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## “Worthy” Households but “Unworthy” Invitees?: The Matthean Uses of ἄξιος

John K. Ridgway, S.J.

### Abstract

This essay summarizes uses of ἄξιος in non-biblical and biblical literature and analyzes Matthew’s usages of ἄξιος. These uses apply to (a) impersonal “fruit” that correlates with repentance (3:8); (b) faithful “workers” worthy of their food (10:10); and (c) persons’ faithful/honourable behaviours of hearing and accepting Jesus’ apostles and their kingdom preaching, accepting the apostles’ other ministries, and loving Jesus supremely and following him (10:11, 13, 37–39; 22:8). The essay advances scholarship on Matthew’s uses of ἄξιος in three original ways: it provides *exegetical foundations* for meaning(s) of ἄξιος in its contexts; it establishes coherences between worthiness–unworthiness, honour–shame, and hospitality–inhospitality; and it demonstrates synthetic relationships between occurrences of ἄξιος in Matthew.

Through the centuries, Christian traditions have admonished believers to be “worthy” followers of Jesus and “worthy” of the kingdom and eternal life. “Worthiness” is not a secondary Christian accretion; it flows directly from the NT where it is a qualification instated by Jesus. “Worthy” is expressed in Greek by ἄξιος that appears nine times in Matthew, eight in Luke’s Gospel (seven in Acts), and once in John; Mark does not use ἄξιος.<sup>1</sup> This essay analyzes the First Gospel’s uses of ἄξιος with focus on the theological contexts in which the word occurs. The analysis is important because it aids in

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1. For (a) abbreviated, ancillary work on 3:8; 10:37–38; (b) short treatment of 22:8; and (c) extended, earlier exegeses of 10:9–15—on separate topics of healing and peace, see John K. Ridgway, “*Let Your Peace Come Upon It*”: *Healing and Peace in Matthew 10:1-15* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), esp. 211–301. This article has a new focus with substantially ongoing and vastly revised developments of earlier ideas in the book.

answering three largely neglected questions: (1) What are some instances of ἄξιος in Greco-Roman and biblical texts that may have helped shape the concept world in which Matthew wrote; and what light, if any, do these uses shed on ἄξιος in this Gospel? (2) What are the denotations of ἄξιος in Matthew; what traits/behaviours make subjects ἄξιος or not; and of what or whom are subjects ἄξιος or not? (3) Does ἄξιος in one passage illumine its meaning(s) in others?

### I. State of the Matter

While scholars recognize that being “worthy” is significant in Matthew, a literature sample reveals that in a majority of studies there is a deficiency of contextually precise and lexically-exegetically generated analyses of ἄξιος. For instance, without exegeting ἄξιος in Matt 3:8, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison assert that it means “corresponding to” or “befitting” repentance. Likewise, for 10:11 these authors simply state that ἄξιος denotes readiness to welcome the disciples; and without giving reasons, the authors concur with Robert Gundry that “worthy” applies to places that have satisfactorily accepted the kingdom’s announcement. Davies and Allison do not specify meanings for ἄξιος elsewhere in Matthew. While acknowledging that ἄξιος is a “key word,” Ulrich Luz virtually passes over it in 3:8; 10:10–11; without directly exegeting the term, Luz implies/asserts that in 10:11–13 ἄξιος means favourably receiving Jesus’ disciples. Luz does not directly address ἄξιος exegetically in 10:37–39; he merely states that relative to 10:11–13 and 22:8, the adjective in 10:37 applies to decisions at the last judgment about accepting or rejecting Jesus. Luz undertakes lengthy analyses of 10:38–39, and he concludes that disciples become worthy of Jesus by enduring the cross and by suffering for Jesus as judgment approaches.<sup>2</sup> Often, the precise denotation(s) of ἄξιος in specific

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2. Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, Rondal B. Smith, et al., eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988–1989), 1:vii. For literature samples, see Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–1997), 1:305; 2:175 and

texts is/are not treated.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars offer a fuller discussion. For example, Craig S. Keener holds that persons are ἄξιτος in 10:10–13, 37–38 when they offer supreme loyalty to Jesus and hospitably receive his disciples. In 22:8, being ἄξιτος pertains to clients’ honouring their patrons and, specifically, respecting the prestige and kindness of the king who invites guests to a marriage feast. In the same context, Keener contends that “worthy” involves reacting

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Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 188, also 47, 187–201; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989–2001), 1:165–72; 2:70–71, 76–82, 112–18 (Luz’s commentary does not cover Matthew 21–28); Corina Combet-Galland, “Du champ des moissonneurs au chant des serviteurs: Matthieu 9,35–11,1,” *Foi et Vie* 81 (Cahiers Bibliques 21; 1982): 35; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 27–28 (3:8); Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Matthäusevangelium* (2 vols.; Kommentar zum Neuen Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung 1; Würzburg: Echter, 1985–1987), 1:97; 2:208–11; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (2 vols.; HTKNT 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1986–1988), 1:367–69; Benedict T. Viviano, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” in *NJBC*, 637, 665; Ivor H. Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Epworth, 1994), 18 (3:8), 66 (10:11); Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1-13: New Testament 1A* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 196–97 (10:10).

3. E.g., John L. McKenzie, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” in *JBC*, 68, 80–82, 100; Plummer, *Matthew*, 27–29, 149–51, 156–57, 300–303; Theodor Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 1; reprint, Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1984), 399–401; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:305–7; 2:171–77, 220–223; 3:202; Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 116–18, 155–56; Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 24–31, 119–22, 246–48; William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1:54–58, 423–26, 457–59; 2:309–16; Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 26–40, 106–15.

positively to God and Jesus so as to be “chosen” (22:14).<sup>4</sup> This essay advances and makes original contributions to scholarship on ἄξιος in Matthew in several chief ways. First, it distinctively gives extended *exegeses/bases* specifically for the meaning(s) of ἄξιος in all its contexts. Second, it augments existing work in social-science analyses and other commentaries by exegetically establishing fresh, explicit coherences between worthiness–unworthiness, honour–shame, and hospitality–inhospitality. Third, it innovatively shows synthetic relationships between instances of ἄξιος in Matthew.

## II. A Lexical and Literature Survey of ἄξιος

As is further treated below, it is important to point out that since ancient Israelites and first-century C.E. Mediterraneans were *group-based* people, being “worthy” (or not) was not a private matter but a publicly assessed valuation about persons’ worth and repute. In early Greek, non-biblical writings chief denotations of ἄξιος relative to persons and/or things include: worthy (ethically or otherwise), estimable; of good/identical value or price, cheap; worth (a certain value); counterbalancing; due, fit; deserved/deserving (of); of people: persons of equal status; sufficient for; authorized to act.<sup>5</sup>

ἄξιος occurs, for example, relative to eminent achievements (Diodorus Siculus *Bib. hist.* 4.11.1), a shout worthy/fit for favor (Josephus *Vita* 250), a city worthy/deserving of respect (Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 39.1), or deeds deserving/befitting death (Josephus *A.J.* 11.144). Persons are ἄξιος in relation to: “admiration” (*Let. Aris.* 282), confidence (Josephus *A.J.* 4.179), freedom (Josephus *B.J.* 5.408), honour (Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 31.93; cf. Lucian *Tox.* 3), punishment (*B.J.* 5.408), or suspicion (Plutarch *Cat. Ma.* 21.4). Dionysius of Halicarnassus says persons are ἄξιος to give reliable

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4. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 119–23, 320, 330–31, 519–23; cf. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33A/33B; Dallas: Word, 1993–1995), 1:272, 292–93.

5. E.g., LSI, 171.

reports (*Ant. Rom.* 1.22.5). Herodotus indicates that rainfall is not ἄξιός of account (4.28). The *Letter of Aristeas* expresses that it is ἄξιός to inform Philocrates of political events (4).

Similar uses appear in the LXX and deuterocanonical texts. LXX denotations for ἄξιός include: worthy (of), deserving (e.g., ethically); good (of humans or otherwise); just (e.g., monetarily); deserved, due, proper; adequate; compared with.<sup>6</sup> Job 11:6 says a person is worthy/deserving of guilt (or: “just recompense”). People are ἄξιός (or not) of: beatings (Deut 25:2), God (Wis 3:5), old age (2 Macc 6:27), honourable memory (2 Macc 7:20; cf. Sir 26:15), military victory (2 Macc 15:21), death (4 Macc 4:12), or a just/full price (1 Chr 21:22, 24). Proverbs 8:11 declares, “For wisdom is better than jewels, and every precious thing cannot compare with [ἄξιόν] her” (cf. 3:15; Esth 7:4; Wis 6:16). Used impersonally, in 4 Macc 17:2–18:5 in adulation of the mother of seven sons, 17:8 states: “Indeed it would be proper [ἄξιόν] to inscribe upon their tomb these words as a reminder to the people of our nation” (cf. Philo *Leg.* 1.22.70).

In the NT ἄξιός appears forty-one times. For relations between *things*, the adjective can signify: corresponding or comparable (to), of elevated comparable value; worthy, appropriate; of identical value/price; deserving, or not; befitting/befits; meet(s) for; in keeping with; as evidence of. For *persons* ἄξιός can denote: worthy, fit/fitting, proper; deserving, deserve(s); sufficiently good; possessing elevated distinction or worth; comparable (value); consonant with expectations; conforming to standards.<sup>7</sup> Ἄξιός also describes relations between one’s deeds and punishment or death (e.g., Luke 12:48; 23:15, 41; Acts 23:29; 25:25; 26:31). The adjective expresses, for instance, that a centurion is ἄξιός to have Jesus heal his slave (Luke 7:4), masters are ἄξιός of honour by slaves (1 Tim 6:1), or undefiled Christians are ἄξιός of Christ (Rev 3:4). In Rev 4:8–11 the four heavenly creatures offer God praise with an acclamation in v. 11,

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6. J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (vol. 1; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992), 43.

7. E.g., BAGD, 78; Louw, Nida, Smith, et al., *Lexicon*, 1:622, 628.

“Worthy [ἄξιός] art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, . . . .” (cf. Rev 5:2, 4, 9, 12).<sup>8</sup> ἄξιός can signal lack of worthiness. As the “prodigal son” (Luke 15:11–32) realizes his wrong, he returns to his father and confesses, “I am no longer worthy/fit [ἄξιός] to be called your son” (v. 19 RSV; cf. v. 21; John 1:27; Acts 13:25, 46).<sup>9</sup> *Impersonally* ἄξιός can mean: fitting, worth, worthwhile, advisable, proper, meet.<sup>10</sup> In 1 Cor 16:1–4 as the Jerusalem collection becomes ready for delivery, Paul states he will send it to Jerusalem via envoys, adding: “If it seems fitting [ἄξιόν] that I should go also, they will accompany me” (v. 4; cf. 2 Thess 1:3).

Senses of ἄξιός, some of which overlap, are summarized in this Table. Denotations in boldface type can be particularly interdependent with characteristics of *honour*, which is discussed below.

PERSONS (& GOD)	THINGS/NONHUMAN ENTITIES	IMPERSONAL STATEMENTS
ASSESSMENTS ABOUT ETHICAL OR GROUP VALUE, OR UTILITY	ASSESSMENTS ABOUT GENERIC DEGREES OF INHERENT VALUE AND/OR UTILITY	INDICATING THAT AN ACTION OR THING IS SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE OR UTILE
<b>worthy (of); estimable; fit (for)/fitting; due; good/ sufficiently good; just; deserve(s)/ deserving (of, or not); proper, adequate; authorized to act;</b>	worthy (of), of estimable value, worthwhile, adequate, proper, good, sufficient for/of, due, fit (for), befitting/befits, deserved/ deserving of (or not), meet(s) for, appropriate, in keeping	fitting, worth, worthwhile, proper, good, just, appropriate, advisable, meet, adequate

8. See W.C. van Unnik, “‘Worthy is the Lamb’: The Background of Apoc 5,” in *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R. P. Béda Rigaux* (ed. Albert Descamps and Anré de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 445–61.

9. For John 1:27 some MSS have ἱκανός (fit, competent, worthy): 66 75 pc; cf. Matt 3:11.

10. See, in part, BAGD, 78.

<p><b>possessing elevated/ notable distinction or worth/repute; adhering to norms—expectations</b></p>	<p>with, as evidence of, eminent</p>	
<p>PARTICULARLY OF TRAITS OR ACTIONS <i>COMPARED WITH</i> THOSE OF OTHERS</p>	<p>PERTAINING MOST SPECIFICALLY TO ECONOMIC VALUE</p>	
<p><b>compared with, comparable to</b></p>	<p>of good/identical value or price, worth (a certain value), cheap, just (monetarily), adequate, sufficient for/of, appropriate</p>	
<p>RELATIVE TO SOCIAL HIERARCHY</p>	<p>CHIEFLY OF WORTH— UTILITY WHEN <i>COMPARED WITH</i> OTHER THINGS</p>	
<p><b>sharing the same status as another or others (this also relates to “honour” challenges— ripostes)</b></p>	<p>compared with, comparable to, being of elevated comparable value, appropriate, counterbalancing, corresponding (to)</p>	
<p>RELATIVE TO PERFORMANCE ON A MEASURABLE (E.G., ECONOMIC) SCALE</p>	<p>“OF WORTH” ESPECIALLY WHEN CORRESPONDING TO A MEASURABLE SCALE</p>	
<p><b>corresponding to public standards, e.g., that prescribe expected remuneration for a person’s labours</b></p>	<p>corresponding with</p>	



### III. ἄξιος in the Gospel of Matthew

ἄξιος occurs nine times in the First Gospel: at 3:8; 10:10, 11, 13 (twice), 37 (twice), 38; 22:8. This essay's aim is to examine these occurrences that reflect both diversity from and consonance with each other; these uses apply to (a) impersonal fruit/deeds relative to repentance (3:8); (b) faithful "workers" (10:10); and (c) persons' faithful behaviours of hearing and accepting Jesus' apostles/emissaries and their preaching God's kingdom, accepting the apostles' other ministries, and loving Jesus supremely and following him or being so ready (10:11, 13, 37–39; 22:8).

As will receive fuller development below, it is important here to examine two values often operative in first-century C.E. Mediterranean culture: honour and shame.<sup>11</sup> One reason is that there are NT correlations between worthiness (ἄξιος)—unworthiness and honour—shame (e.g., Heb 3:3; Rev 4:11; 5:12). The positive, public worth that people had in their judgments and in the appraisals of the *group(s)* to which people belonged constituted *honour* (//worthiness). Two criteria for honour were family affiliation and hospitality. Conversely, *shame*—conceived negatively (//unworthiness)—resulted when persons violated group norms of social behaviour and expectations, bore a reproachful public assessment, and/or were judged transgressors of ethical standards. A group's honour embedded in the leader or master (e.g., God, Jesus, *paterfamilias*, or

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11. Some data on honour–shame in this and the next paragraph are culled from Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J. G. Peristiany; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), esp. 19–39; idem, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3d ed.; rev. and expanded; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27–80, 104–5; Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," *BTB* 23 (1993): 167–76; Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

king) who merited unqualified obedience. The honour of a group’s leader bore upon the honour of family members or other associated persons (e.g., children, servants, or disciples) so that a provocation against the latter’s honour was a challenge to the leader. Challenges required some type of retort by recipients so as to regain or preserve honour.

Since Mediterraneans were group-based, their world views, public worth (*ἄξιος*), and life norms were functions of their group(s). People could belong to *natural groups* and/or *chosen ones*. Persons were in natural groups independent of choice, e.g., by family origin, domicile, or ethnicity. People selected their chosen groups; religious or craft networks, legal arrangements, or other volitional affiliations generated such groupings. The apostles called by Jesus (as in Matt 10:1–15) formed a chosen group. In natural and chosen groups, honour could be *ascribed* or *earned–procured*. In either case, *interactions among persons* governed honour—and not, as is often predominant in the modern world, *economic power, success, and product manufacture/accumulation*. Ascribed honour arose not from persons’ achievements but from public judgments about persons’ worth (worthiness—*ἄξιος*) based, for example, on valuations of (worthy) family origins (as in Matt 10:37–39 below). People judged to have socially recognized prerogative, power, and/or eminent worth could *ascribe* honour–worthiness to others. By contrast, honour (*ἄξιος*) was often *earned–procured* (or lost) by engaging in gambits of challenge and riposte that included variegated transactions from public greetings to physical attacks (Matt 22:6–7). Normally such challenges and ripostes were interchanges between persons not affiliated by kinship or intimate acquaintance. A “challenge”—a social “joust” involving acquisition or diminution/loss of honour—had two chief components. First, by issuing a challenge, the challenger inserted oneself into a foreign public arena whose “territorial” boundary lines of status and power belonged to the recipient. In prosecuting a challenge, the perpetrator ventured some type of physical and/or verbal conduct toward another person(s), the recipient(s), who usually was considered socially equivalent with the result that each joust had to assess whether the one regarded the other as socially equal and *worthy*—thereby adding to or exchanging honour—or as inferior—thereby undermining the honour–worthiness (*ἄξιος*) of one or both jousters. Second, and relatedly, having

received a challenge, the recipient(s) had to ascertain (a) whether and how the challenge cohered with customary mores; (b) whether the challenge escalated or affronted the recipient’s honour and worth/worthiness—i.e., one’s distinction, status, and socially evaluated repute; and (c) if and how to respond. A recipient would judge a challenge “favourable” or “unfavourable” depending on whether the person construed it as (a) augmenting honour (//worthiness) and being reciprocally propitious or (b) devaluing honour and attempting to usurp the recipient’s status and worth(iness). A response constituted any reciprocation by the recipient, and every reciprocation entailed public valuations—taking into account the perceived social ranks of each jousting—about whether the reciprocation amplified or reduced the honour–worth of the challenger and/or recipient. An array of tactics could comprise a response: e.g., an assent to the challenge and challenger(s); a counter-challenge that perpetuated the dynamics of challenge–riposte; a defiant backlash that rebuffed and disgraced the challenger; or withholding any response, which connoted public dishonour for the recipient. While persons related by kinship instinctively evaluated each other as enacting “insider” honourable relations among each other, such was not the case for those “outside” a family. Until they publicly evinced the contrary, “outsiders” were “without honour” (unworthy) and were appraised as suspect or antagonistic so that interplays between “insiders–outsiders” involved scrutinizing one another to ascertain each one’s motives, actions, and potential threats to insiders’ honour–worth/worthiness.

### **A. Matthew 3:8**

ποιήσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας.

Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

The account of John the Baptist prophesying in the Judean desert appears in Matt 3:1–12.<sup>12</sup> In 3:2 John mandates, “Repent

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12. In exegeting Matt 3:8, I consulted, in part, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (2 vols.; AB 28/28A; Garden City: Doubleday,

[μετανοεῖτε], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This verse echoes Jesus’ charge in 4:17, “Repent [μετανοεῖτε], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (cf. 10:7). Μετανοέω in 3:2; 4:17 denotes “repent, be converted, change one’s mind”; μεάνοια in 3:8 means “repentance, change of mind, conversion.”<sup>13</sup> Repentance in the NT entails initiating a fresh relation with God, involving not simply a change of mind but a reconstitution of one’s inner dispositions and exterior behaviours. In 3:7 John preaches to some Pharisees and Sadducees whose need for repentance is manifest by John’s branding them “You brood of vipers!”—a metaphor for their iniquitous, dishonourable state (cf. Gen 49:17; Job 20:12–16; Isa 59:5; Matt 12:34; 23:33) because they (a) overvalue their lineage with their father Abraham (3:9) relative to God and Jesus and (b) consider themselves impervious to the coming divine wrath (3:7–12). In Matthew, some Pharisees are often portrayed disapprovingly: e.g., for deficient righteousness (5:20; 23:23–39), aversion to Jesus (9:34; 12:14, 24; 22:15), hypocrisy (23:1–39), and obstruction of entrance to the kingdom (23:13). Impending doom forms the backdrop for John’s imploring the Pharisees and Sadducees to repent, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? . . . Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (3:7b, 10). John enjoins his hearers in 3:8, “Bear fruit [καρπὸν] worthy [ἄξιον] of repentance [μετανοίας]” (cf. Acts 26:20).<sup>14</sup> Καρπός can signify: fruit, work, deed, result. The primacy of bearing (good) fruit is underscored by nineteen references to καρπός in Matthew: 3:8, 10; 7:16–20 (seven times); 12:33 (three times); 13:8, 26; 21:19, 34 (twice), 41, 43. An idiom for honourable behaviours/deeds and for evincing that one has repented is “bearing

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1981–1985), 1:464–65, 468; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:304–7; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:50; Keener, *Matthew*, 119–31; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 97–98; Clarke, *Matthew*, 26–40.

13. BAGD, 511–12.

14. Luke’s parallel in 3:8 reads, “Bear fruits worthy of/that befit repentance” (καρπούς ἁγίου τῆς μετανοίας); the variant καρπὸν ἄξιον is attested by D W pc e r<sup>1</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>.

good fruit” (cf. Matt 3:10 par. Luke 3:9; Matt 7:16–20; John 15:2–16; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11). In 3:8 καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας (“fruit worthy of repentance”) denotes fruit/deeds, e.g., that are worthy of, befit, meet for, are in keeping with, or are evidence of repentance. Bearing such fruit signifies that true repentance entails inner conversion and moral behaviours. To repent in 3:2 parallels producing “fruit worthy of repentance” in 3:8. Matthew 3:2, 7–12 affirm that ἄξιον in v. 8 appears in a theological context since 3:2, 7–12 attest that to yield καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας is essential for receiving God’s kingdom and for evading ruin.

### B. Matthew 10:9–10

<sup>9</sup> Do not acquire [Μὴ κτήσηθε] gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> <sup>a</sup> no bag for the journey, <sup>b</sup> nor two tunics, <sup>c</sup> nor sandals, <sup>d</sup> nor a staff; <sup>e</sup> for the worker is worthy [ἄξιος] of his food.

The precepts in 10:9–10 are part of the mission discourse in 10:1–15 where Jesus commissions the Twelve to sustain his work of preaching the kingdom (v. 7), healing, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and exorcising—all as “free” ministries (v. 8; see these acts of Jesus in, e.g., 4:23–24; 5:1–9:35).<sup>15</sup> Matthew’s ardor to ensure that the venality of spurious prophets and missionaries who amass fortune and accouterments from their activities eludes true disciples—based on the imperative Μὴ κτήσηθε (“Do not acquire”) at the beginning of v. 9—attests itself in vv. 8b–10. A foundation for the interdicts in vv. 9–10d (recall 10:8b) is the γάρ adage of 10e: ἄξιος γὰρ ὁ ἐργάτης τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ (“for the worker is worthy of his food”; par. Q/Luke 10:7). Γάρ is a causal conjunction introducing the bases for

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15. In exegeting Matt 10:9–10, I consulted Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 130; M. Eugene Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 46; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 45–47; Plummer, *Matthew*, 148–51; Gundry, *Matthew*, 186–88; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:171–74; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:269–74; Keener, *Matthew*, 317–19; Carter, *Matthew*, 235; Clarke, *Matthew*, 106–9.

the preceding journey regulations and for the disciples’ being worthy.<sup>16</sup> A reason (γάρ) for the apostles’ self-restraint is that God, via hospitable–receptive hosts, will supply the envoys’ τροφή (food, nourishment; v. 10e; cf. 10:19–20; 1 Cor 9:14–18; 2 Cor 11:7–15; 1 Thess 2:9) of which they are worthy.<sup>17</sup> Matthew’s use of τροφή clarifies that accepting gratis food and lodging from hospitality is permissible and honourable (10:11–14) but garnering income or similar resources (μισθός) is not.<sup>18</sup> Compared with its other uses in the First Gospel, ἄξιός in 10:10e occurs in a lesser theological context by signaling that an economic precept of *honour* decrees a worker warrants food based on what should be expected given that person’s labours.<sup>19</sup> Though in 10:10e ἄξιός does not mean being “worthy” of the kingdom or “worthy” of being Jesus’ disciple, one can infer that the disciples’ faith in God by avoiding material gain can lead them to be worthy of Jesus and the kingdom, as per worthiness in 10:11, 13, 37–38.

### C. Matthew 10:11

And into whichever city or village you enter, find out who is worthy [ἄξιός] in it and stay there until you depart.

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16. BAGD, 151; Richard A. Edwards, “Narrative Implications of *Gar* in Matthew,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 636–39, 652–55. See also BAGD, κτάομαι 1 (455).

17. BAGD, τροφή 1 (827).

18. BAGD, μισθός (523). Some manuscripts for Matt 10:10e record μισθοῦ: K 565 892 *al* it syr<sup>h</sup> mg. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:174; Gundry, *Matthew*, 187; Ernest James Bursey, “Exorcism in Matthew” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992), 163–64; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:272; Carter, *Matthew*, 235.

19. A. E. Harvey, “‘The Workman Is Worthy of His Hire’: Fortunes of a Proverb in the Early Church,” *NovT* 24 (1982): 211; Louw, Nida, Smith, et al., *Lexicon*, 1:622 n. 4; Long, *Matthew*, 117–18.

The transition from mandates about pecuniary gain and mission resources in 10:9–10 to instructions about the emissaries' comportment in a city or village occurs in Matt 10:11.<sup>20</sup> Ἀξιός in 10:11 points to "worthy" houses in 10:13. In the charge ἐξετάσατε τίς ἐν αὐτῇ ἄξιός ἐστίν ("find out who is worthy in it") in 10:11, ἐξετάζω denotes: scrutinize, investigate, analyze, explore meticulously for someone/something.<sup>21</sup> This verb's potency is patent by the exigency with which Matthew—unlike Mark, Q, and Luke—insists that when the apostles arrive in a locale they must find who (τίς) is ἄξιός.<sup>22</sup> In 10:11, 13, Matthew does not specify how the apostles determine who is worthy, or not. Ἐξετάζω in v. 11 implies that once they reach a city or village—and/or when they approach or enter a house (vv. 12–13)—the disciples explore meticulously for persons, socially prominent or not, who meet the Matthean social standards/norms for worthiness and honour. It is conceivable that some people who first appear worthy—or are presumed to be—end up unworthy since they fall short of Matthew's worthiness norms, found in 10:1–8, 14–15. In 10:1–6, Jesus commissions his apostles for their mission. While in 10:7 Jesus charges them to preach the kingdom, 10:8 concretizes the charge by empowering the apostles to extend Jesus' labours of healing, raising, cleansing, and exorcising. Relatedly, 10:14–15 warn that failure to accept the emissaries and their preaching ("hear your words," v. 14) results in dishonourable repudiation and eschatological ruin (v. 15). Based on 10:1–8, 14–15 one can conclude that ἄξιός in v. 11 (and v. 13) signifies behaving

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20. In exegeting Matt 10:11, I consulted, in part, Bennie R. Crockett, "The Missionary Experience of the Matthean Community: A Redactional Analysis of Matthew 10" (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 55–59; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:174–75; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:272; Neyrey, *Honor*; Carter, *Matthew*, 235.

21. LSJ, 592; BAGD, 275.

22. Mark 6:10 says only that when the missionaries arrive in a home, they should remain there until they depart (cf. Q 10:5–8; Luke 9:4; 10:7). There are no norms in Mark, Q, or Luke for selecting any particular house.

faithfully and hospitably/honourably—”bearing worthy fruit/deeds” (καρπός) as in 3:8—by (1) accepting the apostles and their kingdom proclamation (from v. 7); (2) accepting the envoys’ attendant services (from v. 8); and, inferably, (3) following Jesus or being thus willing (vv. 1–6). Such behaviours/deeds comprise public norms/expectations about fidelity and acceptance toward: God and Jesus, Jesus’ and his envoys’ ministries, the kingdom, and thus social standards of *honour*.

#### D. Matthew 10:12–13

<sup>12</sup> And as you enter into the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> <sup>a</sup> And if the house is worthy [ἀξία], <sup>b</sup> let your peace come upon it; <sup>c</sup> but if [it] is not worthy [ἀξία], <sup>d</sup> let your peace return to you.

Matthew completes in 10:8b–11 sojourn and residence standards. Next come the charges to salute a “worthy” house (10:12, from 10:11) and confer peace on it (10:13).<sup>23</sup> Mark 6:10 and Q 10:5–6 (cf. Luke 10:5–6; Luke 9 has no parallel to Matt 10:12–13) likely include traditions, that Matthew edited, behind Matt 10:12–13. In 10:13a Matthew has καὶ ἐὰν μὲν ἦ ἡ οἰκία ἀξία (“And if the house is worthy”) instead of καὶ ἐὰν ἐκεῖ ἦ υἱὸς εἰρήνης (“And if a son of peace is there”; Q 10:6a). The earliest instance of οἰκία in Matthew 10 is at 10:12. *In the context of Matt 10:11–14* οἰκία means (a) a physical edifice and (b) a household, family unit, and/or those dwelling with each other.<sup>24</sup> Following from τῖς (“who” = a person) in v. 11, it is *people* in v. 13 who make up an οἰκία ἀξία that is “worthy” of peace. Matthew 10:13–14 also accent people: an οἰκία that is “not worthy” (dishonourable) consists of householders refusing to accept or hear the envoys: “And whoever [ὅς ἄν] does not receive you or hear your words, as you are going out from that house [οἰκίας]

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23. In exegeting Matt 10:12–15, I consulted, in part, Filson, *Matthew*, 130; Crockett, “Missionary,” 59–66; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:175–79; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:269–70, 272–74; Long, *Matthew*, 118–19; Neyrey, *Honor*; Keener, *Matthew*, 320–21; Carter, *Matthew*, 235–36.

24. BAGD, 557; Louw, Nida, Smith, et al., *Lexicon*, οἰκία, κτλ.; οἶκος, κτλ.; γένεσις, κτλ. (1:81, 111–13, 115, 558, 560).



or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (10:14). Every house the missionaries visit obtains a peace salutation in Q/Luke 10:5, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace [be] to this house!’” Stricter selectivity exists in the First Gospel: only a “worthy” house acquires peace (v. 13); an “unworthy” one forfeits it. Given the calamity in 10:14–15 of eschatological ruin that Matthew associates with not being worthy, granting peace to “worthy” houses can be reckoned as exceeding mundane practices.<sup>25</sup> Matthew 10:13 highlights the bestowal of peace via symmetrical constructions. Clauses 13a and 13c contain ἀξία in two antipodal-symmetrical protases: καὶ ἂν μὲν ἡ ἡ οἰκία ἀξία (“And if the house is worthy,” 13a) and ἂν δὲ μὴ ἡ ἀξία (“but if [it] is not worthy,” 13c).<sup>26</sup> If the protasis in v. 13a appertains, the apodosis in v. 13b tells the disciples: ἐλθάτω ἡ εἰρήνη ὑμῶν ἐπ’ αὐτήν (“let your peace come upon it”). But if the proviso in v. 13c applies, the apodosis in v. 13d prescribes a *retort*: ἡ εἰρήνη ὑμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐπιστραφήτω (“let your peace return to you”).

The disciples’ sojourning in a house (10:11–12) and conferring peace (10:13) on it depend on its “worthiness.” Ἄξιος in v. 11 described worthy, honourable *persons*. In 10:13 ἄξιος denotes “worthy” householders who hospitably/honourably receive and accept the disciples and their ministries (vv. 7–8). The *direct mention of receiving* (δέχομαι = receive, accept, welcome) the envoys in 10:14 verifies that this is a correct reading of ἄξιος: “And whoever [ὅς ἂν] does not receive [δέξηται] you or hear your words, as you are going out from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.” Ὅς ἂν (“whoever”) means house members from 10:11–13. Receiving and accepting God, Jesus, the kingdom/gospel, their emissaries—an emissary’s reward, and/or someone in Jesus’ name are the *sole* semantic contents of δέχομαι in Matthew: 10:14, 40–41 (six times); 11:14; and 18:5 (twice). Commonplace articles or persons are never objects of this verb. The tenor of δέχομαι in 10:14 parallels ἄξιος in 10:11, 13: both words apply to social norms/expectations of behaving

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25. E.g., Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:176; Carter, *Matthew*, 235.

26. Gundry, *Matthew*, 189; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:176–77.

faithfully and honourably by (1) embracing the apostles; (2) accepting their labours; and, inferably, (3) becoming Jesus’ followers. In Matt 10:40 to receive/accept (δέχομαι) the apostles is to receive/accept (δέχομαι) Jesus and God: “The one who receives [δεχόμενος] you receives [δέχεται] me, and the one who receives [δεχόμενος] me receives [δέχεται] the one who sent me” (cf. Q/Luke 10:16; John 13:20). Such behaviours parallel “worthy fruit” from 3:8 since they are moral deeds of accepting Jesus’ apostles and their commissioned “deeds” that illustrate the Baptist’s and Jesus’ message that persons should repent because the kingdom is imminent (3:2; 4:17; cf. 10:7). The claims for ἄξιος in 10:11, 13 can include the view of George Wesley Buchanan. Based on a Jewish mission portrayed in Matt 10:1–6, Buchanan holds that relative to Jewish hospitality in 10:10–11, 13, readiness to welcome the apostles or demonstration of worthiness of Jesus was not the sole ground for being ἄξιος; “worthy” also and specially depicted orthodox Jews strictly complying with diet and purity statutes. Buchanan’s assertion may have merit; however, given the *Matthean text of 10:10–15, 40* it is difficult to conclude that Buchanan’s legal signification is the *dominant* one, on two counts: (a) no such legal predications are explicitly present in 10:1–15 (also, see Jesus’ and the apostles’ associations with gentiles, e.g., in Matt 4:12–17; 8:5–13; 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30; Luke 2:32; 7:1–10; Acts 10:1–11:18) and (b) the unequivocalness of Matt 10:14–15, 40 cogently suggests that being worthy directly entails *receiving/accepting*—δέχομαι in 10:14, 40—the disciples and their message/labours.<sup>27</sup>

When repulsed by those not ἄξιος—inhospitable and dishonourable—the envoys *retort* in 10:14 by leaving the locale and brushing its dust from their feet, a sign of abjuration (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6). Brushing off dust portends perdition in Matt 10:15 for the “unworthy”: “Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on [the] day of judgment than for that city.”

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27. Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (vol. 1, books 1–2; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1996), 1:446; also 1:134–37, 427–49; 2:843–52.

When arriving in a locale (Matt 10:11–12) to which they may not belong by dint, for instance, of (a) kinship, shared domicile, or social status or (b) other social affiliations, the “outsider” apostles insert themselves into a foreign public arena.<sup>28</sup> Thereby, the apostles issue a “challenge” to local residents. The recipients must decide (i) whether and how the challenge coheres with their customary norms, (ii) whether the challenge escalates or affronts their honour and worthiness, and (iii) how to respond. If a recipient judges the challenge as allotting honour, the person can reciprocate in ways that render honour–worthiness (ἄξιος) to the challenger and recipient. If the challenge is regarded as dishonourable, the recipient retorts, for example, by spurning the challenge or by withholding any reaction—which would connote public dishonour. Unless the residents (a) are already favourably inclined toward the apostles’ messages or (b) are Christians, the emissaries are assumed to be “without honour” and are publicly appraised as suspect or antagonistic so that interplays between the “insider” locals and the “outsider” apostles involve circumspect scrutinizing as the locals try to ascertain the apostles’ motives, actions, and potential threats to the honour–worthiness of the “insiders.” Each “joust” enacting challenges and responses rates the social standing—involving honour and worthiness—of the other(s) to decide whether the challenge–response augments or diminishes each joust’s honour and worth(iness). This scenario applies to the apostles whom Jesus commissions in Matt 10:1–15 to carry on his mission among residents of various locales. However, this scenario may need some revision given that several scholars argue that ἄξιος in Matt 10:11 points to the feasibility that at least in some locales/houses, Jesus’ gospel had antecedently been preached (a) where Christian approbation had already been granted to the kingdom’s proclamation and/or (b) where the apostles’ labours transpire among worthy disciples.<sup>29</sup> In such cases, the apostles would not receive as negative evaluations as is normal for “outsiders.” Indeed, the apostles could be judged as having equal or higher social

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28. Malina, *New Testament*, 32–36, 44–45.

29. See Gundry, *Matthew*, 188; Crockett, “Missionary,” 58; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:175.

standing than some recipients of their challenges/ministries. Jesus’ apostles could be esteemed as possessing relatively heightened honour/worth/repute—qualities that reflect being worthy and honourable—due to the envoys being commissioned by and labouring as *agents* for Jesus, and God (Matt 10:40), who are likely recognized by at least some or many recipients as figures of noteworthy or supreme honour and worthiness (see Rev 4:8–11). Hence, amid a matrix of honour valuations, various “actors” performing challenge–riposte judge each others’ public honour–worth relative to (a) the propriety and success, or not, of challenges and responses and (b) resultant acquisitions or losses of honour–worthiness (ἄξιος). In each locale in which Jesus’ apostles minister, these social-status and worthiness-honour valuations undoubtedly influence the residents’ decisions about whether worthily/honourably/hospitably to accept the emissaries or not. *Within the world view of worthiness–unworthiness and honour–shame and according to the context of Matt 10:1–15*, by accepting the challenges initiated by Jesus’ agents and their ministries the residents would procure worthiness (ἄξιος) and honour; but by rebuffing the agents or by withholding a response, the residents would stigmatize themselves as not ἄξιος and as dishonourable (10:14–15).

*Honour–shame* also interpenetrate with *hospitality–inhospitality*.<sup>30</sup> To accommodate an “outsider” within one’s social location reflects hospitality. Biblically, hospitality exhibits covenant holiness (Lev 19:33–34) and honour; for example, Abraham is honoured and “worthy” to receive the Lord hospitably (Gen 18:1–21) and inhabit the kingdom (Matt 8:11). Jesus accepts hospitality across social lines (e.g., Matt 9:9–10; 26:17–30; Luke 7:36). Luke 14:7–11 discusses hospitality and honour at a marriage feast (cf. Phil 2:29). When Jesus accepts hospitality in the house of Simon the leper, and a woman anoints Jesus’ *head* (a distinctive locus of honour; Matt 26:6–13),

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30. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (OBT 17; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 87; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 279–80; Malina, *New Testament*, 38–41.

Jesus honours her and declares her worthy of memory, "Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (v. 13). Conversely, Jesus speaks of the dishonour of everlasting suffering in Hades resulting from a rich man's inhospitality toward the indigent Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). When persons are ἄξιος by (a) possessing publicly recognized distinction or worth and (b) complying with socially proper norms and expectations applying to God, Jesus, Jesus' kingdom preaching and other ministries, Jesus' apostles and their labours, faith, and discipleship, then persons are also publicly judged to have honour. Thus, in view of: biblical traditions about honour, hospitality, and worthiness; Jesus' practices of honouring and accepting hospitality; and recognition that hospitality accords with social norms, the interrelation of honour, hospitality, and worthiness is apparent. In Matt 10:11–13 by entering and labouring in a locale, the apostles challenge the residents to accept or reject God's and Jesus' agents whom Jesus commissions (10:1–14). Matthew 10:14–15, 40 supply the keys to what constitutes a proper rejoinder to or result of (καρπός) the challenge. A worthy/honourable/hospitable rejoinder, consonant with social mores about being both ἄξιος and honourable, is to accept the apostles and their ministries—thereby, for instance, obtaining God's gift of peace; an unworthy/dishonourable/inhospitable riposte of rejection results in the shame-imbued calamities mentioned in 10:14–15. Bruce Malina holds that in the NT there existed a hierarchy with God and Jesus as supreme figures, followed beneath by agents of God and by archangels, inferior nonhuman beings (e.g., spirits or demons), humans, and then sub-human characters.<sup>31</sup> Jesus avows in Matt 10:40 that whoever receives his apostles, receives him; and receiving him means receiving his sender (God). Accordingly, as per Matt 10:14–15, 40 one can argue that the apostles' worthiness–honour embed in the worthiness–honour of God and Jesus so that to accept hospitably the apostles and their ministries procures worthiness–honour for the acceptors but unworthiness–dishonour for the rejecters. In Matt 25:35, 42–46, Jesus likewise assigns eternal punishment for the unrighteous who fail to welcome him hospitably but eternal life for the righteous who are

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31. Malina, *New Testament*, 32–33, 104–5.

welcoming. Similar attributions of worthiness–honour for loving and following Jesus appear in Matt 10:37–39.

### E. Matthew 10:37–39

<sup>37</sup> The one who loves [φιλω̄ν] father or mother more than me is not worthy [ἄξιος] of me; and the one who loves [φιλω̄ν] son or daughter more than me is not worthy [ἄξιος] of me;<sup>32</sup>  
<sup>38</sup> and whoever does not take his/her cross and follow [ἄκολουθεῖ] me is not worthy [ἄξιος] of me. <sup>39</sup> The one who finds his/her life [ψυχὴν] will lose it, and the one who loses his/her life [ψυχὴν] for my sake will find [εὕρησει] it.

Matthew 10:34–39 describe how the gospel’s demands produce domestic schisms (cf. Mic 7:6), as the pericope opens in 10:34 with Jesus’ dictum that he comes to the earth with a sword, not peace (par. Luke 12:51; *Gos. Thom.* 16).<sup>33</sup> Matthew 10:37 is likely a variation of Q 12:52–53; 14:26.<sup>34</sup> Two chief questions inhere in Matt 10:37–39: (1) How do persons become worthy of Jesus? and (2) What does being “worthy of Jesus” mean? The answer to the first query has two interpenetrating components. First, in 10:37 *Jesus declares* that ἄξιος applies *exclusively to him*. The aim of 10:37 is to stress the need to love Jesus unsurpassably to be worthy of him. If family

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32. Manuscripts B\* D et al. omit, “and the one who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” likely because of homoeoteleuton. The clause was penned at the end of the column by the earliest copyist of B when the copyist saw the error (*TCGNT*, 28).

33. In treating Matt 10:37–39, I consulted, in part, Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:220–24; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:290–93; Crockett, “Missionary,” 155–63; Carolyn Osiek, “The Family in Early Christianity: ‘Family Values’ Revisited,” *CBQ* 58 (1996): 1–24; Neyrey, *Honor*; Keener, *Matthew*, 329–31; Carter, *Matthew*, 243–44.

34. The parallel logia in Luke 12:52–53; 14:26–27 lack any ἄξιος expression. A logion in *Gos. Thom.* 55 has an analogous saying of Jesus: “and whoever does not hate brothers and sisters, and carry the cross as I do, will not be worthy of me”; cf. John 12:26.

relations hinder discipleship, they must be severed; otherwise persons are not worthy of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Though φιλέω (love or show affection, e.g., by affiliation) occurs five times in Matthew (6:5; 10:37 [twice]; 23:6; 26:48), it conveys love for *Jesus* solely in 10:37.<sup>36</sup> Jesus’ single sentence in 10:37–38 evinces that deeds (καρπός) of loving (φιλῶν) him supremely (v. 37) and taking one’s cross to follow (ἀκολουθεῖ) him (v. 38) would make one worthy. There is dual evidence in 10:37–38 that being a loving, faithful disciple would render a person worthy/befitting of Jesus. Most directly, in Matthew ἀκολουθεῶ (“follow,” v. 38)—which associates with φιλέω/ἄξιος in v. 37 and with ἄξιος in v. 38—regularly connotes following Jesus *as a disciple*: e.g., in 4:20–22; 8:10, 19–23; 16:24; 20:34; 27:55–56.<sup>37</sup> Discipleship assertions pervade Matthew 10: e.g., vv. 5–33, 40–42. Fracturing natural family ties—thereby likely incurring familial dishonour (Exod 20:12; Deut 21:18–21; Matt 15:4)—for the sake of an unencumbered love for Jesus make one worthy–honourable toward him by engaging in expected norms of faithful discipleship within a new, fictive “family” of Jesus by taking the dishonour-laden “cross” and following Jesus worthily.<sup>38</sup>

The second component, linked with the first, of the answer to the question about how persons become worthy of Jesus occurs in 10:38–39. After implying in 10:38 that to take one’s cross and follow Jesus *make one worthy of him*, Jesus in 10:39—continuing the thought line

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35. Employing ἄξιος with a genitive of a person (“is not worthy [ἄξιος] of me”) denotes “does not deserve to belong to me” or possibly ““is not suited to me””—BAGD, 2a (78).

36. Louw, Nida, Smith, et al., *Lexicon*, 1:293.

37. Luke 14:26 reads, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

38. Some honour data here are based on Neyrey, *Honor*, 175, also 15–16, 21–22, 28, 52–55, 58, 79, 91–94, 113–14, 173–79, 186; Moxnes, “Honor and Shame.”

from 10:38—declares, “The one who finds his/her life will lose it, and the one who loses his/her life for my sake will find it.” “Taking one’s cross” likely signifies utmost commitment and self-surrender by which actually or symbolically one is willing to endure suffering, family loss, and death for Jesus, discipleship, and the gospel (cf. Matt 10:16–25; 16:21–26 par.; 26:36–46; 27:27–50). For “losing one’s life [ψυχή] for Jesus’ sake” in v. 39, it is sufficient to epitomize that ψυχή probably means a person’s physical life and the soul’s spiritual life.<sup>39</sup> Forfeiting life for love of Jesus can refer to physical sacrifice and/or death, to martyrdom (cf., e.g., Matt 2:13; 10:21–22; 12:14; 20:23; 27:20; Rev 12:11), and/or to selfless following of Jesus by submission to God in emulation of Jesus (cf. Matt 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 26:39, 42). In 10:39b, “losing one’s life” means finding, gaining (εὐρίσκω) it—on earth and in the *eschaton* as eternal life (cf. Luke 12:16–21; John 12:25).<sup>40</sup> Jesus clearly implies in 10:38–39 that one is worthy/befitting of him by (a) “taking one’s cross” and following him in discipleship and (b) “losing one’s life” for him. Many texts commend martyrs as “worthy” (using forms of ἄξιος) and, inferably, honourable: Rev 5:12; Wis 3:5; 2 Macc 6:27; 4 Macc 18:3. John 12:26 links following (ἀκολουθείτω) Jesus with divine honour. Senses of ἄξιος in 10:37–39 reflect “worthy fruit” (3:8) since they include expected, *honourable* norms of loving-following Jesus faithfully relative to the kingdom: “that you may be made worthy [καταξιωθῆναι] of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering” (2 Thess 1:5).

The second chief question for Matt 10:37–39 is what does being “worthy of Jesus” mean? In 19:23–24 as Jesus affirms the difficulty for the rich to arrive in the kingdom, the apostles ask Jesus in v. 25 about who can attain salvation. In the spirit of 10:37–39 Peter inquires in 19:27, “Lo, we have left everything and followed [ἠκολουθήσαμεν] you. What then shall we have?” Given this fact, the apostles’ stated alacrity to follow Jesus to their own deaths (Matt

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39. BAGD, 893–94.

40. BAGD, εὐρίσκω 3 (325); Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:224; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:293.



26:35), and Jesus’ prediction in light of Peter’s threefold declaration of his love for Jesus that Peter will undergo a violent death as Jesus’ follower (ἀκολουθεῖ, v. 19) in John 21:15–19, it is reasonable to assume that the apostles basically love Jesus in ways that make them “worthy” of him in fulfillment of the criteria in Matt 10:37–39. There is evidence in the Gospel that being worthy of Jesus means that his followers are eligible for or will receive, e.g., heavenly bounties (5:12; 6:6, 18; 7:11), forgiveness (6:12, 14; 26:28), authority to partake in judging and ruling the eschatological people of Israel in the kingdom (16:19; 19:28), divine sonship (5:45; cf. 12:49–50), eternal life and salvation (10:32–33, 39; 19:29; 26:29), the Spirit’s inspiration (10:20), and Jesus’ abiding presence (18:20; 28:20). In summary, in 10:37–39 Jesus affirms that loving him absolutely and following him radically are expected norms for worthy and honourable believers called to live faithfully in accord with the kingdom’s claims and with Jesus’ teachings, deeds, and example.

#### F. Matthew 22:8

Then he said to his servants, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy [οὐκ ἦσαν ἄξιοι].”

The saying in 22:8 is part of the Parable of the Marriage Feast, which has triple attestation: Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24; *Gos. Thom.* 64.<sup>41</sup> Matthew 22:1–10 likely constituted the earliest parable; the Wedding Garment story (22:11–13) was presumably secondary, along with the later aphorism in 22:14. The clause about “not being ἄξιος” in 22:8 is probably redactional.

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41. In treating 22:1–14, I consulted Filson, *Matthew*, 232–34; J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970), 126–55; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2d rev. ed.; reprint, New York: Scribner, 1972), 63–70, 176–90; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 70–73; Plummer, *Matthew*, 300–303; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:205–6; 2:624–32; Neyrey, *Honor*; Keener, *Matthew*, 517–23; Carter, *Matthew*, 432–37; Barclay, *Matthew*, 2:313–16.

The story begins in 22:2 by comparing the kingdom to a king who has a marriage feast for his son, at which time a king may exhibit signs of honour. Analogies between the eschatological kingdom and wedding banquets are common in the NT: e.g., Matt 9:15; 25:1–13; Mark 2:19–20; Luke 5:34–35; 14:7–14; John 2:1–11; Rev 19:7–9. Though there is no unanimity about allegorizing the parable, many scholars do so: the “king” could symbolize God, and the “son” Jesus (cf. Matt 21:33–46). The first servants sent (22:3) could allude to OT prophets. In 22:3a, the servants summon the “invited,” possibly signifying the Jewish leaders and/or the entire Jewish people. But these invitees do not come (v. 3b; also vv. 5–6). Their repeated disinclinations recall the Israelites’ obstinate rejections of God’s OT calls; in 22:4 the king dispatches a second set of servants—who for Matthew could symbolize John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus’ envoys—all of whom are shamed and killed in 22:6 (cf. Matt 10:16–31; 14:3–12 par.; 21:33–36 par.; 26:47–27:50 par.; Josephus *A.J.* 9.265).<sup>42</sup> These servants proclaim that the feast is prepared (22:4), a sign of the end time’s imminence (cf., e.g., Matt 3:1–2; 10:7; 12:28; 25:1–13).<sup>43</sup> A note of preparedness reechoes in v. 8: “The wedding is ready, . . . .” Given the comparison of the kingdom–feast and the credible allegorizing of the king’s son (v. 2) with Jesus, the banquet’s readiness in v. 8—in Matthew—can indicate that by Jesus’ earthly ministry and death the kingdom drew near (cf. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7, 23; 12:28) and is ready to receive those ἄξιός of it. The misfortune in v. 8 is that the original invitees “were not worthy” (οὐκ ἦσαν ἄξιοι). So in v. 9 the king charges his servants to comb the highways and hospitably beckon everyone they meet. They went “and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests” (v. 10). This situation symbolizes the final, inclusive influx into the kingdom: even outsiders (perhaps unbelievers and/or

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42. Jeremias, *Parables*, 67–69; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:630; Buchanan, *Matthew*, 2:848–52; Barclay, *Matthew*, 2:310–11.

43. Jeremias, *Parables*, 64; Viviano, “Matthew,” 665; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:630.

the hapless in Palestine; cf. Rom 11:7–32) are encompassed.<sup>44</sup> This scenario envisions an ethos that contrasts with norms about honour and shame whereby social unequals probably would not share meals with each other; such practices spurred divisiveness even among Christians (e.g., Matt 11:19; 1 Cor 11:17–22). Partaking meals with social inferiors posed particular problems for members higher on the social ladder whose kinship groups could disavow them for such dishonourable behaviour, especially where social boundaries were narrow and unyielding.<sup>45</sup>

Accents on repentance (3:2, 8), righteousness (5:20), and worthiness relative to the kingdom appear in 22:11–13 in the story of the Wedding Garment, which can signify repentance and its attendant "worthy fruit/deeds" (καρπός). Numerous scholars hold that keys to understanding the symbol of the Wedding Garment lie in various OT and NT texts. Given the likelihood that Matthew was a Jewish-Christian, the evangelist indubitably drew on Jewish Scriptures. One focal text is Isa 61:10 in which God attires the beloved with "the garments of salvation" and "the robe of righteousness," as at a wedding. *1 Enoch* 62:3, 13–16 state that on the judgment day, the "righteous and elect ones shall be saved" and shall wear "the garments of glory" and "the garments of life from the Lord." The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–24) combines repentance of the younger son (vv. 18–19, 21, 24), a festal robe (v. 22), and ἄξιος (vv. 19, 21). Revelation 3:4, 5, 18 describe faithful, honourable (v. 18) Christians with unsoiled garments who will walk with the Lord "in white, for they are worthy [ἄξιοί]" (v. 4). Revelation 19:8 declares that the Lamb's Bride is "clothed with fine linen" which is "the righteous deeds of the saints." The OT ties fasting with repentance (e.g., 1 Sam 7:6–11; Neh 9:1–3; Joel 1:13–14; Jonah 3:5–9) while Matt 9:14–17 associate notions of fasting/repentance, a wedding feast, and unshrunk (new) cloth that belongs on a new garment (par. Mark 2:18–22; Luke 5:33–39). The OT relates fasting/repentance and righteousness (e.g.,

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44. Gundry, *Matthew*, 438; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1056–57; Carter, *Matthew*, 436–37.

45. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Commentary*, 135.

Isa 58:2–9).<sup>46</sup> Matthew’s linking the kingdom and righteousness is paramount: “But seek first his [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness . . . .” (6:33).

Matthew 22:14, however, indicates that not all invited to the feast–kingdom gain access (cf. 3:10; 7:13–14; 13:1–30, 36–43; 19:24; 25:31–46), for “many are called, but few are chosen [ἐκλεκτοί].” Forms of ἐκλεκτοί (chosen, elect) occur four times in Matthew: at 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31. In 24:22, 24, 31, “chosen” could mean steadfast Christians, Jew and gentile. The same sense applies in 22:14 where ἐκλεκτοί could connote ἄξιος Christians who are responsive and faithful to Jesus and his ministry, as in 10:11–13.<sup>47</sup> Those failing to repent and gain proper righteousness are banished (22:13), as in 10:11–15 where those not worthy/dishonourable are condemned.

We can now further analyze ἄξιος in Matt 22:1–14. By ignoring the king’s hospitality—and by seizing, mistreating, and killing his servants—the unrepentant invitees dishonour the king (and his son) in whom the son’s and servants’ honour embeds. Such transgressions—i.e., “bad fruits”—render the invitees “not worthy” (22:8) and dishonourable by violating social expectations regarding royal invitations and patron–client norms. Richard Bauckham argues that because the presence of the initial invitees at the king’s feast for his son would manifest the invitees’ honour toward the king and fealty to the royal heir, the operative issue is political duty. No invitee could be exonerated for dismissing the invitations, and any dismissal would

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46. Many of this paragraph’s data up to this note are adapted from Jeremias, *Parables*, 187–90; cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:631; Senior, *Matthew*, 155; Carter, *Matthew*, 436.

47. BAGD, ἐκλεκτός (242); Gundry, *Matthew*, 440–42; Viviano, “Matthew,” 665; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:632, 703; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 196–97.

be equivalent to a revolt—an action unavoidably rendering the invitees unworthy—dishonourable.<sup>48</sup>

Verses 1–10 imply that being worthy would mean honouring the king’s hospitality by attending the feast and not maltreating his servants; declining the banquet and abusing the servants make the original invitees unworthy—dishonourable (vv. 3–8). Attributions of worthiness—unworthiness are not so straightforward, however, since the scenario in vv. 11–14 complicates the matter; this scenario does not fit the *parable’s literary unit of vv. 1–10* since the person who comes to the feast, without having assailed the servants, but who lacks a wedding garb is hurled “into the outer darkness” where people “will weep and gnash their teeth” (v. 13). This language expresses exclusion from the kingdom and ruin for the unrighteous who fail to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” (3:8; cf. 5:20)—e.g., metaphorically unbelievers, Jew and/or gentile (cf. Matt 8:12; 13:41–42, 49–50; 24:50–51; 25:30). Since v. 2 links kingdom and feast, being unworthy of the feast means being unfit for the kingdom (cf. 3:10; 10:13c–15, 39). Verses 12–13 infer that the guest without suitable attire is *not* ἄξιός. Though this invitee attends the feast, this guest is unworthy and dishonourable by failing to don a proper garment—allegorically to repent and produce good fruit/deeds.<sup>49</sup> Verse 14 reinforces this idea: “For many are called, but few are chosen [ἐκλεκτοί]” iterates that not all who accept the invitations are worthy. Symbolically, worthiness applies only to ἐκλεκτοί—righteous (5:20) Christians, Jew and gentile—who meet social expectations (honour) by responding to God, Jesus, and their envoys (as in Matthew 10) so to enter the kingdom.

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48. Bauckham, “The Parable of the Royal Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14) and the Parable of the Lame Man and the Blind Man (*Apocryphon of Ezekiel*),” *JBL* 115 (1996): 483–84; also Malina, *New Testament*, 46; Derrett, *Law*, 140, 154; Keener, *Matthew*, 517–23; Carter, *Matthew*, 432–37.

49. The idea of dishonour/shame here is from Neyrey, *Honor*, 31.

#### IV. Conclusions

Here the essay proposes answers to the innovative questions posed at the outset. The first set asks about ἄξιος in Greco-Roman and biblical literature that may have helped shape Matthew’s concept world. Among its nine usages in Matthew, ἄξιος is predicated once of a nonhuman item (“fruit” in 3:8) and eight times of persons: a worker in 10:10; a host/household members in 10:11, 13 (twice); persons relative to Jesus in 10:37–38 (three times); and invitees in 22:8. In both groups of literature, ἄξιος applies to such traits, circumstances, or beings as: respect, honour, confidence, guilt, punishment, death, humans, and/or God. The second and third questions at the beginning of this essay ask about (2) the denotations of ἄξιος in Matthew, the traits and/or behaviours that make subjects ἄξιος or not, and the objects of ἄξιος; and (3) whether ἄξιος in one text helps illumine its denotation(s) in others. As we saw, occurrences of ἄξιος in 3:8; 10:11, 13, 37–39; and 22:8 cohere theologically, to a considerable degree. These data offer support that the eminence Matthew attributes to ἄξιος exhibits itself by the trenchant predications about worthiness, or its lack.<sup>50</sup> The relation between the uses of ἄξιος can be summarized thus:

- 3:8                    “bear **fruit worthy** of, befitting, meet for, in keeping with, as evidence of **repentance**” + “**Repent**, for the **kingdom** of heaven is at hand” (3:2; 4:17)
- ⇕
- (10:7                “**The kingdom** of heaven is at hand”)
- ⇕
- 10:10                “**worthy**”—based on an economic honour principle that a worker/**emissary** warrants expected sustenance deriving from the person’s labours
- ⇕

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- 10:11, 13      “**worthy**” by performing deeds of (a) hospitably accepting Jesus’ apostles/**emissaries**, their **kingdom** preaching, and other ministries; and (b) **following Jesus faithfully**, or being willing to—paralleling “bearing **fruit worthy of repentance**”  
⇕
- 10:37–39      “**worthy**” of Jesus by deeds of loving him supremely and “taking one’s cross” to **follow Jesus faithfully**—reflecting “bearing **worthy fruit**”  
⇕
- 22:8            being “**worthy**” by deeds of (a) responding **faithfully** to God, Jesus, and their **emissaries** and (b) “bearing good **fruit**” befitting **repentance** so as to be chosen for the **kingdom**

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