

ECHOES

**THE BIBLE MEETS
THE CULTURE OF TODAY**

THE MESSAGE OF
MATTHEW

EUGENE H. PETERSON





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The Message of Matthew: Echoes

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HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

A Note from the Editors

The world is haunted by the words of God. The God who spoke all of creation into being, who has called and led and commissioned and confronted and changed people simply by speaking, is the most successful author of all time. Not only has the Bible—the collected canon of God’s words to his people—outsold all other texts in the history of printing, but the Scriptures show up almost everywhere. From wisdom sayings to historic scenes to iconic characters to tropes and archetypes, the ground around us is seeded with God’s words. And the harvest is ongoing.

How the Scriptures show up in our lives—in literature, in music, in film and television, in art and other media—is often pious and occasionally profane. Some people echo the Scriptures as a kind of taunt, supposing that they’re demonstrating how archaic and arcane the idea of God is. Others quote God as a way of sanctifying their own efforts, suggesting that since God is their copilot, you should get on board with what they’re doing.

Each of these extremes bears the scent of desperation, inadvertently demonstrating that God stands apart from us but is nevertheless here in the midst of us. Unperturbed by these acts of

desperation, he remains about his business: confronting us with his righteousness, confounding us with his ineffability, saving us by his grace.

But mostly people echo the Scriptures in good faith. They are faithfully practicing their own craft in service to their faithful audience, and in service to that faithfulness, they rightly draw on the near-universal penetration of the Scriptures into contemporary culture. These stories, these scenes, these characters, these sayings *mean* something to people. They are intelligible, recognizable, evocative, pregnant. They reliably do not come back empty-handed (see Isaiah 55:11).

Sometimes, however, these artists echo the Scriptures unconsciously. They're not even aware that in the stories they're telling, the music or art they're making, they're calling the words of God into the space between them and their audience. That's how Bible-haunted the world has become. We might recall the first image of the first story of the first book of the Bible:

Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

GENESIS 1:2

Substitute “Art” for “Earth”—the canvas, the page, the stage, the unstrummed guitar—and you have a resonant portrait of every artist at the genesis of each creation. All art, consciously or not, reflects back to this primal moment, when the Creator first creates.

The next line: “God spoke.” And God’s words continue to echo.

In *The Message of Matthew: Echoes* you’ll read the text of the Scriptures in the contemporary language of *The Message* Bible. *The Message* itself is an actualization of the idea of *Echoes*: Pastor-poet Eugene H. Peterson developed this Bible as a medium through which the message of salvation—the story of God, people, and the

redemptive history of all that ever was and ever will be—might land more resonantly on our contemporary ears.

It is always worth noting that Peterson approached this creative work as a matter of craft. He worked from the original languages in which the Bible was written, and he tested his efforts in the proving ground of his congregation as well as against the well-honed instincts of Bible scholars of high repute. As singer-songwriter Bono has written, “Peterson . . . has the heart of a musician, his intellectual rigor and humility saving him from the vicissitudes that have the rest of us banging tambourines as he lays out a feast on the altar.” This version of the Bible is artisanal, born of a creative process intended to honor the Creator.

Alongside the text of *The Message* you’ll find cultural references inspired by particular passages. Some are song lyrics, some are passages from novels or film or television. We expect you’ll be surprised by some of what you find here.

We bring biases with us into our encounters with the arts. Some artists we imagine to be profane to their core, and perhaps some are, but as the story of the Scriptures suggests, while God is set against sin, in Christ God “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15); God is not soft on sin, but he is tender toward sinners (see Jude 1:22-23). He does not withhold his words from them.

Other artists and art you encounter here may surprise you because you don’t associate certain kinds of culture with the Bible. Some artists, to your thinking, may be so high-minded as to be no earthly good. The Bible is too “low culture” for them, you might think. Other art forms may strike you at first blush as lacking the depth of thought that engaging with the Scriptures might typically entail. They are, in your mind, too “low culture” for the Bible, perhaps.

The Message of Matthew: Echoes is in this respect a “cultural apologetic,” a way of demonstrating both the reach of the Bible as a force of culture and the inherent receptivity of all people to the

God who created them. We encourage you to engage in a kind of “cultural exegesis” of these references as they intersect with the Scriptures:

- What might have made this particular passage particularly resonant for this artist?
- What might they have observed in this passage that related to the story they were telling, the scene they were setting?
- Having moved into this artist’s neighborhood (see John 1:14), where might the transformative power of God’s words be at work there?

Here and there we’ve also drawn your attention to passages of the Bible that have become so embedded in the popular imagination that they are part of everyday speech. We point out these occurrences of “original language” as a reminder: The Scriptures are not just the domain of cultural elites but have pervaded our language all the way down to our imaginations. More often than we expect, we can’t complete our thoughts without resorting to the words of God.

Having seen these references in the context of the Bible passages that inspired them, you’ll likely find yourself noticing more often how frequently God’s words show up in the art, the culture, you interact with on a regular basis. So we’ve left lots of writing space in *The Message of Matthew: Echoes* for you to log these encounters, a kind of running archive of your encounters with the words of God in the cultural artifacts of the world. In this respect you become a kind of missiologist, taking note of the myriad ways that people—from the halls of cultural power to where you live, work, and play—rely on God’s words to speak for them, to speak to their audiences. This exercise in observation conveys an important theological truth: God is never far from us. “He’s not remote; he’s *near*” (see Acts 17:24-29).

A missiological exercise like this is interesting and even gratifying

by itself. We become more confident in the power and authority of the Scriptures by observing their impact on the culture of our world. But God's words are not just working in the world *out there*—they are working in your inner world as well. God's Spirit is hovering over you, as well, stirring the waters of your soul. God is speaking to you, as well, offering you light, inviting you to participate in the creative life he makes possible.

So don't think of the open space in *The Message of Matthew: Echoes* as simply a logbook of Scripture-inspired culture you've consumed. Consider it creative space for you. Having read God's words, now *create*. Here and there we've provided "experiments in echoing Scripture"—prompts for your own creative reflection and expression. But these are only a tool for you to use or lay aside at your discretion. The creative interaction with God's words is the main thing. The way to get the most out of *Echoes* is to get the Message in you and let it echo through you.

Ultimately, anytime you encounter God's words, you face the possibility of transformation. You emerge different from who you were in the beginning. You may be made new. In this respect, as you interact with *The Message of Matthew: Echoes*, you are not only creative; you are *creation*—a work of art brought into being by the Ultimate Artist, out of whose imagination came all that is seen and unseen. You are in good hands.

Enjoy the creation to come.

The Message is a contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages, crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MESSAGE

Reading is the first thing, just reading the Bible. As we read we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. We soon realize that we are included in the conversation. We didn't expect this. But this is precisely what generation after generation of Bible readers do find: The Bible is not only written about us but to us. In these pages we become insiders to a conversation in which God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

We aren't used to this. We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But this is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us in by invitation and command to participate in God's working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realize that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes his grand rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). "Revelation" means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed or figured out on our own. Revelation is what makes the Bible unique.

And so just reading this Bible, *The Message*, and listening to what we read, is the first thing. There will be time enough for study later on. But first, it is important simply to read, leisurely and thoughtfully. We need to get a feel for the way these stories and songs, these prayers and conversations, these sermons and visions, invite us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible and illuminates what it means to live here—really live, not just get across the street. As we read, and the longer we read, we begin to “get it”—we are in conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us: who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and—most of all—the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see—more to everything!—than we had ever dreamed, and that this “more” has to do with God.

This is new for many of us, a different sort of book—a book that reads us even as we read it. We are used to picking up and reading books for what we can get out of them: information we can use, inspiration to energize us, instructions on how to do something or other, entertainment to while away a rainy day, wisdom that will guide us into living better. These things can and do take place when reading the Bible, but the Bible is given to us in the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God, God's Word and world, and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.



Our reading turns up some surprises. The biggest surprise for many is how accessible this book is to those who simply open it up and

read it. Virtually anyone can read this Bible with understanding. The reason that new translations are made every couple of generations or so is to keep the language of the Bible current with the common speech we use, the very language in which it was first written. We don't have to be smart or well-educated to understand it, for it is written in the words and sentences we hear in the marketplace, on school playgrounds, and around the dinner table. Because the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that the “boy that driveth the plough” would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the “unspiritual” quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and he contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a “nicer” world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God

works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures. It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry out in indignation, “You can’t let this happen!” For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn’t offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagine. But our Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.



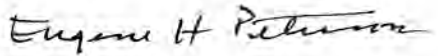
God doesn’t force any of this on us: God’s Word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing—but not forcing. Not coercing. We are given

space and freedom to answer, to enter the conversation. For more than anything else the Bible invites our participation in the work and language of God.

As we read, we find that there is a connection between the Word Read and the Word Lived. Everything in this book is live-able. Many of us find that the most important question we ask as we read is not “What does it mean?” but “How can I live it?” So we read personally, not impersonally. We read in order to live our true selves, not just get information that we can use to raise our standard of living. Bible reading is a means of listening to and obeying God, not gathering religious data by which we can be our own gods.

You are going to hear stories in this book that will take you out of your preoccupation with yourself and into the spacious freedom in which God is working the world’s salvation. You are going to come across words and sentences that stab you awake to a beauty and hope that will connect you with your real life.

Be sure to answer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eugene H. Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with Jesus. God had been at work for a long time. Salvation, which is the main business of Jesus, is an old business. Jesus is the coming together in final form of themes and energies and movements that had been set in motion before the foundation of the world.

Matthew opens the New Testament by setting the local story of Jesus in its world historical context. He makes sure that as we read his account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see the connections with everything that has gone before. In fact, in his account of Jesus' birth alone, Matthew reminds his readers of two Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah.

Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; they will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”).

MATTHEW 1:23, QUOTING ISAIAH 7:14

*“It’s you, Bethlehem, in Judah’s land,
no longer bringing up the rear.*

*From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel.”*

MATTHEW 2:5-6, QUOTING MICAH 5:2

Fulfilled is one of Matthew’s characteristic verbs: such and such happened “that it might be *fulfilled*.” Jesus is unique, but he is not odd.

Better yet, Matthew tells the story in such a way that not only is everything previous to us completed in Jesus; we are completed in Jesus. Every day we wake up in the middle of something that is already going on, that has been going on for a long time: genealogy and geology, history and culture, the cosmos—God. We are neither accidental nor incidental to the story. We get orientation, briefing, background, reassurance.

Matthew provides the comprehensive context by which we see all God’s creation and salvation completed in Jesus, and all the parts of our lives—work, family, friends, memories, dreams—also completed in Jesus, who himself said, “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama” (Matthew 5:17). Lacking such a context, we are in danger of seeing Jesus as a mere diversion from the concerns announced in the newspapers. Nothing could be further from the truth.





MATTHEW

1 **1** The family tree of Jesus Christ, David's son, Abraham's son:

2-6 Abraham had Isaac,
Isaac had Jacob,
Jacob had Judah and his brothers,
Judah had Perez and Zerah (the mother was
Tamar),
Perez had Hezron,
Hezron had Aram,
Aram had Amminadab,
Amminadab had Nahshon,
Nahshon had Salmon,
Salmon had Boaz (his mother was Rahab),
Boaz had Obed (Ruth was the mother),
Obed had Jesse,
Jesse had David,
and David became king.

6-11 David had Solomon (Uriah's wife was the
mother),
Solomon had Rehoboam,
Rehoboam had Abijah,
Abijah had Asa,
Asa had Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat had Joram,
Joram had Uzziah,
Uzziah had Jotham,
Jotham had Ahaz,
Ahaz had Hezekiah,
Hezekiah had Manasseh,
Manasseh had Amon,
Amon had Josiah,
Josiah had Jehoiachin and his brothers,
and then the people were taken into the
Babylonian exile.

12-16 When the Babylonian exile ended,
Jeconiah had Shealtiel,

**Before the
earth was
made, you
said, "Tamar,
I will lead
the way,
and you'll
go far."**

PRINCE, "BEAUTIFUL, LOVED AND BLESSED"

**Rahab spoke to Joan of Arc;
never doubt the power
of a woman's heart.**

NASOI, "GET YOUR PEACE"

Shealtiel had Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel had Abiud,
Abiud had Eliakim,
Eliakim had Azor,
Azor had Zadok,
Zadok had Achim,
Achim had Eliud,
Eliud had Eleazar,
Eleazar had Matthan,
Matthan had Jacob,
Jacob had Joseph, Mary's husband,
 the Mary who gave birth to Jesus,
 the Jesus who was called Christ.

- 17 There were fourteen generations from Abraham to David,
 another fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile,
 and yet another fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Christ.

The Birth of Jesus

18-19 The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they enjoyed their wedding night, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term:

Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;
They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").

24-25 Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

Scholars from the East

1-2 **2** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod’s kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We’re on pilgrimage to worship him.”

3-4 When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

5-6 They told him, “Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It’s you, Bethlehem, in Judah’s land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people,
my Israel.”

7-8 Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in your worship.”

9-10 Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

11 They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

12 In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

**People marching
through the streets
again,
down into the
city and into the
shopping malls.
Peace on earth and
goodwill to all men.
If we hope to get
there in the end,
this is not the way
to Bethlehem.
Oh, no, we're
following the
wrong star.**

- 13 After the scholars were gone, God’s angel showed up again in Joseph’s dream and commanded, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child, and wants to kill him.”
- 14-15 Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod’s death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached: “I called my son out of Egypt.”
- 16-18 Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he’d gotten from the scholars.) That’s when Jeremiah’s revelation was fulfilled:

A sound was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much lament.
Rachel weeping for her children,
Rachel refusing all solace,
Her children gone,
dead and buried.

- 19-20 Later, when Herod died, God’s angel appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt: “Up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel. All those out to murder the child are dead.”
- 21-23 Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and re-entered Israel. When he heard, though, that Archelaus had succeeded his father, Herod, as king in Judea, he was afraid to go there. But then Joseph was directed in a dream to go to the hills of Galilee. On arrival, he settled in the village of Nazareth. This move was a fulfillment of the prophetic words, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Thunder in the Desert!

- 1-2 **3** While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called “the Baptizer,” was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”
- 3 John and his message were authorized by Isaiah’s prophecy:

**Steer clear of
royal welcomes.
Avoid a big to-do.
A king who would
slaughter the
innocents
will not cut a
deal for you.**

JAMES TAYLOR, "HOME BY ANOTHER WAY"

Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!

4-6 John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life.

7-10 When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It's your life that must change, not your skin! And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. What counts is your life. Is it green and flourishing? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire.

11-12 "I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I'm a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

+ + +

13-14 Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, "I'm the one who needs to be baptized, not *you!*"

15 But Jesus insisted. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism." So John did it.

16-17 The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life."

**John the Baptist
prepared the way
for what I came to say today.
They deceived us,
had us thinking Jesus
really didn't need us
when he loved the old days—
he loved them boys
in the hallway up
in Broadway.**

KANYE WEST (FEAT. MASE AND COMMON),
"JESUS WALKS (REMIX)"

The Test

- 1-3 **4** Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.”
- 4 Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.”
- 5-6 For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, “Since you are God’s Son, jump.” The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: “He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won’t so much as stub your toe on a stone.”
- 7 Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: “Don’t you dare test the Lord your God.”
- 8-9 For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth’s kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, “They’re yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they’re yours.”
- 10 Jesus’ refusal was curt: “Beat it, Satan!” He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.”
- 11 The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus’ needs.

Teaching and Healing

- 12-17 When Jesus got word that John had been arrested, he returned to Galilee. He moved from his hometown, Nazareth, to the lakeside village Capernaum, nestled at the base of the Zebulun and Naphtali hills. This move completed Isaiah’s revelation:

Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
road to the sea, over Jordan,
Galilee, crossroads for the nations.
People sitting out their lives in the dark
saw a huge light;

**All of this—
all of this can
be yours.
Just give me
what I want,
and no one
gets hurt.**

U2, "VERTIGO"

Sitting in that dark, dark country of death,
they watched the sun come up.

This Isaiah-prophesied revelation came to life in Galilee the moment Jesus started preaching. He picked up where John left off: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”

18-20 Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.

21-22 A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee’s sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father.

23-25 From there he went all over Galilee. He used synagogues for meeting places and taught people the truth of God. God’s kingdom was his theme—that beginning right now they were under God’s government, a good government! He also healed people of their diseases and of the bad effects of their bad lives. Word got around the entire Roman province of Syria. People brought anybody with a sickness, whether mental, emotional, or physical. Jesus healed them, one and all. More and more people came, the momentum gathering. Besides those from Galilee, crowds came from the “Ten Towns” across the lake, others up from Jerusalem and Judea, still others from across the Jordan.

You’re Blessed

1-2 **5** When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no

**Blessed are the arrogant,
for theirs is the kingdom
of their own company.**

U2 (FEAT. KENDRICK LAMAR),
“AMERICAN SOUL”

**Blessed
are the
sat upon,
spat upon,
ratted on.**

SIMON & GARFUNKEL, “BLESSED”

more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

7 "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

8 "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

10 "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

11-12 "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Salt and Light

13 "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

14-16 "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Completing God's Law

17-18 "Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

“salt of the earth”

An idiom that refers to people who are exceptionally honest, reliable, and unpretentious.

SEE, FOR EXAMPLE:

- » Herbert Biberman, *Salt of the Earth*
- » Rolling Stones, “Salt of the Earth”
- » Echo and the Bunnymen, “The Puppet”
- » Green Day, “Give Me Novacaine/She’s a Rebel”

but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

- 19-20 "Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

Murder

- 21-22 "You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.
- 23-24 "This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.
- 25-26 "Or say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you're likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. If that happens, you won't get out without a stiff fine.

Adultery and Divorce

- 27-28 "You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those ogling looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.
- 29-30 "Let's not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have

to chop off your right hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump.

- 31-32 “Remember the Scripture that says, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights’? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are ‘legal.’ Please, no more pretending. If you divorce your wife, you’re responsible for making her an adulteress (unless she has already made herself that by sexual promiscuity). And if you marry such a divorced adulteress, you’re automatically an adulterer yourself. You can’t use legal cover to mask a moral failure.

Empty Promises

- 33-37 “And don’t say anything you don’t mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you,’ and not meaning it. You don’t make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.

Love Your Enemies

- 38-42 “Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look: ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: ‘Don’t hit back at all.’ If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.
- 43-47 “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and

bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

- 48 “In a word, what I’m saying is, *Grow up*. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

The World Is Not a Stage

- 1 **6** “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won’t be applauding.
- 2-4 “When you do something for someone else, don’t call attention to yourself. You’ve seen them in action, I’m sure—‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that’s all they get. When you help someone out, don’t think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

Pray with Simplicity

- 5 “And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for fifteen minutes of fame! Do you think God sits in a box seat?
- 6 “Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.
- 7-13 “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;
Do what's best—
 as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

14-15 “In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part.

16-18 “When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don't make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won't make you a saint. If you 'go into training' inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn't require attention-getting devices. He won't overlook what you are doing; he'll reward you well.

A Life of God-Worship

19-21 “Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

22-23 “Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a musty cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

24 “You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.

25-26 “If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the

**Give us your
daily bread.
We have no
shoes to wear,
no place to call
our own—
only this cross
to bear.
We are the
multitudes.**

WILLIE NELSON, "LIVING IN THE PROMISELAND"

clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

27-29 “Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

30-33 “If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

34 “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

A Simple Guide for Behavior

1-5 **7** “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ‘Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

6 “Don’t be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don’t reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you’re only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

**"Sufficient for
to-morrow
is the evil
thereof;
but I hope
before the day
is past to have
the upper
hand at last."**

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES*

- 7-11 “Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn’t a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we’re in. If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn’t think of such a thing. You’re at least decent to your own children. So don’t you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?
- 12 “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. Add up God’s Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

Being and Doing

- 13-14 “Don’t look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don’t fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.
- 15-20 “Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don’t be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers *are* is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned.
- 21-23 “Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance—isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our super-spiritual projects had everyone talking.’ And do you know what I am going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here.’
- 24-25 “These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.
- 26-27 “But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on

**I'm a very ordinary man,
trying to work out life's
happy plan,
doing unto others
as I'd like to have
them doing unto me.**

BENNY GOODMAN, "I WANT TO BE HAPPY"