

## ARTICLE

## Stretching the Scope of Salvation in Matthew: The Significance of the Great Peter's Failings

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### Abstract

Matthew's didactic teaching blocks often present the terms of salvation as an uncompromising dichotomy, envisioning either complete loyalty or faithlessness (e.g. 10.37–9; 16.25; 24.13). However, the characters in his narrative sections, especially Peter, nuance this harsh binary to allow for a significant degree of failure. After a brief survey recent works on Matthean soteriology and the use of Peter, it is argued that two features of Peter, when combined, widen the scope of salvation. First, Matthew portrays him as occupying a 'middle ground' between complete obedience and absolute failure, with all indications pointing to Peter remaining in that space, as emphasised by the last references to him (27.25; 28.16). Second, this failing Peter will not only be allowed in the kingdom, but will have a position of greatness there, as demonstrated by both Matthew's overall theology of status variation within the kingdom (e.g. 19.28; 20.26–7; 5.19) and his unique Petrine accounts (14.22–33; 16.17–19; 17.24–7). Though the way to salvation is narrow (i.e. 7.14), the character of Peter widens it to allow for more failure than some texts in the didactic sections might initially suggest.

**Keywords:** Matthew; soteriology; discipleship; Peter; eschatology

The Gospel of Matthew frequently presents the terms of salvation as a strict dichotomy. To name a few examples of this presentation, the Matthean Jesus envisions a narrow or wide gate (Matt 7.13–14), wise or foolish builders (7.24–7), those who confess or deny (10.32–3), those who keep life or lose it (16.25), wise or foolish virgins (25.1–13) and sheep or goats (25.34–46). Even the three figures in the talents parable of 25.14–30 conform to this dichotomy. Whereas Luke's minas parable allows for gradations of response by envisioning some who are less fiscally responsible than others but still receive a warm welcome (Luke 19.16–19), Matthew's version only considers those who yield a 100 per cent investment or none at all (25.14–30).<sup>1</sup> In didactic accounts like these, Jesus envisions no middle ground or grey areas.

While this binary scenario has the advantage of compelling the audience to greater commitment,<sup>2</sup> Matthew is aware that what narrative critics call the 'implied reader' is fictional and actual audiences have a chequered experience. This article investigates the

<sup>1</sup> J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 1013 rightly comments that 'reconstructing the source forms is necessarily quite tentative'. My comparison here does not require a particular redactional view but is only illustrative.

<sup>2</sup> This feature comports well with Matthew's apocalyptic features (D. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) e.g. 82–7).

ways in which Matthew nuances the harsh binary of some of Jesus' statements with his complex portrayal of Peter. Though the scope of salvation is narrow and difficult in Matthew (e.g. 7.13–14), the description of Peter stretches this scope to be wider than what might initially appear. After briefly surveying some previous approaches to this question, our argument comes in two main sections. First, Matthew portrays Peter as occupying the 'middle ground' between complete obedience and absolute failure, with all signs pointing to him staying in that space. He exemplifies both success and failure with no trend towards improvement. Second, Matthew portrays Peter as not only being in the kingdom, but as having a position of greatness within it. Despite his shortcomings, Peter does more than barely qualify for salvation; he has a position of high status in the coming age. Combining these two considerations implies that the dividing line of Matthew's dichotomy allows for more failure than the harsher statements might imply.

## 1. Select Approaches to Matthew's Terms of Salvation and the Use of the Figure of Peter

### 1.1 Approaches to Matthean Soteriology

Difficulties surrounding Matthew's terms of salvation continue to draw the attention of scholars. Two major recent works on Matthean soteriology share similarity with the approach here and so warrant mention. Nathan Eubank's *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin* explores the role of economic language in Matthew regarding sin, salvation and status in the kingdom, arguing that though sin creates a debt towards God (e.g. Matt 6.12) and heavenly treasure is necessary for kingdom entrance, Jesus is the 'earner of heavenly wages par excellence'<sup>3</sup> through whom 'provision will be made for those without heavenly treasure'.<sup>4</sup> Eubank allows for heavenly wages to increase one's position in the kingdom, but focuses on wages as a requirement for kingdom entrance. He notes the tension this creates with texts such as the ones requiring uncompromising obedience, as well as the uncertainty of knowing where the dividing line falls.<sup>5</sup> We will agree with the premise that Jesus sees a range of status within the kingdom, and in fact will incorporate it into our argument more than Eubank does. Furthermore, we will agree with Eubank that Jesus allows for a substantial, though undefined, degree of generosity in applying the terms of salvation.

Anders Runesson's *Divine Wrath and Salvation* investigates different judgement schemas in Matthew, arguing that not only do the principles of salvation for Jews differ from those for gentiles, but that the types of judgement should be separately categorised as well: repayment in this world, the world to come and the final judgement.<sup>6</sup> While he disagrees with Eubank about kingdom access as a reward, he does argue that 'various levels of righteousness will result in different wages in the world to come'.<sup>7</sup> To be included in Jesus'

<sup>3</sup> N. Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (BZNW 196; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013) 198.

<sup>4</sup> Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 161. He allows for heavenly wages to increase one's position in the kingdom, but focuses on wages as a requirement for kingdom entrance. Eubank argues that the rich ruler pericope (19.23–9) raises the question, 'What is the fate of those who have not earned treasure in heaven?' (96), to which the following parable of the tenants (20.1–16) answers, 'God will faithfully repay those who have earned treasure in heaven, but those who have not done enough to enter the kingdom will receive a wage that is wildly disproportionate to what they have done' (96).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 158.

<sup>6</sup> A. Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016) 44.

<sup>7</sup> Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 100. Runesson relies heavily upon the inheritance metaphor, so that eternal life is not earned by those within the covenant family since it comes from the work of others (unless one fails in loyalty

family, according to Runesson, one does not need to have absolute obedience, but be ‘perfect’ – i.e. possess ‘sincere dedication to the law’ which is ‘required only in relation to a person’s ability, and is thus not an absolute measurement’.<sup>8</sup> He comments,

Matthew’s Gospel contains no illusions about human perfection. Rather, the people prepared for the kingdom is a people who keep the law to *the best of their ability*, acknowledge their shortcomings and repent of and seek atonement for them; they also forgive others who likewise sin and repent. It is especially the latter who identify what Matthew’s Jesus means by perfection: love of God and love of neighbor, and mercy.<sup>9</sup>

Runesson’s reference to ‘*the best of their ability*’ lacks specificity, but he clearly wants to allow for significant moral failure on the part of the disciples who nonetheless will enter the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> We will agree with the basic framework of some responses contributing to repayment (i.e. kingdom greatness) and some concerning salvation (i.e. kingdom entrance). We will also agree with his emphasis on the graciousness of salvation which does not require perfection. The research here will probe more deeply into how ‘perfect’ one must be. My hope is that the case study of Peter will provide further clarification to the questions of liberality which Eubank and Runesson raise.

## 1.2 Approaches to the Matthean Peter

Many have noticed Peter’s vacillating behaviour, particularly seen in Matthew. One of the watershed studies in this area was the ecumenical project, *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Catholic Scholars*.<sup>11</sup> Their redactional comparison concludes that Matthew has not drastically changed the portrait of Peter when he uses Mark, but that the figure comes through more positively in Matthew’s three unique stories involving Peter, namely his walking on the water (Matt 14.22–33), his expansions on the Caesarea Philippi pericope (16.13–28) and the temple tax question (17.24–7). However, Matthew also shows no concern to dull Mark’s negative portrayal (e.g. Matt 16.23; cf. Mark 9.33). They conclude:

Is Matthew’s picture unfavorable to Peter? At the worst, is Peter painted as a man who confounds pretentious enthusiasm with faith, and who consequently fails and needs Jesus’ salvation? ...Or in a more favorable interpretation, is Peter painted as a typical disciple both *in his real love* for Jesus, as he desires to go to him, and *in his insufficiency of faith* during Jesus’ ministry?<sup>12</sup>

Since then, Nau and Wiarda have both written monographs on the use and purpose of the conflicting portraying of Peter.<sup>13</sup> Nau draws a church-political conclusion from this,

to the law and so is disinherited). He speaks of ‘Matthew’s careful avoidance of understanding salvation as a reward for works performed’ (200; cf. 420–5).

<sup>8</sup> Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 331.

<sup>9</sup> Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 268–9 (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 134 argues that Judas’ repentance is effectual. He also allows for gradations of status within the kingdom, though he still locates harsh binaries within the category of ‘final judgment’. See his lists of texts in each of the three categories in Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 49–52.

<sup>11</sup> R. Brown, K. Donfried and J. Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Catholic Scholars* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Brown, Donfried and Reumann, *Peter in the New Testament*, 81–2 (emphasis original).

<sup>13</sup> A. Nau, *Peter in Matthew: Discipleship, Diplomacy, and Dispraise* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) and T. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

that Matthew is ‘diplomatically seeking to neutralize Peter’s traditional prominence within the Antiochan community and equate him with the other disciples, with the ultimate ecclesiological/ Christological goal to present Jesus as the unrivaled head of the developing Church’.<sup>14</sup> Wiarda examines this feature but instead of focusing on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community, he looks at its narrative functions – to impact the story (e.g. to create sympathy) or to contribute to characterisation (e.g. as a foil for Jesus or to illustrate discipleship).<sup>15</sup> Volumes like these, as well as a large number of essays continuing to the present, show that Matthew is particularly concerned with painting a conflicting portrait of Peter in which he oscillates between commitment and failure.<sup>16</sup>

Using Peter to explore soteriological issues has a very long history, going at least as far back as the Acts of the Apostles in the second century.<sup>17</sup> In chapter 7 of ‘The Vercelli Acts’. Peter confronts those who had been won over by Simon Magus and presents himself as an example to show that repentance is still possible. He urges, ‘Turn yourselves, therefore, brethren, chosen of the Lord, and be strong in God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>18</sup> Peter first reminds them that he was with Jesus on the lake. But he then leverages this as an argument from the greater to the lesser:

[Y]et I denied him, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and that not once only, but thrice; for there were evil dogs that were come about me as they did unto the Lord’s prophets. And the Lord imputed it not unto me, but turned unto me and had compassion on the infirmity of my flesh, when (or so that) afterward I bitterly bewailed myself, and lamented the weakness of my faith, because I was befooled by the devil and kept not in mind the word of my Lord.<sup>19</sup>

However, we will see that this use of Peter to demonstrate the possibility of repentance is unlikely since so little, if any, attention is given to his restoration.<sup>20</sup> Instead, our research

<sup>14</sup> Nau, *Peter in Matthew*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Soteriology is not a major concern for Wiarda, though he does conclude, ‘The pattern episodes point to grace as the basis of the believer’s relationship with Jesus ... failure and sin do not break the connection which Jesus has established with Peter’ (Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels*, 233).

<sup>16</sup> E.g. J. D. Kingsbury, ‘The Figure of Peter in Matthew’s Gospel as a Theological Problem’, *JBL* 98 (1979) 47–61; R. Edwards, ‘Uncertain Faith: Matthew’s Portrait of the Disciples’, *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 67–83; F. Burnett, ‘Characterization in Matthew’, *Semeia* 63 (1993) 3–28; A. van Aarde, ‘The Disciples in Matthew’s Story’, *HTSS* 5 (1994) 87–104; K. Syreeni, ‘Peter as Character and Symbol in the Gospel of Matthew’, *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999) 106–52; R. H. Gundry, *Peter: False Disciple and Apostate according to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) has also recently contributed to the discussion by considering Matthew’s portrait of Peter from a redactional perspective. However, he concludes that the changes from Mark are significant in downplaying Peter. While Gundry rightly points out several instances in which Peter is viewed negatively in Matthew, he either neglects the more positive passages or resorts to constrained exegesis.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Verheyden, ‘Rock and Stumbling Stone: The Fate of Matthew’s Peter’, *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity* (ed. D. Senior; Leuven: Peeters, 2011) 263–311, at 284–9.

<sup>18</sup> M. R. James, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924) 311.

<sup>19</sup> James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 311. The alternative translation which James notes seems unlikely and *ut* should be retained as ‘when’ (or even ‘since’) inasmuch as the thrust of the message is that forgiveness awaits repentance. The Latin is *ut me postea plangerem amariter*.

<sup>20</sup> For a current example that argues similarly to the Acts of the Apostles, see M. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Work, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017) 122–4. Bates addresses the problem of ‘imperfect allegiance’ and asserts, ‘we are saved when our confessed and imperfectly maintained allegiance unites us to Jesus the king ... allegiance must be a settled conviction and basic disposition’ (123). He then considers ‘denial’ as a separate (but related) category as ‘disloyalty’, with Peter’s restoration as proof that ‘treason is at least sometimes reversible through renewed allegiance’ (123). Yet for Bates, Judah’s

will focus on the overall portrait of Peter as one who regularly fails in his discipleship and yet, even so, is actually great in the kingdom (as opposed to potentially being great). The Matthean Peter does not so much demonstrate the possibility of repentance and restoration, but nuances the strict binary terms of salvation to show that even great apostles are weak and failing. In order to see that, we need first to appreciate Matthew's portrait of Peter as a consistently failing disciple and then to consider the depiction of this Peter, as he is, as someone who will not just enter the kingdom, but will be great there.

## 2. Matthew's Concluding Descriptions of Peter as a Mixture of Success and Failure

As we have seen, scholars and authors have much discussed Peter's wavering character, so the evidence to demonstrate this feature does not need to be repeated here. However, the final depictions of Peter warrant our attention since they demonstrate that Matthew intends to portray Peter not as generally improving, but as continuing in the middle ground between commitment and failure. The last lexical occurrence of Πέτρος is found in Matt 27.75, where Peter remembers the saying of Jesus after his denial and ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκλασεν πικρῶς. Matthew's version has significant redactions to Mark's καὶ ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν (14.72).<sup>21</sup> The repetition of 'going out' (ἐξελθὼν ἔξω) not only contrasts Peter's 'coming in' (προσέρχομαι) in Matt 27.58,<sup>22</sup> but also recalls the ominous 'outside' language of eschatological judgement passages (e.g. 8.12; 13.41–2, 49–50; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30).<sup>23</sup> The addition of the adverb πικρῶς heightens the despondency of the scene and invites closer comparison with Judas' remorse (μεταμέλομαι, 27.3). Yet, this is as close as Matthew comes to describing Peter's repentance and, however understood, the expression is vague.<sup>24</sup> Though there are good reasons for eventually seeing Peter's return to the disciple band, we must account for Matthew's lack of focus on his repentance. Matthew clearly has a special interest in this figure and goes out of his way repeatedly to direct attention to him.<sup>25</sup> As readers track his spiritual journey, Peter starts out in exemplary commitment and obedience (4.18–20) and ends in tragedy and failure. Matthew thus reinforces to his readers that Peter is a thoroughly flawed character, starting out well and ending up poorly. In appreciating Peter's holistic portrayal, Matthew will not allow his reader to think that all of Jesus' promises apply to him because he will eventually change. This observation argues strongly against the approach that we saw earlier, in which the narrative effect of Peter's failures is to show that repentance is always possible. If that were the case, Matthew's virtual silence on the subject at the end of chapter 26 is incomprehensible. Any interpretation that places the emphasis on Peter's repentance misses the mark. Instead, Matthew's Peter is a round character and the decision to end the last explicit discussion of him on a note of his weakness emphasises this complex portrayal.

Because the audience would have seen him as a historical character, we should avoid distinguishing Peter's symbolic role and his role as character too sharply. Kari Syreeni separates Peter's role as symbol and character because of Peter's conflicting portrayal and concludes from the lack of attention to Peter's restoration that Matthew sees Peter

demise demonstrates that 'reversal, even for those who were at one time followers of Jesus, is not an inevitable outcome' (123).

<sup>21</sup> Luke 22.62 similarly has καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκλαυσεν πικρῶς, though several early manuscripts insert ὁ Πέτρος before ἔκλαυσεν. We have Q material here, but our argument does not require these to be Matthew's unique compositions.

<sup>22</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1143.

<sup>23</sup> Gundry, *Peter*, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Gundry, *Peter*, 53–6.

<sup>25</sup> So much so that C. Kähler, 'Zur Form und Traditionsgeschichte von Matt xvi.17–19', *NTS* 23 (1974/77) 44 has famously called the first Gospel the 'Peter gospel'.

as a symbol here.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Fred Burnett argues strongly that the Matthean Peter is on the 'round' end of the spectrum, by rightly pointing to features such as his house, marriage, relatives and emotions that push him from being a mere agent to having personhood.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of how Matthew's community viewed Peter, they would have at least seen him as a historical figure and so Matthew could expect readers to accumulate the data of Peter into a composite picture.

Not only does the last lexical reference to Πέτρος require a composite, conflicted portrait of Peter, but the last unit of Matthew does so as well. Peter's presence is assumed in the reference to the eleven in Galilee (28.16). The clause 'which Jesus commanded them' in v. 16 points back to 26.31–2, where Jesus predicts that all the disciples will fall away (σκανδαλίζω) and says προάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, where the antecedent of ὑμᾶς must include Peter. Thus, we are to see Peter in Matthew's last description of the disciples' actions – καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν (v. 17). Though the syntax of this final clause has been variously understood, the negative connotation of the description is still unmistakable.<sup>28</sup> This expression alludes to the earlier worship/doubt scene on the lake (14.31–3),<sup>29</sup> which foregrounds Peter's little faith and doubt (Ὀλιγόπιστε, εἰς τί ἐδίστασας; v. 31). Thus, the syntactic complexities of 28.17 should not distract the readers from the intratextual connection to 14.31–3. This connection underscores the failure that continues to characterise the disciples, particularly Peter. This means that in both the last lexical occurrence of Πέτρος and his final description as part of the disciple band, Matthew chooses to end with a negative portrayal of Peter. This does not erase the positive elements of Matthew's description of him, but it does force the audience to struggle with a round, conflicted Peter who fails at least as much in the call of discipleship as he succeeds, with no signs of improvement.

### 3. Matthew's Portrait of Peter as Great in the Kingdom

Though Matthew insists that we take Peter with his strengths and weaknesses, ending on a negative note lest we forget how conflicted he is, he nonetheless portrays *this* Peter as someone who not only will certainly be in the kingdom, but will be great there. Two features support this conclusion: (a) Matthew's general theology of kingdom greatness and (b) Matthew's specific statements regarding Peter's status. If Matthew's eschatological categories do include variations of status within the kingdom, then Peter is one of the first characters to come to mind as one who will rank highly. A number of passages confirm this reaction to the possibility of Peter's kingdom greatness.

<sup>26</sup> Syreeni, 'Peter as Character and Symbol in the Gospel of Matthew', 150. However, he does see Peter as character and Peter as symbol being closely connected, going so far as to call them 'Siamese twins' (150). Peter is still a historical figure in Syreeni's approach, but Matthew's concern at this juncture is for his reader to see him as a symbol.

<sup>27</sup> Burnett, 'Characterization in Matthew', 4, 20.

<sup>28</sup> J. Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 116–20 overviews the various approaches and rightly concludes, 'Even when they are reunited with Jesus after his resurrection, the portrayal of the disciples as those of little (i.e. inadequate) faith is reaffirmed, for in their worship of him they still hesitate or waver ...The disciples are consistently portrayed as prone to misunderstand and as wavering in their faith. It is true that the disciples' portrayal is only gradually revealed to the reader as the story unfolds. This does not mean, however, that the disciples go through any significant change from the beginning of Matthew's story to the end. Their desertion and Matthew's final description of them as hesitating before the resurrected Jesus confirms that they have not grown in understanding of faith' (118, 120).

<sup>29</sup> Syreeni, 'Peter as Character', 147.



### 3.1 *Matthew's General Theology of Kingdom Greatness*

Several prominent commentators reject the hypothesis of varying status levels in the kingdom of heaven. Craig Blomberg writes, 'May all evangelicals ... do away with the depressing and damaging notion of eternal degrees of reward in heaven once and for all.'<sup>30</sup> In this view, the reference to 'least in the kingdom' in Matt 5.18–19 should be understood as 'out of the kingdom'.<sup>31</sup> This perspective can be traced back to at least Chrysostom: 'But when thou hearest, "least in the kingdom of Heaven", surmise thou nothing but hell and torments ... such a one will be at that time *least*, that is, cast out, last. And he that is last will surely then fall into hell.'<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, scholars who see varying status kingdom levels in Matthew also have an impressive line-up.<sup>33</sup>

The broader historical context of Matthew strongly suggests that he thinks in terms of a variety of status positions, but it is the text of Matthew itself which ultimately decides the matter. Thus, we can briefly review evidence outside of Matthew, but then focus on the text itself for determinative evidence. The Septuagint uses μέγας to refer to those in a high and powerful position (e.g. Daniel in Dan 6.3, Mordecai in Esth A.2 (Old Greek) 10.3, David in 1 Chron 17.8, Isaiah in Sir 48.22). Extrabiblical evidence also suggests that mentioning 'great' and 'least' within the kingdom would have accorded with currently existing categories. Horbury provides a fascinating discussion of the twelve phylarchs, rulers at the end times, and concludes:

It may be said that the constitutional importance of the twelve princes in particular is clear in the Septuagint (Numbers, Deuteronomy, Chronicles and 1 Esdras), Eupolemus, and ... three Qumran texts (4Qp1a, 1QM, 11Q Temple). It is also implied by the hope that the twelve patriarchs will arise to govern their tribes (Testaments of Judah, Zebulun, and Benjamin). More generally, the idea of a governing body of twelve is accepted in 1QS and 4QOrdinances, and is conjectured by Baumgarten, with probability, to have influenced early rabbinic tradition ... it seems that the Gospel company of twelve, in the first century AD, could well have awakened in their contemporaries associations with the ancestral Jewish polity ... and with the constitution significance of the twelve tribal princes in particular. The previous section has shown an interest in the phylarchs that can be assumed in the biblical interpretation of this period.<sup>34</sup>

Goodrich also considers the importance of the Qumran community for interpreting the Gospels' accounts by considering 1QS, especially 2.13–17, where priests will follow the messiah and 'shall sit be[fore him each man] according to his glory'. He concludes,

<sup>30</sup> C. Blomberg, 'Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?', *JETS* 35 (1992) 172.

<sup>31</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (trans. D. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 105; C. Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992) 105; R. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994<sup>2</sup>) 84; C. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 178–9.

<sup>32</sup> *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* (ed. P. Schaff; trans. G. Prevost and M. Riddle; New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888) 106 (emphasis original).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 188; U. Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (3 vols.; ed. H. Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, rev. edn 2001–7) 1.220–1; C. A. Evans, *Matthew* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 117; Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 96; Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> W. Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016<sup>2</sup>) 219. Furthermore, rabbinic tradition states that those who made themselves small for the law would be great in the future world. They, along with martyrs, were to be assigned the first of seven divisions in the next age. J. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17–48* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976) 95. See also O. Michel, 'μικρός', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 11 (ed. G. Bromiley and G. Friedrich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 653.

‘despite the Qumran community’s rhetoric of brotherhood and social equality, they nonetheless maintained a stress on rank and status that manifested itself in a distinctive political inequality. Such hierarchies should not surprise us, since they were commonplace within all ancient Mediterranean societies, including early Jewish communities.’<sup>35</sup>

Rabbinic Judaism sees variation of status within the world to come, and this may inform us of Matthew’s categories, if its tradition goes back that far.<sup>36</sup> The Midrash on Ruth 1.17 states, ‘In this world he who is small can become great, and he who is great small; but in the future he who is small cannot become great, nor he who is great small’, and later, the Babylonian Talmud states, ‘He who makes himself small in this world on account of the words of the Torah will be great in the future world; and he who makes himself a slave in this world on account of the words of the Torah will be free in the future world’ (b. BM, 85b). The סדר גן עדן (‘Order of Garden of Eden’), though it dates later (perhaps around the seventh century), similarly describes a ranking system so that Eden has ‘seven compartments of the righteous’, ranging from ‘the first: the martyrs ... such as Rabbi Aqiba and his associates’ to the seventh, which ‘consists of the poor, who still had among them Scripture, Mishnah, and morality’.<sup>37</sup>

Three passages from Matthew suffice to demonstrate that he also foresees variation of status within the kingdom. First, Matt 19.28 gives the twelve apostles a unique, elevated position, probably with ruling implications. The apostles are promised that when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne in the new age,<sup>38</sup> ὑμεῖς οἱ ἀκολουθήσαντες ... καθήσεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ δώδεκα θρόνους κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλάς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ. Syntactic and lexical concerns could allow for the meaning of κρίνοντες to be either ‘judging’ or ‘ruling’ (or both). A present participle modifying the future καθήσεσθε would fit nicely with an enduring action such as ‘ruling’ (though this does not necessarily rule out ‘judging’). David Turner rightly situates this throne saying within its wider context of both Second Temple Judaism and Matthew in particular to conclude that it includes both judging and reigning elements.<sup>39</sup> Since this kind of ‘sitting’ is shared with the twelve (καὶ

<sup>35</sup> J. Goodrich, ‘Rule of the Congregation and Mark 10.32–52: Glory and Greatness in Eschatological Israel’, *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism* (ed. B. Blackwell, J. Goodrich and J. Maston; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018) 166–73, at 169–70 (emphasis original).

<sup>36</sup> In arguing against the variation of status view, Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 178–9 writes: ‘Jesus again employs hyperbolic rhetoric characteristic of sages: his words do not envision the possibility of many who would keep or break the least commandment, hence vie for the same status, nor of some who would break some commandments while keeping others. Jewish teachers typically depicted various persons as “greatest”; the emphasis was not on numerical precision but on praising worthy people (e.g., m. ’Abot 2.8)’. However, Keener’s reference to the Mishnah here hardly argues against variations of status. The text reads:

- J He would say, ‘If all the sages of Israel were on one side of the scale, and R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus were on the other, he would outweigh all of them.’  
 K Abba Saul says in his name, ‘If all of the sages of Israel were on one side of the scale, and R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus was also with them, and R. Eleazar [b. Arakh] were on the other side, he would outweigh all of them.’

While the text does not specify what ‘weighing’ means – perhaps ability or significance or value – nothing suggests a rejection of varying levels of status. In fact, this text reveals that not all were the same.

<sup>37</sup> Translation from H. Spurling, ‘Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise: A New Translation and Introduction’, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (ed. R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila and A. Panayotov; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 699–753, at 736–7 (cf. 705–6 for discussion of the date of composition).

<sup>38</sup> See W. Davies and D. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004) II.212; M. Konradt, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015) 296 for a good argument that this statement depicts the coming eschaton.

<sup>39</sup> D. Turner, ‘His Glorious Throne: Israel and the Gentiles in Mission and Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew’, *Matthew Within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel* (ed. A. Runesson and D. Gurtner; Atlanta: SBL, 2020)



ὑμεῖς), this would involve them having an enduring, elevated status above those who are within the kingdom.<sup>40</sup> It is unlikely that everyone in the kingdom participates in this same authority – in that case all would be rulers and none would be subjects.<sup>41</sup> In view of Horbury's comments discussed earlier, a connection with the twelve phylarchs seems highly probable. V. 29 generalises the principle of reward, that everyone who has made sacrifices (καὶ πᾶς ὅστις ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν) will receive a hundred-fold and inherit eternal life, but this does not exclude a unique role for the twelve. Furthermore, though 'judging and ruling' seems to be the sense of κρίνοντες, even if the sense were restricted to 'judging' alone, the uniqueness of the role remains and we are still left with a description of a position for only some of Jesus' followers, raised over others who are nonetheless in the kingdom. At the very least, we can agree with John Nolland's conclusion, 'We do not yet know what is to be reversed, but after vv. 27–29 a connection with rewards and status is likely.'<sup>42</sup>

Second, Matt 20.26–7 requires variations of status within the kingdom. The parallelism of v. 26 (ὃς ἐὰν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι) and 27 (ὃς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος) demonstrate that 'first' (πρῶτος) is synonymous with 'great' (μέγας).<sup>43</sup> The simple positive adjective μέγας is best understood as a superlative<sup>44</sup> since πρῶτος clearly has that sense.<sup>45</sup> In this context, John and James' mother has asked Jesus if her sons can sit on his right hand and his left.<sup>46</sup> The 'right hand' is an expression referring to high regard and honour (Gen 35.18; 1 Kgs 2.19; Ps 45.9; Zech 3.1).<sup>47</sup> Though the term 'left hand' sometimes refers to the opposite of the right (i.e. Matt. 25.33), this can hardly be the mother's request in Matt 20. That this position designates royal authority can be seen by Jesus' comparison with οἱ ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐθνῶν ('The rulers over the gentiles'). James and John (as well as the other disciples) have already shown the desire to be the greatest, perhaps specifically greater

135–68. Gundry, *Matthew*, 392–3 and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, III.55–8 convincingly argue that κρίνω should be understood in light of πρῶ and thus mean 'govern'. Contra Luz, *Matthew*, II.517.

<sup>40</sup> The disciples are described elsewhere as sharing in the messiah's rule (e.g. Matt 10.6; cf. B. Henning, *Matthew's Non-Messianic Mapping of Messianic Texts* (BINS 188; Leiden: Brill, 2020) 45–92).

<sup>41</sup> Pace Blomberg, *Matthew*, 301 who sees both 'ruling' and 'judging' elements but still states, 'So we cannot conclude that the apostles necessarily receive any privilege they do not share with all believers'.

<sup>42</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 805. Matt 19.30 may form the conclusion of the previous section, similarly to 20.16 (an extremely similar but not verbatim repetition), but the two probably form an *inclusio* around the parable of the vineyard labourers. If the former, then the δε introducing Matt 19.30 is simply a coordinating conjunction. But if the latter, it would be contrastive, to qualify the earlier discussion which stresses merit over grace.

<sup>43</sup> If ἐν ὑμῖν in vv. 26 and 27 modify μέγας ('great among you') and πρῶτος ('first among you'), then this argument is only strengthened. However, the phrase is actually used three times in these two verses and the first contrasts ἐν ὑμῖν with the way status operates with the gentiles (v. 25). If the following two uses of the same prepositional phrase are to be understood similarly, and there is no reason to think they change, then they modify ὃς ἐὰν and ὃς ἂν.

<sup>44</sup> D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 298.

<sup>45</sup> BDAG, 892. P. J. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 737 place it in the same category as μεγας and ἐκ δεξιῶν καθίζω.

<sup>46</sup> France writes, 'Their open bid for leadership now is therefore a direct challenge to Peter's leading position: if James and John are at Jesus' right and left, where will Peter be? ... At any rate, the egalitarian picture of the "twelve thrones" in 19:28 is now challenged by the brothers' concern for personal status' (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 758).

<sup>47</sup> M. Silva, 'δεξιός', *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) I.665. The phrase 'right hand' is often the description of where Jesus has ascended (i.e. Matt 26.64; Acts 2.33; 5.31; Rom 8.34; Eph 1.20; Col. 3.1; Heb 1.3; 1 Pet 3.22). *Midr. Ps.* 18§29 in discussing Ps 110.1 says that the Messiah will sit at God's right hand and Abraham at his left. This shows that the left is not a derogatory place, but still less than the right. See discussion in Grundmann, 'δεξιός', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel, G. Bromiley and G. Friedrich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–) I.40.

than Peter (cf. Matt 18.1–4). In 20.20–1 they explicitly ask for this position through their mother. Jesus confirms the disciples' thinking of the categories 'first', 'greatest' and 'right/left hand of the throne'. He states that though James and John will go through the necessary suffering, he cannot grant them their wish, not because such positions do not exist but because 'it [this] is not mine to give, but by my father'<sup>48</sup> to those who have been prepared' (οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν [τοῦτο] δοῦναι, ἀλλ' οἷς ἠτοιμάσται ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου). Thus, this passage affirms the existence of varying levels of status in the eschatological kingdom.<sup>49</sup> The Father will give the high positions of being at the right/left hand only to specific individuals.<sup>50</sup> The evidence surveyed thus far also suggests a possible category for this 'greatness' – ruling within the future kingdom.

Lastly, we can consider Matt 5.19 (though our comments easily apply also to Matt 18.1) as a text which depicts variations of status within the kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Both ἐλάχιστος and μέγας are adjectives commonly used to describe differing values, especially in regard to significance.<sup>52</sup> Though ἐλάχιστος is superlative, it often functions as an elative, as seen in its other uses in Matthew (25.40, 45), and only rarely occurs as an actual superlative.<sup>53</sup> That the elative sense is correct in Matt 5.19 is seen by the contrast with the simple adjective μέγας as well as the logic of the verse. If the person who breaks only one commandment is the absolute least, then what about the one who breaks two? Nolland notes this difficulty and argues that 'the practical effect of marginally allowing (no more than one) disregard of a least important commandment is to insist that anything short of a commitment to the whole of the Law in all of its detail is tantamount to excluding oneself from the kingdom'.<sup>54</sup> However, the elative use of the superlative should be preferred as it is a simpler explanation and conforms to the overwhelming majority of the uses of ἐλάχιστος. The first use of ἐλάχιστος in modifying ἐντολῶν should be understood similarly. Jesus is warning against breaking the 'very little of these commandments'.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου could also modify ἠτοιμάσται, but the contrast (ἀλλ') is between the Son, who does not give the position and the Father, who does.

<sup>49</sup> Blomberg, 'Degrees in Heaven?', 167 claims, 'Jesus' reply ... leaves the door open for some people to receive such a higher status, but tellingly Christ refuses to discuss that option, redirecting his disciples' attention to servanthood instead and employing the language of present.' Luz, *Matthew*, II.545 similarly sees the text as eliminating authority structure: 'there simply is not to be in the church any "being great" and "being first" at all'. On the contrary, Jesus *does* discuss the option and asserts that it will be given by the Father. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, III.93 rightly observe, 'we have here the spirit of Jesus, who found in the motif of eschatological reversal not just consolation (cf. the beatitudes) but also an imperative: those whom God will one day exalt must in the meantime humble themselves'.

<sup>50</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 486 suggests that the position of the right hand and the left allude to those who were crucified on either side of Jesus. However, this is far from certain and seems too cryptic to be the intended meaning. But even if the allusion is present, it would not rule out the actual position of honour, but only reinforce the suffering that is necessary to obtain these positions.

<sup>51</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I.497; Konradt, *Das Evangelium*, 76; D. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 480; Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 100; Evans, *Matthew*, 117; Luz, *Matthew*, I.220–1; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 188. Some see the text as specifically directed against Paul's communities. D. Sim, 'Are the Least Included in the Kingdom of Heaven? The Meaning of Matthew 5:19', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 54 (1998) 573–87 argues that it places these communities outside the kingdom.

<sup>52</sup> M. Silva, 'μέγας', *New International Dictionary*, III.254–7; BDAG, 624.

<sup>53</sup> BDAG, 314.

<sup>54</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 222.

<sup>55</sup> Though rabbinic literature does speculate on which of the commandments was the least important (Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 178–9), and Jesus himself addresses the question of which is the first commandment (Matt 22.34–40), this does not seem to be in view at this point.

### 3.2 Matthew's Specific Statements regarding Peter's Status

Since Matthew probably depicts the eschatological kingdom as having variations of status so that some are particularly great there, Peter ('the first', 10.2) immediately comes to mind as one who will occupy such a place. This can be confirmed by briefly considering the three texts where Matthew has added unique material to highlight Peter. First, Matthew's account of Peter walking out on the water to meet Jesus (Matt 14.22–33) elevates the figure. Most commentators rightly see this as a praiseworthy action so that Jesus' rebuke only refers to Peter's doubt and Jesus does not reprimand coming to Jesus as 'presumptuous'.<sup>56</sup> Jesus has recently given the apostles a share in his own authority (10.1) and has challenged them to use this power by showing compassion for the crowds in feeding the 5,000 (14.16). Matthew has thus prepared his reader to look favourably on Peter's request to do the miraculous in 14.28. But though all the apostles have been given this authority, Peter is the one who takes the bold 'step of faith'. The result is that Peter occupies a position very close to the most elevated symbolism used of Jesus. Many see the imagery of a figure walking on water as indicating Jesus' deity.<sup>57</sup> However, the question of how this corresponds to Jesus allowing Peter to participate in such a function is given less attention. In fact, in light of the strong Elisha and Moses echoes present in the earlier pericope (cf. Exod 16; 2 Kgs 4.42–4), Peter is probably being portrayed with Jesus as being a prophet better than Moses and Elisha (who mirrors Elijah), who both similarly have authority over water and walk through it.<sup>58</sup> Though Moses and Elisha part the water while Jesus and Peter walk on it, this does not rule out the proposed imagery. It may be a contrastive allusion to show the superiority of Peter's authority of water.

Matthew famously adds significant Peter material to Mark in the Caesarea Philippi pericope (16.17–19). It is not clear if Peter alone occupies this space or if he functions as a representative of all the apostles.<sup>59</sup> For the purposes of our argument, we can disregard this question since we are not concerned with Peter being superior to the other apostles – only with him being in some position of greatness. However, some have argued that Peter represents not just all apostles but all believers, and that his role as 'foundation' is based simply on the fact that he was chronologically the first to do what all believers do, namely confess that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>60</sup> However, to say this is to neglect the significance of the temple foundation imagery. I have elsewhere argued that the allusion to a temple foundation stone in Matt 16.18 draws on messianic expectations, and so again Peter is portrayed with surprisingly elevated imagery.<sup>61</sup> At this point, it will suffice to observe that the role of being a foundation stone, which obviously has some element

<sup>56</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 567–8 is a rare exception in suggesting that the action is a 'foolhardy risk' or a 'childish search for exhilaration'.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 566; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 600; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, II.504; Konradt, *Das Evangelium*, 229.

<sup>58</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, II.500 note the similarities between Elisha and the lake scene. J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 250 rightly quips, 'if water walking is indicative of divinity, then Peter is divine, at least for a few moments.'

<sup>59</sup> See D. Turner, 'Primus inter pares? Peter in the Gospel of Matthew', *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent Jr.* (ed. G. Meadors; Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1991) 179–201 for a discussion and support of Peter as a representative of the apostles.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 423; W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958) 161; J. Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. II (trans. W. Pringle; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010) 291.

<sup>61</sup> B. Henning, 'The Church's One Foundation? Peter as the Messianic Temple Stone in Matt 16:18', *Practicing Intertextuality: Jewish and Greco-Roman Exegetical Techniques in the New Testament* (ed. M. Lee and B. Oropeza; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021) 77–90.

of continuity with the other elements of a building, is a significant and unique role (e.g. Matt 21.42).

Lastly, Matthew's unique story of the temple tax in the fish's mouth (Matt 17.24–7) may confirm that he sees Peter as particularly great in the kingdom, though this is certainly the least clear of the three places where Matthew has added unique material to depict Peter. Matthew's description of Peter here is not 'load-bearing' for our argument, but still warrants discussion since it is a uniquely Matthean pericope that may raise Peter above other followers.<sup>62</sup> The logic of Jesus' question in v. 25, 'From whom do the kings of earth receive customs or tax? From their sons or from others?', differentiates between commoners and royalty. Jesus portrays himself and Peter as 'sons' (οἱ υἱοί) who do not relate to the king like the other citizens. The account begins by questioning the stance of Jesus – 'Does your teacher not pay the didrachma?' (v. 24). If the account focuses on Christology, which it seems to at first, Matthew would probably have us see something messianic in the title υἱός.<sup>63</sup> Since the logic of this small parable requires differentiating between royal sons and common citizens and since this connotation is often present in Matthew's use of υἱός, it probably retains that royal connotation here and there may be a reference to the exalted status of Jesus and Peter. Alternatively, it is possible that Jesus uses the phrase 'sons of the king' to refer to all believers (e.g. Matt 5.9, αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται).<sup>64</sup> However, in Matt 17.24–7, this leaves the interpreter in the awkward position of seeing unbelievers as citizens of the kingdom. While this is possible in some sense (e.g. 8.12), Matthew's pre-existing categories of status variations within the kingdom provide an easier solution. As confirmation that this pericope has implications regarding greatness in the kingdom, 18.1 continues by placing the next narrative 'in that hour' in which the disciples want to know who is the greatest. This suggests that Jesus' depiction of himself and Peter as οἱ υἱοί raises the question of greatness. Chrysostom similarly comments, 'The disciples experienced some feeling of human weakness; wherefore the evangelist also adds this note, saying, "In that hour"; when He had preferred him to all. For of James too, and John, one was a firstborn son, but no such thing as this had He done for them. Then, being ashamed to avow their feeling, they say not indeed openly, "Wherefore hast thou preferred Peter to us?"'<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Whereas the terms of salvation in Matthew often appear simple and binary, the portrait of Peter is complicated and conflicted. Since Matthew's community surely saw Peter as a historical figure, they are forced to conclude that however Jesus may apply his binary terms of salvation, Peter himself ranks highly there. Because he is a solitary figure, considering

<sup>62</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, II.413 does not see Peter's role as significant – 'Peter is little more than a prop on the stage.' However, Matthew's interest in Peter's figure elsewhere suggests that this text contributes to his overall portrayal.

<sup>63</sup> For more on Matthew's use of this expression, see R. Mowery, 'Subtle Differences: The Matthean "Son of God" References', *NovT* 32 (1990) 193–200 and 'Son of God in Roman Imperial Titles and Matthew', *Bib* 83 (2002) 100–10. D. Carson, 'Matthew', *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. VIII (ed. F. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 394 states: 'Jesus acknowledges the temple tax to be an obligation to God; but since he is uniquely God's Son, therefore he is exempt (v 26). The focus of the pericope is thus supremely Christological ... Jesus here implicitly frees his followers from the temple tax on the grounds that they, too, will belong to the category of "sons", though derivatively'. Cf. D. Garland, 'Matthew's Understanding of the Temple Tax (Matt 17:24–27)', *SBLSP* (1987) 190–209, at 206.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 726–7.

<sup>65</sup> *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 359. E. Lim, 'Entering the Kingdom of Heaven Not like the Sons of Earthly Kings (Matthew 17:24–18:5)', *CBQ* 83 (2021) 425–45 has also recently stressed the often overlooked link between the children imagery in Matt 17.24–7 and 18.1–5.

him as an individual is simpler than considering a group (e.g. ‘the disciples’) to which one may or may not belong, and so this study sidesteps the issue of apostasy.<sup>66</sup> Whereas we might wonder if Judas ultimately leaves the disciple band so that the promises to the disciples no longer apply to him, Peter cannot stop being Peter. On the one hand, Matthew insists that his readers conceive of this figure as a composite whole. His decision to conclude his material on Peter by focusing on his failings ensures that readers take him with both his strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, Peter’s presence in the kingdom is not conditional on him not being the person whom Matthew has portrayed him to be. No, *this* Peter, the Matthean Peter, will not only certainly be in the kingdom but will be great there.

Thus, Matthew envisions not only the categories of ‘in the kingdom’ and ‘out of the kingdom’, but also variations of reward in the former.<sup>67</sup> However, the Matthean Jesus’ strict demands for obedience make knowing the location of the ‘dividing lines’ between these categories difficult. In other words, Eubank’s view that ‘through Jesus, provision will be made for those without heavenly treasure’ makes us wonder about how ‘little treasure’ one can have and still benefit from Jesus’ ransom and ultimately be saved.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Runesson’s stance that salvation in Matthew does not demand ‘illusions about human perfection’ but instead requires ‘sincere dedication to the law’ raises the question about those who stand between these ends and often fail in their responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> While the present article may not allow us to be as precise as we would like about these questions, it has addressed the problem of the strict binary of the didactic sections, not with definite propositions but by considering the round character of Peter. It has shown that the kind of person allowed not only in the kingdom but as a high-ranking person there can nonetheless be as flawed as the Matthean Peter. How little treasure can one have and still be in the kingdom? Matthew does not give specifics, but those who have treasure such as the Matthean Peter’s can be assured that they will not only be in the kingdom, but rank highly there. Though Jesus warns that ‘narrow is the way which leads to life and those who find it are few’ (7.14), the case study of the great but failing Peter stretches the scope of salvation to be larger than what it might initially appear.

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<sup>66</sup> B. Oropeza, *In the Footsteps of Judas and Other Defectors: The Gospels, Acts, and Johannine Letters* (Apostasy in the New Testament Communities; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011) 48–97; N. Eubank, ‘Damned Disciples: The Permeability and the Boundary between Insiders and Outsiders in Matthew and Paul’, *Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. M. Siegal, W. Gründstäudl and M. Thiessen; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 33–48.

<sup>67</sup> See section 1.1.

<sup>68</sup> Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 161.

<sup>69</sup> Runesson, *Divine Wrath*, 268–9.

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