



Peninsula City Church

Making First Things First

Core Values for Living

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Making First Things First

Core Values for Living

Introduction

Q. Do you have core values for living as Christ-follower and what are they?

If someone were to ask you this question, what would be your response? Do you have core values for living as Christ-follower? If so, where did you get them and what are they? If not, where would you look to get some?

Matthew's gospel has recorded numerous core values for living as Christ-follower that were proposed by Jesus Christ. In this series, we will explore seven core values, and how you can make them first in your daily life.

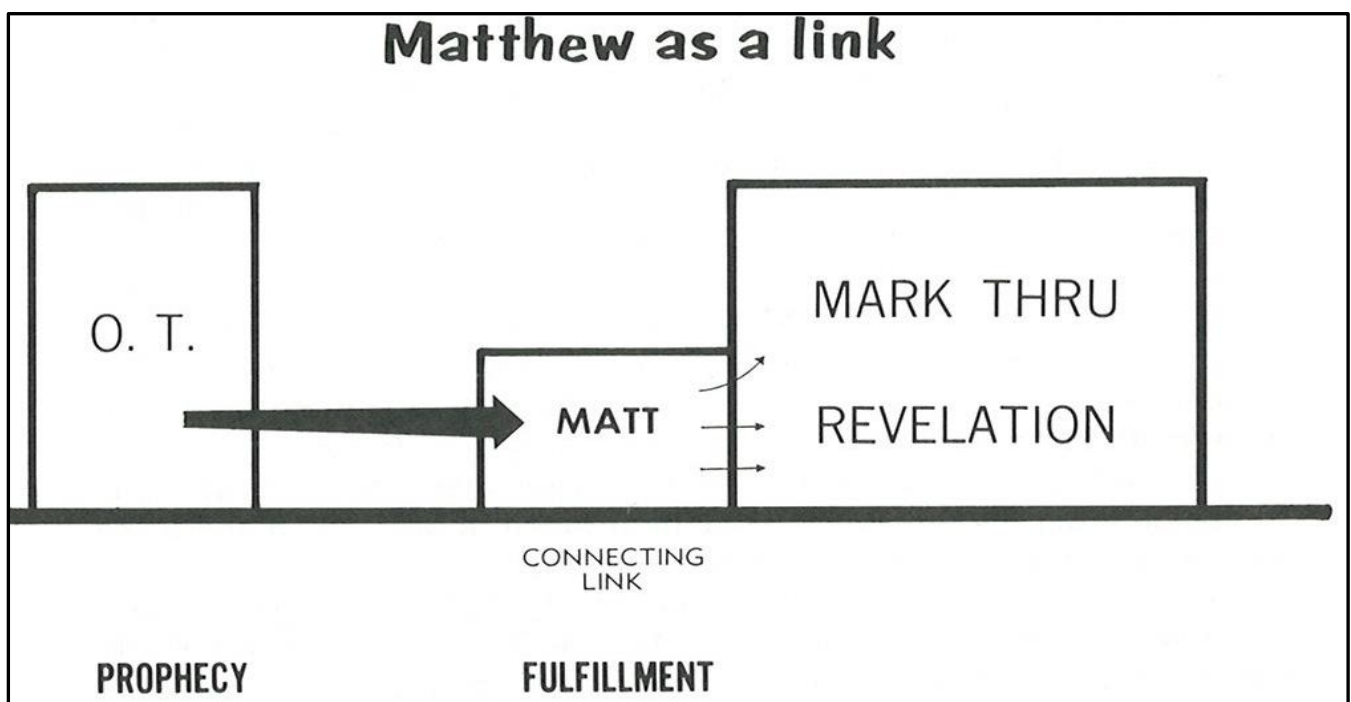
1. A historical and theological background

Q. What is the historical and theological background behind the Book of Matthew?

In writing about Jesus Christ, Matthew made no distinction between history and theology. However, here for this study, history and theology will be dealt with separately, to draw out the various aspects of both. The history will be dealt with first and then the theology.

a. First, Matthew's historical context for being the first book in the New Testament

The historical link revealed through Matthew's gospel between the New Testament and Old Testament 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.¹ 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,²



¹ Morris, Leon. *New Testament Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 115, 120.

² Jensen, I.L. *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1981), 113.

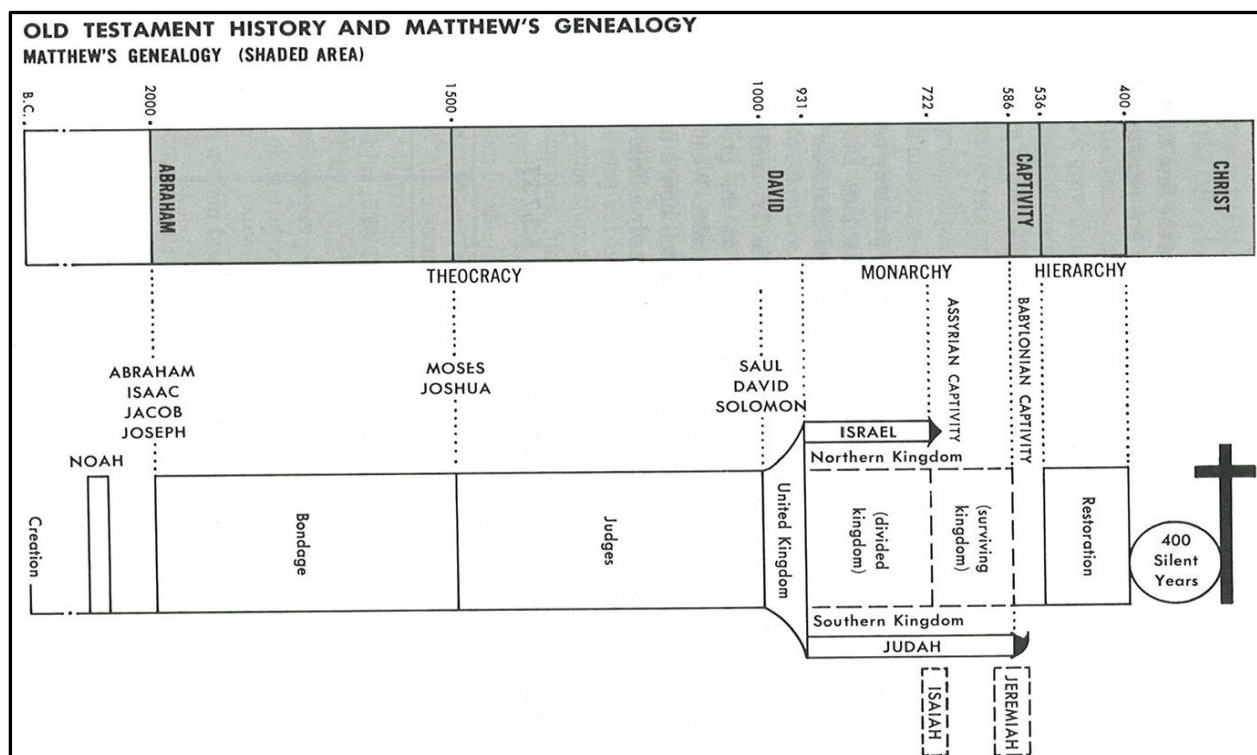
Therefore, Matthew's gospel sits at the beginning of the New Testament reaching back into the Old and highlighting the historical context that has led to the point of the Coming of Messiah. On the matter of the placement of the gospel of Matthew it has been said,

"The Gospel of Matthew is appropriately located at the beginning of the New Testament. This is not because it was the first New Testament book, or even the earliest Gospel, to be written. Rather, more than any of the other Gospels it emphasizes Jesus' relation to the Old Testament. Thus it serves as a bridge, connecting the two Testaments as promise and fulfillment."³

The bigger picture presented in Matthew's gospel had this Old Testament context in mind as he speaks to Jewish believers and Jewish non-believers. His gospel has Hebrew nuances and themes, which are understood from verses like, Matt 1:1

"This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham" (Matt 1:1 NLT).

See also, 10:5-6,23; 15:24; 19:28. However, there is also a universal feature to his gospel to the other people of the world, see Matt 8:5-13; 13:24,38; 24:14; 25:31-46; 28:16-20. Matthew's linking of these two groups, draws out a linking motif of the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), and David (2 Sam 7).



As far as the historical purpose of Matthew's goes,

"The original purpose of this Gospel was to provide a written proclamation of the redemption of God brought about through Jesus with an emphasis suitable for Jewish Christians: Jesus is the promised Messiah. People who read and study Matthew today should view it with this original purpose in mind."⁴

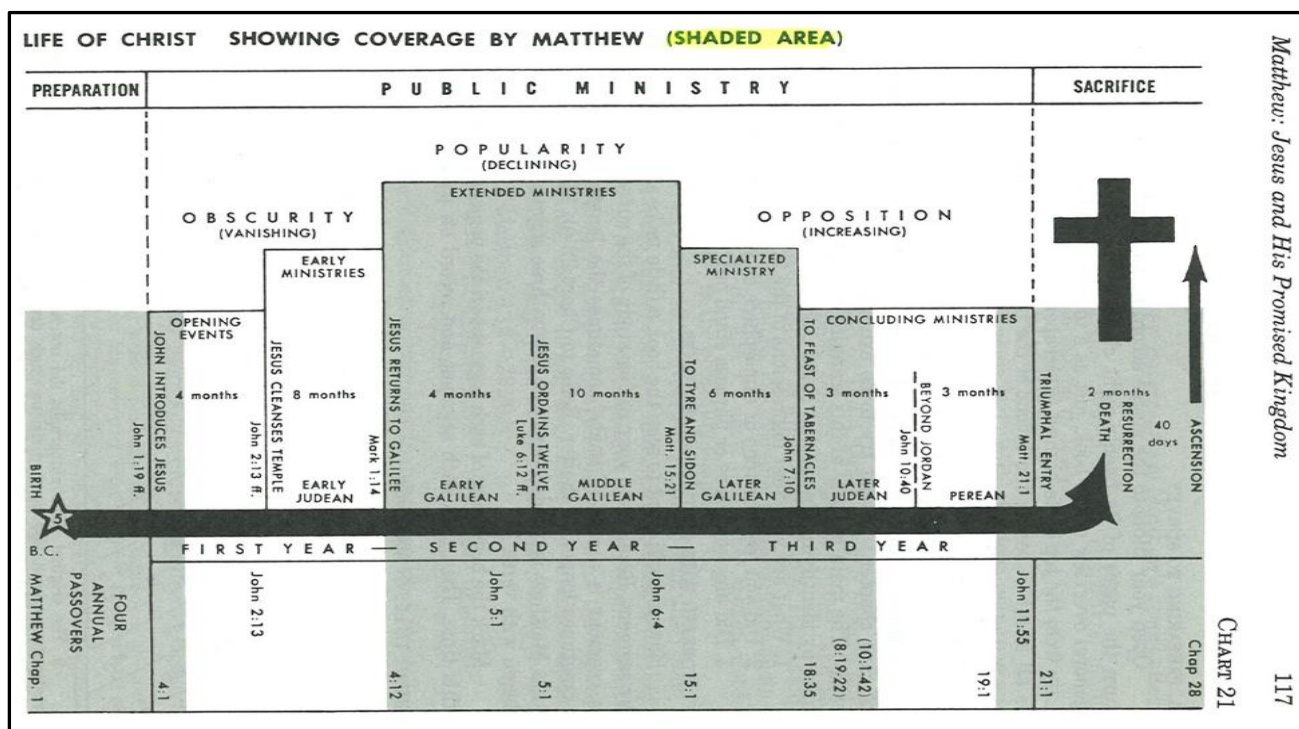
³ Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament* [computer file], Electronic ed., Logos Library System, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

⁴ Easley, Kendall H. *Holman Quick Source: Guide to Understanding the Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2000), 244.

Matthew's gospel has internal evidence of its leaning towards a Jewish audience (possibly in Hebrew, which was later, translated into Greek).⁵ Having said this though, it is not inferring that non-Jewish readers were excluded from reading and understanding it, but simply that it is Jewish in its nuance and context. Following are some internal indicators as to its sense of Jewishness:⁶

- Matthew never attempted to translate or explain any of the Jewish words or customs.
- Matthew quoted the Old Testament more than any other gospel writer; e.g. 129 references, 53 quotes and 76 allusions; these are taken from 25 of the 39 Old Testament books.
- He recorded the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy through Jesus the Messiah e.g. Matt 1:22; 2:5,15,17,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4,42; 26:31,54; 27:9-10.
- Jesus was revealed as the descendant of Abraham and David, Matt 1:1; in fact He is continually referred to as the "Son of David," 1:1,20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9,15; 22:42,45.
- His genealogy (family line) would make more sense to a Jewish reader, as it draws on a Jewish history to illustrate Jesus as Messiah the fulfilment of the line of Abraham.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, i.e. Chapters 5–7, Jesus was revealed as a teacher whose authority even surpassed that of Moses.
- Jesus fulfilled the prophecies given to David, the greatest king of Israel. For example, Jesus was born in Bethlehem (stated five times in Chap 2), and like David He appeared as a King, see 19:28. He was frequently recognised as "the Son of David" cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9,15, although in truth He is David's 'Lord' see 22:41–46.

Following is the coverage of Matthew's gospel; notice what he covers and what he does not,⁷



⁵ France, R.T. *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 31.
 France, R.T. *Matthew Evangelist & Teacher*. (Downers Grove, IL: Eerdmans, 1998), 62-66.

⁶ Youngblood, Ronald F. (ed.). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary: An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full colour illustrations* [computer file], electronic edition of the revised edition of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary, Logos Library System, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), CD.

⁷ Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, 119.

Having pointed out that the audience was most likely Jewish; it would be amiss to ignore the fact that, some illustrations do still have a non-Jewish references e.g.

- The visit of the wise men from the (non-Jewish) east possibly Persia: Matt 2:1–12
- Jesus is taken to Egypt to escape Herod: Matt 2:13-15
- The Roman centurion and his faith to believe: Matt 8:10
- The Canaanite woman and her daughter: Matt 15:21-28
- Possible hints to the rejection of the gospel by the Israel and it being accepted by non-Jews, Matt 21:43; also see 4:15–16; 8:5–13; 12:18–21; 13:38
- Then there is the Great Commission which was to “make disciples of all the nations,” Matt 28:19

b. Secondly, let us explore what Matthew recorded regarding the theological core values for living as mentioned by Jesus Christ.

As pointed out earlier, Mathew’s gospel aptly placed at the beginning of the New Testament is a link back into the Old Testament. In all likelihood, it is not because it was the first New Testament book to be written, as this may have been Mark or Galatians. Rather, it underscores Jesus’ prophetic relationship to and fulfillment of the Old Testament more than any of the other New Testament writings (especially the gospels). Matthew’s theological view of Jesus Christ is not that different from that of Mark or Luke only that, he appears to portray the Kingdom of God as based on the evangelistic thrust to Israel more strongly.

As a result, Matthew’s gospel also functions as a theological link, between the two Testaments. This stands out amongst other things in the promise and fulfillment of the Messianic hope and expectation of the Jews.

“We find in the Gospel of Matthew is a record of the life of Jesus, which has been shaped by Matthew in such a way that we can detect emphases and patterns and themes that are the author’s. It is these patterns and themes that we describe when we outline Matthew’s theology.”⁸

This theological link between the New Testament and Old Testament has a foretold promise and fulfillment of the coming of Messiah to the nation of Israel. This is,

“In His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Jewish Messiah and created the church.”⁹

Did Matthew simply record the life and words of Jesus in a theologically narrative style, which is purely embedded within the history of Jesus’ day, while recording the revelation that Jesus was presenting? Sometimes this appears to be the case. However, that does not mean that he skipped any sort of structure. Rather, he used a method or structure that will do justice to both the larger and the smaller (or immediate) context of the book. Namely, there is a flow from one theme to another, one plot to another and one teaching to another, as the Holy Spirit guided Matthew in this theological task of His gospel.

⁸ Green, J.B. & McKnight, Scott. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 532.

⁹ Easley, *Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 243.

Following is some of the theology in Matthew's gospel. "Matthew's main subject is the 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God.' Matthew mentioned this some 51 times within his gospel. This is, twice as often as in any other gospel. Matthew highlights that,

- The Kingdom of God is already here in Jesus, Matt 12:28, but it is not yet fulfilled, see Matt 13:43; 25:34.
- The Kingdom cannot be earned, Matt 19:23; it can be received only by those who recognise that they do not deserve it and enter it by faith, Matt 5:3; 21:31.
- The Kingdom extends like a fishing net, gathering people from every part of society, see Matt 13:47, offering new life in the life-changing presence of God, Matt 8:11.
- The Kingdom is more valuable than a precious gem, Matt 13:45–46, and it excludes all competitors for its allegiance, Matt 6:33.
- The Kingdom of God means 'the rule or reign of God' in the entire creation, in the world, and especially in lives. The primary indication of the presence of the Kingdom in the world is the transformation of life, both individually and socially. A person enters the Kingdom not by saying the right words, but by doing "the will of My Father in heaven," Matt 7:21."

2. A Tapestry

Therefore, although dealing with the Gospel of Mark (which we will deal with next week) Joanna Dewey's uses what she calls an 'Interwoven Tapestry' approach.¹¹ I see it also having application to Matthew in this context. In applying Dewey's concept of an interwoven tapestry to Matthew, the many threads (or strands), within their overlapping structures and sequences, will echo what has already been said history, and forecast what is to come theology and prophesy.

It would seem more textually, exegetically and theologically sound, to understand Matthew as simply writing narrative (story or an account) theology about Jesus, interwoven with all its culture and history. He probably would have sat down and wrote the Gospel over time, recalling and discussing with others what Jesus had said and done. It would be like weaving a tapestry with its separate strands (some major strands and other minor) intertwined to create a single picture. Each strand is necessary for the makeup of the whole picture, the more strands there are and the more they are intertwined, the stronger the tapestry and the more suited to its purpose. If any of the strands are taken out of the tapestry, will only distort it.

When Matthew wrote his gospel with all its Jewish flavour and culture, he was writing a narrative theology. What is narrative theology? As Gabriel Fackre points out in his article,

"Taking into account its very wide borders, narrative theology is discourse about God in the setting of the story."¹²

That is to say, Matthew went from one theological theme to another to another, thereby building the larger picture of the whole plot or scene within the larger narrative sections in his gospel. So, Matthew's narrative theology was a cultural product, embedded in the history of his day. He was a theological narrator (storyteller) of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is important that we read and study the gospel of Matthew with this in mind and not violate his gospel. His writing of the text was not just a writing of history he was writing to affect the listener (reader) with deep theological truth in light of his history. In doing so, he used such tools as plots,

¹¹ Dewey, Joanna. (1991) "Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience." *CBQ* 53: 221, 224, 234. Dewey, Joanna. (1989) "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark." *Int* 53.1: 40.

¹² Gabriel Fackre, (1983) "Narrative Theology." *Int* 37.4: 343.

discourse, events, and teaching etc. Jesus taught in quite a rabbinic style, in that He used things like short sayings, parables, proverbs etc., and a not long flowing single topic of teaching sections. These short sections were often woven together as part of the whole tapestry. The common people were taken back at His authoritative style of teaching e.g. Matt 7:28,29 (which was not rabbinic in that it did not just quote or recite earlier rabbinic traditions).

²⁸ “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, ²⁹ for He taught with real authority, quite unlike their teachers of religious law” (Matt 7:28-29 NLT)

Jesus’ was a new way of seeing things and teaching them. This was especially in relation to the Kingdom of God, and how those who enter the Kingdom were to live.

The First Things

With this in mind, let us briefly look at one major theme or strand that appears in Matthew’s gospel. This is an intertwined and interrelated strand of the same theological and historical tapestry. This strand is that of ‘Making First Things First.’ As a result, this topic of the first things in Matthew also recorded the theological motif of making the first things the first things. Seven of these first things or core values have been chosen to evaluate in this series. They are,

- i. **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).

See also,

“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).
- ii. **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.

See,

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).

See also,

“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.

See,

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).

See also,

“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.

See,

“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).

See also,

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.

See,

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).

See also,

“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.

See,

“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,

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 a 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** – 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."¹³

See,

"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

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. Do you have core values for living as Christ-follower and what are they?

Yes, it is as Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of these first things, but we need to be intentional about making these the first things first in our lives. So, Jesus Christ did not speak these things in a vacuum, but they were part of His Jewish culture, but He took them to another level. Matthew made no distinction between these first things from a historical or theological perspective. But, He showed Jesus Christ teaching these Kingdom truths as part of the Jewish fabric of their theological relationship with God.

However, the religious system had distorted them and made them into rules for living and a holy life. They had missed the whole focus of making these first things part of their relationship with their heavenly Father, each other and the world around them. The bigger picture presented in Matthew's gospel had this Old Testament context in mind as he speaks to Jewish believers and Jewish non-believers.

Although you might not be a Jewish believer, have you made these first things the first in your life? That is, have you,

- i. Aligned your priorities – by first seeking the Kingdom of God
- ii. Aligned your attitudes – by first removing the log from your own eye
- iii. Aligned your relationships – by first be reconciled to your brother
- iv. Aligned your authority – by first binding the strong man
- v. Aligned your heart with God's – by first keeping the greatest commandment

¹³ Mounce, Robert H. Matthew. *New International Biblical Commentary*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 265.

- vi. Aligned your inner world – by first cleansing your inside
- vii. Aligned yourself with His body – by keeping the first day of the week

If you have not, well you can and this series aims to help you in this area. If you have that is great, but we can always seek to be purposeful regarding these core values for living as Christ-follower. It is time for us as Christ-followers to step up and made these first things the first things in our daily lives.