



Peninsula City Church

Making First Things First

Wrapping up

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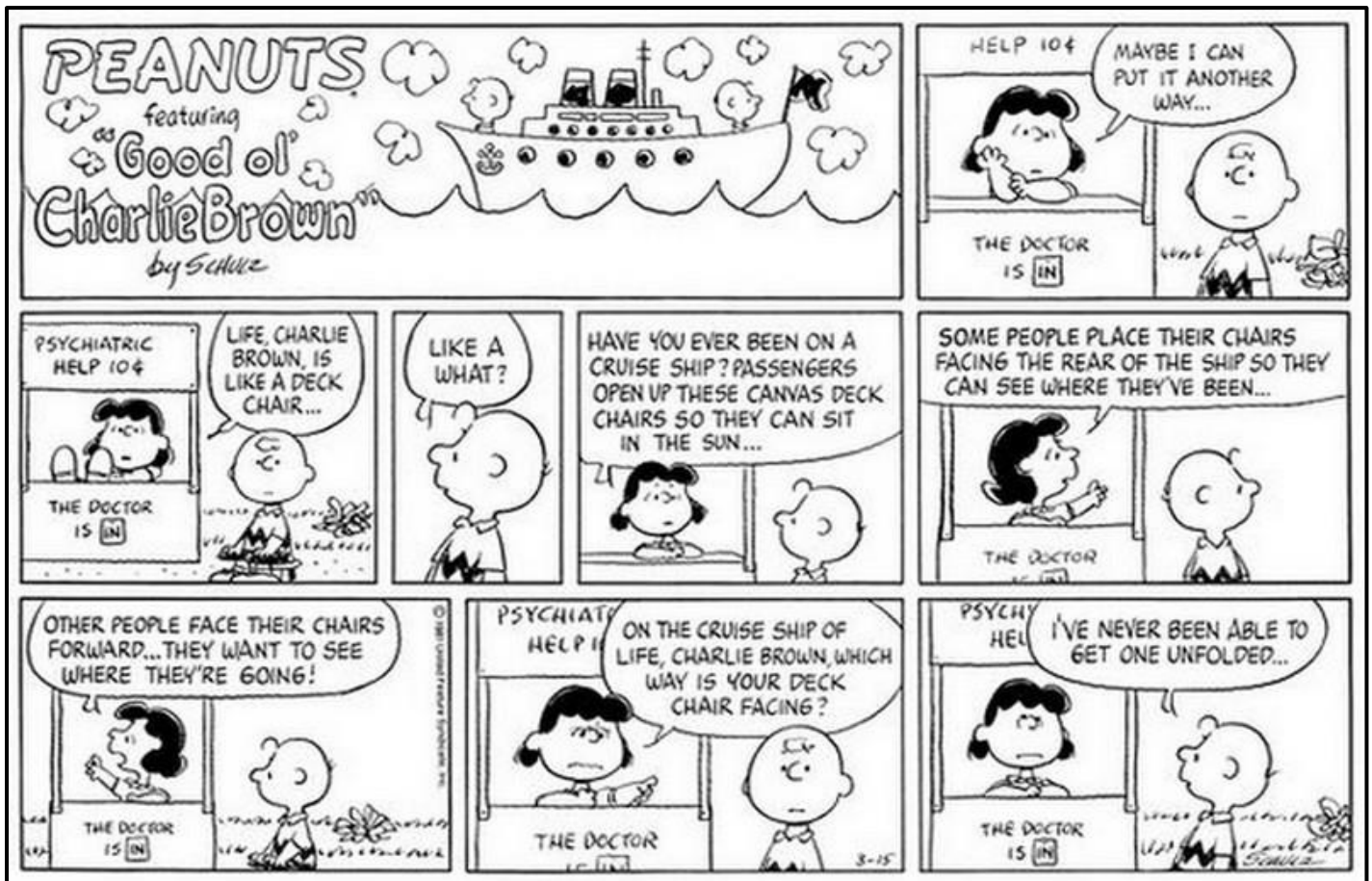
Making First Things First

Wrapping Up

Introduction

Q. So, now that we have examined these first things, now what?

If someone were to ask you this question, what would be your response? Well, it has been said that, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”¹ This all reminds me of a Charlie Brown comic that I read,²



Well perhaps you can identify with Charlie Brown. You wonder, now I know what the first things are, and what they are for, “How do I unfold them?” How do I move from what Jesus said, to what has been explained, to a response in my world?

1. A Brief Recap (Life is like a Deck Chair)

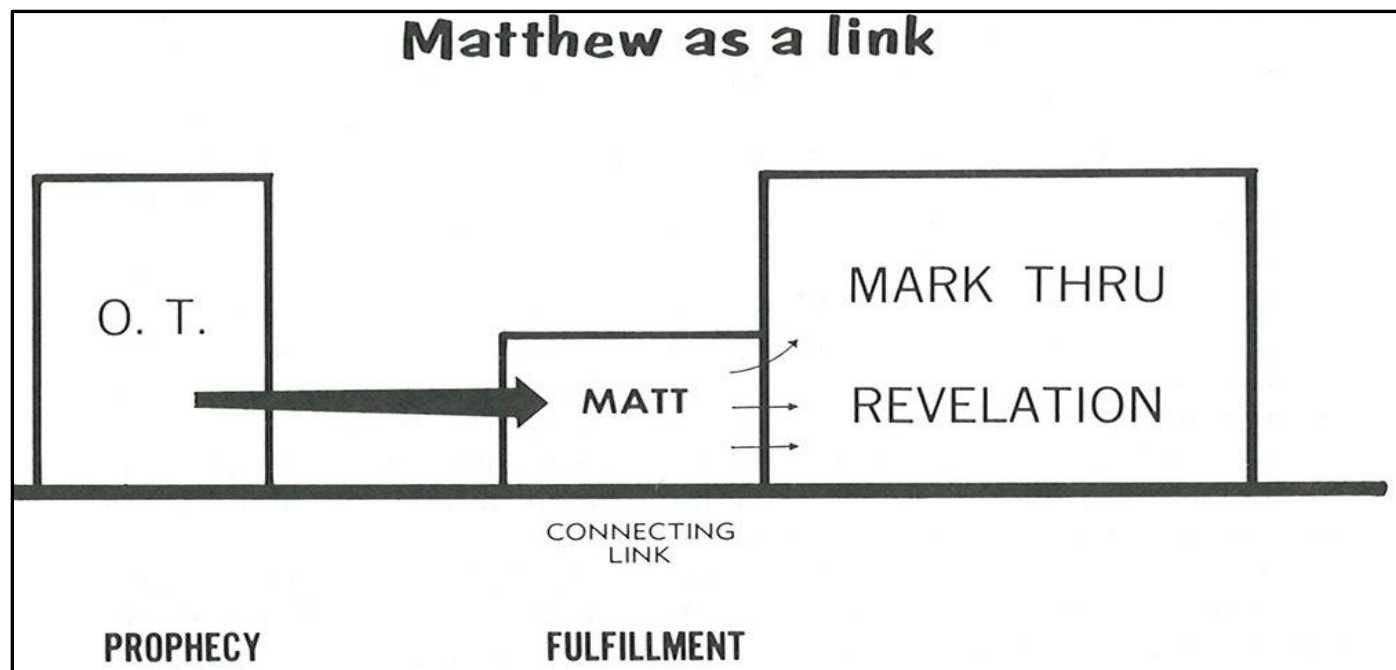
Q. What are the First Things in the Book of Matthew that has been examined?

In attempting to help Charlie Brown to get some perspective on life, Lucy points out that, “Life is like a Deck Chair.” This can be likened to we saw that, as Matthew in writing about Jesus Christ, Matthew attempted to bring perspective to Jesus Christ in relation to the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) history and theology.

¹ Covey, Stephen (et. al.). *The First Things: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy*. (New York, NY: Fireside, 1995), 75, 102

² “The Complete Peanuts, Vol. 16 Quotes.” <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/435104-maybe-i-can-put-it-another-way-life-charlie-brown> (1st June 2016).

In fact, Matthew's gospel has its own historical context as the first book in the NT. The historical and theological link revealed through Matthew's gospel between the NT and OT has to do with the coming of Messiah to the nation of Israel. As a result, Matthew's gospel has a Jewish worldview that comes through as he highlights the coming Messiah.³ Matthew presented Jesus Christ as the descendant and King of Abraham, David and Israel who had come to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Consequently, the coming Messiah came from the Kingdom of Heaven and made available salvation to the Israel and the nations. See the illustration below,⁴



the promised Messiah. People who read and study Matthew today should view it with this original purpose in mind.”⁶

We saw that theologically Irving Jensen suggested one of the better outlines of Matthew’s gospel. He breaks the book into three sections,

- Matt 1:1-4:16: An introduction to Jesus the Messiah and theological fulfilment of the Old Testament
- Matt 4:17-16:20: Proclaim the arrival of promised Kingdom of God
- Matt 16:21-28:20: Give evidence for why He came to earth

Each of these sections has a hinge (or pivotal point), these are

- Matt 4:17: “From then on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near’” (NLT).
- Matt 16:21: “From then on Jesus began to tell His disciples plainly that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, and that He would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious Law. He would be killed, but on the third day He would be raised from the dead” (NLT)

It is on these two hinges that the storyline of the gospel swings. In both cases, Matthew has used the phrase, “From then on Jesus began to...” In 4:17, He began to preach repentance the kingdom of God to the crowds, while in 16:17 it was that He began to present the evidence to His disciples for why He must go up to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed and rise on the third day.

2. The First Things in Matthew (The explanation of the use of the deck chair)

Q. Do you remember the first things that were dealt with?

Lucy then went on to explain the use of the deck chair in order to help maintain one’s perspective. Having briefly looked at the first things in Matthew’s gospel, we have explained their use. The first things explained are,

- Aligning your Priorities** - First seek the Kingdom of God: Matt 6:33. See, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:33 ESV).
This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in passages like, “Who have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth” (Ps 73:25 NLT).
“I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High” (Ps 7:17 ESV).
“For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold His face” (Ps 11:7 ESV).
- Aligning your Attitudes** - First remove the log from your own eye, Matt 7:4-5, the word used for a log here refers to the heavy beams used in the temple.
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” (Matt 7:4-5 ESV).

⁶ Easley, Kendall H. *Holman Quick Source: Guide to Understanding the Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2000), 244.

This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in a passage like,

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (Lev 19:15 NIV).

iii. **Aligning your Relationships** – First be reconciled to your brother, Matt 5:24-25.

²⁴ “leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison” (Matt 5: 24-25 ESV).

This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in passages like,

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18 ESV).

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6 ESV).

iv. **Aligning your Authority** - First bind the strong man, Matt 12:29. This action of binding is the trying up of one strong that is stronger.

“Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Matt 12:29 ESV).

This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in a passage like,

²⁴ “Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? ²⁵ For thus says the LORD: ‘Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children’” (Is 49:24-25 ESV).

v. **Aligning your Heart with God’s** – First the greatest commandment, Matt 22:36-38.

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment’” (Matt 22:36-38 ESV).

This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in passages like,

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18 ESV).

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5 ESV).

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (Deut 10:12 ESV).

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6 ESV).

vi. **Aligning your Inner World** – First cleanse the inside, Matt 23:26.

“You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matt 23:26 ESV).

See the following regarding the cleanliness of household containers. This perspective links back in to the OT and can be seen in passages like,

³² “And anything on which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or skin or a sack, any article that is used for any purpose. It must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. ³³ And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. ³⁴ Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. ³⁵ And everything on which any part of their carcass falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you. ³⁶ Nevertheless, a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, but whoever touches a carcass in them shall be unclean. ³⁷ And if any part of their carcass falls upon any seed grain that is to be sown, it is clean, ³⁸ but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you” (Lev 11:32-38 ESV).

“And every open vessel that has no cover fastened on it is unclean” (Num 19:15 ESV).

However also see the following regarding the cleanliness of the inner life,

⁹ “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?¹⁰ But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve” (Jer 17:9-10 NLT).

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him (Eliab David’s son). The LORD does not see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ (1 Sam 16:7 NLT).

- vii. **Aligning with His Body** – The first day of the week, Matt 28:1. This was when the Sabbath had ended and the new day was about to begin, that is on Sunday morning. It has been said that, “On the night after the Sabbath, at the hour when dawn broke on the first day of the week.”⁷

“Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb” (Matt 28:1 ESV; See also, Mk 16:1-2,9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1-2,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2). The first day of the week was a day of work, as the rest day had finished. But in Jesus Christ the rest day and the work day are united and completed. Jesus Christ declared, “It is finished” see Jn 19:30. The writer to the Hebrews pointed out that Jesus Christ is now the rest, Heb 3:7-4:10.

This perspective is built on the OT perspective and can be seen in passages like,

¹ “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation” (Gen 2:1-3 ESV).

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:8-11 ESV).

⁷ Mounce, Robert H. Matthew. *New International Biblical Commentary*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 265.

3. Our Response - (Unfolding the Deck Chair, So, What?)

Q. So, where do we go from here?

We can know that there is a deck chair. We can even have the use of the deck chair explained to us. However, if we do not unfold it and sit in it, what is the point of having it? That is to say, we can know that there are first things that need to be first. We can even have their use explained to us. However, if we do not respond in a way that affects our world around us, what is the point of having them as part of our priorities for life?

As Christ-followers who have heard and know about these first things we need to ask, “What is to be my response?” That is, how am I to practise what I have arrived at from what I have heard? What are you going to do about what you have heard over these weeks? That is to say, “So what?”

I will let Jesus have the last word on this matter, as He says it better than I can. I have chosen the Message translation, although it is a modern translation, I find that gets to the heart of the matter.

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 God-sponsored 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 the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.”

²⁸⁻²⁹ When Jesus concluded His address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that He was living everything He was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard” (Matt 7:21-29 Message)

Ask yourself, “What is to be my response?” from what I have heard over this series. That is to say, “So what?” Let me tell you what, we need to respond and put into practice what we have heard, otherwise it has all been a big waste of time. To be precise, you may know that there is a deck chair. You may even have the use of the deck chair explained. However, if you do not unfold it and sit in it, what is the point? This is the point of Jesus’ words here in Matthew.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. So, now that we have examined these first things, now what?

Yes, as a Christ-follower you may know about these first things and can explain them, but if there is no response to this knowledge so what? We need to be intentional about working these first things into our lives. Jesus Christ did not speak about these things for the sake of it, but they were part of His life. He showed how these first things are Kingdom truths and are part of the fabric of Life.

They are not part of a religious system, distorted into rules for living a holy life. If that is how they are perceived, then we have missed the point. The whole focus is to work these first things into every area of our life. They are to flow from our relationship with our heavenly Father. They need to touch the world that we live in, touching each other and the world around us. Have you begun to make these first things the first in your life? That is, have you begun the alignment of:

- i. Your priorities – by first seeking the Kingdom of God
- ii. Your attitudes – by first removing the log from your own eye
- iii. Your relationships – by first be reconciled to your brother
- iv. Your authority – by first binding the strong man
- v. Your heart with God's – by first keeping the greatest commandment
- vi. Your inner world – by first cleansing your inside
- vii. Yourself with His body – by keeping the first day of the week

If you have not begun the alignment, then why not? You can and need to begin to do this now, today. Otherwise, it will be just another series of sermons to add to the rest of the sermons that you have heard and may not have acted on. If you have begun the alignment that is great, but we can always seek to be more purposeful regarding these living as Christ-followers. It is time for us as Christ-followers to step up and make these first things the first things in our daily lives. It has been said,

“In a time when many people (*many Christians included*) are aimlessly meandering about the earth as wandering generalities, those who have implemented these ‘first things’ have become purposeful possibilities. By obeying Jesus with the ‘first things’ they are able to push all non-essentials out of the way.”⁸

Our response or lack of is actually an indication of our love for God. Now that is an important thought that we need to get a hold of and respond to. It is not a new idea, as John in his first letter said,

¹⁻³ “Every person who believes that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah, is God-begotten. If we love the One who conceives the child, we’ll surely love the child who was conceived. The reality test on whether or not we love God’s children is this: Do we love God? Do we keep His commands? The proof that we love God comes when we keep His commandments and they are not at all troublesome” (1 Jn 5:1-3 Message).

Pause in His presence for a moment and think this over... To be continued in you...

⁸ Damazio, Frank. *The Power of Spiritual Alignment: Living According to the Seven Firsts of Jesus*. (Portland, OR: City Christian Publishing, 2002), the back cover. The italics are mine.