

Why was Matthew written?

- 1) To convince the Jews that Jesus is the promised Messiah (e.g., prophecy fulfillments)
- 2) To convince the Jews that Gentile mission is of God
- 3) To convince the Jews that the Sanhedrin is anti-God
- 4) To explain what went down in the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection
- 5) To critique Pharisaic spirituality

Evangelical spirituality

Models include experiential, knowledge-based, rule-based, shame-based

- 1) Can be helpful or harmful or both (a mixture of truth and error?)
- 2) Differ in degree of fidelity to Scripture
- 3) Differ in assessment of the human condition

Right assessment = right treatment; wrong assessment = wrong treatment (we want our doctors to accurately diagnose our medical problems and proscribe the right treatment; shouldn't we want our pastors/elders to do the same?)

- 4) Differ in ability to apply truth to our condition

Today we ask this question:

BIG QUESTION: How should we think about spirituality?

PRAY

Body

Passage focus

Record the 10 points. Jot down the Bible references. Grasp the concepts.

Point 1: Biblical spirituality moves beyond head knowledge to practice

Explanation

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" – 7:21-23

Mere head knowledge doesn't save! Jesus says only those who obey him will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven when he returns at the end of the age to separate the Christian from the non-Christian.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. – 16:24-27

Eternal life hangs in the balance. Jesus is talking about salvation from judgment when he returns at the end of the age. Jesus doesn't say believe these facts and you'll be saved. Jesus says if you follow me you'll be saved.

Jesus teaches that true faith results in works. We could say Jesus equates faith with self-denial, suffering for Jesus, and following Jesus' teachings. Jesus understands faith to be a changed response to God that we can reasonably observe.

Jesus says you can tell whether or not a person is a Christian by how they live. Do they do the Father's will? Do they practice lawlessness? Have they denied themselves? Are they suffering for Jesus' sake? Are they following Jesus? These are some of the questions Jesus would have us ask.

At prayer meetings I've asked you whether or not the person you're requesting prayer for is a Christian. It's not that I have a problem praying for non-Christians. I encourage your concern for non-Christians. It's just that if we care about a person's physical needs we should also care about their spiritual needs.

Point 2: Biblical spirituality focuses on the heart

Explanation

Heart = our inner self, our desires, our affections (what we love), our feelings, our intentions

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. – 5:6

Christianity is life lived with the right longings. Sanctification is a matter of bringing our longings in line with God's will.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. – 23:5-7

Motivations matter. We need to want the right things, not just do the right things. Wrong loves = wrong spirituality. What we love drives our behavior. Love for a pet causes people to fork over huge sums of money for their treatment.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. – 23:25-28

God is in the business of transforming our desires, loves, motivations. God wants more than external obedience.

Point 3: Biblical spirituality responds to God in humility

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. – 18:3-4

We relate to God like a child relates to a parent. Trusting for provision and protection. Stance of neediness. Stance of learner. A six year old doesn't teach their parent how to drive. We come to God as people in need of his help to fix our ruined hearts.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. – 11:28-30

We come to God as learners. As needy sinners! We need correction, perspective, direction, etc. In Jesus we find rest for our souls (= heart). Rest from the disturbance within (e.g., fears, greed, selfishness, despair).

Point 4: Biblical spirituality responds to God in faith

Explanation

Faith means to trust God. His promises. His character. His Word (the Bible). Jesus issues soft rebukes when he detects little faith.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. – 6:30-34

Worry about basic provisions reveals little faith. Jesus says if God cares about the natural world (grass) he'll care for you. God knows what you need don't worry about tomorrow. But do worry about obeying God.

To seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness means to seek to bring our lives under God's rule and live according to kingdom ethics.

He [Jesus walking on water] said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" – 14:29-31

Circumstances (the wind) caused Peter to doubt. When we take our eyes off Jesus (his care, his goodness, his ability) and fix our sight on our circumstances, our faith shrinks.

Point 5: Biblical spirituality seeks to glorify God

Explanation

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." – 6:9-10

We want to see God honored and obeyed because we treasure God. One reason we live righteously in public is because we want to see others glorify (ascribe worth, honor) to God.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. – 5:16

That's a God-centered motive for obedience.

Point 6: Biblical spirituality judges oneself before judging others

Explanation

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." – 7:1-5

Don't point out minor sin in others when major sin is present in your life. This doesn't mean don't ever challenge or rebuke a brother when they sin. You can help your brother with their speck, but not until you've first dealt with your own log (repentance). In other words, deal with your own heart first. Be more alert to your own faults.

Point 7: Biblical spirituality extends mercy to sinners

Explanation

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. – 5:7

The merciful will receive mercy at the end of the age when Jesus returns. Why? Because those who've experienced God's mercy are merciful to other sinners. In other words, it's assumed recipients of God's mercy show mercy to others.

for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. – 26:28

Jesus died so that we could be forgiven. On the cross, Jesus died in our place as a substitute so that we wouldn't have to suffer the penalty our sins deserve. Being just, God had to punish our sin. In his mercy, Jesus took the wrath we deserve, if we repent and believe. In other words, God is merciful to sinners. God delights in forgiving sinners. God delights when we're merciful.

Point 8: Biblical spirituality engages the world with gospel optimism

Explanation

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. – 5:16

Some will repent and follow Jesus because of our public obedience to God.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. – 13:23

In the parable of the soils, one of the four soils responded positively to God's Word = some believe when they hear!

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. – 16:18

Jesus is at work building his church. Shouldn't we expect him to work in our midst?

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – 28:18-20

Jesus commands us to make disciples and he's with us in the mission = disciples will be made as we go.

One thing I've discovered in Matthew is that there's much reason for optimism in proclaiming the gospel. Optimism, not guilt or shame, should drive our evangelism.

Point 9: Biblical spirituality is communal

Explanation

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. – 18:15-17

Jesus gives instructions as if every brother belongs to a local body of believers. As if we know who our brothers are. As if brothers hold one another accountable to live according to God's Word. Jesus assumes Christianity is lived in community.

Point 10: Biblical spirituality is holistic

Explanation

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. – 28:19-20a

We need to observe all of Jesus' commands. Not just the ones we like. Not just the ones that make sense to us. Every command. Jesus' commands cover a lot of ground:

- 1) How we relate to God
- 2) How we relate to our neighbor (all people in general)
- 3) How we relate to brothers
- 4) How we interact with the Bible (obey it; don't add to it)
- 5) How we deal with people who oppose our Savior
- 6) How we do marriage
- 7) How we behave sexually
- 8) How we use our money
- 9) How we use our words
- 10) How we pray
- 11) What our aim in life should be (bringing our lives under God's rule and making disciples)

Christianity isn't a list of a few basic rules. Christianity isn't mental agreement with a few basic facts. Christianity isn't sitting through a church service once a week. Christianity is a trust in the one true God that permeates all of our existence.

A trust in the person of Jesus that affects how we do marriage and parenting and dating and friendship. How we conduct ourselves at work. How we interact with people. How we use our time and money. How we assess public policy. What we love. What our goals are.

The Christian faith is much bigger than Jesus loves me, my sins are forgiven, and I'm going to heaven. Jesus wants to transform our entire existence. In this life.

Non-Christian

We trust in the person of Jesus. That he died for our sins. He's good. He's merciful. He's caring. He's wise. He receives the humble.

A Savior to follow. He's worth learning from! A Savior that gives direction in life.

A Savior to treasure. A Savior that directs our loves such that we are living according to our design rather than against it.