice, it must be manifest in action. It is actions that will expose the authenticity of faith. Jesus warns his disciples that “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Matt 7:21). Obedience to the Father in doing his will is the evidence of faith in the life of the disciple. Jesus identifies his family of disciples as those who do the will of his Father in heaven. “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt 12:50). It is the concern of the Lord’s prayer that his disciples request that the Father’s will be put into effect (Matt 6:10b) and it is a theme that is picked up again in the parable of the father who asks his two sons to work in the vineyard, which is only recorded by Matthew (Matt 21:28–32). Of the two sons it is not verbal compliance that matters but the one who did the will of his father who is praised. Tellingly it is on this basis that Jesus explains that those on the margins, the tax collectors and prostitutes, will go into the kingdom of God ahead of his listeners, the chief priests and elders (Matt 21:32).

To summarize: faith is a fundamental aspect of discipleship in Matthew. Jesus looks for a response of faith among all those who come to him for help. In Matthew’s Gospel, characteristically it is those on the margins, women and the outsiders who believe and respond in faith to Jesus, whereas his disciples often lack faith. This reversal of expectations, where faith is found where least expected, has been anticipated in Rahab the prostitute’s narrative where her surprising faith in YHWH contrasts with the noticeable lack of faith in the spies. Her faith anticipates the kind of faith Jesus seeks among those who would follow him. It is a faith that reaches out to God, trusting that in his mercy he will respond to those in need. Significantly, Rahab’s faith is also a faith that is manifest through action in the demonstration of practical mercy towards others; in Matthean terms she does the will of the Father.

15. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 938.

Mercy in Matthew

Whereas Tamar's story illustrates the theme of righteousness, Rahab and Ruth's stories focus on the theme of loyalty (ἰσχύς). It is significant therefore that, like righteousness, mercy is a closely related theme that receives particular attention in Matthew's Gospel. It could be argued that the twin concepts of righteousness and mercy summarize the essence of the ethical outworking of what it is to do the will of the Father.¹⁶ The Matthean Jesus teaches on the importance of demonstrating mercy to others on a number of occasions. This important and distinctive Matthean theme has been foreshadowed in the genealogy by the naming of Rahab and Ruth. The stories of Rahab and Ruth not only foreshadow the importance of mercy as a theme, they illustrate a principle of mercy that is reflected by the Matthean Jesus; mercy given to others results in mercy received. Rahab and Ruth's stories point not only to the reciprocal nature of mercy in human relationships but also to the theological dimensions of a God who is merciful and who responds in mercy towards those who show mercy to others.

Unparalleled in the other Gospels, it is only the Matthean Jesus who speaks of God's mercy and his desire for mercy in the lives of those who follow him. The noun ἔλεος occurs three times in the sayings of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, twice in Jesus' polemical response to the Pharisees (Matt 9:13; 12:7) and once in Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:23). The adjective ἐλεήμων describes those who are blessed (Matt 5:7) and the verb ἐλεέω is the action called for by the king in the parable of the unjust servant (Matt 18:33).

In Matthew's Gospel the concept of mercy is based on the premise that God is a merciful God; this is demonstrated in the actions of the Messiah towards those in need. On a number of occasions those who come seeking help from Jesus echo the Psalmist's cry for mercy (Matt 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30, 31). As the merciful Messiah, Jesus interacts with those around him seeking help. In turn, Jesus highlights the need for others to practice mercy. "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy" (Matt 5:7).¹⁷ The call for mercy is linked back to God's own merciful ways. Although in this saying the future passive (ἐλεήμονος) implies that the emphasis of Jesus' words is not on how other people will respond to the person who is

16. Edin convincingly argues that "in Matthew's Gospel, to be righteous is to show mercy." Edin, "Learning What Righteousness Means," 356. Certainly mercy in Matthew can be identified as an aspect of righteousness, just as righteous behavior towards others is considered to be an aspect of ἰσχύς in Hosea 6.

17. This saying is not included in the parallel passage in Luke 6:20–23.

merciful but on how they will be rewarded in the future by God, elsewhere in the sermon Jesus makes clear that there is a human response to mercy that responds to like with like, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt 7:12).

Twice in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 9:13; 12:7) Jesus quotes words from Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” The citation of Hosea’s words by Jesus is unique to Matthew’s Gospel. The citation does not occur in the two parallel passages in Mark and Luke that also describe Jesus’ dispute with religious leaders,¹⁸ nor does this citation occur elsewhere in the New Testament, indicating that it is particularly important to Matthew, the implied author.

Within the Hosea passage contrast is made between Israel’s חסד that is transient, like the morning mist that burns off with the sunrise (Hos 6:4), and the steadfast constant חסד love that YHWH desires, “for I desire loyalty (חסד) and not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6). Israel’s loyalty must be founded on the knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God Israel’s actions are not characterized by mercy towards her fellow Israelites; on the contrary her behavior becomes evil, “There is no faithfulness or loyalty (חסד) and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed” (Hos 4:1–2). By contrast, the love that God requires must be constant in duration and merciful in the treatment of others. Israel’s love is not חסד because it is short lived and is not characterized by mercy.¹⁹

Hosea’s words are a key prophetic principle. Mercy, declares the prophet, is of far higher value than ritual sacrifice and religious observance, it is fundamental to covenant loyalty. Twice Jesus quotes this principle when in dispute with the Pharisees over their judgment of others.

The first citation of Hosea 6:6 occurs in the context of Jesus’ call of Matthew the tax collector (Matt 9:9–13), “a typical act, expressive of God’s mercy among the marginal and constitutive of a new community.”²⁰ The Pharisees witness Jesus eating with Matthew and “many tax collectors and sinners” (Matt 9:10). Criticism is implicit in the Pharisees’ question put to Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matt 9:11). Jesus himself answers the question put to his disciples, starting with a proverb that uses the analogy of a doctor with sick

18. The parallel passage to Matt 9:9–13 is Mark 2:13–17, where the quotation from Hosea is missing. It is also missing from Jesus’ words in the passages in Mark 2:23–28 and Luke 6:1–6 that parallel Matt 12:1–8.

19. Edin, “Learning What Righteousness Means,” 359.

20. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 219.

patients. In his reply he cites Hosea 6:6, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’. For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Matt 9:12–13). The practice of mercy, of kindness and generosity towards others, is of much higher importance than religious observance or outward show of piety; it involves welcoming all, especially those on the margins who are “sick” and in need of help and deliverance. In citing Hosea 6:6 Jesus indicates that although the Pharisees consider themselves to be righteous it is not true righteousness because it lacks mercy. In their opposition to Jesus’ eating with tax collectors and sinners they betray their exclusionary attitude towards others. They neither understand nor are able to embrace the inclusive action of Jesus eating with those on the margins of society, which is a manifestation of the mercy and love of God.

The second citation (Matt 12:7) also comes in a polemical response to the Pharisees’ criticism. This time their criticism is directed towards Jesus’ disciples for picking and eating grain on the sabbath because they were hungry and therefore “doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath” (Matt 12:2). In his reply Jesus states that their understanding of the law is inadequate (Matt 12:4–5). The Pharisees’ condemnation of the guiltless disciples rests on a legalistic interpretation of the law that involved a rigid compliance. This was because, more fundamentally, their understanding of Jesus’ identity is inadequate too, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (Matt 12:6). With no knowledge of God their religious observance, like those in Israel at the time of Hosea, is without mercy and without understanding of what is at the heart of what God desires, “If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’, you would not have condemned the innocent” (Matt 12:7). What is of primary importance to God is his desire for mercy, in this case the provision to meet the basic human need of hunger.

Jesus warns that there are dire consequences for those who do not respond to God’s mercy with mercy towards others. Jesus tells the parable, unique to Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 18:23–35), of a king who exhibits mercy towards his servant who is in his debt, “out of pity for him, the lord of the slave released him and forgave him the debt” (Matt 18:27). Although released by the king from his large debt, the servant himself refuses to forgive the minor debts of his fellow servant. The king responds, “Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave as I had mercy on you?” (Matt 18:33). The king, representative of God, demands the practice of mercy in response to the gratuitous mercy shown. The servant who lacks mercy is called wicked (Matt 18:32).

In summary, Jesus calls his disciples and the religious leaders to practice mercy. This involves the inclusion of all those on the margins, just as Jesus himself showed friendship to “tax-collectors and sinners” (Matt 11:19). The outworking of mercy should be further seen, for example, in the justice of provision of food for the hungry and forgiveness for fellow human beings. Themes of mercy have been explored both in the stories of Canaanite Rahab and Moabite Ruth. Both Gentile women demonstrate mercy to those in need (the spies and Naomi) and in turn receive mercy from others (Joshua and Boaz) and ultimately from God. The rhetoric of the ongoing text of the Gospel suggests that this is one reason for Matthew’s inclusion of these two women in his genealogical annotations.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the idea that the virtues that characterized the first three named women in Matthew’s genealogy are some of the key virtues that the Matthean Jesus seeks for among those who would follow him. Given that justice is synonymous with righteousness, these three key components of discipleship are enumerated by the Matthean Jesus when he criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting the more “weightier matters of the law” (Matt 23:23). Weightier or heavier refers to the essentials, what is really important. The scribes and Pharisees should have practiced “justice, mercy, and faith” (Matt 23:23). Love notes that for Matthew these themes “become for him evaluative criteria for community life governed by the kingdom of heaven . . . The three matters viewed together amplify Matthew’s meaning of the highest commandment of love.”²¹

Faith is portrayed as an active reaching out to Jesus trusting that in his mercy he will transform situations of need; it is often those on the margins who respond with such faith. Faith is an important element both in the healing miracles and also in Jesus’ teaching directed towards his disciples from whom he seeks for a response of faith and a life of faithfulness; a faith that is manifest in doing the will of the Father. Doing the will of the Father, in Matthean terms, can be summarized by Jesus’ call to his disciples to lead a life of “higher righteousness.” The virtue of righteousness is central to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and is used by the Matthean Jesus as an all embracing term to describe both the outward actions and interior life that should characterize the disciple. The virtue of mercy, an

21. Love, *Jesus and Marginal Women*, 235.

outworking of what it is to be righteous, is also considered to be of great ethical importance; it is at the heart of what God desires and is manifest in the inclusive practice of Jesus.

Matthew has named Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth in the genealogy to draw their stories as intertexts into the story of Jesus. The effect of these stories is to foreshadow these three important themes in Jesus' teaching, themes that are descriptors of discipleship in Matthew and point towards the construal of a new identity for the people of God. It is therefore of significance for Matthew's rhetoric concerning the identity of the group of disciples that Jesus will gather to himself that the individuals that demonstrate these virtues are not Jewish male patriarchs but women who are on the margins both ethnically and socially. This calls into question some of the traditional boundaries that gave Israel identity, boundaries of race, social and religious status, and patriarchy. Read as intertexts to Matthew's Gospel it has been noted that Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth's stories indicate that their presence in Messiah's ancestry is subversive of Israel's identity on these three levels. This has implications for three groups of people whom, it will be argued, are significant in Matthew's narration of Jesus' story: those on the margins in Israel, Gentiles, and women. Chapters 9 and 10 will explore the importance of these groups in Matthew's Gospel.