

Emily J. Choge - "I WAS A STRANGER
AND YOU WELCOMED ME

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NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

"I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME. . .": JESUS'
TEACHING ON HOSPITALITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MATTHEW 25:31-46

BY

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Abstract

Hospitality was valued in ancient Israel and it was enshrined in the Mosaic legislation. In first century Judaism, it was continued positively in the institutions of the Sabbath meal, the Synagogue and the travelling pairs of teachers who depended on the hospitality of their students. Negatively, restrictions were introduced in the enforcement of purity or cleanness laws intended to exclude those who did not qualify. These rules were strictly observed by the Essenes and the Pharisees. However, Jesus demonstrated a very inclusive ministry both in his teaching and interactions. In his teaching couched in the apocalyptic imagery in Matt. 25:31-46, he shows that hospitality will be the mark of identification for those who will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom. The apocalyptic element shows that the teaching was given in the context of hardships and persecutions for these early Christians. In his interactions Jesus showed an open attitude to those who were left out of the covenant community, the Gentile Centurion and his servant (Matt. 8:5-13), the Canaanite woman and her daughter (Matt. 15:21-28), and the tax collector, Matthew and his friends (Matt. 9:9-13). The church in Africa today finds it difficult to practise hospitality because of Socio-economic hardships, growing insecurity, the influence of modernization and the lack of guidance due to the breakdown traditional values. Jesus' teaching can inform our situation because it arose out of a similar context.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents

The Rev. Job A. Choge and Mary Jelagat Choge

They Welcomed me into their home and introduced me
to the hospitality of God

Acknowledgements

This work has not been possible without the contribution and cooperation of many people. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ngewa for his continued meticulous supervision of my work in his quiet, gentle, prodding and encouraging manner. I thank Mrs. Sim for her useful and thought-provoking comments. I thank Dr. Wood, who has been my mentor, stretching me beyond the limits, teaching me how to read by introducing me to Adler, and for encouraging me to learn to use the computer so that I could do my own work. My thanks also go to Prof. Hannah W. Kinoti who graciously accepted to be my external reader at the last minute and who has contributed a lot to the final shape of the work. Dr. P. J. Johnston also deserves mention because he helped me to get some of the material for this work. All in all, I appreciate all the faculty, staff and students of NEGST for the prayer support and the encouraging smiles that have given me the courage even when the going was tough. My appreciation also goes to my six "senior, saved, sanctified, satisfied, single sisters," Ruth, Priscilla, Joyce, Noel, Jean, and Laura, who let me present this paper to them prior to the defence so that I could organise my thoughts after which they gave valuable comments which have been incorporated in this paper. Last but not least my deep gratitude also goes to Block G. fellowship and the single sisters' fellowship among whom I have enjoyed wonderful hospitality. I thank God for you all.

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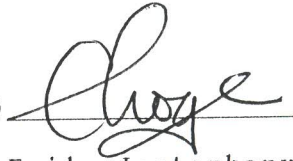
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Student's Declaration Form

"I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME...": JESUS'
TEACHING ON HOSPITALITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MATTHEW 25:31-46.

I declare that this is my original work and has not
been submitted to any other College or University for
academic credit

(Signed)



Emily Jeptepkeny Choge

Date

23/6/97

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me..": Jesus' Teaching on Hospitality with Special Reference to Matthew 25:31-46.

Statement of the Problem

One of the traditional values accepted and practised all over the world¹ is hospitality. The Hebrew Scriptures do not have a word for the concept of hospitality, but the activity is evident throughout the Old Testament and more particularly in the Patriarchal narratives and in the historical books. This practice is reinforced by the favourable attitude extended to the stranger or the alien in the Mosaic legislation,² for example,

"You shall not oppress or wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Ex.22:21)

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33-34).

¹In his article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Koenig gives a survey of the forms of hospitality practised by various religious traditions in the world. He also presents a good bibliography for non-Christian religions. Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), s.v. "Hospitality" John Koenig, 470-473.

²Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 34. She says that none of the Mesopotamian legal collections mention anything about how an alien was to be treated.

In the New Testament and the LXX the word most associated with hospitality is *Xenos* which literally means stranger foreigner or even 'enemy'.³ The one who receives visitors is said to be *philoxenos*, 'a lover of strangers' or to be practising the virtue of *philoxenia*. Just as it was expected of the people of God in the Old Testament to show hospitality to the alien, the church is reminded not to neglect *philoxenia* (Heb. 13:2).

However, in the modern world with its ever increasing pressures of life, the move towards individualistic lifestyles, the high cost of living and the tightening of immigration rules by most governments, hospitality is a virtue that is on the verge of extinction. Koyama Kosuke, a professor of Ecumenics and World Christianity at Union Theological Seminary New York, tells us that the College's Handbook of 1992 opens with a chapter on community security which says,

Never open your door to someone you do not recognize. Even if your door is self locking your apartment will not be safe unless you use the key to turn the dead-bolt.⁴

Hoffmann also reports that in the refugee-receiving countries there is

an increasing restrictive policy against asylum seekers and a growing xenophobia due to economic recession and unemployment, both resulting in a vicious circle within which a xenophobic public opinion influences more public

³ John Koenig, "Hospitality" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 299.

⁴ Koyama Kosuke, " 'Extend Hospitality to Strangers' - A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*," in *IRM* 82 (July, 1993), 283.

restrictive legislation, which again influences public opinion.⁵

One might expect a better situation in Africa but the picture is even more grim, especially in the urban areas. The ever rising violence, wars, famines and natural catastrophes, have meant that the victims are dependent on the hospitality of the neighbouring countries. But how is this possible in the face of heavy economic debt to the IMF and the World Bank, the glaring poverty of their own citizens, the continuing influx of refugees, the growing hostile attitude towards strangers evidenced by the "Mbwa Kali"⁶ residences and the tribal clashes? One recent report⁷ indicates that in Kenya, in one refugee camp alone, there are 47,000 refugees and the kind of life they live is hopeless. This camp has been relegated to the driest and most inaccessible parts of Kenya. But this may be on a large scale. What about the ordinary person on the street, the

⁵ Gerhard Hoffman, "Solidarity with the stranger as Part of the Mission of the Church," in *IRM* 78 (Jan. 89), 53. See also Chris Wright, "Who is my Neighbour?" in the editorial of *Themelios* 16 (April/May 1991), 3. He laments a world where children are told to say no to the stranger.

⁶ A Kiswahili word meaning fierce dog. It is a common sign on the gates of most of the affluent residences in Nairobi, especially in Karen, Muthaiga and Lavington areas. It is meant to keep off any undesirable elements from getting to the houses.

⁷ Wordofa Shilesha, "Idle Zoo," in *Wajibu: A Journal of Social and Religious Concern* ii, 3 (1996), 12-13 shows us the idle and miserable life led by refugees. Is this how we should treat these strangers? Is this our form of hospitality? See also Renata Kizito Sesana, *Father Kizito's Notebook*, (Nairobi, Kenya: Koinonia, 1996): 49-51. He highlights the hopeless situation of the refugees and shows that the sheer numbers make it difficult for people to show traditional hospitality.

"Mwananchi",⁸ as we say in Kenya? What is his attitude to foreigners? One encounters an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, the stranger is exotic and most people will have an interest in his country, but on the other hand, if a few coins can be traded out of his ignorance, then such a situation will be fully utilized. Due to our colonial heritage there is this unrealistic assumption that every "Mzungu"⁹ is a rich person or a tourist so there are two prices in the market; one for a white person and another for the Kenyans. Again, due to the breakdown of the traditional social systems and the move towards urbanisation, there is need for guidance in order to differentiate between genuine hospitality and economic parasitism. The latter breeds continued dependence on and exploitation of a relative or neighbour with some financial means. Mazrui laments this lack of direction

Before colonization indigenous cultures had their own checks and balances between ethnic solidarity and hospitality on one side and the tendency towards parasitism, on the other. Then came colonialism. By its very nature colonial rule was a supreme form of economic parasitism - Europeans living off others. No longer were the Africans able to obey traditional wisdom in the Swahili adage, 'Mgeni siku ya pili, siku ya tatu mpe jembe' ('Treat your guest as a guest for two days; but on the third day give him a hoe.') The Colonial white man was at best an uninvited guest in Africa, but alas his African hosts were in no position to force a hoe on him."¹⁰

⁸A Kiswahili word which literally means "child of the land". It means citizen.

⁹A Kiswahili word meaning white person.

¹⁰Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1986), 234-235.

But whatever the cause for our failure to show hospitality, it is evident that our world is demonstrating **xenophobia** rather than **philoxenia**. But is this how we should treat the stranger? How can we correct these attitudes? What guidelines do we get from the Scriptures regarding this matter? What about the time of Jesus? What did Jesus teach about hospitality? Are there any principles and guidelines we can draw from his life and teaching for our day? What was the socio-economic and historical milieu of his teaching? How will this context help us to recapture this significant practice, a practice almost lost even in our churches today? How can our churches, by their teaching and example, help to change the opinion of the society in general as to how strangers should be treated?

Our task therefore, will be to seek biblical guidance for the practice of hospitality in our day. Our prime example will be the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus as presented by Matthew. A brief glimpse will be given of how the practice was worked out in Ancient Israel. But our main focus will be to examine the social, political, cultural and economic situation of Palestine at time of Jesus to see how this influenced the attitudes and treatment of strangers. Did Jesus give any teaching on the treatment of strangers? Was Jesus' attitude and teaching revolutionary or was he building on what was there in the culture? Were there any social, cultural and economic barriers that restricted the practice of hospitality? What were the socio-cultural issues that influenced the relationships across ethnic and

social lines in Matthew's Church? We will do an exegetical analysis of Matthew 25: 31-46. This is a passage that has been worked on a great deal.¹¹ But we would like to see whether paying attention to the socio-cultural dynamics of Jesus' day and more specifically the community of Matthew, will shed fresh light on the understanding of this passage. We will also see how Jesus' interactions with those considered outcasts by his community illustrate the importance of his teaching on hospitality in his life and mission.

We hope this will motivate the church worldwide, and especially in Africa to respond appropriately to the challenge of incorporating strangers into their communities in such a way that these people will experience self-worth, dignity and wholeness.

-The key questions will be the following:-

-Who was the stranger in the time of Jesus?

-What kind of treatment did he get?

-Who are being referred to as "the least of My brothers" in Matthew 25:31-46?

-What did it mean to show hospitality to these people?

-What were the social, political, and economic conditions that influenced the attitudes and the treatment of strangers during the time of Jesus?

¹¹ See Sherman W. Gray *The Least of My Brothers, Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1989). An extensive survey of the interpretation of this passage from the first century to the present.

- What hindrances and barriers prevented people from showing hospitality during Jesus' time?
- What were the socio-cultural dynamics that influenced the attitude to strangers in Matthew's community?
- How will this teaching help the Church in Kenya in providing guidance for inter tribal relationships?
- What are the missiological implications for the Church in Kenya of showing hospitality to strangers?

Hypotheses

Major

Our commitment to God and his people will be demonstrated by our concern for the "Least of my brothers", with special emphasis on showing hospitality to the stranger.

Minor

Jesus' teaching and interactions illustrate his concern and care for the lowly members of the society.

A sociological analysis of the situation in Matthew's church will shed light on Jesus' teaching on hospitality to the stranger.

The Jews of Jesus' time had introduced barriers and restrictions that prevented one from practising hospitality across social and ethnic lines but Jesus demolished these barriers in his relationships.

Hospitality in the time of Jesus enhanced brotherly relationships and helped in the spread of the Gospel.

The practice of hospitality across social and ethnic lines in the Church in Kenya today will build the sense of oneness among the Christians and this will result in the spread of the Gospel.

Significance of the Study

Showing hospitality to strangers is in keeping with God's character and mission in the world. If we Christians do the same then we are doing what is in His heart and what He has already demonstrated. One writer terms it as "God's own mission" (*missio dei*).¹² He continues to emphasize that

Christians who have become sensitive to the signs of the times and to God's own mission in our time will not only learn by listening to the experiences of the strangers but will also rediscover in a new light that basic story of God's own mission: the Bible. They will meet the biblical God who loves the stranger (Deut. 10:18) and will discover that issues like flight, migration, homelessness, exile and the search for a continuing city (Heb. 13:14) belong to the most central traditions in the Bible.¹³

Though there have been refugees and migrants in previous centuries, today the refugee and migration movements have become mass-phenomena on a worldwide scale. This has come about because of the escalating violence and hostilities in our modern world as well as the modern technological advances presenting unprecedented travel opportunities. Os Guinness says that this situation provides the church with the greatest single opportunity and the

¹²Hoffman, 55

¹³Ibid., 56

greatest single challenge since the time of the apostles.¹⁴ It is indeed a great opportunity since most of the unreached peoples are now on our doorstep. In Kenya, the opportunity to reach Somalia, which was closed to the Gospel has now been opened due to the influx of refugees as a result of the political instability in that nation. If we overcome **xenophobia** then we will realize that this is a privilege granted by God's grace for us to extend love and protection to these people. It is also a challenge because it makes the problem of religious pluralism even more acute. So pastors and evangelists have to adopt new strategies in the presentation of the Gospel.

The problem of strangers also provides an opportunity for the church to practise that which is her true identity. We are called to be pilgrims in this world but without the challenge of strangers we become complacent and we think we have a permanent abode here. Peter addresses his readers as "aliens and exiles" (I Peter 2:11). In the same vein, Vinay Samuel reminds us that

Pilgrimage is not something that is optional or secondary to our identity. It is the stuff of our identity. We may also learn from the powerlessness of the refugees what the Lord means when he says, 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'¹⁵

One other writer says,

. . . the presence of immigrants is itself, for believers, a sign that believers themselves are aliens

¹⁴Os Guinness and John Seel eds. , **No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 8.

¹⁵Vinay Samuel, "Strangers and Exiles in the Bible," in **Transformation** 12 no. 2 (April/June), 29.

and immigrants before God. Their existence, in other words, is a fleeting shadow or a breath; and what goods they possess are but expressions of the generous creator.¹⁶

Being hospitable to strangers will also open new worlds to us. Van Houten reiterates this by showing us that the law to secure the welfare of the alien was good news to the patriarch

. . . it opened him to the stranger's gifts, to the new worlds they can introduce. Taking strangers as guests allowed him enter places he had not been before. Practising hospitality is an adventure, and he, as well as the rest of us, need adventures.¹⁷

Koenig also reminds us that,

It is no accident . . . that the three major festivals of the church - Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost - all have to do with the advent of a divine stranger. In each case the newcomer offers blessings that cannot, at first, be comprehended. The child in the manger, the traveler on the road to Emmaus, and the mighty wind of the spirit all meet us as mysterious visitors, challenging our belief systems even as they welcome us to new worlds.¹⁸

Practising hospitality will also help to heal some of the ethnic and tribal hostilities in our world. Most of the hostilities between warring communities are fuelled by unfounded suspicions. If these communities are open to one another then they may realize that their fears are unfounded. Matthews and Benjamin discussing the importance of hospitality in the ancient world say,

¹⁶ Georges Chawkat Moucarry, "The Alien according to the Torah," in *Themelios* 14, no.1 (Oct/Nov. 1988), 20.

¹⁷ Van Houten, "Tradition: Anchor and Adventure", in *Perspectives* 9 (Oct. 1994), 24

¹⁸ John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 5.

Hospitality in the world of the Bible was more than an amenity for the travelers. It was a village's most important form of foreign policy. Villagers used hospitality to determine whether the strangers were friends or enemies. . . Hospitality neutralized the threat which strangers posed by temporarily adopting them into the community.¹⁹

The Purpose of the Study

Our purpose will be twofold. First, we will attempt to examine Jesus' teaching on hospitality in its social, cultural and historical setting by doing an exegetical analysis of Matt. 25:31-46. Along with this we will also try to show how Jesus demonstrated these teachings in his actions by practising an inclusive hospitality. Secondly, we hope to show briefly the relevance of this teaching to the Church in Kenya especially that which is in the urban areas. This is in view of the rapid loss of traditional values which upheld hospitality, the harsh economic constraints, the rising insecurity and violence in our cities, and the growing influence of Western individualistic lifestyles.

Assumptions

Christians should demonstrate their love for God and love for neighbour in a tangible way especially by showing hospitality to the stranger.

The Church should practise not only a community ethic but also social ethic.

The Church in Kenya has not fully utilized the teaching on hospitality in order to strengthen brotherly love and to heal ethnic tensions among the believers.

¹⁹V. H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *The Social World of the Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 82.

Limitations/ Delimitations

It would be interesting to study the practice of hospitality across the Biblical spectrum but this is not possible in view of the time and the length of such a work. So I have focused my work mainly on the life and teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew with a brief background showing the practice in Ancient Israel. References may be made to other relevant materials in the Synoptic tradition but our focus will be on the Gospel of Matthew, specifically 25:31-46. Our concern will particularly be, to examine the socio-cultural dynamics that prompted Jesus' teaching on hospitality to the stranger and how this teaching informed and challenged the situation of Matthew's church. So we will pay attention to the social, cultural and historical context of Matt. 25:31-46. Only three representative scenes in Jesus' life as given in Matthew, where he interacts with outsiders and those considered outcasts will be studied to show how these illustrate his teaching on hospitality (Matt. 8:5-13; 9:9-13; 15:21-28). We would also have liked to do an extensive study on how hospitality is and should be practised in the African Church but we can only give a brief note on how these findings will apply to the Church. Such a detailed study will be left for another time.

Methodology

This is a work that requires an interaction between the sociological data of the time of Jesus with the Biblical

evidence. Materials that will shed light on the socio-cultural dynamics that enhanced or hindered the practice of hospitality both for the time of Jesus and Matthew's community will be very useful. We will then do an exegetical analysis of the key text Matt. 25: 31-46, paying special attention to the social, historical and the literary context. We hope this will throw light on those identified as "the least of my brothers" among whom the "stranger" is included. In order to illustrate Jesus' teaching on hospitality we will examine three other passages in which he interacted with those who were excluded from the mainstream of first century Judaism, namely, the Gentiles (Matt. 8:5-13), the tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:9-13), and the women (Matt. 15:21-28). The application to the situation of the church in Kenya will be based on recent documented studies and from personal observation.

Definition of Key Terms

Certain terms that we will be using throughout this work need to be clarified before we can proceed. These are:

Hospitality: Malina defines hospitality as the process of receiving "outsiders" and changing them from strangers to guests. He also adds that hospitality in the Bible is never about entertaining family and friends. It is

about receiving strangers.²⁰ But we would like to extend the meaning beyond this literal sense of receiving strangers to our homes, to show that hospitality is the fundamental attitude of openness toward our fellow human beings, especially those in need. It is the building of bridges rather than the erection of walls and barriers. This can be expressed in a variety of ways such as a warm smile, a firm handshake, a word of appreciation, lending a hand, being considerate especially to those that can easily be taken advantage of; to those not protected by the support systems of the society. This is the opposite of hostility, hatred, rejection and exclusion. Pohl tells us that Jesus practised hospitality by offering welcome, healing, meals, and recognition to many who were marginal in the community.²¹

Stranger: While in Ancient Israel²² there were a variety of words to describe one who was not a member of the

²⁰Bruce J. Malina, "Hospitality" In *Biblical Social Values and Their Meanings: A Handbook*, eds J. P. Pilch and B.J. Malina (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1993), 104.

²¹Christine Pohl, "Hospitality from the Edge: The Significance of Marginality in the Practice of Welcome," *The Annual of the Society of Ethics* (1995): 126.

²²There are four words in the OT that are used to refer to various types of foreigners. The word *ger* and *tosab* are used to designate those foreigners that are settled in the land of Israel and so can be translated "immigrant or resident alien". The other two words *nekar* and *Zur* are used to denote the foreigners living outside the land of Israel. It is important to make this distinction because it is only to the first category of foreigners that the Mosaic legislation accords any rights. See also the extensive discussion in van Houten's work *The Alien In Israelite Law*. G. C. Moucarray in his article "The Alien According to The Torah" and D. I. Block, "Sojourner; Stranger; Alien" in *ISBE* 561-564, give helpful summaries of these four categories. Angel Salvadierra, "The Immigrant and the stranger in the Bible," in *Theology Digest* 42:2 (Summer, 1995): 141-144, attempts to

covenant community, the vocabulary of the Church does not give us clear categories. But we would like to use the word "stranger" to refer to anyone who does not belong to our group linguistically, racially, socially or gender wise and those in danger of being excluded because of these things. Those who were excluded in the first century Judaism for a variety of reasons were, the sinners, prostitutes, the lepers, the tax collectors, women, the Gentiles etc. Jesus welcomed all these people to his fold. So we will extend our definition beyond the literal sense so that the word will also refer to those who are excluded from the mainstream society. Therefore, the examples we will use showing how Jesus practised hospitality will include, the Centurion who was excluded because of race, a tax collector excluded because of social status and the Canaanite woman, excluded because of race and gender.

Data Collection

Since this is a literary research, no book review has been done. But the following libraries have been useful for data collection

1. Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST).
2. Nairobi International School of Theology (NIST).

give a modern way to categorize foreigners. He gives two basic divisions, those who would like to obtain citizenship and those who are passing through. Though he insists that hospitality should be shown to all human beings, he also argues that the foreigners must respect the values and customs of the country that receives them.

3. Daystar University.
4. Catholic University.
5. Hekima College.

Arrangements were made with the director of the Library services at NEGST to get copies of journal articles and other useful materials, for this project not available locally. For this reason I am grateful to the Director of the Library Services, Dr. Dorothy Bowen and her assistants for their prompt and efficient services.

The General Contents of the Paper

Chapter 1 includes introductory matters such as, the statement of the problem, thesis or hypothesis, the purpose and significance of the study and the method of study. Chapter 2 will cover the background. This will include a brief coverage of the practice of hospitality in Ancient Israel, some of the provisions in the Mosaic Law concerning strangers and the changes that occurred during the time of Jesus with particular emphasis on the socio-cultural dynamics of first century Judaism. In chapter 3 we will focus on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31-46, locating it in its social, historical and literary context. A summary of the history of interpretation of this passage will be given. In the light of this, an exegetical analysis of the passage will be done and a brief summary of the findings outlined. In chapter 4 we will survey the hospitality scenes in the life of Jesus according to Matthew; the healing of the

Centurion's servant (8:5-13), the calling of Matthew (9:9-13), and Jesus encounter with the Canaanite woman (15:21-28). Chapter 5 will wrap it all up by giving a summary of the findings, the application, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

Introduction

One of the characteristic features of the Gospel of Matthew is the attempt to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. But while this is so, it is also true that he met the needs and fears of his generation and that is why he had such a large crowd following him. This section of our work is an attempt to locate Jesus' teaching in its widest context, that is in his Jewish heritage especially as exemplified by the pioneer of the nation, Abraham. We will also point out briefly how the position of foreigner was further safeguarded by the favourable Mosaic legislation. In the second part of this chapter we will come closer home to examine the socio-cultural dynamics that characterized relationships to strangers in first century Judaism.

Hospitality in Ancient Israel

Hospitality was highly valued in the Ancient world. R. H. Stein suggests that this emphasis must have originated in the nomadic life in which travel if ever undertaken must

have arisen out of necessity rather than pleasure.²³ Janzen underscores this by showing us that travel in the ancient world was only undertaken for grave reasons which were often negative in nature such as flight from persecution or search for food and survival.²⁴ One never knew when one would be dependent on the hospitality of others. Therefore, the stranger had the right to expect hospitality.

But for Israel there was an added dimension. This was commanded in their Scriptures as a part of their experience as aliens in the land of Egypt and later in Babylon. They knew what it felt to be a stranger so they could identify fully with being strangers. That is why there is the constant refrain in the Mosaic law "for you were aliens in Egypt" (Ex.22:21; 23:9; Lev.19:33-34; Deut.10:19). Repeatedly Israel is reminded that her attitude to the *gerim* was to be tempered with the memory of their experience in Egypt (Ex.22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:34). They were not to treat the outsider as they had been treated. It was not merely a courtesy but an obligation to care for the strangers. Hoffman also says that hospitality was a matter of creed to

²³R.H. Stein, "Entertain "in ISBE 2:105. de Vaux also says that hospitality was a necessity of life in the desert. Ronald de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1961), 10.

²⁴ Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1994), 43.

Israel. They confessed the God of the unsettled, the homeless and the slave as they recited Deut.26:1-11.²⁵

The experience in Egypt served to enrich a heritage that was already passionately interested in how strangers were treated. Genesis 18 gives a vivid example of Abraham, the father of the Jews, as one who welcomed strangers. On seeing the strangers coming in his direction he runs out to plead with them to stay in his home and then he offers them lavish attention (Gen. 18:1-15). Our reading of this story knowing what happened in the end sometimes prevents us from seeing the extent of Abraham's generosity.²⁶ Once the stranger was accepted into the household, the hosts provided the best available for their guest. In keeping with the custom²⁷ of the day Abraham offered a little water to wash

²⁵Gerhard Hoffman, "Solidarity with the Stranger as Part of the Mission of the Church" in *IRM* 78(Jan. 89), 58.

²⁶John Koenig, "Hospitality" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 300. A Midrash on the story of the three visitors says that after the advent of his visitors God appeared and the Patriarch told him to wait until he had attended to the needs of those who arrived first.

²⁷V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *The Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 1993), 85. They suggest that it was typical for hosts to make a modest offer of a cup of water, a bit of food and a simple night gesture when offering hospitality to the stranger. The simplicity of the offer did not preclude more being given. It served two functions. It prevented the guest from declining an overly generous offer. It also ensured that the host could offer the best without bragging and being immodest.

the feet²⁸, a bit of food and time for them to rest before proceeding on their way. But he did not stop at this; he offered the best of what he had. This was bread made from fine flour, some curds, milk and a choice calf. This shows the extent of sacrifice²⁹ he was willing to go through to minister to his guests.

While Abraham is the best example of hospitality, the Old Testament has several examples of others who showed hospitality. There are many examples of women involved in extending hospitality and of course they did it within the context of the household. Rebecca extended hospitality to the servant of Abraham which was an answer to the prayer of this man (Gen. 24), the daughters of Jethro (Ex. 2:16-25), Jael and Sisera (Jud. 5:24), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:18), the

²⁸Matthews and Benjamin, 85. They say that the strangers who accepted invitations were promoted to the status of guest when the host washed their feet. This seems to have been a practice continued to the time of Jesus (Jn. 13).

²⁹Nothing seemed too big to show hospitality. Reuel is amazed that his daughters did not extend hospitality to the stranger (Ex. 2:20). Both Lot and the old man of Gibeah are ready to sacrifice the honour of the daughters to protect their guests (Gen. 19:8; Ju. 19:23). Matthews and Benjamin say that once hospitality was offered a household had the sacred duty to protect its guests from harm, 85. Rabbi Nosson Schermann and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds. *Bereishis/Genesis* (Brooklyn, New York: Messorah Publications, 1977), 642. They suggest that this event occurred three days after the circumcision. This means he was indisposed yet he was ready to serve.

widow of Zerapath (1 Kings 17:8-24), and the woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-37).³⁰

While it is evident that hospitality was highly valued there are also negative examples to underscore the practice. In the case of Lot, the men of Sodom wanted to assault the guests and in the case of Gibeah, the Ben-jaminites showed a serious breach of hospitality.³¹ The Ammonites and Moabites are also castigated for not showing hospitality to Israel on their way from Egypt (Deut. 23:3-6). Jael's murder of Sisera³² (Jud. 4-5) and the incident of Nabal's treatment of David's men (1 Sam. 25) are also shown as further examples of lack of hospitality. Thus, these indicate how being inhospitable brought one under a curse

³⁰Matthews and Benjamin, 83. They offer the protocol expected from the hosts and strangers. The fathers of the households were the ones who extended hospitality. They ran to meet the guest, washed their feet, provided food and protection, and did not question the guests. The strangers on the other hand had to refuse the first invitation, stayed for the agreed time, were not expected to covet their hosts possessions, and blessed the hosts' household upon departing.

³¹Matthews and Benjamin, 84. The explanation of this incident is that the right of granting hospitality was reserved to the citizens. When Lot and the old man who are aliens try to offer hospitality they are challenged by the citizens of the place.

³²Stein argues that though this was a patriotic act it must be taken as breach of hospitality, ISBE 2:106. But Matthew and Benjamin do not subscribe to this view. They argue that only by understanding how hospitality works in the world of the Bible are we able to appreciate that Jael is not a host who betrays her guest, but a hero who defends her household against an intruder. See full explanation, 87-95.

and judgment while a result of showing hospitality one got a reward.

The incidences above also reveal that despite the oriental concern for hospitality to the strangers (Job 31:32), aliens were vulnerable in the society. That is why when they are being mentioned they are included with other groups subject to exploitation, servants, the needy, the poor, orphans and widows. In order to safeguard the interests of these people it was not left only to the whims of the people to practise hospitality. It was clearly legislated. Their rights by and large included them into the community. Certain rights were conceded to them as follows: sabbatical rest (Ex. 20:10), access to the cities of refuge (Nu. 35:15; Jos. 20:9), and participation in the feasts of booths³³ and weeks (Deut. 16:11,14). Their sustenance was guaranteed by the provision for gleaning along with the other needy groups (Lev. 19:10; 23:22), the triennial tithe (Deut. 26:11), and the produce of the land in the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:6). They were to be treated for the most part as the natives of the land.

Their privileges and responsibilities included those that were expected of a fellow Israelite, such as, observing the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), the Passover (Ex. 12:49;

³³Matthews and Benjamin, 83. They suggest that Israel's celebration of the Feast of Booths was their commitment to hospitality. During the celebration, households built huts *sukkot* where they hosted a variety of strangers—slaves, Levites, orphans, and widows.

Nu. 9:14), Unleavened bread (Ex. 12:19), sacrificial procedures (Lev. 17:8; 22:8; Nu. 15:14-16), atonement for unintentional sins (Lev. 15:26-31), and purification after eating unclean meat (Lev. 17:15; Nu. 19:10). Sacrifices to Molech (Lev. 20:2), and blaspheming the name of the Lord were forbidden (Lev. 24:16). Sexual and moral purity was commanded (Lev. 18:26). The law of retribution (*lex talionis* Lev. 24:20-22) was applicable to them. The *ger's* position was so secure that he could be rich to the point that he could hire a native Israelite (Lev. 25:47-55). The idealized position is summarized in Lev. 19:33-34. Such rights and privileges accrued to the sojourner following complete identification with the covenant community including circumcision (Ex. 12:43-47).³⁴ This same expectation was seen throughout the Old Testament period (see Zech. 7:10). And this brings us to the time of Jesus to see what changes took place to enhance or hinder this practice.

Hospitality In the Time of Jesus

By the time of Jesus, due to the social, political, and economic changes of first century Palestine, we notice a two fold attitude toward strangers. First, we notice that there is the positive element which is in continuity with the Abrahamic tradition and in the spirit of the Mosaic

³⁴D. I. Block, "Sojourner; Alien; Stranger" in ISBE 4: 562. He also suggests that the Mosaic legislation was so open to receiving foreigners that is why the translation for *ger* is *proselytos* in the LXX.

legislation. Secondly, there is an element of exclusivism and even hostility towards the strangers. One commentator observes that contrary to the openness to strangers that the Mosaic legislation had, a broad chasm between Jews and Gentiles was institutionalized by the Herodian temple with a separate court for the Gentiles beyond which no foreigner was to pass on the pain of death.³⁵ This attitude not only governed relations between Jews and strangers but also between Jews of certain social and religious classes. In line with this Janzen comments,

By the time of Jesus however, this remnant of divine intention had been heavily overlaid by careful distinctions between the worthy and the unworthy. Social status, religious purity, national origin, wealth and power, and so forth, were well systematized into rules that governed hospitality.³⁶

We will discuss the positive element first. In line with this tradition Koenig points out that,

Much of the lore about hospitality during Jesus' time was centered around the figure of Abraham for it is he and Sarah who had welcomed the heavenly visitors at their tent by the Oaks of Mamre. . . This event was commemorated just a few years prior to the ministry of Jesus with the erection of a monument on the supposed site by Herod the Great. For the Jews of Jesus' day Abraham had become a patron saint for Hosts. Many stories about his generosity were circulated probably to encourage this virtue in others.³⁷

³⁵Block, 563.

³⁶Janzen, 209.

³⁷John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 15. He also has a helpful bibliography of extra canonical references to Abraham in page, 45.

Even in Jesus' teaching he makes reference to Abraham "I tell you many will come from the East and the West and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven "(Matt. 8:11). In his parable of Lazarus and the rich man, heaven is called "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:19-31).

Koenig also shows that the actual practice of hospitality in Jesus' day was incorporated into three of Judaism's religious institutions: the sabbath, the synagogue, and the travelling pairs of Palestinian teachers.³⁸ From the earliest of times the sabbath eve was considered a special time for opening one's family to others, especially those thought to be needy. Luke pictures Jesus as guest at the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1). Virtuous Jews were also known to open their homes to the needy on other occasions. First century synagogues both in Palestine and among the Diaspora functioned as houses of hospitality especially for Gentiles who wanted to become proselytes or simply wanted to learn about Judaism.³⁹

The travelling pairs of first century Jewish teachers who included the contemporaries of Jesus reveal another dimension of hospitality in Palestine. These teachers were not rich in material goods-Hillel is said to have worked for a time as a day labourer-but they had the

³⁸Koenig, 16.

³⁹ Colin Brown, NIDNT 1: 688. He suggests that the Jews learned about the establishment of inns from Greeks in Diaspora.

wisdom of the Torah so it was common for them to be invited to the homes of people who wanted to learn.⁴⁰ In exchange for food and lodging they taught members of the household and friends. Ben Joser is quoted to have said "Let thy house be a place of meeting for the wise and dust thyself with the dust of their feet and drink their words with thirst" (Abot. 1:4).⁴¹ Jesus exemplified this model of travelling teacher and he expected his disciples to do the same. Jesus experienced hospitality in his mission, at the home of Lazarus and the two sisters (Luke 10:38-42), Simon, the Leper (Matt. 26:6-13) etc. He sent the mission of the twelve and of the Seventy-two on the assumption that there would be hospitality (Matt. 10; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-24). In his teaching he showed that the reception of Christian strangers and messengers is in reality the reception of Christ himself (Matt. 10:40-42; 25:31-46). Jesus refused to be restricted by the rules of table fellowship and he challenged the conventions of his day as to who should be invited (Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 14:12-14).

The Socio-cultural Dynamics of First Century Judaism

The social, economic, political situation of the Palestinian Jews underwent a number of upheavals in the Graeco-Roman Period which demanded adaptation of Jewish

⁴⁰Koenig, 17.

⁴¹Ibid., 17.

customs and a reinterpretation of the Jewish identity.⁴² The Jews were a conquered people from 586 B.C. And except for a period of independence under the Maccabees (164-63 B.C) they were now under Roman colonial rule. They were facing not only political subjugation but also the fact that what they held dear and precious in their culture and religion was in danger of being swept away.⁴³ Unlike the extreme provocation that they experienced during the time of the Antiochus Ephiphanes IV which sparked off the Maccabean revolt, the Roman masters gave the Jews a measure of religious tolerance but it was an uneasy peace which finally blew up in 66 A.D. Riches observes that Hellenism had such drastic effects on the Jewish way of life. Politically they lost their independence and economically they were subjected to a foreign taxation system whose unpopularity is evidenced by the numerous peasant uprisings that dominated this period.⁴⁴

⁴²Anthony Saldarini, *The Pharisees and the Scribes and the Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 282. Derek Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983), 43. He also says that at the time of Jesus, Palestine was undergoing a time of rapid social transformation. A number of natural phenomena occurred, the famine of 25 AD when even Herod was moved to melt the palace plates for the poor and the epidemic of 29 AD which combined the problems of overpopulation of Palestine and the problem of distribution of goods to produce social upheaval. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few. The movements in the social classes shattered the traditional values and made men cry out for a renewed situation.

⁴³Tidball, 48.

⁴⁴John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 65-66.

This situation introduced changes in the life of the people especially in their understanding of their position as the chosen people of God and in how they should respond to strangers. This threat of almost losing their distinction as the people of God caused people to react in various ways. Malina, explains from a sociological perspective that this situation was very anomalous and it required a response otherwise the cultural cues would lose meaning.

In the first century believing Jews knew they were God's people, living in God's land, and worshipping a God of power capable of everything. What an anomaly it must have been to have the land occupied by the Romans and their gods! The longer the occupation, the more urgent became the problem of reconciling God's power and abilities in the face of the anomalous unbeliever and his god's power. Unless such a major anomaly were reconciled, the cultural system would run down or be radically changed.⁴⁵

Thus, we see that the Judaism of the first century was not a monolithic entity. There were several sects and parties⁴⁶ such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes and popu-

⁴⁵Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1981), 127-128.

⁴⁶Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 1987), 406. He points out that modern scholars make a distinction between parties (groups that recognize the existence of others from whom they are separated as having a place in the total people: cf. modern Christian denominations or political parties in a country) and sects (groups claiming the exclusive right to represent the total people and the only ones expecting to receive salvation). According to this distinction the Pharisees and the Sadducees were parties but the Essenes were a sect, 406. This distinction might later be useful when we discuss why Christianity was being persecuted by Judaism.

lar peasant movements all trying to give alternative responses to the situation. One sociologist offers the explanation for the direction that this response took,

It is a sociological principle that one reaction to crises is an intensification of norms, a renewal movement which will call members to a deepened commitment to the group and its original qualities. In the face of the invasion of the Hellenistic culture, most Jewish reform movements stressed more intense dedication to traditional cultural and religious values: the Law (Pharisees), The Temple (Sadducees), exclusivist notions of the priesthood (Essenes). While traditions of Jesus preaching stressed respect for these traditions (e.g. Matt. 5:17-19). Others challenged them with universalist trends that transcended Jewish ethnocentrism (Matt. 28:19-20), picked up the universalist trends of post-exilic prophecy, and laid the foundations for a missionary movement that could thrive in the cosmopolitan pluralistic environment of the Roman world.⁴⁷

Despite the differences that seemed to have characterized these sects and parties the dominant thing was their meticulous observance of purity or cleanness rules that helped them to maintain their distinctiveness. Malina explains that when a culture confronts certain anomalies one of the ways that it reacts is that

the society might impose strict and clearly spelled out rules for avoiding anomalous persons, things and behaviour. Such rules affirm and strengthen what is socially acceptable and indirectly underscore what is socially unacceptable.⁴⁸

He also identifies these rules as purity rules which

deal with the system and order, with definitions of general boundaries and of exclusivity, with anomalies that

⁴⁷Carolyn Osiek, *What are they Saying about the Social Setting of the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 45.

⁴⁸Malina, 128.

defy classification or that are positively abominations.⁴⁹

He explains further the function of these rules,

Furthermore, since purity rules present a sort of grid that covers all aspects of society, such rules are equally concerned with maintaining the wholeness or completeness of the social body. The pure social body is much like a perfect container with no overflow or oozing in or out, a complete body. From this perspective, purity rules are very concerned with the outer borders of the society and strive to maintain integrity or wholeness. . . . purity rules have a place for everything and everyone in its place-with anomalies properly excluded.⁵⁰

The function of the cleanness rules in the Old Testament had been to set aside the priests especially as they were serving God in the Temple. But the Jews of Jesus time applied these purity rules especially to determine the relationships across race lines and also across the various social strata of the society. Jeremias confirms this when he says,

The whole community of Judaism at the time of Jesus was dominated by the fundamental idea of maintenance of racial purity. Not only did the priests, as the consecrated leaders of the people, watch anxiously over the legitimacy of priestly families and weed out all priestly descendants born of an illegitimate union, but the entire population itself in theory and in practice was classified according to the purity of descent. All the families in which some racial impurity could be established were excluded from the pure seed of the community. Because this division of the people into social classes was entirely ruled by the principle of maintaining racial purity, the single breach of this principle took on heightened importance. In case of pagans that converted to Judaism, they could not become part of the pure seed of the Israelite people but they were received into the larger community of the people and had

⁴⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 129-130.

the right to marry non priestly Israelites of pure ancestry.⁵¹

According to the classification list of the population of Judaism according to their proximity to the temple, the Gentiles were last on the list or they did not appear at all.⁵² Therefore, this meant that association with them made one ritually impure.

Though racial purity determined to a large extent the position of a person in the community, there were also some trades with a social stigma in public opinion. Among these were those who dealt with trades involving transport and chance games, like gambling. Those who dealt with such were entirely forbidden, officially deprived and ostracized. Tax collectors also did not enjoy a high status. They were deprived of civil and judicial rights.⁵³ This makes us appreciate the enormity of Jesus' act of calling a publican to be one of his disciples and announcing good news to publicans and sinners.⁵⁴

The two groups that very vividly exemplify these purity rules for us are the Pharisees and the Essenes. First, we will look at the Essenes. This group is not men-

⁵¹ Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the time of Jesus: An Investigation into the Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 271.

⁵² Jeremias, 272. Malina, 132-137.

⁵³ Jeremias, 310.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 312.

tioned in the New Testament but a wealth of sources from the Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed a lot about the lifestyle of these people. They were part of the Hasidim who had supported the Hasmonean revolt. When the Hasmoneans set up the priesthood in Jerusalem and decided to pursue a secular policy they withdrew into the wilderness under the leadership of the "Teacher of Righteousness." The Essenes have been identified with the Qumran sect though this view is not universally held. There was one year of waiting before one became a member, and two years of probation before full membership was granted. They lived under a strong eschatological expectation, believing that they were living in the last days that the prophets had been referring to. They made a sharp distinction between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness." The "sons of darkness" were considered as those temple officials and the general populace of Palestine. So they attempted to keep themselves pure from these people as they waited the coming of the Lord who would liberate Israel from foreign domination. The meals of the community had a sacred character, and the proceedings were carefully regulated. Dunn reports,

According to Josephus, the novice has to pass through several stages of purification before participating in the common food and senior members could be rendered impure by the touch of a junior member. Once the concept of differing degrees of purity within the temple ritual was translated into rules governing everyday table fel-

lowship it meant that differing degrees of association was possible. He who lived at a stricter level could not eat with the one who observed a less strict discipline.⁵⁵

This means that outsiders were not allowed into the community and the members of the community were not allowed to eat with outsiders. All the same the Essenes are said to have assigned someone to be in charge of foreigners in every town.⁵⁶

The Pharisees also observed the rules of purity strictly but they did not attempt to separate themselves from the community. They sought to apply the ritual rules of purity to the everyday life of the community. They held that even outside the temple, in one's own home the rules of purity were to be followed at the table. They had to eat secular meals in a state of ritual purity as the priest in the temple and with those who were in this state of purity. The food had to be properly tithed, prepared and served.⁵⁷ To show their extreme concern for purity, Dunn who quotes J. Neusner has concluded that of their 341 regulations no fewer than 229 directly or indirectly pertain to table fellow-

⁵⁵ James D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-18)" in JSNT 18 (1983): 17

⁵⁶ NIDTT, 1: 688

⁵⁷ J. Neusner, Judaism In the beginning of Christianity (London: SPCK, 1984), 58. He shows that this meticulous observance even began with growing of the crops themselves. Those which had not been properly grown could not be eaten.

ship.⁵⁸ This shows that only under certain carefully specified conditions outsiders might be accepted as guests. But an associate of this group would never become a guest for fear of ritual pollution.⁵⁹ This then is the context in which Jesus practiced a radically open and inclusive table fellowship contrary to those who observed strict purity regulations. The full discussion of Jesus' attitude to the purity rules has to wait until chapter four when we see how he interacted with those considered outsiders.

Conclusion

Thus we have observed that the openness that was extended to foreigners in the early part of Jewish history was restricted during the time of Jesus. We have also seen that the social, economic and political climate of first century Judaism dictated this kind of response. We have deliberately not discussed how the Jesus movement provided an alternative response to these upheavals. The chapters following will show how Jesus provided an integrating solution to this volatile situation on how strangers were to be treated both in his teaching (Chapter Three) and by demonstrating it in practise (Chapter Four).

⁵⁸Dunn, 14.

⁵⁹Koenig, 18.

CHAPTER 3

JESUS' TEACHING ON HOSPITALITY: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 25:31-46.

Introduction

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . ." Donahue suggests that the portrayal of the last judgment, Matt. 25:31-46, where this saying appears is one of those classic texts which has inspired and challenged generations of Christians.⁶⁰ He also records that the same passage has recently been called "a summary of the gospel" and is one of the most widely cited Biblical passages across confessional and even religious boundaries.⁶¹ However, this has also been the subject of much debate regarding the interpretation of who the "nations" are that are being judged, and who are the "least of the brethren".

Our attempt in this section is to show that if we pay close attention to the socio-cultural⁶² background of

⁶⁰ John R. Donahue, S.J, "The "Parable" of the Sheep and the Goats: A Challenge to Christian Ethics" *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the Gospel as a whole, we will help to throw light to the interpretation of these issues. Stanton has shown that it is difficult to reconstruct the social setting of this gospel, but the literary genre of this section he has suggested is predominantly apocalyptic. This will help shed light on the socio-cultural setting of the first recipients of the first Gospel.⁶³ We will attempt to show how Matthew presented these authoritative words that Jesus spoke to his disciples so that they could speak to the volatile situation of his church⁶⁴ especially on the issue of the inclusion of

⁶²G. N. Stanton, "Introduction: Matthew's Gospel in recent scholarship" in *The Interpretation of Matthew* ed. by G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 23. He states that Matthew does not lend itself readily to a social historical approach as many other NT writings. This is especially so because we cannot say where Matthew wrote from. And although Antioch has been widely accepted the evidence is far from conclusive.

⁶³G. N. Stanton, *A Gospel For a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 222. He shows that this pericope is apocalyptic. He supports this assertion by comparing this section with other apocalyptic literature of the time e.g. 4 Ezra, 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham. Dan O. Via "Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31-46" in *HTR* 80:1 (1987): 79-100. He also agrees that this passage is apocalyptic. See also C. C. Rowland, "Apocalyptic, the poor and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Journal of Theological studies* 45 (October 1994): 504-518.

⁶⁴Most of the commentators show that the church in Matthew's time was facing opposition both from Judaism which was trying to reassert itself after the fall of Jerusalem and also from Gentile environment. One of the volatile issues that may have caused the rift was how Gentiles who had been "aliens and strangers" to the covenants of promise were to be one with the people of God.

Gentiles who were considered as "aliens and strangers" to the covenants of promise. Our first attempt will be to see how the debate on introductory matters such as authorship, the original recipients, the place and date of writing of this gospel throws light on the issue. We will also discuss the literary context and this will help to highlight the uniqueness of this passage which has no synoptic parallels. A brief overview of the history of the interpretation⁶⁵ of the passage will help us to avoid the exegetical pitfalls which have derailed other interpreters. We will then look at the passage in the light of the foregone discussion paying close scrutiny to the text itself, to see what fresh insights we can glean from it. These findings will then be summarised with a view to seeing how they can apply to our situation today.

The Socio-cultural context of Matthew

Authorship

The question of authorship has been the subject of much study among the Matthean scholars⁶⁶ but our purpose

⁶⁵Thanks to the comprehensive and almost exhaustive work by Sherman S. Gray, **The Least of My Brothers Matthew 25: 31-46: A History of Interpretation** SBL Dissertation Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1989).

⁶⁶W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, **A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew** Vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1988), 10-11. They have given a helpful table on the summary of the opinions of scholars on

will not be to give an exhaustive coverage of all that has been done but to touch on the recent findings that would help to illuminate the meaning of the text in question. Matthew, like all the other Gospels is an anonymous document. The title *κατα Μαθθαίου*, "According to Matthew," was fixed in the second century. But the unanimous tradition of the church⁶⁷ has attributed the authorship to the apostle Matthew. The main external evidence is a statement attributed to Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (60-130)⁶⁸ by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (260-340), to the effect that

Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best as he could.⁶⁹

the issue of authorship. The two main camps are Jewish vs. Gentile authorship.

⁶⁷Papias who received the tradition from the elder or apostle John, which was passed on to Pantaenus, Ireneaus, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome

⁶⁸Davies and Allison, 129. They suggest that Papias may have been written before 100 A.D and in which case Matthew would have to be dated earlier. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1992), 12. He gives the dating of this between 60-130.

⁶⁹Morris, 12. Most commentators have pointed out how these words are difficult to interpret. R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: W. B. Eerdmanns, 1985), 30. He shows how the words are ambiguous because they could be translated and interpreted in different ways. Davies and Allison, 14-17. summarize the findings of Kennedy and Kurtzinger who have taken the Papias witness seriously and tried to understand what it means. Kurtzinger posits an author familiar with the Hebrew style of writing while Kennedy suggests an original Matthew in Aramaic and Hebrew. Although Papias and those after him identified the logia of Matthew with our first Gospel one cannot be sure that this was true of Matthew's predecessors.

This traditional position on authorship has held sway until recently in the twentieth century when it has been assailed mainly in two fronts. First, there has been a push to reject the witness of Papias.⁷⁰ Secondly, there has been a strong objection to a Jewish authorship, mainly because of the strongly anti-Jewish element that is present in the Gospel⁷¹ and the apparent ignorance of Jewish customs and teaching⁷² that the author of Matthew displays. We will

⁷⁰Davies and Allison, 14. While they appreciate fully the difficulty of saying with confidence what Papias meant, Davies and Allison are rather hesitant about a hasty dismissal of Papias, so they observe, "One is still left with the question. How do we explain the Bishop's statement about Matthew? Surely he did not concoct it out of thin air. Surely he had some basis for his assertion. At the minimum, and if τα λόγια did not before Papias mean Q, it would seem that he knew of a tradition according to which the author of the first Gospel, the apostle Matthew, wrote for Jews who believed in Jesus (cf. Eusebius, H.E. 6.14.2). In that case, however, one must concede that already before Papias' time our gospel was thought of as Jewish and as having been written by a Jew."

⁷¹See Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew", *JBL* 66 (1947): 165-172. He argues strongly that the gentile bias is a primary thesis in Matthew and such a message would be natural only from the bias of a gentile author.

⁷²The one example most quoted is how Matthew puts the Pharisees and Sadducees together as if they were agreed on their teaching (16:5-12). Davies and Allison, 32, explain this as no more than a convenient way of indicating their shared error rather than identical teaching. Stanton (1995), 4, introduces a note of caution when he notes that we do not know enough about all the currents of first-century Judaism to pronounce confidently on Matthew's ignorance.

not delve deeply into the discussion of the first issue but the anti-Jewish flavour of the Gospel draws our attention because it gives us a clue of the existential situation of the author. While this anti-Jewish element has been used as a weapon by those who argue for the Gentile position, those commentators who support a Jewish authorship have used it to good effect, to show that the writer is a Jewish Christian who is caught up in the tension of love for his people and yet with the recognition that these people have rejected the Messiah. R. T. France who sums up this situation so well says,

But it is hardly realistic to expect all Jewish Christian authors to be 'pro-Jewish', and all the Gentile Christians to be 'anti-Jewish'. What we see in Matthew is rather the uncomfortable tension in the mind of one who, brought up to value and love all that Israel has stood for, has come to the painful conclusion that the majority of his people have failed to respond to God's call to them and that it is in the 'remnant', the minority group that have followed Israel's true Messiah, that God's purpose is now centred. Such a conclusion carries with it the recognition that what counts for membership in the true people of God is no longer a person's national identity, but his response of repentance and faith which is open to Gentiles as well as Jews.⁷³

⁷³France, 19. Davies and Allison, 15. They agree with the above and argue that, "One should not underestimate the hostility that could have existed between Jews and Jewish Christians. The covenanters at Qumran rejected the temple establishment in Jerusalem, damning them in the strongest terms possible. And Jesus himself presumably had very harsh things to say about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The apostle Paul who may have had rabbinic training, and a man who had no doubt about the final salvation of all Israel (Rom 11) could write that "God's wrath has come upon them at last". . . Indeed debates within a religion are more passionate than between members of different religions."

And as if this was not bad enough, those of the Jewish community who had become Christians were being persecuted, suspected and ostracised by the official leadership of Israel. Therefore it is not a wonder for one writing from such a situation that an anti-Jewishness element may be detected and as France observes, "it may come to sharper expression than might be expected of a Gentile Christian for whom it was not such a painfully existential issue."⁷⁴

Stanton adds his voice to those who support a Jewish authorship. By drawing on parallels with apocalyptic literature he observes that

Once again 5 Ezra provides instructive parallel: anti-Jewish and pro-Gentile views are even more pronounced than they are in Matthew, but from its form and contents there can be no doubt that its author was a Jewish Christian.⁷⁵

We therefore concur with these scholars, that while we need to take seriously⁷⁶ the arguments for a Gentile authorship, arguments for a Jewish author for Matthew carry

⁷⁴France, 20. He adds that this feeling of rejection would have been felt more by a former "Jewish *τελωνης* ostracized by the religious leadership of his people, yet personally strongly conscious of his Jewishness."

⁷⁵ Stanton (1995), 20.

⁷⁶Davies and Allison, 7-58. They give an extensive and useful coverage for all the possible arguments for authorship in various categories. While paying special attention to the arguments raised against the traditional position, they use several charts to display Matthew's use of the OT to support a Jewish Christian author.

the day.⁷⁷ This line of argument not only supports the traditional position it helps to throw light on the tensions in the Christian community that Matthew wrote to as they tried to grapple with relations between the Jews and Gentiles.

The Audience

The tensions between particularism and universalism in Matthew has been the cause of a lot of heated debate as to who were the original readers. Most of the scholars noting this have argued that the readership was a mixed community in which both the Jews and the Gentiles were represented. Matthew is the only Gospel that records Jesus' startling words and restricts his disciples' immediate ministry to Israel 10:5-6. The reply to the request of the Syro-Phoenician Woman "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" 15:24 restricts Jesus' mission only to Israel.

However, Hagner notes that against this particularism there is an implicit universalism throughout the Gospel. He points out that in Matthew we encounter an apparent polemic against the Jews that is all the more striking because of the favoured position of the Jews

⁷⁷Davies and Allison, 33, 58. Their conclusion on the issue of authorship is that nothing in the gospel demands a Gentile author, but there are especially two weighty factors that call for a Jewish author. One is that much of the special material especially the redactional material is strongly with a Jewish flavour. The other is that the author's use of the OT strongly implies the author must have been one that could have read the OT in Hebrew.

already noted in the generally Jewish tone of the Gospel. The most conspicuous, he adds are the passages referring to a transference of the kingdom from Israel to those who believe (the church) and those which speak of Judgment of unbelieving Israel (8:11-12; 21:41, 43; 22:3, 9; 12:45; 13:10-15; 23:38; 27:25).⁷⁸ Therefore, on the one hand there is a marked emphasis that Christianity is firmly rooted in Jewish roots and that categories of the law have a place in the Christian faith. Yet on the other hand there is a genuine concern that God's plan is not limited to the Jews but that it embraces all nations. Some of the scholars have correctly observed that these tensions in the Gospel are a reflection of what was happening in the real life situation of Matthew's church. One such scholar is R. T. France who suggests that,

The paradoxes and even apparent contradictions of Matthew are best accounted for not by successive editions of the Gospel at the hands of redactors of conflicting sympathies, but by the painful tensions in the real-life situation of a Jewish Christian . . . The mixture of Jewishness and anti-Jewishness. . . results not from a literary incompetence but from the existential situation of the 1st Century Jewish Christianity.⁷⁹

⁷⁸D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13 Word Biblical Commentary* 33A (Dallas, Texas: Word Publisher, 1993), lxvi-lxx.

⁷⁹France, 71. Hagner (lxx) also sums up the situation of Matthew's original readers as being in a kind of "no man's land, between their Jewish brothers and sisters on hand and the Gentiles Christians on the other." Struggling to defend a Jewish Christianity to the Jews, on one hand, and to realize their identity with the Gentile Christians on the other. This two fold challenge explains the tensions.

In the light of this, most commentators suggest that the life setting for Matthew, is that of early Jewish Christianity, late enough for a clear distinction and hostility between the two groups and yet early enough for this to still be a live issue. With this in mind, the Gospel was thus, written to confirm the Jewish believers in the truth of Christianity as the fulfillment of the promises to Israel, which entails the argument that Jesus is the Messiah, that he was loyal to the law and that he came for the Jews and yet to affirm at the same time the Gentile participation in this new work. Through this, the readers could gain confidence in the correctness of their faith as something standing in true succession to the Scriptures and at the same time be in a better position to answer their unbelieving Jewish brothers and sisters in the synagogues. So instead of renouncing Judaism as K. W. Clark maintains, Hagner argues that Matthew finds in Christianity a perfected and fulfilled Judaism, brought to its goal by the long-awaited Christ.⁸⁰

⁸⁰Hagner, lxx. Davies and Allison, 24. who also join hands in refuting Clark argue thus, "This is an exaggeration. The Jew are no longer the stewards of God's Kingdom but the nation to whom it has been given is not an ethnic identity. It is rather the Church consisting of both Jew and Gentile. . . . A more objective analysis would have to hold that in the first gospel, both Jew and Gentile are assumed to belong to the Christian Church and Matthew's animus is not directed against the Jewish people as an indivisible whole but against the Jewish leaders."

In support of the above argument Stanton also observes that Matthew wrote following a period of prolonged dispute and hostility with fellow Jews. Though they were both heirs to the same Scriptures and shared in many religious convictions, their differences ran very deep. This led to mutual incomprehension, hostility and eventually to a clear parting of ways.⁸¹ Therefore the reason Matthew is writing is to legitimize⁸² the new group and Stanton puts it this way,

With considerable literary, catechetical, and pastoral skill Matthew has composed a gospel for a new people - fellow Christians (both Jews and Gentiles) in a cluster of Christian churches which are defining themselves over against the local synagogues. The Christian communities with which the evangelist is in direct contact have grown rapidly: shallow faith and dissension are much in evidence.⁸³

This element of persecution hostility from the Jews is also brought out by Gundry in the second edition of his commentary entitled *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*. He observes

⁸¹Stanton (1992), 2.

⁸²Stanton uses sociological models in the study of Matthew in order to make comparative observations on how sectarian movements behave at the parting of ways with the parent body. He uses the Damascus Document which belongs to the Qumran community and he notes that this exhibits similar features with Matthew. So he concludes that Matthew was intended to legitimate the stance of sectarian community which perceived itself in sharp conflict with the parent body.

⁸³Stanton, 2.

True disciples are suffering with endurance. Some of them to flee for their lives (10:23). In doing so, they have become itinerant missionaries who depend on the hospitality of other true disciples willing to risk their own necks by harbouring fugitive preachers, by giving them food and drink, by supplying them with clothes, by ministering to them in illness and by going as far as to visit them in prison (10:40-46; 25:31-46).⁸⁴

Thus we may conclude that this gospel is written to a "church in transition, seeking to preserve what is viable in its Jewish past as it moves into the uncharted waters of a predominantly Gentile future in the Graeco-Roman world."⁸⁵ This transition is not a smooth one because the parent body is persecuting them. Indeed, the persecutions that face Jesus and his disciples in the gospel speak also to the situation of the present readers.

Place

In the light of the above circumstances, What would be the place that would have both a considerable Jewish majority as well as a Gentile population? The place that has

⁸⁴Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* Second Ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM.B. Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1994), 5-6. This observation by Gundry is useful for us because it speaks directly to the passage under discussion. The fact Matthew uses an apocalyptic form to communicate to his audience will bring home the fact that the situation that they are going through is not an easy one.

⁸⁵J. P. Meier "Matthew, Gospel of" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Double Day Publishers, 1992), 625.

been widely acclaimed has been Antioch. This has been suggested because of its large Jewish community, and the flourishing Christian Church, in which the claims both of Jewish-Christian conservatism and the Gentile Mission were strongly represented. It was a cosmopolitan centre not too far from Palestine and yet it would exhibit the sort of linguistic and cultural mixture which we find in the Gospel.⁸⁶ But others have argued that these are characteristics which Antioch would have shared with other Jewish centres where the Church would have been established. So this suggestion is not definitive.⁸⁷ Those who suggest a Palestinian provenance do so because of the Patristic tradition that the Gospel was written for Jews in their own language and also because of the predominant Jewish tone of the Gospel. However, because the arguments are not conclusive,⁸⁸ we do

⁸⁶Raymond E. Brown and J. P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 18-27. They dismiss all the other suggestions and give a lengthy argument to support an Antiochene provenance. Some of the reasons they give for their suggestion are as follows: 1) It was founded in the 30's by a Hellenistic group that favoured both a Gentile and Jewish orientation. 2) It stood on the borderline between the Jewish and Gentile world, so that it was a perfect meeting place and a melting pot, that is represented in the gospel. 3) It was a wealthy urban church that could sponsor the writing of such a lengthy gospel. 4) Ignatius of Antioch was the first Church Father to use it.

⁸⁷Hagner, lxxv. He says Antioch is a good guess.

⁸⁸Stanton, (1995), 14. He has summed up the discussion and brought us up to date, thus, "There have been several attempts to locate Matthew's community. G. D. Kilpatrick (1946) proposed a southern Phoenician city, perhaps

not have to insist on an exact location. The Gospel itself gives us some indicators of Jewish/Gentile relations in this community.

Date

Arguments about date have really been along two lines. The landmark in between has been the destruction of Jerusalem and the break of Christianity from Judaism, also known as the declaration of the *Birkath ah minim*.⁸⁹ Most of those who argue for a Markan priority have favoured a post 70 A.D. date of writing. They also locate Matthew's community in Antioch. One writer argues

After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the second generation of Christians in Antioch was severed from the conservative umbilical cord of the Mother Church in Jerusalem. By this time the rejection of the Christians gospel by most Jews and its acceptance by many Gentiles raised anew the question of how a church rooted in

Tyre or Sidon, but our knowledge of these cities in the final quarter of the first century is so limited that it is not easy to make a case for or against them. S. van Tilborg (1972:172) proposes Alexandria, and B. T. Viviano (1979) suggests Ceasarea Maritima. H. D. Slingerland (1979) believes that Matt. 4:19 and 19:1 both reveal the redactional hand of the evangelist and confirm that he is writing somewhere east of the Jordan: Hence both Antioch and Phoenician sea coast are unlikely. But in his major commentary Ulrich Luz (E. tr. 1990:92) notes correctly (in my view) that while Antioch is not "the worst of the hypotheses", the Gospel of Matthew "does not betray a place of origin."

⁸⁹The prayer against heretics which is said to have been set in place about AD 85, which excluded Christians officially from participation in the synagogues.

Judaism should relate to the larger Gentile world. Matthew's Gospel represents a conscious attempt at synthesis and compromise among the competing traditions inherited from the first generation.⁹⁰

This line is also in favour of the fact that there were tensions between the Jews and Christians and there was already a break from the synagogues.

It is impossible to see how a group that pursued a universal mission without circumcision, rejected the food laws of the Pentateuch, abandoned the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:11-12) in favour of loosing and binding invested in Peter and the local church gathered, could remain in union with the synagogue.⁹¹

Those who follow this line argue that the intensity of the persecution was much more after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The opposition of the Jewish leaders to Christianity was probably more intense during the period of Jamnian reconstruction, when Johanna ben Zakkai and others sought to consolidate Judaism in a period of trial and tribulation⁹²

R.T. France on the other hand argues that we cannot use the argument of whether the church was inside or outside Judaism to date the gospel. He states that it is impossible that the break occurred at once. It must have been gradual. This is supported by the fact that there was hostility towards Jesus and the apostles even during the lifetime of Jesus. So he says that the above question is artificial,

⁹⁰Meier, 624.

⁹¹Ibid. , 625.

⁹²Davies and Allison, 23.

i.e. the inside/outside debate, because it is based on the unrealistic understanding of the way Jewish/Christian relations were in the 1st century. It assumes that after the Birkath ha minim there was the beginning of a totally new situation; before when relations were not troubled and after which there were no meaningful contacts.⁹³

There are also arguments for a pre 70 A.D. date especially with the support of those references that seem to point out that there was still worship at the temple.⁹⁴ What is clear from the Gospel is that the situation it reflects was true in the life of the Church in the first century so we cannot insist strongly on any date.

The Literary context of Matthew 25:31-46

The literary genre of Matthew

There have been long discussions on the genre of the gospels.⁹⁵ Previously the gospels were thought to belong to

⁹³France, (1985), 28-30. He gives a concise summary on the discussion of date of writing.

⁹⁴The reference to offering and leaving one's gift on the altar (Matt. 5:23-24), the passage on the rightness of paying of the Temple tax (17:24-27), and the reference to swearing by the sanctuary (23:16-22).

⁹⁵Reference can be made to the following works: David E. Aune, **The New Testament and Its Literary Environment** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), Richard A. Burridge **What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), France, **Matthew-Evangelist and Teacher** (1988), 123-154.

a unique category of their own but recent findings show that they share literary characteristics with forms both in Graeco-Roman literature and also in Jewish literature.

Philip L. Shuler who has applied the findings specifically to the gospel of Matthew tells us that

Matthew belongs to that form of laudatory biography which can be identified as the encomium biography genre and there is no need either to qualify or apologize for the use of the word biography. . . The Gospel according to Matthew contains traditions that are historical even biographical but the whole literary portrait developed by Matthew is not biographical in any modern sense of the term, and this gospel cannot be relied upon for such historical information as chronology, development or appearance. . . The book of Matthew as literature, however stands within the ancient and respected tradition of literature which has been specifically designed to praise the hero in a biographical composition.⁹⁶

Although France⁹⁷ has critiqued Shuler's findings as being limited because he locates Matthew in the Graeco-Roman world may not have been in Matthew's mind, it is widely accepted that this genre is biography. Stanton, in agreement with the above has suggested that Matthew has extended the genres of both his main sources, both Mark and Q which have biographical features. And as a result of this combination, revision and extension Matthew has written a gospel which is

⁹⁶Philip L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 109.

⁹⁷ 126. Stanton (1992), 62. He has also pointed out that the features that Shuler pays attention for the *encomia* are present in other biographical forms.

closer than Mark to the Graeco-Roman biographical tradition. He also highlights one of the most prominent structural features of Matthew's Gospel and that is the interchange of narrative and discourse material as a feature he shares with the ancient biographers. He observes

Like many ancient biographers, Matthew sets out the life of Jesus in order to persuade the readers of his significance. . . In ancient biographical writing (including Matthew) there is a deeply-rooted convention that a person's actions and words sum up the character of the individual more than the comments of an observer. In his own direct comments to the reader Matthew does occasionally link carefully the actions and the words of Jesus (4:23 and 9:35), but by and large they are simply juxtaposed and allowed to speak for themselves. Matthew's use of extended discourses and his frequent topical arrangement of material are both found in the main ancient biographies.⁹⁸

But while all these may be true we should heed the note of warning that Hurtado gives us, that even though the Graeco-Roman literature help us to understand the Gospels "the Gospels are not fully explainable in terms of Graeco-Roman setting. They form a distinctive group within the broad body of ancient writings."⁹⁹

The genre of Matthew 25:31-46

It is widely accepted among commentators that 25:31-46 concludes the major discourse of the last formal teaching

⁹⁸Stanton (1992), 69, 70, 71.

⁹⁹L. W. Hurtado, "Gospels, Genres" in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1992): 282.

discourses¹⁰⁰ in Matthew. What is debated among the scholars is where the final discourse begins and whether this section is to be regarded as an independent unit or not. Those who see it beginning from chapter 23 consider it as a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount. The woes in 23 balance with the beatitudes in chapter 5 and in the closing judgmental scenes each concludes with the addressing of Jesus as "Lord" by the condemned (7:22-23; 25:44-46).¹⁰¹

The centre of attention here is the return of Christ at the end of the age. He is beyond his imminent passion and offering encouragement to his disciples about the time of

¹⁰⁰In agreement with Bacon, Gray says, "I am convinced that . . . exclusive of the preamble (Chaps. 1-2) and an epilogue (Chaps. 26:3-28:20), Matthew can be divided into five parts, each beginning with the narrative material and ending with a discourse. Each of the parts is terminated with the formula *καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς...* which occurs at 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1. Stanton (1992), 40, also notes that at the end of the fifth discourse, *παντὰς* 'all' is added to the formula ending which has characterized all the previous endings of the discourse. This shows that all these belong together as "the sayings of Jesus" and this is the climax.

¹⁰¹See Gundry, 453. Blomberg, 339. Gray, 7, however, does not agree with Bacon and the above in seeing the debate with the Pharisee as part of the fifth discourse. He includes it with the preceding material. With Lambretch and Cope, they see 24-25 as a unit. He divides this section into three parts

- a) 24:1-35 Following Mark closely he gives information about events leading to the Parousia.
- b) 24:36-25:30 Using Parables mainly from Q and his parable of the Ten Virgins, he exhorts his readers to be vigilant.
- c) 25:31-46 A description of the Universal judgment of the Parousia.

his return. L. Cope has also argued that each of the four formal discourses in Matthew contain some reference to judgment in concluding the sections: 7:23b; 10:42; 13:49; 18:35.¹⁰² The fifth discourse is concluded not by a single reference to future judgment but an extended description of the final event. Thus Matthew 25:31-46 is viewed as an intriguing technique to conclude not only the fifth discourse but all the preceding discourses of Jesus as well.¹⁰³ Gray also suggests that

To appreciate fully the position that the scene of the last judgment has in Matthew it is not sufficient to see it merely as a conclusion. Looking at the larger context, it would seem that 25:31-46 in a proleptic fashion is integrally related to the Great Commission that occurs a few chapters later (28:16-20) where the disciples are sent to the very same people (Πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) that are to be gathered before Christ at the end of the time. The two scenes have to be taken together in any attempt at exegesis, the judgment that takes place in 25:31-46 cannot be viewed apart from the events described in 28:16-20.¹⁰⁴

This passage is unique to Matthew being drawn apparently from the evangelist's special source. This has given many critics a lot of work as expressed by J.A.T.

Robinson

It has proved intractable to form criticism and source critics go no further. It stands without synoptic parallels in the Matthean tradition but whether it is late or

¹⁰²Lamar Cope, "Matthew XXV: 31-46: The Sheep and the Goats, Reinterpreted" *Novum Testamentum* XI (1969), 33.

¹⁰³Gray, 8.

¹⁰⁴Gray, 8.

early, composed by the evangelist or derived from its source, integral or composite, or if composite what are its ingredients does not seem to have been successfully analyzed . . . an Everest of synoptic criticism.¹⁰⁵

The only partial parallels are its opening and closing. Hagner shows that Mark 8:38, and Luke 9:26 both refer to coming of the Son of Man in glory with his holy angels. Two previous passages in Matthew also anticipate the parts of this pericope. The content of the opening verses is stated concisely in 16:27 and in 7:23, one finds the command to "workers of iniquity" "to depart from me"(cf. v 41). He continues to discuss how the pericope is artistically constructed and making use of repetition for effect and perhaps for ease of memorization.¹⁰⁶ Most of the commentators agree that this is not like the preceding parables, because this narrative is not based on a fictitious story but on the description of a very real though future event. Despite the parabolic elements the passage with its future tense forms is more properly categorized as an apocalyptic revelation discourse,¹⁰⁷ which gives a straightforward description of the last judgment. The features of the apocalypse are also noted as very important. Stanton who has given extensive

¹⁰⁵J. A. T. Robinson, *New Testament Studies* 2(1955/56): 225-237.

¹⁰⁶Hagner, 740.

¹⁰⁷See Hagner, 740. France, 354. Morris, 633. Carson, 518.

comparison with the other apocalyptic literature says,

Whatever its original form may have been, in its present form Matt. 25:31-46 is an apocalyptic discourse. Several redactional phrases and motifs in this passage, its antithetical structure, and . . . its central thrust are all strongly reminiscent of passages in apocalyptic writings such as 4 Ezra, 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch and the Apocalypse of Abraham . . . Unlike the preceding pericopae, Matt. 25: 31-46 is not a parable. Its genre as an apocalyptic discourse prepares the reader or listener for a change of direction in the argument of the discourse as a whole. Since apocalyptic writings usually function as a consolation to groups of God's people who perceive themselves to be under threat or alienated from the society in which they live, this is likely to be the central thrust of Matt. 25:31-46.¹⁰⁸

In relation to what is coming immediately after it, this scene provides such a stark contrast. Instead of the exalted Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, we see a rejected, despised Servant going to the cross. But this cross leads to the victory of the resurrection and ascension. So in this final pericope of the eschatological discourse we are given a glimpse of what will happen at the end so that we are not discouraged by the events that happen immediately after. Robinson observes the "superb artistry" with which Matthew presents this scene which he terms as "the lull before the Passion." He also notes how the themes

¹⁰⁸Stanton (1992), 221, 222. Dan O. Via "Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31-46" in HTR 80:1 (1987), 80. Via also supports the element of the apocalyptic although he records the fact that one feature of this genre i.e. the mediation of the divine revelation by an exalted figure is what is missing in this section but it still stands as apocalyptic.

of rejection and the inauguration of the coming of the Son of Man in glory are ironically interplayed.¹⁰⁹ Thus we can say that the pericope of the last judgment is linked to the rest of the Gospel in the themes that appear in it, especially the theme of authority of the Son of Man. And in keeping with Matthew's presentation in the rest of the Gospel the Son of Man demonstrates his authority both in word (The discourse 23-25) and deed (Passion narrative).

A Summary of the History of Interpretation

This passage has been the subject of attention over the centuries. Sherman W. Gray in his doctoral dissertation investigates the interpretation of this passage in the following historical periods: the early church, the middle ages, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation and the modern era which begins with the eighteenth century and concludes with the present.¹¹⁰ In his recent work, a collection of essays, Graham N. Stanton has also included another attempt at the interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 appropriately entitled "Once More: Matthew 25:31-46." And he notes:

With the exception of the Sermon on the Mount, no passage in Matthew's Gospel has attracted more attention from exegetes, theologians, and preachers, than the final pericope of the fifth and final discourse. The

¹⁰⁹Robinson, 235.

¹¹⁰Gray, 10.

interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 has been keenly disputed since at least the third century.¹¹¹

He commends Gray's work as "impressively wide ranging" but he also notes that the weakness of this work is that of not paying attention to the methods adopted by the various authors.¹¹² We will summarize briefly the findings of these two scholars as to the key points of the interpretation of this passage but we will also pay attention to the errors they have noticed so that we can avoid them in the interpretation.

Stanton observes that according to Sherman Gray's comprehensive survey, as many as thirty-two variously nuanced positions have been advanced. However two positions are predominant; that is the universalist and the particularist views.¹¹³ Gray sums it this way:

The Matthean scene of the final judgment belongs to that category of biblical passages that have exerted

¹¹¹Stanton, 207. See also D. A. Carson, *Matthew The Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol. 8, Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 488-495, 518-520. He gives a useful survey first of the interpretation of what he calls the "Olivet Discourse", then he also summarizes more specifically the interpretation of Matt. 25:31-46. He especially draws attention to the dispensationalist point of view.

¹¹²Stanton, fn 1, 207.

¹¹³There are mainly two lines of thought
 1) The particularist view- restrictive, narrow, regarding the identity of the least. The needy are considered Christ's apostles, or the members of the Christian community.
 2) The universalist or expansive: all encompassing, universalist indicates that the author sees the

tremendous influence on Christian preaching, praxis, literature, and art. It has been used to remind the readers of the certainty of eternal judgment. Vv 35-40, 42-45 "Dialogue of the needy Christ" or the "identity dialogue" have been used to exhort Christians to greater alms giving. Throughout the centuries exegetes have found in this passage grounds for charity without bounds, interpreting it as a command to Christians and non Christians alike to care for every human need. In recent years this has been challenged as not providing a legitimate basis for Christian concern for the poor and the needy in the world. The problem lies on the interpretation of the pericope πάντα τα ἔθνη in v 32 and ἐν τούτων (τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου) τῶν ἐλαχίστων in vv 40, 45. What is the make up of "all nations"? Is it to be understood in its Jewish sense as those not Jewish, or in the Christian sense of all who are not Christian, or in its widest possible sense of all human beings? Who are the least of the brothers? are they the disciples or all Christians, or Jews, or any human being in need?¹¹⁴

Stanton's main contribution to the interpretation of this passage is the emphasis on the apocalyptic aspect. He notes that the passage contains apocalyptic, parabolic, and poetic language which by its nature is evocative and elusive rather than didactic.¹¹⁵ He says that if this literary form is taken seriously then it will shed light on the social setting of the recipients of the Gospel, so he asserts

These verses are intended to console anxious Christians who perceive themselves to be threatened both by the local Jewish leadership and the Gentile society at large¹¹⁶

In his conclusion Sherman Gray notes that until the 20th century the predominant interpretation was the narrow or the particularist view. He also suggests that the 20th

beneficiaries as all men and women.

¹¹⁴Gray, 8-9.

century interpretations may have been influenced by the two world wars and the growth of the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical movement and the Second Vatican council. The exegetical pitfalls that have dominated this passage which he observes are two. One, is the failure to take into account the parabolic nature of the passage and the other is the failure to realize that the Matthean judgment scene can be interpreted only in the context of the remainder of the gospel.¹¹⁷

Exegetical Analysis of the passage: Matt. 25:31-46

Outline

I The summons vv. 31-33

A. The coming of the Son of Man v. 31

1. He will come

2. He will sit

B. The gathering of the nations vv. 32-33

1. He will gather them

2. He will separate them

II The surprises vv. 34-45

A. The address to the Sheep v. 34

1. The declaration vv. 35-36

2. The reason for the declaration vv. 35-36

3. The surprised response of the righteous vv. 37-39

¹¹⁵Stanton, 209,

4. The clarification v. 40
- B. The address to the Goats vv. 41-45
 1. The declaration v. 41
 2. The reason for the declaration vv. 42-43
 3. The surprised response of those cursed v. 44
 4. The clarification v. 45.

III The sentencing v. 46

- A. Eternal punishment
- B. Eternal life.

The summons vv. 31-33: Stanton states that this passage forms the climax of the eschatological discourse.¹¹⁸ As the drama of the last judgment unfolds we are introduced immediately to the main actor of the drama. This is mentioned as the Son of Man¹¹⁹ (v. 31), the King (v. 34) and he

¹¹⁶Stanton, 210.

¹¹⁷Gray, 351. We hope to pay close attention to these facts as we interpret the section.

¹¹⁸The conjunction $\delta\epsilon$ should be taken as continuative, showing that the parables are in a sort of series. But all the same there is a change of scene. Stanton (1992), 222, argues that the supporters of the universalist interpretation insist that since there is no syntactical break in the fifth discourse in v. 31, the passage must be treated as the preceding parables, as an exhortation to faithfulness, vigilance and showing loving concern to those in dire need. But his point is that there is still a break in the thrust because it is no longer Christians who are being addressed but the men and women in general.

¹¹⁹The Son of Man title has given rise to a great

is addressed as the "Lord" by both the "sheep and the goats" (v. 37, 40). This section is opened by the dramatic entry of this exalted figure. Since we have been introduced to the subject of judgment in the preceding sections it is really a worthy finish of the discourse to be ushered into the finality of all things. The temporal clause in the subjunctive mood introduced by the word ὅταν brings in an element of indefiniteness.¹²⁰ However, what is indefinite is not the fact that the son of man will come but the fact that the time of his coming is not clear. This has been repeated in the previous parables where the believers have been exhorted to keep vigilant because they do not know the day nor the hour (24:42, 44; 25:13).

The glorious appearing of the son of Man is described in two prepositional phrases ἐν τῇ δόξῃ and καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ. This shows that the son of man is exalted and has power and he is certainly the main actor of the drama. The picture is one of grandeur, majesty,

deal of discussion among scholars. We will be diverted from our main course if we delve into the full discussion. See Carson, 521. He draws our attention to the fact that nowhere in this discourse does Jesus explicitly (see 8:20) identify the Son of Man with himself (24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44). But since the title is used in response to the question "What will be the sign of your coming?" (24:3), the inference is inescapable. Morris (1992), 635, draws our attention to the fact the place that Matthew assigns the Son of Man is what is usually for God himself not the Messiah. But in note 55, he explains that this is something that is not exceptional for in I Enoch, the elect one is on the throne of God judging (I Enoch 61:8) and the "Son of Man" performs much the same function (I Enoch 62:5).

authority and judgment.¹²¹ A close parallel to this is "the Son of Man coming from heaven with power and great glory" (24:30). Mention has also been made earlier of the Son of Man coming "in the glory of his father" rather than "his glory".¹²² The accompanying angels have been mentioned in 13:41. Zechariah 14:5 has also been mentioned in connection with the "holy angels". This is further highlighted by the mention of what he will do when he comes τότε καθίσει ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ (see also 19:28, "the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory"). This is a descriptive genitive¹²³ so the translation should be "his glorious throne".¹²⁴ This brings home the fact that the one we are meeting here is not just an ordinary being but the one who has power over the destinies of all human beings. He is the eschatological judge who is coming to show all mankind what their lot is. This may have its source from Daniel 7:13-14 and the Similitudes of Enoch in which a Messianic figure

¹²⁰ See also Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament* Vol. 3 (Bowling Green, Kentucky: Renaissance Press, 1978), 384.

¹²¹ Blomberg, 376. See also Carson, 521. He quotes Broadus who said, "nothing earthly could furnish the images for an adequate description".

¹²² Hagner, 741. He says that this is an indication of the high Christology in Matthew.

¹²³ Yeager, 385. He says that the absence of the article makes the genitive a descriptive adjective.

¹²⁴ Morris, 635. He draws our attention to other alternative translations. He says that "His Kingly state is

occupies the throne of God's Judgment.¹²⁵

B. The gathering of all nations (vv. 32-33): When the judge has assumed his position then all the nations will be gathered before him. In this section there are three main clauses all joined by *καί*. The first sentence describes what will happen *συναχθησονται*¹²⁶ *εμπροσθεν αυτου παντα τα εθνη*. That all the nations will be gathered before him is a comprehensiveness that matches the commission that the Gospel will be preached to all nations (Matt. 24:14). The verb is in the passive and commentators¹²⁷ suggest that this should be taken as a divine passive. The interpretation of the "all nations" has been a subject of contention. Hagner summarizes the five options which have been suggested by Gray¹²⁸. What seems to be plausible is that this refers to all mankind both Jews and Gentiles. As the Gospel is

shown by the reference to his sitting in his glorious throne". The GNB refers to it as "royal throne", NIV "His throne in heavenly glory" both he acknowledges as bringing out the splendour of the "Son of Man". JB has the "throne of his glory" which means that the throne is itself his glory.

¹²⁵J. A. T. Robinson, 225.

¹²⁶Robinson, 231. He says that this is a Matthean word. Whereas in this verse it is used in the regular Matthean sense in vv.35, 38, and 43, it has the meaning found only here in the NT of "take in" or "show hospitality" which is generally recognized as Semitism. Yeager also points out that this verb is emphatic because it appears before the noun. This gathering or assembly is crucial to the continuation of the drama. What happens afterwards is dependent on this being gathered.

¹²⁷Hagner, 742.

preached to all people, Jews and Gentiles, even the judgment must be for all.

Then he will separate them from one another. The shift from the neuter *τα εθνη* to the masculine *αυτοις* (them the people) in v. 32b implies that individuals and not just nations or people groups are intended.¹²⁹ Then he uses a common imagery from the pastoral world. This is the separation of the sheep from the goats.¹³⁰ It seems to have been a well known thing in the countryside for the sheep and the goats to mingle during the day but in the night they were often separated. The sheep tolerate the cool air, but the goats have to be herded together for warmth. In the sparse grazing areas the animals might be separated even during the day as well. All these well known pastoral details are now used in symbolism.

He will place the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left. This right hand usually refers to a place of honour. The sheep's wool made them more valuable than the goats so naturally Jesus chooses the sheep to represent those who are blessed by God.

¹²⁸Hagner, 742. All Nations has been said to refer to, 1) All human beings. 2) All Christians. 3) All Non Christians and Jews. 4) All non Christians. 5) All non Jews. There are no indicators in this verse that any group is to be excluded, since the command is clearly to preach to "All nations." The end will come when "All nations" have been reached (24:14), indeed "All nations" will see him (24:30).

11. The surprises vv. 34-45: This section contains two major declarations. First, the sheep are addressed and commended for what they have done (vv. 34-40). Then the goats are castigated for not doing what was expected and they are consigned to eternal damnation (vv. 41-46). The two dialogues follow the same pattern except for some slight variation. The author's literary skill is made clear by his use of comparisons and repetitions to emphasize his point.

The declaration to the sheep v. 34: The temporal conjunction $\tau\omicron\tau\epsilon$ ¹³¹ makes the assembling and separation and the king's statement to the sheep successive events. First we see that the title of the one addressing has now changed to King. Carson says that this change is not unnatural,¹³² for in the book of Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days to receive a Kingdom. He also notes that the kingship motif has long since been hinted at or made explicit to certain persons in the Gospel (see 3:2; 4:17; 5:35; 16:28; 19:28; 27:42).¹³³

¹²⁹Blomberg, 376; Gundry, 188.

¹³⁰France (1985), 356. He notes that the parables of chap. 13 also emphasize division. Robinson, 233, also notes Matthew's fondness of the parables of separation, one from agriculture (Wheat and Tares), one from fishing (The Dragnet) and one from sheep farming (The Sheep and the Goats).³

¹³¹Gundry, 188 and Robinson note that this is one of Matthew's favourite phrases. It occurs 90 times in the gospel and in this section it occurs six times. It is a literary device that helps to propel the drama forward and it gives one a sense of expectation for what is yet to come.

The King issues a strong command Δευτε, the plural of δευρο. It is also used as a hortative so that here we get the sense that the king is imploring them to come to his presence. This communicates to us the fact that the sheep are not welcome in an offhand manner but that their presence is deeply desired by the King. To underscore this privileged status, they are further addressed as "the blessed ones of my father";¹³⁴ a noun clause clarifying who they are. This also shows the link between the work of the Father and the Son. In this section we have two perfect participles εὐλογημένοι and ἡτοιμασμένην. The perfect tense looks at both the beginning and conclusion of the action and thus represents a present condition or state as the result of a past completed action. The sheep were blessed at the time that the Lord made the statement because they were blessed from the time the foundation of the world was laid. Similarly, we also learn that the kingdom which they were to inherit had been prepared for them at the same time.¹³⁵ This further indicates their honoured position. The concrete blessing that is bestowed upon them here is that they were to inherit the Kingdom, κληρονομησατε. The aorist here can

¹³² I agree with Carson who sees this change as natural, because Matthew uses various Messianic titles for Jesus, see Carson, 521. However, other scholars see this change from "Son of Man" to "king" as a signal that Matthew fused two sayings together but forgot to be consistent in his characters. See Robinson, 236.

¹³³ Carson, 521. See also Gundry, 188. He notes that

be treated as constative to emphasize the idea that this will certainly take place. Furthermore this Kingdom was not an afterthought in God's mind but something that had been prepared before the foundation of the world. This is part of God's eternal purpose.

The reason for the declaration vv.35-36: These are a series of reason clauses introduced by the particle $\gamma\alpha\rho$.¹³⁶ Each clause has two parts, one indicates the lack while the other indicates the response of the sheep or the goats to the lack. These are six different situations of need all in the aorist tense repeated four times in the passage.¹³⁷ One wonders why these six needs and why the order? But it seems logical to take these needs as representative. Hagner asserts that the catalogue is representative, so it covers the most basic need in order to represent the meeting of human need of every kind. He also quotes Gray who says that they are "Parabolic stage props . . . used to convey

Matthew likes to portray Jesus as King (1:23; 13:41; 16:28; 20:21)

¹³⁴Though the Son is the Judge, he still works in conjunction with the father. Carson, 521. He also points out how Jesus loves to associate his work with that of the father in the following references: 10:32-33; 11:25-27; 15:13; 16:17, 27; 18:10, 19; 20:23; 26:29, 53.

¹³⁵Yeager, 390.

¹³⁶This should be taken as consequential not causal. Carson, 521, says that this is more evidential than causative. See also Morris, 637, fn. 67. The conjunction gives the evidence rather than the reason. Yeager (392), however gives an opposite view. He says that the $\gamma\alpha\rho$ is causal and

the primary meaning of the parable".¹³⁸ Most of the commentators recognize the resemblance of this list with Isaiah 58:7.¹³⁹ This list is presented to us in memorable couplets as follows, giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, providing shelter for the stranger and clothing to the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. If we may note the mention of the stranger, Morris mentions that in first century Palestine the stranger was in a particularly diffi-

he comments on how the doctrine of grace and works are evident in this passage.

¹³⁷France (1985), 357. He suggests that the importance of repetition is to aid in remembrance for this may have been a guide to practical discipleship.

¹³⁸An alternative suggestion has been offered by Via. He says the six-fold list of needs which are not satisfied could have been a traditional list of deeds of mercy and charitable action, or could be a list of hardships such as those experienced by missionaries. He says that tradition knows of a charitable ethic to be practised by the Christian community, which includes an alms giving to be performed in secret. But there has been a substantial Matthean redaction which has created this pericope as we now see it has given to it a specialised context and application, particularly relevant to the needs of Matthew's community. The charitable ethic has been converted to an eschatological ethic, the poor and needy recipients have become Christian missionaries in their hardships. A tradition of charity which has strong Jewish roots has been reinterpreted so that it speaks specifically of relations to the missionaries of a Judaeo-Christian community. What are the reasons that might justify this radical reorientation of the material and a judgmental attitude? There is a situation of hostility. The evidence found in 10:16-33. Much of the material is concerned with the non-acceptance of the gospel and the hostility with which missionaries are treated, such that the minimal acceptance of even offering a cup of cold water will receive its due reward (230).

¹³⁹See Carson, 521 and Gundry, 189. Hagner, 744. He has included other OT and Apocryphal references e.g. Ezek. 18:7,16; Tobith 4:16, Job 31:32; Sir. 7:32-35. Stanton, 218. He also recognizes that Is. 58:7 is the closest to Matt.25:31-46. Though he draws our attention to the fact that this is not an exhaustive list of the needs of society because it does not refer to widows, orphans, those who mourn, the physically disabled or to the burial of the dead

cult position especially because there was lack of hotel facilities. He points out the fact that Christians were meant to take this seriously especially as they cared for the travelling evangelist.¹⁴⁰ Most of the commentators see the connection between this passage with 10:11-15, 40-42, where those who welcome and provide hospitality to the disciples of Jesus, welcome him and those who give a cup of cold water to the "little ones" will be rewarded.¹⁴¹ The mention of visiting those in prison is unique among the deeds of piety expected of a Jew. This may be a further indication of the hostile situation that the early Christians were facing.¹⁴²

which were other serious concerns of the community.

¹⁴⁰Morris, 637-638. He mentions the references in Acts 10:23 and Hebrews 13:2, to emphasize the fact that Christians were expected to be hospitable especially to the ministers of the gospel.

¹⁴¹Stanton, 220. He refers to the *Didache* 12-13 in which instructions of acceptance of Christian prophets show the major role that hospitality played in the spread of the gospel such that it had to be regulated. See also Gundry, 189. He emphasizes the socio-cultural setting that was unfavourable to the Christians. So he notes that this is an allusion to the hospitality given by genuine Christians to a fellow Christian who is fleeing persecution (cf. 10:42).

¹⁴²Stanton, 220. Christians are encouraged to visit prisoners Heb. 10:34; 13:3. He indicates that nations will be judged for the improper treatment of the prisoners taken from God's people. Morris, 638, gives us a grim picture of first century prisons. He says that people avoided prisons as a plague, so this is really commendable that these who are being commended visited those in prison.

The surprised response of the righteous¹⁴³ vv.37-39: These are three interrogative clauses introduced by the particle ποτε. This series of repetitions is meant to heighten the drama and to indicate the extent of surprise that this group is expressing. They address the king as Lord which show that they are aware of his exalted position.

The King's response v. 40: This further clarifies to the righteous why they are being treated favourably. The preposition εφ with the indefinite relative pronoun οσον in the accusative case is adverbial, indicating the cause¹⁴⁴ of their commendation. Whenever they did anything for those "the least of my brothers" they did to him, "ενι τουτων των αδελφον μου των ελαχιστων εμοι επισατε. The superlative of μικρος, is used here to indicate the very least in importance, that is the most insignificant. One could not go lower than that. The identification of "the least of my brothers" has been the subject of much contention. There are

¹⁴³This is a favourite term of Matthew (cf. v.46; 10:41; 13:43, 49). This further shows the link with the parables of division and also the reference to the missionary discourse with the discourse in question. Robinson also mentions apart from these references the phrase occurs only in Luke 14:11; and Acts 24:15. Donahue draws attention to this term saying that it reveals to Matthew's community the criteria by which all people will be judged and the norms by which they, like those on the right, can be called just (δικαιοι). He also says the treatment of the least whom he identifies as Christians in mission and mission to the world becomes the occasion by which the true meaning of justice is revealed to the world (30).

¹⁴⁴Yeager, 397,

two main views, the particularist and the universalist.¹⁴⁵ There are strong reasons for interpreting them as disciples and the church.¹⁴⁶ The term "least of my brothers" combines two terms Matthew uses for the disciples, the "little ones" and "brothers." The disciples are referred to as Jesus' brothers in 12:48-50. They are those who hear the word and do it. In Matthew 23:8 those who have him for their teacher, are the disciples. In 28:10 the risen Lord tells the ladies to tell his "brothers," the disciples, to meet him in Galilee. The church members are also called "little ones" (18:6, 10, 14) employing the positive degree of the adjective of which "the least" (25:40, 45) is the superlative. This is also closely parallel to 10:40, 42, "the little one" to whom a cup of cold water is given, whom Jesus closely

¹⁴⁵ Gray's summary as presented by Hagner (744) in descending order of popularity. 1) Everyone particularly the needy of all mankind. 2) all Christians 3) Christian Missionaries. 4) Jewish Christians. Option 1 is termed Universalist because it embraces all mankind needy ones. The other three options are shades or nuances of the Particularist view.

¹⁴⁶ See France, 355, for the support of the particularist view. He quotes Green who says "It is the nearest that Matthew, or the synoptic tradition generally comes to the conception of the Church as the Body of Christ". Stanton strengthens his support of the Particularist view by appealing to apocalyptic literature and he says "Apocalyptic language is also often used to reinforce attitudes of group solidarity among minority groups at odds with society at large; clear lines are drawn between insiders and outsiders", 228.

identifies himself and who is clearly a disciple.¹⁴⁷

The declaration to those on the left vv. 41-45: Then he, understood to be the king because he has been the subject all along, issues a command *πορευεσθε απ εμου*. Just as those on the right had been implored to come to the presence of the king these are being sent away in the strongest terms possible. They are also identified as the "cursed ones." The perfect tense, *κατηραμενοι*, means having been cursed from eternity past they were still condemned.¹⁴⁸ Their destina-

¹⁴⁷Via, 92. He however, adds that there is a difference between the sheep of 25:40 and those who give water in 10:42. The sheep do not know those whom they care for while the giver giving water gives it for the sake of Christ. Thus the least cannot be limited to the disciples of Jesus and the Gentiles who have shown love to brothers of Jesus who are not disciples cannot be evangelised Gentiles. The reader learns that the son of Man is met both in the church and outside the church. In response to this, Cope says the surprise theme with stress on the indirectness of the contact with Jesus so essential to the story, is regarded by some of the commentators as an obstacle to the identification of the least with the missionaries. But in answer to this he notes that what is so obvious in a well organized mission in an established church is by no means obvious with itinerant missionaries peddling religion like door to door salesmen.

¹⁴⁸Yeager, 399. He argues that it is grammatically possible to translate it in the middle voice. But D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 77 warns that the middle voice should not always be taken as a reflexive so the context has to determine. In this particular case it may be possible to give this a middle rendering since the goats by not responding to the needs of the "little ones" put themselves in this unfavourable situation. See also, Morris, 639. He notes that this is the only occurrence of *καταρασαι* in Matthew (found only five times in the NT). He quotes Moulton who says that the perfect *κατηραμενοι* has a full perfect force "having become subjects of a curse" so that it makes the predicate translation "Under a curse" more appropriate.

tion is the eternal fire which had been prepared for the devil and his angels. The double emphatic attributive position in το πυρ το αλωνιον το ητοιμασμενον, draws our attention to the fact that this fire is eternal and it is this fire that was prepared from eternity past for the devil and his messengers. Unlike those who were entering the Kingdom, these are going to what had not been prepared for them. They consigned themselves to where they were not meant to go.

The reason for the declaration vv. 42-43: The clause explains why they had been treated unfavourably. The six items are mentioned again to the unrighteous but now with the verbs of response negated. As the righteous are approved because of the deeds of mercy so the unrighteous are faulted for their lack of charitable deeds toward Jesus.

The reply of those on the left vv.44: They equally show surprise that they did not see him and do these things. The response is shortened and joined by the contrastive particle η. This shortened response helps to speed the drama to the finish.

The King's reply v. 45: He will give the same reply like he gave to those on right, only this time there is the negation of "they did not do." The word "brother" is not repeated this time but the understanding is that these are the same people.

The sentencing v.46: This is then the final result of the two groups of people who had been addressed. The και

can be translated as "and" or "then," in order to bring about a sense of connection of what has gone on before. The sentence of the goats who have just been addressed is given first. They are to go to the eternal Judgment, while the righteous are to go to eternal life. The δε is adversative indicating that the sheep, who are now called the οι δίκαιοι and who are given eternal life are in the opposite category from the goats indicated by the pronoun ουτοι. The parallel places of abode have to be taken together, because they are both described by the adjective "eternal".

Summary of the findings

Despite the great disagreement that has reigned over this passage there is a certain consensus that is coming to the scene. The passage has to be taken in the context of the book of Matthew and especially in its socio-cultural setting. The "least of these my brethren" refers to the disciples who in the first century were facing several hardships in the spread of the Gospel. Those who risked their lives by welcoming them to their homes and giving them assistance are those who are being commended. Those who identified themselves with them in their plight are those who are called to inherit the Kingdom.

Although the passage lacks the lofty universalism that it has received there is a lot that it teaches about

the care of the needy and the poor within the context of believers. Blomberg says

Hence there is no more pressing priority in this life than to respond properly to Jesus and his messengers by becoming disciples through faith in him. Then we must demonstrate Christ's Lordship in our lives through acts of service—to all the needy, yes but especially to those of the household of faith (cf. Gal. 6:10). What is more, picturing Christian witness as needy and suffering reminds us of the lot true believers often face. This is graphically seen in the Two-Thirds World today where some estimates suggest that over two hundred million Christians suffer malnutrition everyday.¹⁴⁹

This passage also causes us to pay attention to those who carry the work of God especially in a full time capacity and they have to suffer hardships. Some have mistakenly believed that the call to the ministry is the call to exalted status but the catalogue of needs, describes the life that faces the minister of the Gospel. It is reported that Martin Luther used this verse to really gain support for the workers of the Church who were deprived of the state support once the break with Rome was complete.¹⁵⁰

Hospitality is one of the deeds that "sheep" are commended for doing to the "least of the brethren." Gundry has argued that during this time of great hostility and per-

¹⁴⁹Blomberg, 380. This the only commentary that mentions the problems that face the believers in the Third-World.

¹⁵⁰Gray, 204. He notes that Luther did this because he considered the poor pastors and preachers as the least ones who had suffered hunger, thirst and persecution because they had been deprived of financial support by the goats "the popes, cardinals, bishops, canons, priests and the whole diabolic rabble in Rome."

secution of the believers and the ministers of the Gospel, those who were ready to risk their lives offered hospitality.¹⁵¹ By this they showed that they were the true disciples of Jesus. This is especially strengthened by reference to the missionary discourse in Chapter 10 for the identification of the "little ones." In his article "Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in Gospel Transmission," D. W. Riddle shows the crucial part the hospitality of the early Christians played in the spread of the gospel.

It is of primary importance that in the beginning, it was people not documents who spread the news about Jesus. It was the spoken word- the human voice which carried the messages.¹⁵²

This is attested by the several references in the paraenetic sections of the epistles.¹⁵³ Riddle also notes that, Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, while offering hospitality inquired diligently about the life of the early

¹⁵¹Gundry, 6.

¹⁵²D. W. Riddle, "Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in Gospel Transmission" *JBL* 57 (1938): 145.

¹⁵³References that enjoin hospitality among God's people, Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2, 3; I Peter 4:9; Titus 1:8; I Tim. 5:10. Extra canonical references are also there. In I Clement the Christians of Corinth are commended for showing hospitality. Hermas praises the practice of hospitality by saying "in hospitality may be found the practice of good" (Mand. 8:10). The Didache which is said to have been written at the same time as Matthew has instructions regulating the practice of hospitality. Justin Martyr notes that the one of the characteristics of the Christians was "we who hated and destroyed one another and because their manners were different would not live with men of a different tribe, now since the coming of the Christ, live familiarly with them and pray for our enemies" (Apol. 14)

apostle because he thought he could learn more this way rather than from books.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, hospitality was one way that clearly demonstrated the oneness among the Christians and especially so during the times of persecution.

Conclusion:

Stanton has argued that the Gospel of Matthew should be entitled "a gospel for a new people" and I would agree with this because it is evident from this discussion that the Jew/Gentile relation issue is very paramount. It is evident that during this period God was rearranging the composition of what had formerly been called "his people" into a new people consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. The rearrangement was a painful one because people had to learn to abandon their old prejudices. This new person was also born out of the crucible of a hostile environment so that even "as brother turned against brother" and "the love of many grew cold" there were still those who reached out, risking their lives by providing food, drink and shelter to their suffering brethren. These are the ones who are being commended "When I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. . ."

This message is crucial in Africa especially where it has been said the spread of the gospel is a mile wide but an inch deep. Opportunities have been provided to test this

¹⁵⁴Riddle, 149.

out in some places more than in others and it has been proved true that in the midst of clashes ethnic or otherwise, Christians have betrayed brothers, sisters and parents. Thankfully some have stood the test and even lost their lives even as they chose to be identified with the people of God rather than their former loyalties. The question is, Are we really the "new people of God?" If this is true, then among us there will be "neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free." However, we have to wait for the application in Chapter 5. Meanwhile we have to see how Jesus set the pace for us as he practised an inclusive ministry as we will see from the various examples of his life in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4
HOSPITALITY SCENES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS
ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Introduction

One distinctive feature of Jesus' ministry was his practice of a radically inclusive and non hierarchical table fellowship as a central strategy in his announcement and redefinition of the in-breaking rule of God. In so doing Jesus challenged the inherent exclusivism and status consciousness of accepted social and religious customs and presented a living parable of renewed Israel.¹⁵⁵ One author also claims that Matthew's salvation history is on two axes, a temporal and a social one. "The temporal axis moves through two periods, from Israelite privilege to universalism, and the social axis represents the incorporation of the marginal elements of the patriarchal society into the new people of God."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵S. S. Bartchy, "Table Fellowship" in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 796-800.

¹⁵⁶S. Mcknight, "Matthew, Gospel of" In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 536-541. Jerome H. Neyrey Ed. *The Social World of Luke-Acts Models for Interpretation* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991, 378. Neyrey, also asserts that Jesus' selection of the table companions

In this section we will attempt to show how Jesus crossed these boundaries by interacting with people from all social and ethnic spheres.¹⁵⁷ This he did mainly through associating with those who were considered as outcasts at meals, as noted above. This is also observed by Christine D. Pohl who says,

Particularly in the context of meals, Jesus as guest and host challenged the socio-religious practices of exclusion. The inauguration of shared meals in his memory made it necessary that Jesus' followers would continue to confront these patterns of exclusion.¹⁵⁸

For this reason we will use the story of the calling of Matthew as his disciple, which also shows how he interacts with tax collectors and sinners thus demonstrating that

is "no mere lapse of regard for the customs of his day but a formal strategy. By eating with sinners and foreigners Jesus formally signals that God extends an inclusive invitation to non-observant and sinful outsiders for covenant membership and for status as forgiven persons."

¹⁵⁷See also G. Lohfink, **Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of The Christian Faith** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 88. He says "It was the characteristic of Jesus that he constantly established community—precisely for those who were denied community at the time, or who were inferior in respect to religion, Jesus made it clear through his word and even more through his concrete conduct that he did not recognize religious-social exclusion and discrimination. The reign of God permitted no "classes"; it was in principle open to all within Israel who accepted Jesus' message."

¹⁵⁸Christine D. Pohl, "Hospitality from the Edge: The significance of Marginality in the Practice of Welcome" in **The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics** (1995): 126. J Healey and D. Sybertz **Towards An African Narrative Theology** (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 170. They write from African context showing how the African form of hospitality was very inclusive.

he had come for all people even those who had been excluded by the religious establishment of Judaism (Matt. 9:9-13). Jesus also extended hospitality through healing and by recognizing those who were marginal in society. Thus, in the story of the healing of the Centurion's servant, Jesus demonstrates that one need not look down on the Gentiles because this one had even greater faith than that found in Israel (Matt. 8:5-13). And in his encounter with the Canaanite woman he broke down the gender and ethnic distinctions (Matt. 15:21-28).

The Healing of the Centurion's Servant Matt. 8:5-13

Context

The first two incidences we will focus on in this section appear in the large section that is signalled by the "inclusio" in 4:23 and 9:35, summarizing Jesus' ministry. "Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, curing every disease and every sickness among the people". In chap. 5-7, the section known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets out his agenda for his people by teaching with an authoritative word (7:28). In this section, 7:28-9:35 he now demonstrates

his authority by his actions.¹⁵⁹ Both the teachings and these "mighty works of justice"¹⁶⁰ were accomplished by his authoritative word, "He taught as one having authority" (7:28), and "He cast out the spirits with a word" (8:16).

This narrative section has nine miracles stories (ten actual miracles and summaries of several others). The structure has been a source of great debate¹⁶¹ but it has recently been accepted that they appear in groups of three, which is a common feature in Matthew.

¹⁵⁹Davies and Allison (1991), 1, 5. They present their views thus: that Mt. 8-9 is the second half of a two-panel series which typifies Jesus ministry. In 5-7 he speaks and in 8-9 he acts. This thereby shows that God in Christ both heals in words and deeds. The function of chap 8-9 is to set him up an example, like the master like the disciple (10:24). The Jesus of Matt. 8-9 is a model. One must not only learn his words (5-7) but copy his acts and imitate his behaviour. As pupil with rabbi, the pupil must learn by normative precept 5-7, and by normative example 8-9. 5-10 This is to say that 5-7, the words of Jesus, 8-9, the deeds of Jesus, 10, the words and deeds of his disciples, 11-12, the response. Thus all these depict Jesus' mission to the lost sheep of Israel, Jesus speaks and acts. Then he sends his representatives to his people and chap 10-12 are the response to this mission.

¹⁶⁰Dr. Wood, my Professor, terms these miracles as mighty works of justice which the bringer of justice uses to authenticate his ministry. They play the same role as the plagues in Egypt when Moses was called to release his people from slavery. He also sees 5-9 in two parts, 5-7 as the proclamation of the justice bringer and 8-9, as the mighty works of justice that show forth retributive and distributive justice. The suffering are restored whole, while judgment is carried on the ones that cause the oppression, the demons that cause the sicknesses and the leaders of the religious establishment e.g. the Pharisees.

¹⁶¹See Davies and Allison, 1-4. They summarize the views of various scholars on the structure of this section.

It has also been noticed by some commentators that these miracles are directed to the outcasts or the lowly members ¹⁶²of the community. Blomberg especially notes that the first miracles clearly demonstrate Jesus' ministry to the social outcasts,

He touches a leper who was ritually unclean, he rewards and praises the faith of a Gentile Centurion who was an outcast among the Jews due to his ethnic background. He heals and touches a woman who was usually treated as a second class citizen due to her gender. In each case Jesus ignores the cultural taboos and lavishes compassion on the ostracized.¹⁶³

All these go to demonstrate Jesus' hospitality to all these people. Now we will look at the healing of the Centurion's servant.

Structure

This is straightforward:

- v 5a-b The setting
- v5c-6 The speech of the Centurion
- v7 The speech of Jesus
- v8-9 The speech of the Centurion extended
- v10-13a The Speech of Jesus extended.
- v 13b Conclusion.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²See Davies and Allison, 1. See also C. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of the Scripture in NIV Text The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 136.

¹⁶³Blomberg, 136. He says that the three healings that in 8:1-17 are Jesus' response to outcasts in Israel, to bodily "uncleanness" (8:1-4), ethnic "uncleanness" (8:5-13), and gender "uncleanness" (8:14-15).

¹⁶⁴See also Davies and Allison, 17.

The setting vv. 5a-b: This event occurs in Capernaum,¹⁶⁵ the town which Jesus had made the headquarters of his Galilean ministry. The prophetic statement in 4:13-16 seems to point to the significance of Jesus' choice of Capernaum. This is a pointer that his ministry would later include Gentiles. In Jesus' day this was an important town as a garrison centre and also a post for customs. The genitive absolute "as he was entering Capernaum," indicates the action prior to the main verb, showing us when this event occurred. This gives vividness to the story.

We are also introduced to the other protagonist of this story, the Centurion.¹⁶⁶ Davies and Allison tell us,

The εκατονταρχος was the officer in charge of a Roman Century, that is one hundred foot soldiers. He was often an ordinary soldier of a legion who had been promoted, although the post was held by magistrates or lower members of the equestrian order. His responsibilities were

¹⁶⁵This is the second mention of Capernaum in Matthew. The first occurs in Matt. 4:13.

¹⁶⁶Luke records almost a similar parallel to this story in 7:1-10. The setting is the same i.e. after the Sermon on the Plain. However, Luke's story is directly after the Sermon without the intervening story of the healing of the leper that occurs in Matt. 8:1-4 before this story. Matthew also omits the delegation that comes to plead to Jesus on his behalf. Carson, 200, *The Expositors Commentary*, on the differences between Luke and Matthew says, "Luke stresses Jewish sympathies and his humility, Matthew his faith and race (vv.10-11). Indeed one reason Matthew says nothing about intermediaries may be because they were Jews, and he does not want to blur the racial distinction". See also Davies and Allison, 17 for a comparison between this story and the one that occurs in John 4:46-53. Most commentators say that despite the similarities the one in John comes from a different tradition.

vast and included field command and the supervision of capital offenses.¹⁶⁷

The important thing about this man is that he was a Gentile and orthodox Jews would have considered him unclean because of his race. He would have also been despised¹⁶⁸ because he was a symbol of Roman subjugation. This position was also unusual because the one who had power was asking for a favour.

The speech of the Centurion vv. 5c-6: The Centurion approaches Jesus with utmost respect addressing him as "Lord,"¹⁶⁹ which is used twice in this exchange. Discussions focus on whether he understood the Christological implications of this title but in view of the fact that we later see him demonstrate such great faith indicates that this may have meant more than ordinary, "sir".

We are not told the nature of the illness, but the use of the word paralyzed and the adverb *δεινως*,¹⁷⁰ which

¹⁶⁷Davies and Allison, 19. Gundry, 141, says that the use of the Centurion may be a loose usage which might refer to a military official in the service of Herod Antipas.

¹⁶⁸However, there is a favourable picture of Centurions in the NT. One is said to have built a synagogue (Lk. 7:3). Another safely conducts Paul to Rome (Acts 27:1). While another stands near the cross and confesses him to be God (Mk. 15:39). Another, Cornelius, is converted, and a whole chapter is devoted to him (Acts 10).

¹⁶⁹Davies and Allison, 20. They say that this was a positive address of Jesus, because none of his opponents address him in this way.

¹⁷⁰Davies and Allison, 21. They say that this is a hapax in Matthew.

means "terribly" does indicate the severity of the illness. This helps us to appreciate all the more the healing when it does come. He makes the request for his servant but the word *παῖς* is used and this could be translated either servant or son.¹⁷¹ He was probably his house slave.

Jesus' initial reply v. 7: His answer is that he will come and heal him. The unusual Greek construction with the emphatic *εγώ* has made some commentators say that this was not a straightforward affirmative¹⁷² but an hesitation on Jesus part. Whichever way we take this reply, the answer of the Centurion in verse 8 still indicates his faith is exceptional.

The extended Speech of the Centurion vv. 8-9:

The Centurion first admits a humility by not accepting Jesus to come to his house. Then he demonstrates a depth of understanding of Jesus' mission by using an analogy from his own work. The construction *καὶ γὰρ εγώ* should be rendered "for I myself". In this he shows an understanding

¹⁷¹Davies and Allison, 21. They say that this may be the original. Only once in the NT does *παῖς* mean son in John 4:51). Luke uses slave consistently.

¹⁷²Blomberg, 141. He suggests that the emphatic "I" is equally appropriate as a forceful statement. In this context Matthew seems to be stressing Jesus' authority and this helps to bring it to the fore. Others like Carson, 201, Morris, 193, Davies and Allison, 21-22, are in favour of the fact this should be interpreted as question. Davies and Allison especially support their answer with five reasons. The main support is that they draw a parallel with the story of the Canaanite woman and show that Jesus was initially reluctant to heal. What is clear, however, from the passage is that Jesus was ready to interact with Gentiles.

of the Roman military system. All the authority belonged to the emperor and it was delegated to him. When he spoke, though a mere Centurion, he spoke with the imperial might of the Roman Emperor and so he was obeyed. This Centurion applied this self understanding to Jesus.¹⁷³ In the same way Jesus was vested with God's authority, so when he spoke God spoke. Thus he offers Jesus an opportunity to show this great power and authority by using a "word" only and also to do this from a distance which he did not see as a barrier. The use of the adverb *μονον* emphasises this point. It is significant that we have no recorded evidence up to this point that Jesus had performed a miracle from a distance so this was exceptional.

Jesus' extended reply vv. 10-13a: Jesus exclaims in astonishment at the faith of this man. The verb used here is the same one used when Jesus marveled at the unbelief of his people (Mark 6:6). He used this opportunity to draw attention to this great faith. He declares that such will come from East and West¹⁷⁴ to recline at the banquet of the Patriarchs. First Century Jews looked forward to the

¹⁷³See Carson, 201.

¹⁷⁴This saying in Luke has a different context (Luke 13:28). Blomberg, 142, points out that the Centurion is a paradigm of the many outside Judaism ("from the east and the west"-cf Ps.107:3) who will become Jesus' followers. Jesus is looking forward to time beyond his earthly ministry when Gentiles will flock to the faith.

inauguration of the messianic banquet¹⁷⁵ but they did not anticipate Gentiles participating in it. This is the reason why there has been a discussion as to who are these who will come from the East or from the West.¹⁷⁶ The fact that the contrast here is being drawn against the "sons of the Kingdom", believed to be the Jews, who will be excluded, shows that the Gentiles are in view here. This is also strengthened by the fact that Jesus has just commended a Gentile for his faith. Then Jesus turns from the crowd and tells the Centurion to go because his request had been answered.

The conclusion v.13b: The author's endorsement is that this healing actually took place at that very hour.

The Call of Matthew (Matt. 9:9-13).

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Context:

This occurs within the larger narrative section of chap. 8-9 where Jesus demonstrates his power in action. This is not a healing but it occurs in between the miracles and this note on discipleship seems to intersperse the "mighty

¹⁷⁵ Passages like Isaiah 25:6-9; 65:13-14 reinforced such expectations.

¹⁷⁶ Davies and Allison, 27. They argue convincingly that these will be those unprivileged Jews but they are careful to show that Gentiles will be included. What they are especially concerned about is the extreme view that some have taken saying that all the Jews will be excluded. They have also provided helpful alternative views regarding the interpretation of this verse.

acts of Justice".¹⁷⁷ In this section Jesus crosses the established boundaries of social status. This comes immediately after he had demonstrated his power to forgive sins in the story of the healing of the paralytic (9:1-8). So what he does in action is to show that this story was actually meant for sinners by interacting with them. What follows after this incident is the discussion of the issues on why the disciples do not fast and the case of the new wine and the old wineskins (9:14-17). This is appropriately placed because it shows that new structures have to be set up to accommodate the changes that are taking place, so that the new wine can be stored in the new wineskins. Carson puts it this way "Jesus came to set up a new structure to embrace the profound reality that he was introducing."¹⁷⁸

The man is called Matthew. The use of this name here has made the commentators¹⁷⁹ wonder why this name is used instead of Levi which the other synoptics prefer. The plausible explanation is that it was not uncommon to have two names. There are examples such as Paul also called Saul,

¹⁷⁷In Dr. Wood's outline of this chap. 8-9. Each of the triad of miracles is broken in between by a teaching of some aspect of discipleship. See "Notes on Matthew," Nov. 1995.

¹⁷⁸D. A. Carson, *When Jesus Confronts the World: An Exposition of Matthew 8-10* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, Michigan), 81.

¹⁷⁹Davies and Allison, 99. They give several alternatives on the use of the name Matthew. See also Leon Morris, 219.

and Peter also called Cephas. The authority of Jesus is demonstrated by the command "Follow me." Matthew, was obedient and he rose up and followed immediately. We are not told of any initial contact between Jesus and Matthew, so this immediate following serves to heighten the authority of Jesus and Matthew's commitment. He left a whole way of life to follow Jesus.¹⁸⁰

The Feast with the Tax collectors and Sinners vv.

10-13:

We are not told where this takes place. Three possibilities have been offered by Davies and Allison,¹⁸¹ namely Jesus' house, Levi's and Peter's. However, the most probable is Matthew's or Levi's house because the tax collectors would have been free to come here since he was one of them. Mark 2:15 and Luke 5:29 also locate the party in Levi's house. It may not be that crucial to know the exact place where this took place but it is important to note that

¹⁸⁰Morris, 220. He draws our attention to the fact that this decision of Matthew must have involved a great material sacrifice. He shows that tax collectors were wealthy people for there was good profit in their business. His action was also final because unlike the fishermen who could return to fishing, if he decided to go back he would not be able to get his job back because such a lucrative employment would have been filled immediately. And if he tried getting another job nobody would be eager to employ a former tax collector. So his response really showed a thoroughgoing trust in Jesus.

¹⁸¹Davies and Allison, 100.

what Jesus was doing was really revolutionary.¹⁸² He was reenacting in form of an acted parable that he had come to break down the barriers of status and class distinctions. He was showing that such divisions would not be tolerated in the kingdom of God. He stages this new message in an appropriate style in form of table fellowship.¹⁸³ Eating together¹⁸⁴ was a form of declaring that a friendship and a pact had been enacted. It was the ultimate sign that one was welcome to the group. The betrayal of one with whom one had shared a meal was considered the most grievous of sins¹⁸⁵ So Jesus made it absolutely clear¹⁸⁶ that his invitation was

¹⁸² It was a deliberate and strategic symbolism that Jesus used to shock the religious leaders of his day that a new era had dawned. See also notes, 156-158.

¹⁸³ Christine D. Pohl recognizes the centrality of meals in the life of Jesus. See note 159.

¹⁸⁴ Among my people, the Nandi, the sign of reconciliation was eating together, they also sealed agreements by drinking milk from the same calabash and also by eating together. Fathers Healey and Sybertz also confirms that eating together among the African people is a sign of togetherness. See Healey and D. Sybertz, 254. France, 167, agrees that to share a meal is a sign of intimacy and Jesus' notorious willingness to identify with the undesirables is a prominent feature of the Gospel portrait (Lk. 15:1-2; 19:1-10)

¹⁸⁵ The Psalmist (Ps. 41:9) laments of his betrayal by the one who had broken bread with him. Such a painful experience looks forward to the betrayal of our Lord by his disciple.

¹⁸⁶ Davies and Allison, 103. It also seems abundantly clear that Jesus in order to illustrate the radical nature of his soteriological stance went out of his way to mingle with outcasts. He appears to have been intentionally provocative and outrageous like a prophet acting out a parable or setting forth a prophetic symbol. Nehrey, 378. He also says that this was a formal strategy of Jesus to show that he was inviting those who had been excluded into a

extended to those who had been excluded before i.e. the "tax collectors and sinners."¹⁸⁷ Jesus and his disciples reclined at table with these people which as we have shown meant a close association.

It is no wonder that those who considered themselves the boundary keepers¹⁸⁸ were the first to blow the whistle when they noticed that the rules were not being kept. These are the Pharisees who were scandalised by what they saw or

covenant relationship with him. Even as meals celebrate group cohesion and identity, Jesus showed by his inclusive table fellowship that in many ways that he turned his world upside down because of the strategy of eating across the board. Thus we discern new maps being drawn by Jesus and his disciples which challenge and rearrange the maps implicit in their culture. Healey and Sybertz, 170, give an interesting proverb from among the Sukuma people that, "The chief eats with a rotting person (leper)." This shows the inclusiveness of African hospitality.

¹⁸⁷Davies and Allison, 100. They say that these should not be identified as the *am haarets*, "the people of the land" but those who in the eyes of the religious establishment could not keep the laws of the covenant. France, 167, says this could be used for the common Jewish people who could not keep the scribal rules of tithing and purity, but is also used widely to include the immoral (Lk.7:37ff.), heretics (John 9:16ff.) and the Gentiles (Gal. 2:15), as well as tax collectors. The important thing about these people is that they were considered as the outcasts who could not participate in the household of God.

¹⁸⁸Wood says that unlike the Pharisees, the bringer of justice must cross boundaries in order to bring Justice to the marginals and the socially undesirable. If the justice bringer observes the prevailing social boundaries maintained by the powerful religious leaders, he will not be able to bring justice justly. "Notes on Matthew," Nov, 1995.

heard. They approached the disciples not so much to ask for information as much as to make an accusation.¹⁸⁹

Jesus' reply vv. 12-13: Jesus took this opportunity to show the central purpose of his ministry. He answers in two ways. First, he replies in the form of a popular proverb, "Those who are well have no need of physician but those who are sick." There is an implied rebuke to the Pharisees in this answer to them. They saw themselves as those who were well but they were not ready to help or extend a hand of welcome to those who were sick. At the same time they could not see Jesus' concern for the sick and they did not appreciate the fact that he did something for them so that they would not continue in their sickness.

Secondly, in verse 13, Jesus in his reply appropriately uses a rabbinic formula which his hearers were familiar with "Go and learn." This was kind of ironical, seeing that he was addressing the Pharisees who do not seem to want to make any effort to change their attitude to the sinners. He was in effect telling them that though they think they have learned, they have missed the point. So he quotes from the prophet Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." This saying has been variously interpreted but what he is saying is that it was not ritual purity that mat-

¹⁸⁹Morris, 221.

tered but reaching out to those who do not deserve¹⁹⁰ just as God had reached out to his people Israel in the OT. Then he appropriately closes the discussion by declaring that "For I have come not to call the righteous but the sinners." Those who like the Pharisees considered themselves self righteous excluded themselves from his fold. While those who had no merit of their own are the very ones whom he had come for.

The Faith of the Canaanite Woman (Matt. 15:21-28)

Context:

This section comes after the teaching in parables in chapter 13 and before the community discourse in chapter 18. This is a time that Jesus is facing increasing persecution from his fellow countrymen. The immediate context is the section when Jesus answers the Pharisees on the cleanness of foods (15:1-20).¹⁹¹ Immediately after the encounter with the Canaanite woman he heals several people who "praised the God of Israel." He also feeds the four thousand (Matt. 15:29-

¹⁹⁰Wood says that Jesus irritated the Pharisees at many points but the most penetrating is that he called them the unmerciful when they refused to break the social barriers in order to reach out to those who needed restoration.

¹⁹¹Gundry, 310. He sees this as an appropriate transition from declaring nothing unclean and then reaching out in actual fact to a Gentile. Just like the incident in Acts 10 when Peter received the vision of unclean foods and then he is sent on a mission to Cornelius. But Davies and Allison do not see this correlation directly and in effect they argue strongly that in the two passages the primacy of the mission to the Jews is upheld.

39). All these are considered as healing and feeding the Gentile population of that region.

Structure:

This story is a very dramatic encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. Matthew heightens the drama by framing this section as a witty dialogue between the two. This exchange is artistically built up to the climax, when Jesus exclaims in incredulity "O Woman ! Your faith is great". The repetitive use of *ο δε* and *η δε* propels the exchange to the climax. Jesus' replies to this woman are introduced in the same way *δε αποκριθεις*, v.24 and 26 and finally *ποτε αποκριθεις*.¹⁹² All through the exchange the woman's requests are politely coded by the use of the word *κυριε*.

- vv 21-22a A brief Setting.
- vv. 22b-c The woman's request
- vv' 23 b-c The response of the disciples
- vv. 24 The reply of Jesus
- vv 25 The woman's request.
- vv. 26 Jesus' reply.
- vv. 27 The woman's request
- vv. 28 a-b Jesus final reply.
- v28c Conclusion.

¹⁹²Davies and Allison, 541, say that these three answers constitute an obstacle of faith in which the dramatic tension is heightened and eventually acquiescence introduced by *ποτε* is made more surprising.

The setting vv. 21-22a: This occurs in the region of Tyre and Sidon.¹⁹³ We are not told where he is coming from but the conditions of his coming are made evident by the verb *αναγορευω* which is said to mean "withdraw" as if he had to escape from danger.¹⁹⁴ The word region has been debated on whether he was actually in the territory or he was in the border. What is clear from the text is that he was in the region where the contact with the Gentiles was possible.

The element of surprise is introduced by Matthew by the use of the word *ιδου*, "behold, see, look". This something out of the ordinary is a woman who shows up to request the healing of her daughter. In this culture there was not much contact between men and women let alone a Jewish man and a Gentile woman. And as if the fact that she was a woman

¹⁹³Davies and Allison, 546. They say that probably Jesus never left the boundaries of Jewish population. This is because at that time the territories of Tyre and Sidon went far east into the interior. That of Tyre stretched over the whole of the northern district of Upper Galilee. That of Sidon extended as the territory of Damascus. If Jesus wished to pass Galilee, to the region of Caesarea Phillipi, he would of necessity have to touch Tyrian territory. Gerd Thiessen, *The Gospels In Context: Social and Political History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992). He offers us another dimension and shows us that these expansionist policies of Tyre and Sidon put them in disagreement with the Jews whose land was taken away. Thus they were not on friendly terms.

¹⁹⁴Russel, 274. He suggests that Jesus was trying to escape the menace of the Pharisees. Gundry, 310, says that this shows Jesus as escaping persecution and this was an encouragement to the Church Matthew writes to, because they were being forced to flee persecution.

was not enough, she is described as being of Canaanite¹⁹⁵ stock. The word brings memories of the ancient enemies of God's people who were meant to be exterminated with the entrance of Israel into the land. Thiessen also show us that apart from the ancient animosities there were recent causes for enmity because of the expansionist policies of these two cities.¹⁹⁶ So it is the situation of a member of an enemy

¹⁹⁵This is the only place that the word Canaan appears in the NT. There are discussions why Matthew adopts this designation for the woman rather than Syro-Phoenician as Mark does. See Davies and Allison, 547, for the summary of the six views that have been suggested by various scholars. The sixth view is the one they advocate. That the term Canaanite is used because of OT associations, so that one immediately thinks of Israel's enemies. It also brings to the fore Israel's deeply ingrained fear and revulsion towards Gentile ways. They quote Chrysostom who says "The Evangelist speaks against the woman that he may show forth forth her marvelous act and celebrate her praise the more. For when thou hearest of a Canaanite woman thou should call to mind those wicked nations who overset from their foundations the very laws of nature- and being reminded of these consider also the power of Christ's advent." James Treat has recently written a thought provoking article comparing this situation, with the volatile "Native American" issue in the United States, "The Canaanite Problem (Analogies for Native Americans Matt. 15:21-28) in *Daughters of Sarah* 20 (Spring 1994): 20-24. In the Kenyan context the analogous situation is the "Asian/Indian Question." Thanks to Bro. Sunnil Kapoor who drew my attention graphically to the plight of the Kenyan Indians in the NEGST Chapel Service on 22/5/97. Though they are wealthy, they live in fear of persecution because they are hated as those who have grabbed the wealth of the country. They are still strangers and aliens to most Kenyans.

¹⁹⁶Thiessen, 79. He shows that apart from the ancient enmity of this people there were also recent causes for even more animosity between these people of Tyre and Sidon and the Jews. He says that the economically stronger Tyrians probably often took bread out of the mouths of the Jewish rural population, when they used their superior means to buy up the grain supply in the countryside.

group asking for help from Jesus. Thus the element of surprise is increased as we see how Jesus will react to this request.

The Woman's request v. 22: The way she presents her request gives us a clue to the intensity of her need. The verb *κραζω* is used twice in this passage to describe the depth of her need. In this verse the imperfect form is used *εκραζεν* to indicate the persistence and desperation of her cry. However, she addresses Jesus as Lord. This may be an indication of her awareness of Jesus' authority especially in view of the fact that later she is commended for her faith. The other surprising factor is that she addresses Jesus as "son of David" which was the Jewish title for the Messiah.¹⁹⁷ She requests Jesus not for her sake but for her daughter.

Jesus and the disciples' response vv. 23-24: The surprising thing is that Jesus responds by silence. No word is spoken, that word which we have seen all along is what he uses to accomplish the mighty acts. This silence has been a matter of discussion by scholars with not much clue for the

¹⁹⁷See Gundry, 310. He says that by addressing Jesus as the Son of David, this anticipates the limitation of his ministry to Israel (vv 24, 26) and the woman's agreement with that limitation (v 27); i.e. in her address the woman shows her recognition that Jesus came to Israel as the Davidic Messiah. But the prefixing with the word "Lord", shows that she hopes to win from Jesus an exceptional benefit in view of his universal dominion.

reason being given.¹⁹⁸ This is very unlike Jesus' responses. The only time that we know that he did not respond to a request immediately is when he was told about Lazarus' illness in John 11. The disciples took advantage of his silence to present their view of the situation. They asked Jesus to send her away for she keeps shouting¹⁹⁹ after them. The use of the word κραζει still reveals her persistence till she becomes a nuisance²⁰⁰ to the disciples. The word απολυσσον has given a headache to commentators²⁰¹ whether it should be understood as saying to release her from the predicament or

¹⁹⁸Gundry, 311. He says that in order to show the greatness of the woman's faith Matthew makes Jesus not to answer her. France, 246, draws parallels with Matt. 8:7 when Jesus was apparently reluctant to respond to Gentile's request for healing but he eventually answered.

¹⁹⁹Hagner, 438. He translates the word as "hounding" to show the kind of nuisance the woman was making of herself.

²⁰⁰In the wake of the Feminist movement this has been a favourite passage for women commentators. Most of the articles applaud the courage of this woman in the face of all that stood against her. One such woman commentator has lauded the fact that this woman was not easily put off by the situation. She says "She is a woman who makes a scene, and that takes courage. She makes a scene because she is committed to her daughter and she sees an opportunity for her to be healed. She is a model mother. She is a woman of tremendous insight." Christiana de Groot van Houten, "Pondering the Word" in *Perspectives* (Aug/Sept, 1994), 24. See also these articles, Anita Monro, "Alterity and the Canaanite Woman. A Postmodern Feminist Reflection on Political Action," *Colloquium* 26 (May 1994): 32-43. Sharon Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story," In *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by L. M. Russel, 65-72.

²⁰¹Carson, 354, France, 246, Hagner, 441, Morris, 403. They all see the possibility that disciples were asking for Jesus to heal her so that they could be rid of the woman and the embarrassing noise that she was making.

to send her away without granting the request. Those who argue that the disciples' request is that of granting her what she wants so that she can go, gain support in the answer that follows.

Jesus' reply v. 24: Jesus answers the disciples' request emphatically "I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel"²⁰² Jesus reveals that his mission is restricted to the house of Israel—a fact that he had previously told the disciples in Matt. 10:6.²⁰³

The woman's request v. 25: This time the woman not only addresses him as Lord, she acknowledges his lordship by kneeling and continues to ask for assistance.

Jesus' reply v. 26: This has been designated as the rudest, most insensitive remark ever made by Jesus.²⁰⁴ Those who want to soften this say that Jesus wanted to draw out the faith of the woman by putting every obstacle in her way so that in the end her faith would gleam like a diamond. The

²⁰²Lohfink, 11 and Davies and Allison, 551. They agree that this does not refer to a part of the house of Israel such as the sinners or the apostates but the entire house which has been compared to a scattered flock which has been led astray. It may have been an allusion to Ezekiel and his reference to the shepherds of Israel. God himself was gathering his people through Jesus the Messianic shepherd (Ezk. 34:23-24).

²⁰³See Leon Morris, 404, 405.

²⁰⁴Davies and Allison, 552. They have quoted Beare who says that this is the most atrocious remark that exhibits the worst sort of chauvinism and incredible insolence.

use of the word *κυνάριον* has also been discussed. Does it refer to the household dogs or does it carry the derogatory connotation as a Jewish term for the Gentiles?²⁰⁵ If we maintain the harsh and unrelenting attitude, the woman's reply shines forth as a true gem.

The woman's reply v. 26: The woman's genius is that she turns what would have been a rebuke and insult to her advantage.²⁰⁶ She agrees to the fact that she is a Gentile

²⁰⁵France, 247. He argues that "dogs" was a current Jewish term of abuse for Gentiles. The suggestion that the term *κυνάρια*, is an affectionate reference to dogs as pets, while it appeals to Western sentimentality, falls foul of the lack of such idea in Judaism, or of a known diminutive form to express it in Aramaic. So Jesus is expressing the contemptuous Jewish attitude to the Gentiles in order to explain why her request does not fit into his mission to Israel. However, France and Morris, 405 concede that Jesus must have said these words with a smile on his face to remove sting in the words. However Blomberg still insists that the diminutive suggests the affectionate term for pets. Drawing support from Louw and Nida, 44 **Greek-English Lexicon**, he says the Greek article should be translated "their" dogs as NIV does. Burkill is even more forthright. He argues that even if we take the diminutive form it does not detract from the offensiveness of the phrase. For he says "As in English so in other languages, to call a woman "a little bitch" is no less abusive than to call her bitch without qualification." T. A. Burkill, "The Historical Development of the Syrophoenician Woman (Mark VII:24-31) in *Novum Testamentum IX* (1967), 173.

²⁰⁶Though I don't fully agree with her, Van Houten makes an interesting remark "Jesus' understanding of his mission develops in this gospel and the episode of the Canaanite woman is a key turning point. Because Jesus was open to her Jesus learned that Gentiles were to be included. Jesus had a teachable moment, and the Canaanite woman was his teacher," 24.

woman and she does not deserve anything apart from the crumbs.²⁰⁷

Jesus climactic response v. 28a-b: The conjunctive particle *ποτε* signals that this is the resolution of the exchange that has gone back and forth. Jesus could not hold back his utmost admiration for this woman and so he exclaims "O Woman, great is your faith."²⁰⁸ Then she was granted what she desired. The editorial comment just goes to underline the fact that this happened at the hour that Jesus spoke just like the healing of the Centurion's servant (8:13).

Conclusion:

In all the three incidences we see Jesus extending hospitality across boundary lines of race, gender, class or social status and even religious barriers. He did not let his ministry be confined to the boundary lines of Judaism. It was indeed the new wine that he was introducing and he could not keep it in the old wineskins of Judaism otherwise the skins would burst and the wine would be spilled. So he needed the wineskins of the "new people of God" consisting

²⁰⁷MORRIS, 405 (fn 63) *φλιτων* is a diminutive of *φλιξ* "crumb" so it points to a little crumb, a very small piece indeed. The food imagery makes the issue of reconciliation around the food table an important matter.

²⁰⁸This seems to be the same amazement that he showed when he was confronted with the faith of the Centurion.

both of Jews and Gentiles, the freeborn and the slaves, the males and females meeting together in fellowship.

Jesus clearly demonstrated that he could not share the same agenda with the Pharisees and the Essenes. They were governed by very strict rules of purity so they had to regulate the traffic of the strangers to a minimum. They only extended acceptance to an exclusive elite. Thus Jesus broke all the barriers and welcomed all to his table, this was the scandal of his ministry. All the boundaries that the Jews had set up to restrict hospitality across the barriers he traversed joyfully.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction:

This has been an interesting study which has taken us through the culture of the Jews, the people of God in the Old Testament right to his Church, the new people of God in the New Testament. Our aim has been to see how this important institution of hospitality has been nurtured through the heritage of the Jews and safely entrusted to the people of God, the Church. Our chief protagonist is none other than Jesus, who is the bridge between Israel and the Church and who presents us with the best example of the stranger to be welcomed as well as the host who welcomes others. Christine

D. Pohl summing up Jesus' stranger/host status has this to say,

The dual identity of Jesus as stranger/guest and host is the core of the image of the Christian faith. Jesus experienced the marginality, vulnerability, and rejection of the stranger. During his ministry he was dependent on the hospitality of others, and his teaching, especially as recorded in Matthew 25, explicitly linked ministry to the "least" with ministry to himself. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" resounds through the history of Christian hospitality as the most significant single text. But Jesus was also host, proclaiming welcome to all who would come to him and enter the kingdom. He was a host with no home, often an outsider, who offered welcome, healing, meals and recognition to many who were marginal in their society.²⁰⁹

We have been interested to see what he taught and how in practical terms he carried out a very inclusive hospitality. Our passage of focus regarding his teaching has been that highest peak in the eschatological discourse, Matt. 25:31-46. We have also looked at three other passages that have shed light on Jesus' attitude to those who were considered strangers and excluded from full participation, Gentiles, women, and those of lowly status in the religious sense (Matt. 8:5-13; 9:9-13; 15:21-28). We will now give a brief summary of the findings.

²⁰⁹Christine D. Pohl, "Hospitality from the Edge: The significance of marginality in the practice of Welcome" in *The Annual Society of Christian Ethics* (1995), 125-126.

Summary of the Findings:

Chapter 2: We found out that strangers/aliens were highly regarded in ancient Israel demonstrated by the hospitality extended in a practical way by the various groups of people among the community and especially exemplified by the father of the nation, Abraham. The extent of the value given to the stranger is shown by the Mosaic legislation whose ideal is clearly stated in Lev. 19:33-34,

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you. You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God

We found out that in the social milieu of first century Judaism this attitude was carried out in the institutions of the sabbath, synagogue, and the travelling pairs of teachers. However, we also noticed that along with this positive attitude there was a negative sensitivity towards the strangers exemplified by the partition of the temple with a separate court for the Gentiles. This was also embodied in the cleanness or purity rules practised by the Essenes and the Pharisees. All these were attempts to keep the distinctions and the boundaries secure so that the

Jewish covenant community would be kept intact from the external, Hellenistic and Roman influences.

In Chapter 3 we saw Jesus' teaching in Matt. 25:31-46 both in the socio-cultural context of Jesus's day and that of Matthew's Church. When Jesus sent his disciples he told them to depend on the hospitality of the recipients. He promised a reward for those who would extend a welcoming hand to disciples facing persecution.

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward (10:40-42).

This is what was continued in the early church and particularly the church Matthew wrote to. In the eschatological and apocalyptic imagery of Matt. 25:31-46 he assures "the little ones" who are being persecuted that their persecutors would not have the last word. He also assures the rest of the world that if they receive these people into their homes and minister to their needs they will be on the side of the sheep who will be welcomed into eternal bliss. While those who are not sensitive to the needs of the "least of these my brothers" will be sent to eternal damnation, for the judge will say "I was hungry. . . I was a stranger and you did not welcome me." After looking

at this passage which has been worked on so much we learn that "the least of these my brothers" are the ministers of the gospel who were destitute, experiencing persecution and even betrayal from those of their own kind. Those who transcend these barriers and are ready to welcome the ministers of the Gospel into their homes are welcomed to the eternal kingdom because they received the eternal judge himself. We noted that in the practice of hospitality, the transmission of the Gospel was speeded. But it was a special challenge to practise this especially in the context of persecution and suffering.

In Chapter 4: we have seen how Jesus practised a radically inclusive table fellowship and outreach. He interacted with those who are socially ostracized and marginalised, the likes of the "tax collectors and sinners as exemplified by the call of Matthew (Matt. 9:9-13), Centurion (8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (15:21-28). He commended the Centurion and the Canaanite woman for the exceptional faith which he said was hard to find even among his own people.

Now it is evident from this that hospitality is a factor that concretely shows that we are concerned about people. The need for food, shelter, drink, visiting the sick and those in prison are cared for if we are hospitable. If

one is not hospitable then he cannot do the rest of the acts of mercy.

Application

Now what does this have to do with the church in Kenya, and especially in the urban areas? I will talk on the macro level, that is the level of the whole body of Christ and also on the personal level. Are we as a Church concerned to extend a welcoming attitude to those not of our social class, race, gender, religious affiliation etc.? Are we separated by these barriers of the isms; tribalism, nepotism, eliticism, materialism, denominationalism, narcissism, etc.? Are we truly the people of God whose first loyalty is to our brothers in need, regardless of the camp that they come from? What kind of hospitality structures have we established to help people to feel welcome or do people come and feel lost in our midst? With the breakdown of the traditional community structures people find it difficult to find social cohesion in the cities and it is only the Church that can provide the alternative society in which the people can come and feel at home rather than suffer the alienation of the city.

One thing that has been noted earlier on has been the abuse that people have suffered when they have extended

hospitality in the past.²¹⁰ That is why Mazrui says that there should be a clear cut distinction between what is called parasitism and hospitality.²¹¹ The strength of the African social system has been a network of relatives that one has and if they visited in the past they could participate in the shamba work but now that labour has become so specialised it is not a wonder that one can have a relative staying idle in the home and giving financial hardship to the community. We need something like the *Didache* of the early church that clearly guarded against the abuse of hospitality. It states as follows;

But let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and then when you have tested him you shall have understanding on the right hand and the left. If the comer is a traveler, assist him as you are able, but he shall not stay with you more than two days or three days, if it be necessary. But if he wishes to settle among you, being a craftsman, let him work for his bread. But if he has no craft he shall live as a Christian among you but not in idleness. If he will not

²¹⁰A close friend, a daughter of a minister of the gospel has told me how she is almost allergic to the word hospitality because of the abuse they have received in trying to reach out. Their home has been a stopping ground for people who have travelled from the rural areas in order to receive help in the city. They as children were constantly shoved from their rooms in order to welcome the visitors. These Christian brothers and sisters misused their welcome and even overstayed. They have even spoken ill of the family and have not been grateful. As a result the children have become anti-social.

²¹¹Mazrui, 234. Father Kizito, 50, also reiterates the fact that traditional hospitality had checks and balances. He quotes a Tumbuka proverb which says, "A traveller is like dew." Meaning that we should be kind to a traveller who might not be seen again and on the other hand, the traveller should be ready to quit when the sun goes up.

do this he is trafficking upon Christ. Beware of such men.²¹²

One other factor that has caused many people in the city to fail to show hospitality is the fact of insecurity and the fact that one cannot know if these people are genuine or not. One needs to mention here that hospitality is a risky business and one has to take chances. Janzen put this beautifully,

Hospitality after the manner of Jesus ceases to be a pleasant Sunday afternoon function and becomes the reordering force in the society. It becomes the arena of risk, battle, suffering and martyrdom. The cross is the extent to which Jesus and God go in behalf of the invited guests.

He continues to show that for the followers of Jesus, the extending of hospitality remains the central way of continuing their Master's mission and of realizing the presence of the kingdom in sign form even now while they themselves are the travelers on the way to their final home where the Messianic banquet awaits them. The communion table remains the central and constant symbol of this guest-host role. It is also the symbol of sacrifice, the body and the blood of Jesus given on the cross. His followers are not

²¹²J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1956), 128. The parallel to this in Africa is the swahili saying translated, "A visitor is a guest for two days. On the third day give the person a hoe." Healey, 173, comments that to be given a hoe is to be accepted into the family and to be invited to participate in the responsibilities of the community.

allowed to forget that their guest-host calling is a calling to take up the cross. But beyond it and stronger is the welcoming realm of the father who has prepared for us a table in the sight of our enemies.²¹³

Christine D. Pohl has also drawn attention to the fact that those who show hospitality have to be constantly reminded not only of their guest's marginal status but also of their own vulnerable position

Although commonly associated with the marginal status of needy strangers and guests, the practice of hospitality is often undergirded by the host's experience of marginality. Historic and contemporary practices of Christian hospitality that involve more than the entertainment of friends and family, that transcend prevailing social boundaries, build community, meet significant needs and reflect the divine hospitality are associated hosts who understand themselves in some way as marginal to the larger society.²¹⁴

We need to emphasize that hospitality has to be done in a communal context so that one is not overwhelmed on an individual basis especially by the enormity of the needs in the urban setting. This is the reason why there is an emphasis on the Church as a family of God and the centrality of the house churches as the context of hospitality in the early church. In recognition of this Pohl says,

The context of hospitality must be community. Highly marginalized individuals are rarely good hosts because

²¹³Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (1994), 209.

²¹⁴ Pohl, 121-122.

they lack the necessary networks and settled identity. Alien status can be cultivated within the community that offers an identity and a place and reasons for responding to the stranger. Although the practice is personal, and shaped by individual experience, the larger context of hospitality must be communal.²¹⁵

Indeed our witness will be united and stronger if we as the body of Christ act together as "salt and light," challenging the prevailing hostile attitudes to strangers in the wider the community.

Certain areas need to be explored for further research. We need to creatively think of practical ways that Christians in the urban areas can show hospitality to fellow Christians and also those not of the body of Christ in order to strengthen the bonds in the body of Christ and to enhance witness to the world. We need to see what is being done in the various churches to meet this need. A series of teachings need to be given in the churches in order to help the Christians cope with the increasing demands of relatives and friends who want take advantage of Christian teaching of hospitality. We also need to examine the socio-cultural practices that hinder or promote hospitality among Christians. There is need to critically analyze the effects of modernisation and western lifestyles to the practice of hospitality.

²¹⁵ Pohl, 134.

Conclusion:

It is clear from the above that hospitality is a central virtue and practice in our Christian profession. It is the evidence of our eternal destiny.²¹⁶ It will strengthen the bonds of our Christian brotherhood as it did in the early church and it is a powerful witness to the world that we belong to another world. And yet we are not ignorant of the challenges and the constraints that work against this practice, such are the strains of economic poverty and the incipient materialism that is creeping in to our world, the dangers that one faces in exposing oneself to strangers, the insensitive and outright exploitation of those we consider our brothers and sisters. All the same, notwithstanding all this, the call has not changed, "Come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for

²¹⁶ Pohl argues in her paper appropriately titled "Hospitality from the Edge: The significance of Marginality in the practice of Welcome" that it is only those who are conscious of their alien status in this world, who can truly practise hospitality and be a cutting edge in their community. She says, "Alien status suggested a basis for a different lifestyle and loyalties to a different order, which in turn challenged the conventional boundaries and relationships. In emphasizing that welcome came as grace, early Christians were able to sustain more fluid property relations and transcend significant ethnic distinctions. Hosts who had a sense of their own marginality were less likely to see the table to which they invited guests, or the setting into which they welcomed strangers as belonging exclusively to themselves. Alien status reminded persons of the importance of making a home on earth and nurturing the practice of hospitality, but it also relativized the experience of a "home."

you since the creation of world. For . . . I was a stranger and you welcomed me in." In view of this we will continue to do good to all men and especially to those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9,10).

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- 1978 East African Advanced Certificate of
Education (EAACE) - "A" Level
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Class Honours (Upper Division)
- 1990 Master of Divinity (MDiv.)
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Teaching Experience

- 1983 -1984 Kapsabet Boys' High School
- 1984 - 1987 Deputy Headmistress, St. Joseph's G.
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- 1990 - 1991 Tutorial Fellow, Moi University
- 1991 - 1995 Lecturer, Moi University
- 1995 - 1997 Teaching Assistant, NEGST.

Membership in Professional Associations

- 1979 - 1987 National Association of Religious
Education Teachers (NARET)
- 1983 - 1990 Nandi Evangelistic Team (NET)
Affiliated to Kenya Students'
Christian Fellowship (KSCF)
- 1984 - 1987 Kenya National Examinations Council-
Examiner
- 1987 - 1991 Kenya National Examinations Council-
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- 1992 - 1997 World Evangelical Fellowship
(Theological Commission)
- 1994 - to date: East Africa Association of Third

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1995 - " Women in Academia

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