

Reflections on Discipleship

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The history books record that in the year A.D. 1415 a battle was waged in the field of Agincourt between two great nations—England and France. Historians have argued over the cause of the battle, but our earliest chroniclers record that Henry V, King of England (A.D. 1387–1422), was seeking to regain his title to the land of Salek. Perhaps the most popular piece of literature depicting this war is Shakespeare’s play *King Henry the Fifth*. Therein Henry gathers together a band of men who leave home and family to rally around their king. Their expedition leads them to France, where they meet with some initial success, easily capturing the town of Harfleur. However, the constant forays, the inclement weather, and the lack of proper rest all take their toll on the small army. At a time when they are ready to retreat and recuperate in Calais, the French en masse decide to confront the Englishmen.

Try and imagine how the Englishmen must have felt. Sick, exhausted, and looking for a dry place to sleep, they were instead being asked to confront a force that outnumbered them five to one! Remember, this wasn’t the form of warfare where you sit in a machine and push buttons; this type of warfare required

foes to meet each other face-to-face and conquer through human rather than mechanical strength. As the appointed time of dawn approached, Shakespeare describes the anxieties that both camps experienced. The French leaders are depicted (remember that Shakespeare is an Englishman!) as confidently anticipating an easy victory—concerned only that they have had to wait so long for the commencement of hostilities. In contrast, in describing the English camp, Shakespeare shows the young king (in disguise) moving among his men trying to determine his followers’ commitment to him. Then, as the night draws to a close, we see the king on his knees in prayer giving an account of his royal stewardship and imploring divine aid to accompany him and his men in the upcoming battle.

[A video clip from Kenneth Branagh’s movie *Henry V* was shown.]

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The English nobles were concerned about their ability to face the formidable French force, and in this play we see the young king's response to their concerns. I have always been impressed by these events. Henry understood well the enormity of what he was asking of his men. He knew that, in terms of numbers, he needed every one of those Englishmen to follow him into battle; but he also knew that a victory would require much more than physical numbers. The fact that they were already outnumbered meant that each one of his soldiers needed to fight with a will and a strength that only come with a personal sense of commitment, both to him as their king and also to the cause in which they were engaged.

Henry, therefore, rallies his men together with a stirring speech that even Captain Moroni would have been proud of! As I have contemplated this speech, particularly in relation to the ensuing battle, I have been impressed by the criteria that Henry stipulates for those who want to join him on the battlefield. He wanted committed rather than compelled followers, and there are four lines that, at least for me, grasp the essence of what he expected from his men.

1. "He which hath no stomach to this fight, Let him depart" (4.3.35–36). Henry expected his followers to be committed to the cause. Later he says that "all things are ready, if our minds be so" (4.3.71).

2. "We would not die in that man's company / That fears his fellowship to die with us" (4.3.38–39). He also fully expected that each man who entered that battle would be willing to give his life for his king and comrades.

3. "We are but warriors for the working-day" (4.3.109). Henry recognized that his army consisted of a motley group of ordinary men who had come together from all walks of life, but he also recognized that the cause they were engaged in would transcend such differences

and transform them into men of extraordinary abilities.

4. "And how thou pleasest, God, dispose the day!" (4.3.132). Most important of all, Henry recognized that after doing all that they could, ultimately they had to place themselves in the hands of God. Now that is not always an easy thing to do, but it is the most important part of being a successful follower.

Each one of these statements depicts qualities that are timeless in nature. Henry may have required them from a heterogeneous band of Englishmen in A.D. 1415, but in doing so he only articulated qualities that leaders throughout history have expected in their disciples.

In another time, and in another place, another king—the King of Kings—also invited his fellow countrymen to join with him in a campaign that would have far-reaching effects. Unlike Henry V, however, this king was not motivated by the desire for lands but rather by the desire for souls. Instead of marching through the valleys and fields of France, he roamed through the hills and plains of Galilee and Judaea. Of course, you all know of whom I speak: Jesus of Nazareth. Elder James E. Talmage, in his book *Jesus the Christ*, wrote:

*To the student of history this Man among men stands first, foremost, and alone, as a directing personality in the world's progression. Mankind has never produced a leader to rank with Him. Regarded solely as a historic personage He is unique. Judged by the standard of human estimation, Jesus of Nazareth is supreme among men by reason of the excellence of His personal character, the simplicity, beauty, and genuine worth of His precepts, and the influence of His example and doctrines in the advancement of the race. [James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979), p. 2]*

In mortality, Christ lived the perfect life and thus set the example for the rest of us of

how life can and should be lived. In doing so, however, Jesus set high expectations for those who would be his followers. Discipleship was never intended to be a “free-ride” affair. He expected his followers to live a life that reflected their commitment to him and to his teachings. Among the Gospels this is particularly evident in Matthew, where the relationship of works to righteousness is one of the central aspects of his writings.

Today I would like to discuss some of the costs involved in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Just as Henry V required committed discipleship, so did the Savior. In mortality, Christ absorbed the full brunt of persecution, but he knew that once he was gone, his disciples would have to bear the burden of that opposition. For them to successfully do so, they needed to be committed disciples. You and I need to constantly strive for the same. It was never easy to be such during the early days of the Church, either in the meridian of time or in the last dispensation. But in times of peace and prosperity, it is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of complacency, lulled to sleep by the peaceful thoughts of “She’ll be right, mate!” (to use an Australian colloquial expression) or, as Nephi prophesied that many would say in the last days, “All is well in Zion” (2 Nephi 28:21). But can you imagine the outcome of the Battle of Agincourt if Henry V’s men had had that attitude? Spiritually speaking, can we expect a different result if we have that type of attitude about our personal discipleship? Just as Henry V required certain characteristics of those who were to follow him into battle, so, too, did Christ expect a similar level of commitment from his disciples in Galilee—and two thousand years later, he still requires it of those who claim discipleship.

1. “He which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart.”

As I have thought about this requirement, my mind has turned repeatedly to the kind of

commitment that Jesus himself displayed to “the cause.” I think that it is instructive for us to reflect on that for a moment before addressing his expectation of his disciples. Immediately after Jesus sought out John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan River, we read that Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (see Matthew 4:1–4). Now, the Joseph Smith Translation informs us that the Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness so that he could be with God, not with the devil, but I would suggest that, even so, the interchange between the Lord and Satan was still crucial to Matthew’s portrayal of Christ’s ministry. Matthew is unique among the authors of the Gospels in that he is the only one who gives the elongated version of the temptation narrative and then follows it almost immediately with the calling of Christ’s senior apostles—Peter and Andrew, and James and John.¹ Given the meticulous way that Matthew has constructed the first half of his book, I do not think that the placement of these two events is happenstance. Instead, in the account of Jesus’ temptations we see the Savior rejecting the lure of physical appetites, rejecting the desire for authentication by heavenly displays, and rejecting the enticement of power.² As Elder Jeffrey Holland has noted:

Denial and restraint are also part of divine preparation. . . . The rewards will come by and by. But even the Son of God must wait. The Redeemer who would never bestow cheap grace on others was not likely to ask for any himself. [Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah,” Brigham Young University 1981–82 Fireside and Devotional Speeches (Provo: BYU, 1982), pp. 79–80; also, Ensign, February 1984, p. 70]

Christ has shown that his first priority in life is his mission. That must come first at all costs, and he will expect no less from those who follow him.

Therefore, after this temptation scene Matthew has Jesus travel quickly to Galilee, where he says to Peter and Andrew, “Come, follow me” (Matthew 4:19, my translation), and calls John and James. In giving this command, Jesus is not just asking the disciples to leave behind their boats and nets, or their father; these things are symbols for a much greater level of commitment. Zebedee represents the power that gave James and John mortality. The fishing equipment represents the means of sustaining that mortal life. In asking his disciples to leave behind these things, Jesus is asking them to leave behind the cares of mortality and journey with him on another plane of existence. To follow such a command takes more than curiosity on the part of followers—it requires commitment. Notice how Matthew has the two sets of brothers respond “immediately” (the Greek word *euthus* is the same in both instances); they left what they were doing “and followed him” (Matthew 4:18–22).

The response of these four disciples is in sharp contrast to the rich young man who came to ask Jesus about gaining eternal life. He had obviously led a good life and had obeyed the commandments from the time of his youth (see Matthew 19:20). But when Jesus instructs him to “sell [all that he has], . . . give to the poor, . . . and come and follow me,” his response is very different from that of the Galilean fishermen. Matthew declares that “he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:21–22). This young man apparently wanted to be a disciple, but only up to a point. His possessions were more important than discipleship. For Peter, Andrew, James, and John it was just the opposite. So, in each of our lives there will also come times—probably more than once—when we are confronted with the decision to choose between our discipleship and the things of the world. The circumstances surrounding such decisions will all be unique for each of us. The

things that tempt me might not tempt you and vice versa, but that does not negate the seriousness of each of the temptations, and each of us will need to make a choice. “He which hath no stomach to this fight, Let him depart.”

The Savior and his church may not formally ask us to leave the kingdom because we make choices similar to those of the rich young man, but let’s not forget that he was the one who went away, not the Savior. The reality is that far more people drift away into inactivity and hence distance themselves from the blessings of the Church than those who formally lose the blessings of their membership. It is the little choices that you and I make on a daily basis that will determine our response to Christ’s invitation to “Come, follow me.”

2. “We would not die in that man’s company / That fears his fellowship to die with us.”

Clearly, point two is an extension of the first. History tells us, and the sacrament reminds us each week, that the Son of God was not afraid to make that sacrifice. All four of the Gospels reinforce that Jesus knew his mission would ultimately lead to the cross. Just after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus tells his disciples that “he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). Peter, in his characteristic exuberance, “rebukes” the Savior, who in turn replies by saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). These are strong words—especially to a man who has just been praised for confessing Jesus’ messiahship! But in a sense Peter was acting just as Satan before him had done in trying to turn Jesus away from the fulfillment of his mission. Having reprimanded Peter, Jesus goes on to teach his disciples about the cost of discipleship.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? [Matthew 16:24–26]

What does it mean to “deny oneself”? The Greek verb *aparneomai* is the reflexive form of the same verb used when Peter later denies Jesus three times (see Matthew 26:69–75). Thus it has to do with “disowning somebody” or “disclaiming any connection with somebody” (see John C. Fenton, *The Gospel of St. Matthew* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963], p. 273; see also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], s.v. “ἀρνέομαι” by Heinrich Schlier). The condition of discipleship is therefore the breaking of every link that ties a person to their self. It is only when we can totally give ourselves over to Christ that we can truly be his disciples. That means being doers of the word and not just listeners. The eminent New Testament scholar W. D. Davies has noted the following regarding this Matthean passage:

*Our text drives home the point that the disciples—and, implicitly, all believers—must not passively observe their Lord and what he does. They are not to be seated spectators watching from the grandstand. . . . Rather must they themselves enter the arena after their Lord. For Matthew, Jesus is not a substitute but a leader. He does not do something for those who do nothing. Instead he commands, “Follow me” (4.18–22; 9.9). This authoritative call leaves no room for considerations of convenience or even self-preservation. Discipleship is a doing of what is right, no matter how irksome the privations, no matter how great the dangers. [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical**

Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. 2 of *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p. 681]

Tradition tells us that Peter, James, Paul, Thomas, Andrew, and many others paid the ultimate price of discipleship. St. Ignatius begged the Roman church not to try and save him from the wild beasts, for it was through the beasts that he could “truly [be] a disciple of Jesus Christ” (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans 4:2*, vol. 1 of *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, ed. G. P. Goold, vol. 9 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970], p. 231). But history also tells us that during periods of persecution there were also those who decided to deny their discipleship (see Pliny, *Letter to Trajan*, 3–6). What made the difference between these two groups of people? In both camps it is the same “cause” with the same “cost.” It appears that for some the price was just too much to pay. “We would not die in that man’s company / That fears his fellowship to die with us.”

Given our present circumstances, the majority of us will not be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice for our discipleship. For the most part, the word *martyr* is something associated with our history books rather than with our journals. The original Greek meaning of *martyr* (*martus*), however, was not someone who “died” for a cause, but someone who was a “witness” for a cause. Under Christian influence it then took on the former meaning, but perhaps the latter is something that we should each consider for our day and age. We need to be a martyr in the sense that we stand up to be counted as witnesses of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reality of his atoning sacrifice. We need to witness that the Book of Mormon is a second witness of Jesus Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of

God, and that Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's mouthpiece on earth today. That witness does not need to be made in the Colosseum, but it does need to be made in our testimony meetings and in our homes with our families, our friends, our acquaintances, and with all who enter our sphere of contact.

3. "We are but warriors for the working-day."

Jesus was a craftsman. To the people of Nazareth he was the son of a craftsman. He called fishermen and publicans to be his disciples. He ministered to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the demoniacs, the sinners, and all of those who found themselves outcasts from society. The Pharisees just could not understand why he would do such a thing (see Matthew 9:10–11). Sometimes he taught in the synagogues or at the temple, but mostly he taught on a mountain, on the beach, sitting in a boat, or anywhere that he could find people to listen to him. In terms of social, economic, or political status, he was insignificant, but, when we look at the influence that he has had upon the world during the past 2,000 years, nothing is further from the truth. It has been said that

Jesus never wrote a book. Yet many libraries would be required to accommodate the books that have been written about him. He never wrote a song. Yet he has furnished the theme of more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college. Yet all the schools in the world put together cannot boast the number of students who have studied under him. [author unknown]

Jesus was indeed a "warrior for the working-day," and his earliest disciples were likewise. Matthew 18 twice compares the Christian community to children by describing them as the "little ones" (verses 10, 14). And yet from this group of "little ones" came the Peters, the Marks, the Johns, and the Marys of the early Church—men and women who dedicated their

lives to serving their master, their community, and their neighbors! Jesus never expected any of his followers to be perfect when they first became his disciples. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said, "God does not begin by asking us about our ability, but only about our availability, and if we then prove our dependability, he will increase our capability!" (Neal A. Maxwell, "It's Service, Not Status, That Counts," *Ensign*, July 1975, p. 7). Isn't that exactly what happened with Jesus' early disciples? Peter, Andrew, James, and John probably were not qualified to be apostles when the Lord first called them on the Sea of Galilee. In fact, Peter, James, and John all made mistakes that elicited rebukes from the Savior, but the Lord knew of their potential and was willing to work with them. In his hands they became tremendous tools to take the gospel to the world. They did not give up because they made a few mistakes. Instead they learned from them and took counsel from the Lord. As a result, ordinary people with an extraordinary mission accomplished supraordinary feats. So each one of us can, with confidence, declare that "we are but warriors for the working-day" and still make tremendous contributions to the building of the kingdom of God.

4. "And how thou pleasest, God, dispose the day!"

Finally, now, the fourth quote from the St. Crispian speech. I think it is important to note that these were the last words Henry spoke before entering into the battle. Many times, after we have done all that we can, we have to just sit back and have faith that we are in God's hands. This was a difficult concept for the early disciples to grasp. We have already mentioned one instance where Peter found it difficult to accept that it was God's will that Jesus should die. Another example is the incident when the disciples were with Jesus in the storm-tossed boat on the Sea of Galilee (see Günther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in

Matthew," in Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963], pp. 52–57).

And when he [Jesus] was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! [Matthew 8:23–27]

Matthew is using this event with a different emphasis than the other synoptic writers. Both Mark and Luke place the story between a series of parables and a series of miracle stories that were performed in Galilee. In these instances, the event is being used to show the power that Jesus had over the physical elements. However, Matthew has a slightly different agenda. In Matthew, the parables don't precede the events in the boat; instead, they are found in chapter 13. The whole of chapter 8 concerns miracles that Jesus performed. This chapter is part of a larger construction whereby Matthew is showing that Jesus is both the Messiah of word and of deed.³ The Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7 attests that Jesus is a Messiah of word, whereas chapters 8 and 9 confirm that he is also a Messiah of deed.

Just prior to Jesus' entering into the boat with his disciples, Matthew has inserted two short pericopae on discipleship that are not found in Mark and don't come until a chapter later in Luke.

Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. [Matthew 8:18–22]

Notice that both of these conversations have to do with the cost of discipleship. It is never an easy thing to follow Jesus; to do so we must often give up comforts that we take for granted and we must be willing to put the kingdom before societal expectations. Only then can the disciple enter into the boat (i.e., the Church) with Jesus.

"And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea" (Matthew 8:24). The Greek word here for *tempest* is *seismos*, which means "earthquake"! It is not the word used in either the Markan or Lukan accounts, which use *lailaps*, a word meaning "tempest" or "furious storm." But *seismos* is regularly used in the New Testament to refer to the trials associated with the last days (e.g., Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Revelation 6:12). Therefore, Matthew's choice of *seismos* would have reinforced his message that discipleship will not be a smooth ride. Instead it will entail some earth-shattering experiences that each disciple will have to weather. Notice though, that when the seismic activity was at its peak, the disciples in the boat (most of whom were veteran seamen) panicked—another indication of the seriousness of the storm. When they had first embarked, perhaps some of them were expecting a smooth ride across the sea, although as seasoned fishermen many of them must have known of the unpredictability of the Sea of Galilee. The fact that such seasoned veterans

turned to the Savior in the midst of the storm confirms its intensity. In pleading for Jesus to save them, Matthew records that the disciples addressing him used the Christological title *Lord*. This is slightly different from the accounts in Mark and Luke, where the form of address is one of respect but without any Christological overtones (see Mark 4:38, Luke 8:24).

Mark and Luke both depict Jesus stilling the storm first and then questioning his disciples, but in Matthew, the order is reversed. First he questions their faith, and then he attends to the storm. It is the faith of the disciples that is the center of this event in Matthew. All of this points to the conclusion that, for Matthew, the incident of the stilling of the storm is more than a simple miracle story. Matthew wanted us to see it on another level of interpretation—that of the trials of discipleship. The story shows us that the disciples had not yet fully grasped the power of Jesus' ability to direct earthly events. They certainly had a sense of his ability—otherwise they would not have wakened him—but not quite the faith to say, "And how thou pleasest, God, dispose the day!" Jesus himself would later say in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

So it must be with each of us. There are often times when the future that we map out for ourselves is not the same as what the Lord has in mind, even though our hopes and dreams may be righteous desires. As a young woman in my twenties, I never anticipated the events that led me down my current path. Studying the scriptures was always something that I enjoyed doing, but I never thought that I would do it formally or that I would come here to America—and I certainly never thought that I would be teaching here at BYU. I thought that by now I would be teaching my own children the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is difficult, after having done all in our power, to sit back and say, "And how thou pleasest, God,

dispose the day!" If, however, we are committed in our discipleship to Jesus Christ, then we must be willing to place ourselves in his hands.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, discipleship is not an easy path. It never has been. Elder Holland aptly describes the "inconvenient Messiah" in his devotional about discipleship. Seldom is it convenient to be a disciple. It is seldom convenient to attend and actively participate in all of our Church meetings. It is seldom convenient to fulfill our Church assignments or to study the scriptures. It is almost never convenient to do our home teaching or visiting teaching, to go to the temple, or to love our neighbors as ourselves. And yet these are just some of the costs involved with such discipleship—but, as my mother always told me, "In the end, we find that it was no sacrifice at all!" (author unknown).

Now, more than ever, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints needs individuals who are committed to dedicated, rather than convenient, discipleship—people who are willing to take upon themselves the Lord's yoke. A yoke by definition entails some restrictions. The yoke forces us to sacrifice some of our individual desires to facilitate a common cause. Even so, it is that very yoke that enables two very individual animals to accomplish tasks greater than either one of them could have achieved individually. Christian discipleship works on the same principle. Discipleship also entails being yoked—therefore sacrificing some of our individual desires—but our yoking partner is Jesus Christ. As a result of that partnership, you and I can accomplish tasks of mortality that would be impossible on our own.

Today I have tried to remind each of us that it takes commitment to willingly place ourselves in that yoke. As Elder Maxwell so eloquently stated, "The taking of Jesus' yoke upon us constitutes serious [as opposed to

“convenient”] discipleship.” He then goes on, however, to remind us that “there is no greater calling, no greater challenge, and no greater source of joy—both proximate joy and ultimate joy—than that which is found in the process of discipleship” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Becoming a Disciple,” *Ensign*, June 1996, p. 12). I know that to be true.

I stand here today and bear to each of you my personal testimony that God lives and that he personally loves each one of us. I have experienced that love in my life, and it has come through most strongly and sweetly when I have been committed in my discipleship, when I have striven to leave behind my 1996 fishing nets and sometimes even my family to come and follow him. May each one of us regularly reevaluate our personal commitment to Jesus Christ and his gospel is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notes

1. Mark simply makes reference to the temptation in passing (Mark 1:12–13). Luke gives a more elongated account but includes a number of narratives such as the preaching in the Nazareth synagogue, casting out an unclean devil, and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law before recounting the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Luke 4:14–44).

2. President David O. McKay summarized them in a slightly different way: “(1) *a temptation of the appetite; (2) a yielding to the pride and fashion and vanity of those alienated from the things of God; or (3) a gratifying of the passion or a desire for the riches of the world or power among men*” (“Individual Righteousness, The Strength of the Church,” *The Instructor* 97, no. 9 [September 1962], p. 290; italics in original).

3. That chapters 5–9 are a literary unit is seen by the nearly identical verses that bracket them. They are introduced by Matthew 4:23: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” The literary unit is then closed with Matthew 9:35: “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”