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Matthew 23:34 and the Discipleship Ideal

Prophets, Wise Men, and Scribes in Matthew 23:34

The purpose of this paper is to explore Matthew's discipleship ideal through the lens of Matt 23:34. By discipleship ideal I refer to that gospel character or characters whom Matthew intends to function as the primary *typos* for readers to imitate. Investigations into the nature of Matthean discipleship have typically focused on Matthew's emphasis as a redactor, the disciples as characters or on discipleship-related language (Kingsbury 1978; Edwards 1985; Luz 1995; Donaldson 1996; Runesson 2008). Minimal attention has been paid to Matt 23:34. In Matt 23, Jesus addresses a series of seven sharp woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). He criticizes their legal judgments in matters of oaths and tithing (23:16-24, cf. 5:33-37). Their external cleanliness and internal greed mark them out as full of lawlessness (23:28). Not only have they failed in matters of law, but they honor the prophets while taking part in the shedding of their blood (v. 30). They reflect their ancestors as the descendants of those who were prophet murderers (v. 31). They both misjudge the law and persecute the prophets. Davies and Allison note that the seven woes, which start with "halakhic disagreements and culminate in the murder of God's messengers, mirror the plot of the whole Gospel, in which religious disputes lead to Jesus' death" (1997:307). In this context, Jesus states that he will send them prophets, wise men and scribes (ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω πρὸς ὑμᾶς προφήτας καὶ σοφοὺς καὶ γραμματεῖς), some of whom they will kill and crucify, and some of whom they will flog in their synagogues and pursue from town to town (23:34; Orton 1989:153-59). Jesus will send Israel alternative leaders to those of the scribes and Pharisees.

It is the thesis of this paper that this mixed group of prophets, wise men, and scribes represents Matthew's discipleship ideal. Note that we are not dealing here with three separate concepts of discipleship (against

Schweizer 1974:140-51). Rather, we are dealing with a united but varied group that combines three different roles (Davies and Allison 1993:315). A reader familiar with the Old Testament will be quite aware of individuals who combined multiple roles. Moses was a lawgiver and prophet (e.g., Deut 4:44; 18:15, 18; 31:9). By the time of Philo, he had expanded his brief to that of king, lawgiver, high priest, and prophet (Philo, *Mos.* 2.292). Samuel combined the roles of priest and prophet (1 Sam 2:18-20; 3:1, 19-20). Jeremiah was a priest and prophet aided by the scribe Baruch (Jer 1:1, 4; 36:4; 8, 10, 13-32). Those who opposed him included a mixed multitude of priests, wise men, and prophets (17:17). In later traditions Jeremiah was viewed as a new Moses, someone who upheld the law (Allison 1993:55). Ezra was a priest and scribe (Ezra 7:1-6). By the late first century AD he was also remembered as a prophet (4 Ezra 1:1; see Metzger 1983:520). David Aune (1983:83) notes that from their first appearance in our sources, Israelite prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, combine “the characteristics of the holy man, the sage, the miracle worker, and the soothsayer” (1 Sam 9; 1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 1:2-17; 6:1-7, 8-10; 13:14-21; 20:1-11). By the first century AD the distinctions between what might have originally been distinct roles had become thoroughly blurred. David Orton observes, for example, that scribes assimilated other functions, frequently replacing the prophets:

Thus Targum Jonathan to Isaiah 9:15 renders “the prophet who teaches lies” as the “scribe who teaches lies”: false prophet = false scribe! Similarly, for Isa. 3:2 “the judge and the prophet” taken into exile are in the Targum “the judge and the scribe.” “The priest and the prophet” who “reel with strong drink” (Isa. 28:7) become “the priest and the scribe.” (Orton 1989:55)

A parallel assimilation of literary genres occurred resulting in a blurring of the distinctions between law, prophecy and sapiential literature (Witherington 1994:75-116). This process cautions us against seeking to overly distinguish between the prophets, wise men, and scribes envisaged by Jesus in Matt 23:34. It is not my purpose to define these three different roles. Rather, my purpose is to demonstrate the significance of 23:34 in delineating Matthew’s discipleship ideal.

The Disciples as Poor Examples

For much of Matthean scholarship the disciples represent the members of a Matthean community in conflict with formative Judaism (e.g., Saldarini 1994:84-123; Sim 1998:31-62; Konradt 2014:355-67). In such readings the evangelist’s portrayal of the disciples serves to legitimate

the community's identity and stance towards non-community members. Implicit within such readings is the assumption that the disciples reflect the community's situation and provide a template or *typos* for the community to imitate. I have argued elsewhere that such readings are selective in their use of the text in that they tend to emphasize the positive characteristics of the disciples while deftly skipping over their multiple failings (Vine 2014:33-78). Others scholars, usually from a narrative critical perspective, have argued that the disciples function as a model of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Terrence Donaldson, for example, states:

Within the story of Jesus, the disciples function primarily as a model of what is involved in being a member of Jesus' "people." Readers of Matthew's Gospel learn what it means to be a disciple by following the disciple's own story under the narrator's guidance—that is, in identifying with them, in learning from their successes and failures, and, above all, in joining with them as they listen to Jesus' teaching. (1996:41)

In broad-brush terms, the story of the Matthean disciples is one of a good start, a so-so middle, and a bad ending (Edwards 1997:141-43). Their positive start is found in the early chapters of the Gospel in the obedient response of Simon and Andrew, and James and John, to the call of Jesus to follow him (Matt 4:18-22). Throughout subsequent chapters the disciples are the beneficiaries of Jesus' teachings and witnesses to his deeds. They are treated by Jesus as worthy to receive the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven in contrast to those whose hearts have grown dull, who hear with difficulty, and have closed their eyes (13:11, 15). As we progress further through the Gospel Peter emerges as the spokesman for the rest of the disciples. His subsequent successes and failures mirror and are mirrored by the successes and failures of the other disciples. This representative function has been amply described elsewhere and need not detain us further (Cullmann 1962:25-28; Nau 1992:133; Wiarda 2000:161-67). Peter's ups and downs are numerous. He steps out of the boat and walks on water in 14:28-29 but then starts to sink under the waves when he sees the strength of the gale in v. 30. In 16:17, he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, but then rebukes Jesus for teaching the way of the cross (cf. 16:21-23). In 17:24-27, Jesus gently corrects Peter for presuming his position on the payment of the temple tax. In 26:33-35, Peter distances himself from the other disciples and promises never to deny Jesus. In verses 69-75, he crumbles under the sustained interrogation of a servant maid, a girl and then bystanders, and denies knowing Jesus. Unlike the Markan Peter, the Matthean Peter receives no rehabilitative post-denial mention (cf. Matt 28:7 and Mark 16:7; Collins 2007:797). The last we hear of Peter

is of him weeping following his denial of Jesus (Matt 26:75). Peter and his fellow disciples are decidedly “inconsistent followers” (Edwards 1985:52) or “fallible followers” (Malbon 2000:41-69) of Jesus. This brief description of the characterization of the Matthean disciples serves to make the point that the disciples are not intended by the evangelist to serve as the primary template for later disciples to imitate. While we may admire their successes and empathize with their failings, they do not serve as the ideal or *typos* for later followers of Jesus.

Where else might we look for Matthew’s discipleship ideal? Our first port of call might be those minor characters who typically but not always make one appearance and who embody one particular character trait (Williams 1994:189-225). In the case of Matthew the most common traits of such characters are faith or the need for mercy. Examples include a supplicant leper (Matt 8:1-4); a believing Centurion (vv. 5-13); the Gadarene demoniacs (vv. 28-34); the faithful friends of the paralytic (9:2-8); the believing woman with a hemorrhage (vv. 20-22); two blind men (vv. 27-31); a mute demoniac (vv. 32-34); a concerned Canaanite mother (15:21-28); a father of a possessed son (17:14-21); and the woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment (26:6-13). Joel Williams asserts in his exposition of the significance of the Markan story of Bartimaeus that while “Mark initially encourages the reader to identify with the disciples, he also moves the reader to associate with other characters through the course of his narrative” (1994:151). Elizabeth Struthers Malbon similarly suggests that minor characters in Mark “extend the continuum of potential responses to Jesus in an open-ended way, providing implicit narrative comparisons and contrasts with the responses of the continuing or recurrent characters and providing a bridge from the (internal) characters to the (borderline) implied audience” (2000:193). These observations equally apply to Matthew. Such minor characters are often transparent in nature and offer the reader distinct character traits to imitate. It is, however, in the character of Jesus, that we find our primary and fullest ideal for discipleship.

Over the last 50-60 years many gospel scholars have shifted the focus of their investigations away from the historical Jesus and towards the Gospels as transparent representations of their respective communities (Watson 1998:197-207). For such scholars, the historical community rather than the historical Jesus provides a more viable and socially rewarding avenue for historical investigation. In recent years a number of British scholars have sought to resist this development. Richard Burridge (2004) convincingly demonstrated in his published doctoral thesis that the genre of the Gospels is that of Greco-Roman biography, albeit narrated with a heavily Jewish accent. The intention of such biographies or *lives*

was to present the reader with an exemplar to imitate. In the case of the Gospels this exemplar is, of course, Jesus himself. Richard Bauckham and others argued in 1998 for the Gospels as intended for an audience of all Christians rather than isolated communities. Their primary focus is on presenting Jesus to a wide audience rather than legitimating the position of a narrowly defined community. As a result of such work, there has been a renewed interest in focusing on Jesus as the central character of the Gospels, offered to the reader in the hope that he or she will choose him as an example to imitate, an ideal for discipleship (Allison 2005:143-44; Klink 2007, 2010; Bird 2010). It is in the context of these wider scholarly developments that I will argue below that the key to understanding the identity and mission of those described as prophets, wise men, and scribes in 23:34 is to be found in Matthew's characterization of Jesus himself. First a few words on the role of imitation in the ancient world.

Imitation in the Ancient World

Let us return to Matt 23. In this chapter, Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for failing to provide an example worthy of imitation in their capacity as leaders and teachers of Israel. Their key failing is that their deeds do not match their words (23:2-7; cf. Newport 1995:118-29; Turner 2015:312-17). In the ancient world students learned through comprehending a teacher's words and imitating his deeds. In Hellenistic religions and philosophical schools imitation or mimesis supplemented oral discourse as the primary method of teaching (Malherbe 1986:34-40; Barrow 1996:18-19). The student or disciple learned through hearing his teacher's words and imitating his deeds (cf. Jesus as a mighty prophet in *deed* and *word* in Luke 24:19). Concerning imitation, we find in the Pseudepigrapha the demand to imitate good men (T. *Ash.* 4:3) and the mercy of God (T. *Benj.* 4:1). Philo proposes Moses as the perfect king, lawgiver, high priest and prophet, a perfect model and typos for "all those who were inclined to imitate (*mimēomai*) him" (Philo, *Moses* 1:158-159). Josephus portrays Moses as the perfect example of one who seeks to imitate (*mimēomai*) the ways of God (Josephus, *Ant.* 1:19). Numerous other Old Testament characters are presented as suitable examples to imitate.

In Greek education children were taught the epics of Homer as a means of providing them with heroes they could imitate (Joyal, McDougall, and Yardley 2009:132-33). Similarly, Pliny extols the virtues of a "living model" (Pliny, *Ep.* 8.13) and Dio Chrysostom exhorts his readers to imitate, among others, clever artists (Chrysostom, *Or.* 4.83-95). In this context the good teacher sought to embody his teachings or philosophy in his actions thereby providing a living example for his students to imitate. The poor teacher

was one who shared his teachings but failed to provide a *bios* in harmony with his teachings as a template to imitate. Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for such a failure when he tells the crowds and his disciples to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees “teach you and follow it but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach” (Matt 23:3). It is a moot point as to which teachings of the scribes and Pharisees the disciples of Jesus should accept. Nevertheless, the scribes and Pharisees are imperfect exemplar figures who should, at best, be heard but not imitated. In contrast, Jesus informs his disciples that they are not to be called rabbi, for they have one teacher (ὁ διδάσκαλος) and they are all brothers (23:8; contrast 23:7). Nor are they to be called instructors (καθηγηταί), for they have one instructor (καθηγητής), the Christ (23:10). Jesus is to be their sole teacher in the sense that it is his words they are to heed and his deeds they are to imitate. It is not surprising therefore, to find the identities of prophet, wise man, and scribe in both the teachings and deeds of Jesus.

Jesus as Prophet

It is in the person of Jesus that we encounter the ideal for discipleship. The combined identity of the prophets, wise men, and scribes sent to warn Israel (Matt 23:34) reflects the Matthean Jesus’ own identity as prophet, wise man, and scribe. A review of the evidence will help establish this point. In terms of Jesus’ prophetic identity, a number of observations may be made:

1. Jesus was clearly viewed as a prophet by others. Matthew records, for example, the crowd’s declaration that “this is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee” (21:11; see also 16:14; 21:46; 68).

2. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus pronounces prophetic warnings and predictions (Aune 1983:171-88). In 11:20, for example, he reproaches the cities in which he had done most of his deeds of power because they did not repent (cf. 12:36). Many of his Son of Man statements relate to the future, such as his repeated warnings of his impending betrayal and death (17:12, 22; 20:17-19; 26:1-2, 24, 45). In chapters 24 and 25 he provides detailed prophecies relating to Jerusalem and the nations, and in chapter 26 he correctly predicts that the disciples would desert him (26:31-35, 56, 69-75).

3. Jesus viewed his own ministry and that of his followers as prophetic: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:12); “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward” (10:40). Jesus views his three days and

three nights in the heart of the earth as a greater example of the sign of the prophet Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster (12:39-40). As with his followers, he will die the death of a persecuted prophet ("shedding the blood of the prophets," "murdered the prophets," "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (23:29-39) (Turner 2015:151-75).

4. Jesus' ministry parallels that of the prophet John the Baptist. John and Jesus both preach "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near" (μετανοείτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, 3:2; 4:17). Initially John starts his ministry in a confrontational manner ("You brood of vipers! Who warned you of the wrath to come?" 3:3:7). This contrasts with Jesus' early ministry in which he intentionally withdraws to avoid confrontation in order to avoid breaking "a bruised reed" or quenching "a smoldering wick" (12:14-21; cf. Isa 42:1-4). By the end of his ministry, however, Jesus uses terms reminiscent of John ("You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matt 23:33). Matthew outlines in detail the arrest and execution of John the Baptist (14:1-12). This prefigures the arrest and execution of Jesus. In the words of Gary Yamasaki, "The narratee is prompted to see this depiction of John's fate as a precursor of Jesus' fate" (1998:132).

Jesus as Wise Man

The Matthean Jesus is also a wise man. In fact, he is argued by a number of scholars to be far more than a wise man. He is Wisdom itself. Jack Suggs (1970) and Celia Deutsch (1996:42-80) have both provided compelling treatments of those passages in Matthew that directly address Jesus' identity as Wisdom. Ben Witherington has broadened and developed their arguments (1994:335-68). Evidence for Jesus as both a wise man and Wisdom include:

1. Jesus is *the* Teacher in a manner similar to both Wisdom and Solomon. In Proverbs, Wisdom is portrayed as *the* teacher who offers her knowledge and wisdom to both the simple, as well as to kings and rulers (Prov 1:20-30; 8:10, 15-16, 33; Murphy 1998:10-11). In Sirach 4:11, "Wisdom teaches her children and gives help to those who seek her." In Sirach 4:24, Wisdom is compared to education. In Wisdom 6:14, she is portrayed as a sage sitting at the city gate, willing and ready to dispense advice. Ben Witherington, and more recently Anthony Le Donne, argue that throughout such traditions wisdom is universally associated with Solomon, the "son of David" (Witherington 1994:352-53; Le Donne 2009:106-10). In the Old Testament "son of David" serves in the majority of cases as an epithet for Solomon (cf. Prov 1:1; 1 Chr 29:22; 2 Chr 1:1; 13:6; 30:26; 35:3; cf. Eccl 1:1;

2 Chr 11:18). Only in late sapiential literature did it take on the nature of a title (see “son of David” in *Pss. Sol.* 17:21). Matthew’s dual emphasis on Jesus as Son of David (cf. Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9; 15) and teacher indicate that the evangelist “set out to show that Jesus was the Son of David, like unto but wiser even than Solomon because Jesus was Wisdom in the flesh” (Witherington 1994:352). Note that “son of David” is also applied to Joseph in 1:20 with reference to his lineage and to the Christ in 22:42. For Matthew, Son of David evokes both wisdom and messianic associations.

2. Jesus understood his healings and exorcisms as the manifestation of wisdom. In non-canonical sources Solomon was known as a miracle worker and exorcist. His wisdom resulted in such abilities. Josephus, for example, recounts how God blessed Solomon with wisdom beyond that of his peers, a wisdom that manifested itself through his use of parables and similitudes and the ability to cure disease and cast out demons (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2.5; Duling 1985). Awareness of these traditions is assumed by both the evangelist and his early Christian readers (cf. Matt 12:22-32; *T. Sol.* 1:1-9; 11:1-6) and complements rather than replaces Jesus’ messianic identity as Son of David. Jesus, as Son of David, heals two blind men in Matt 9:27-31, cf. 21:9. His healing of a demoniac in chapter 12, prompts the crowd to ask, “Can this be the Son of David?” (12:23). There is little justification for the dismissal by scholars such as Lidija Novakovic (2003) of possible allusions to Solomon or wisdom in these deeds of Jesus.

Further evidence that Jesus understands his own ministry to be a manifestation of wisdom is found in Matt 11. In this chapter Jesus contrasts his healing ministry with that of the prophetic ministry of John and concludes in v. 19, “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς). Clearly Jesus is referring to his own deeds, deeds undertaken by Wisdom. Davies and Allison (1993:264-65) observe a link between the deeds of Wisdom in 11:19 with τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ “the works of the Christ” in 11:2. The Davidic or Solomonic question is not an either-or question. The hearings and exorcisms of Jesus as Son of David testify to his identity both as Wisdom and as the Messiah inaugurating the kingdom of heaven (cf. Isa 35:5-6; Matt 11:4, 5).

3. As Wisdom, Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven that relate to God’s purposes for the last days. In Matt 13, Jesus uses parables to address those who have not been given the secrets or mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, 13:11). In Jewish sources *raez* is used in relation to secrets pertaining to the last days. In Dan 2:27-28, the equivalent Greek term in the LXX is μυστήριον: “Daniel answered the king, ‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery (*raezazeh*; μυστήριον)

that the king is asking, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (*ραεζῆν; μυστήρια*), and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days” (Dan 2:17-23; Davies and Allison 1993:398). Throughout this passage those who receive such mysteries are the recipients of wisdom (*σοφία*, 2:20, 21, 23) and are described as wise men (*σοφοῖς*, 2:21). In Matt 13, Jesus dispenses wisdom to the disciples relating to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11). Jesus treats his disciples as wise men.

4. Jesus was recognized for his wisdom by others. For example, his teachings astonish those in his hometown synagogue to the extent that they ask, “Where did this man get this wisdom (*σοφία*) and these deeds of power?” (Matt 13:54). Craig Keener affirms that in the ancient Mediterranean “divinely provided wisdom and the power to work miracles usually represented two basically distinct categories of ‘heroes’” (2009:395). Very few figures combined both categories. Josephus cites two individuals as having this quality, Solomon and Jesus (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.42-49; 18:63), testifying to the ongoing memory of Jesus as a wise man.

5. Jesus used wisdom terminology throughout his teachings. He contrasts a wise man and foolish man in 7:24-27 and wise and foolish bridesmaids in 25:1-13. He consistently uses short sayings and aphorisms typical of wisdom literature. Witherington (1994:158) argues that Jesus “presented himself as a Jewish prophetic sage, one who drew on all the riches of earlier Jewish sacred traditions, especially the prophetic, apocalyptic, and sapiential material though occasionally even the legal traditions.”

Jesus as Scribe

It has been a commonplace of Matthean scholarship to understand Jesus as a rabbi practicing scribal interpretation (Cope 1976; Westerholm 1978). Nuances within this position abound. In 1928, Ernest von Dobschütz portrayed Matthew, and by implication Matthew’s Jesus, as a converted rabbi and catechist (1995:27-38). In contrast, Orton rejected Matthew as rabbi and instead argued for Matthew the apocalyptic scribe (1989:171). Orton’s comprehensive study provides a detailed treatment of the disciples as scribes in Matt 13:51-52 and 23:34. His main omission, however, possibly because of his focus on Matthew and his community, was to link the identity of the disciples as scribes with that of Jesus as scribe. Jewish scholar Philip Segal has argued that Jesus was an anti-Pharisaic “proto-rabbinic halakhist” and charismatic prophet (2007:9). Lawrence Wills (2001) argues that Matthew’s use of precise antithetical parallelism indicates that he was a professional scribe of some sort. More recently, Chris Keith (2014:41-65) has argued on the basis of John 7:15 and Mark 6:1-6/Matt. 13:54-58/Luke

4:16-30 for Jesus as a rival rabbinic-style teacher to the scribal-literate class. Evidence for Jesus' scribal identity is as follows:

1. Jesus frequently interprets the Law and Prophets. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount he states his position with respect to the Law: he has not come to abolish it but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). In the six antitheses (or super theses?) he provides his own understanding of both written and oral laws (5:12-48). He summarizes the Law and the Prophets in 7:12 in a manner reflecting rabbinic use of universal statements (*kelal*; cf. Matt 22:34-37; Gerhardsson 1998:136-48). He makes a judgement on the payment of the temple tax in 17:24-27 and provides a midrashic explanation of Ps 110:1 in Matt 22:44.

2. Jesus is asked for and gives his opinion on a range of halakhic matters, such as table fellowship (9:11), fasting (v. 15), divorce (19:3) and Sabbath observance (12:1-8, 10). Often these discussions occur within conflict settings and serve to contrast Jesus' emphasis on the weightier matters of the Law with his opponents' emphasis on lighter matters (23:23).

3. Jesus understood his ministry as involving the training of scribes. At the conclusion of his parables discourse in Matt 13, he asks whether the disciples have understood his teachings. They answer, "Yes." Jesus replies, "Therefore every scribe (πᾶς γραμματεὺς) who has been trained (μαθητευθεὶς) for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (13:52; Orton 1989:137-63).

4. Just as Jesus is more than a wise man, so too he is more than an interpreter of the Law. He is portrayed as the New Moses, reflecting his role as lawgiver as well as prophet. This has been cogently and convincingly argued by Dale Allison and as such need not detain us further (1999:15-16). Just as the Israelites were to heed the law given from Sinai, so too followers of Jesus are, as declared at his transfiguration, to listen to him (17:5).

Prophets, Wisdom, and Law in the Sermon on the Mount

The triple identities of prophet, wise man, and scribe are reflected in the teachings of Jesus. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the teachings of Jesus throughout the first Gospel. As such, a few illustrative comments on the Sermon on the Mount will serve my purpose of demonstrating the extent to which the triple identities of prophet, wise man, and scribe are reflected in Jesus' teachings. Numerous suggestions have been put forward regarding the genre and structure of the Sermon on the Mount (Goulder 2004:250-69; Betz 1985:1-16; Carter 1994:35-55; Allison 1999:7-25). The variety of these suggestions reflects the difficulties we face in determining the genre of Matt 5-7. Are these teachings actually

a sermon as reflected in its popular title? Are they prophecy? Legal teachings? A covenant? Wisdom literature? Poetry? The suggestion I would make is that in these three chapters we find a deliberate blending of genres. We encounter allusions to Old Testament prophetic, legal, and wisdom literature as well as to the respective roles of prophet, scribe, and wise man. In this sense we may assert that the teachings of chapters 5-7 represent both a fusion and a climax of Old Testament revelation, much in the same way, as observed by Richard Bauckham (1993:5), that John the Revelator presents his visions as the climax of prophetic traditions. Evidence for this assertion is uncontroversial but deserves stating.

First, the Old Testament prophets and their Jesus-era counterparts play a prominent role in the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes, for example, may be read among other things as a description of the remnant of Israel. We encounter a people, whether ideal or real, prescriptive or descriptive, who are humble (Matt 5:3, 5), who mourn (v. 4), seek after righteousness (v. 6), are merciful (v. 5), and who are pure in heart (v. 8). These characteristics allude to Old Testament prophetic traditions relating to a post-exilic remnant who are similarly described as those who poor in spirit (Isa 61:1), who mourn (v. 2), are humble (e.g., Isa 11:4; Zeph 2:3), who seek after righteousness (Isa 51:1; Zeph 2:3) and are pure of speech (Zeph 3:13; Zech 8:16). In the Old Testament this remnant will take possession of the nations (Zeph 2:7, 9). Those portrayed in the Beatitudes will own the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3), will inherit the earth (v. 5), and will be called children of God (v. 9). Those described in the Beatitudes will be treated in the same manner as the Old Testament prophets. Followers of Jesus will be persecuted and reviled as “they persecuted the prophets before you” (v. 12). Many other parallels could be highlighted, such as those between the Beatitudes and Isaiah 61 or the warning concerning false prophets in 7:15 (Davies and Allison 1988:436-39). Such parallels lead Allison to conclude that Jesus is Isaiah’s eschatological prophet (1999:15-17). Clearly there are strong allusions to both prophecy and the prophets in the Sermon on the Mount.

There are also in the Sermon obvious allusions to wisdom literature. W. D. Davies lists, among others, Matt 5:13, 15; 6:27 as including “Wisdom” sayings of Jesus (1989:457-60). In chapter 6, Jesus warns of the dangers of pursuing money. Followers are to pursue treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth “where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt 6:19-21). The service of wealth (μαμωνᾶς) competes with service of God (v. 24). These warnings reflect a dominant motif within Wisdom literature. Eccl 5:10 states, for example, that “the lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth with gain. This also is vanity” (cf. Sir. 5:1). Jesus teaches on the necessities of life—eating,

drinking, and clothing (Matt 6:25-34). This echoes much in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes on the value, or often the limited value, of such pursuits (see Prov 12:27; 13:11, 22; Eccl 5:18-20). The end of the Sermon ends in typical Wisdom fashion, with a contrasting of the wise man who hears these words and acts upon them, the perfect student, and the foolish man who hears these words and does not act on them, the student who fails to imitate his teacher. Witherington identifies the following sapiential motifs as present in the Sermon:

beatitudes; metaphors meant to inculcate good works (5:16); the upholding of Torah and its commandments as an expression of Wisdom and righteousness (cf. Sirach 24); practical teaching on self-control in regard to both anger and sexual aggression; prohibition of oaths and revenge; exhortations to love of enemies, to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; instructions on wealth, health, loyalties; nature wisdom meant to inculcate a less anxious lifestyle; prohibition of judging others, of profanation; exhortations to seek the right thing from God, obey the golden rule, follow the narrow path, avoid false teachers; and to maintain integrity in one's words and deeds. (Witherington 1994:356)

Finally, in a general sense the whole of the Sermon on the Mount is an exercise in scribal interpretation to the extent that it responds to themes and motifs in the Hebrew Scriptures. A specific example, however, of scribal activity is found in chapter five. Jesus affirms the Law and the Prophets and condemns those who teach others to break one of the "least of these commandments" (Matt 5:19). The emphasis is on correct teaching of the Law and the Prophets, teaching being a scribal activity (Keith 2014:57). Jesus then compares what was said "to those of ancient times" with his own position (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). The prohibition to murder (5:21) is compared to the more pressing need to avoid anger or insult towards a brother (vv. 22-26). Jesus' teaching, while constituting a legal ruling, reflects the oft-repeated prohibition in Wisdom literature against anger (cf. Prov 14:17, 29; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 22:24; 29:8). This illustrates the impossibility of making clear distinctions between legal and wisdom motifs in the Sermon. The prohibition against adultery is compared with the need to control one's thoughts (Matt.5:27-30). Old Testament concessions on divorce are heightened through Jesus' own ruling that lack of chastity is the only valid basis for divorce (Deut 24:1-4; Matt 5:31-32). The Old Testament prohibition against swearing falsely is broadened to include swearing in general (Deut 23:21-23; Matt 5:33-37). Jesus replaces the *lex talionis* with an appeal not to resist evildoers, to turn the other cheek and to give to anyone that begs from you (vv. 38-42). The saying "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" is replaced with an appeal to love

your enemies and to pray for those that persecute you (vv. 43-47). In all these instances, Jesus is interpreting either written or oral laws and traditions. He is acting as a scribe.

These examples serve to illustrate the fact that the Sermon on the Mount is redolent with allusions to the Law, Prophets, and Wisdom literature and their corresponding functionaries of scribe, prophet and wise man (so Matt 23:34). Rather than read these different traditions as reflecting differing redactional layers or competing traditions within early Christianity, a less strained interpretation is to read them as a deliberate attempt on the part of Jesus to embody all Old Testament genres and roles within his teachings and deeds and, in light of Matt 23:34, in the ministry of his followers. His followers are to present a climax of revelation to those to whom they are sent.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have argued that the discipleship ideal is not primarily to be found in the characterization of the disciples with their glimmers of understanding interspersed among their multiple failures. Rather, it is to be found at those points in their portrayal that intersect with the identity of Jesus as prophet, wise man and scribe (e.g., Matt 13:54; 23:34). It has not been my purpose to discuss the role of this climax in revelation in precipitating judgement upon “this generation” (τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην), although this is clearly implied in subsequent verses (23:35-36).

One final question. Should we equate the mission of the prophets, wise men, and scribes sent to the house of Israel in 23:34 with the mission of the Eleven to all nations in 28:16-20? It may well be argued that two distinct missions are in view, one to Jerusalem and one to the nations. I have argued in this paper, however, for the close association between the three roles identified in 23:34 and the identity of Jesus himself as prophet, wise man and scribe. The call to “teach them all things I have commanded you” of 28:20 implies that the identity and mission of Jesus, including his roles as prophet, wise man, and scribe, is of fundamental importance to the mission of the Eleven. We may therefore conclude that Matthew envisages a mission to all nations undertaken by disciples who combine the roles of prophet, wise man, and scribe. Adventism has typically defined itself in prophetic terms (cf. Rev 19:10). Faithfulness to Matthew’s discipleship ideal requires that a corresponding emphasis be placed on our calling to be wise men and scribes. In this way we may intentionally serve as Matthew’s climax of revelation prior to the judgement of all nations by the Son of Man.

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