



ATTHEW

PART THREE, BOOK ONE
THE SOWER AND THE SEED





WELCOME TO MATTHEW

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

MALACHI 4:4-5



The above verse is the last portion of scripture found in the Old Testament. It is a closing of an era, but also a looking to the future. What is fascinating is that in one turn of the page, a reader goes from Malachi in the Old Testament to the first page of the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. What is hidden to many readers is the massive gulf between the page turn—between Matthew and Malachi. In that one turn of the page 400 years transpire.

For 400 years the people of God lived in this silence. In this time, there was much violence and war. Invaders from far off lands, evil tyrants, rulers who have no right to rule, exercised their power. Although at times it seemed as if hope was lost, the faithful clung to promises of old, promises that one day a good King would come to rule over his people. This King would exercise wisdom and implement the will of God. This King would be more than a King... he would be a Messiah.

Matthew tells his story in this context. When hope seems all but lost, when dictators rule, and when the promises of God seem like a long forgotten hope, Matthew introduces us to a man named Jesus of Nazareth. This is his story.





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LESSONS ON PERSECUTION

MATTHEW 10:16-42

¹⁶ "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ "A disciple is not above

his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. ²⁶ "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I





also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. ³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰ "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

INTRODUCTION

No one wants to hear that trouble is coming. The disciples have just been commissioned to do great and exciting work—healing, casting out demons—they were to do what Jesus had been doing. But Jesus' message was not done yet. The One who is all-knowing continues his teaching and he predicts betrayal, physical punishment, and trials for his disciples. He even says they "will be hated by all for my name's sake" and that members of a family will offer each other up to death. At the same time, his disciples are not to be anxious, but to be faithful in their witness before all.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Describe a time when someone berated you or spoke poorly of you. What emotions did you experience? Whether your accusers were right or wrong, how did you respond?
- 2 How consistent is this section to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)? Give specific examples if you can.
- 3 Jesus states that the predicted trouble is specifically “because of me” (vv. 18, 22). Have you ever been disliked or humiliated “because of Jesus”? Explain. If not, what would you suggest as the reason that you have been safe from such challenges?
- 4 Do you see the world as hostile toward your faith? Why/why not? How does your answer here relate to your answer in the previous question?
- 5 Read Matthew 6:25-34. What had Jesus taught previously about not being anxious? Compare and contrast with the current text.
- 6 Have you ever prayed before going into a situation or conversation? What made prayer so important? How did it turn out?
- 7 Read Matthew 10:34-39. What is your initial reaction to this text? Considering the context, what do you think Jesus is primarily communicating?





- 8 Throughout Matthew 10:16-42 we see the general message “fear this, not that.” Where should our fear be pointed and where should it not be pointed? Point out specific reasons mentioned throughout the text.
- 9 If you tend to avoid conflict and please people, what does this text communicate to you?
- 10 Matthew uses the word “cross” here which would have brought to mind images of physical suffering, public disgrace and death. What are some simple ways you might describe “taking up your cross” in our day?

GOSPEL MOTIVATION

In Matthew 10:24-25 one can get a sense of purpose, to be “like the master.” But do we really want to do that? While the text in this session is specifically to the disciples, what are we to take from them? Are we interested in persecution for his name? Do we understand that Jesus’ authority over our lives may mean families are split? Or would we prefer the comfort of silence and keeping the status quo? Jesus’ point is that we should receive no better treatment than he has received, but often our lives in this age are not very comparable. Each of us should ask “why?” Some might be because of cultural differences, but some has to do with our trust in God’s faithfulness. Pray this week about ways you may have chosen an “easier” route rather than taking the way of your King.



THE BAPTIST QUESTIONS

MATTHEW 11:1-19

¹ When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. ² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." ⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, " 'Behold, I send my

messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁶ "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ " 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."





INTRODUCTION

Another teaching complete and a question comes from the one who prepared the way for Jesus. Simultaneously we hear from Jesus that John has been both essential to the Kingdom, but somehow of a different kind—he was the last of an era and a new era has come.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Are you typically a skeptical person? Explain.
- 2 Compare Matthew 11:5 with Isaiah 35:4-6 and Isaiah 61:1-2. What is missing in the Matthew text?
- 3 Read Malachi 3:1-5. If John is the “preparer of the way” describe who and what is coming? What kind of day is being described?
- 4 John’s disciples asked Jesus a question in Matthew 9:14 and a new question (from John himself) here. Compare the questions. What do they have in common? What is your sense of the reason behind the questions?

- 5 Read Psalm 2. This Psalm points to a Messiah figure and the work he will bring. After reading Matthew 11:1-6, what might be the cause of John's question? What might he be looking for that is not on display?
- 6 Read Matthew 2:4. This was the last time the term "Christ" was used. Christ means "anointed one" and it is synonymous to "messiah" from the Old Testament. What is different about this use in Matthew? Why would he use this term now? How does it fit with the question and answer of today's text?
- 7 Matthew 11:8-11 may seem a bit cryptic. What do you think Jesus is saying about John? Is Jesus' view of John the Baptist positive? Explain.
- 8 Why do you think there are so few people who are responding to John and Jesus in a positive way?
- 9 What are ways that you may not be responding appropriately to Jesus' "coming"? What would be an appropriate response?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This statement calls back to many of the major prophets in the Old Testament. God called them saying "Go tell Israel, but they are not going to listen." And here we see the same. Jesus shows that whether "eating and drinking" or "not eating and drinking" some simply are never satisfied. Nothing will change their way of thinking or break through the old paradigm. Are you like this at all? Are there parts of our faith that you constantly "rationalize" as not applicable to you or otherwise unimportant? Find one of these areas this week, commit it to prayer, and talk to someone about discipline to break the pattern.



JUDGMENT & REST

MATTHEW 11:20-30

²⁰ Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you." ²⁵ At

that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."





INTRODUCTION

Words of judgment to some, then a prayer of thanksgiving, and then an offer of rest to others. It would seem that repentance is pretty important, but many resist it. The Son has received from the Father, and he offers a “lighter yoke” to those that would follow.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Go back and read Genesis 19:1-29. Who lived in the cities that Jesus points out in Matthew 11:21-23? Why is the comparison of the cities around Galilee to Sodom so heavy?
- 2 Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and compare to Matthew 11:23. To whom is the Isaiah text referring?
- 3 Why is repentance so difficult?

- 4 Describe a significant moment of repentance in your life. What made it so significant? If you haven't had such a moment, why do you think that is the case?
- 5 Matthew 11:25 speaks about "wisdom." Last session "wisdom" was also referenced at the end of Matthew 11:16-19. How might they be related?
- 6 How might you rationalize the "Father's gracious will" along with things being "hidden from the wise and understanding"?
- 7 How do you feel about God's judgment, whether good or bad? What has lead you to this understanding?
- 8 Matthew 11:28-30 are verses that many Christians have leaned on for years. How do you think these fit with the previous verses on judgment? What is the "rest" he is offering in the context? What is the "burden" of which he speaks and why is it light?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30 can at times be hard to receive. We have already gone through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 where Jesus has revealed a side of the Law deeper than previously understood. How can his yoke be easier? How is he offering rest for wearied souls? While we have not arrived at his death, suffering, and resurrection, Jesus' implicit answer can be seen in his treatment of the weary and suffering. He heals. He restores. He welcomes the unwelcome. This includes you and me. Who needs to hear this in your life? Who is suffering and needs rest? Maybe a prayer, or maybe even an invitation to look to the cross is the next order of business. Don't hesitate to offer your King's grace and mercy this week no matter how much it costs.



ORD OF THE SABBATH

MATTHEW 12:1-21

¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." ³ He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." ⁹ He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse

him. ¹¹ He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. ¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope."





INTRODUCTION

The Sabbath is one of the most important observances in Judaism. Being one of the Ten Commandments, it generated a vast amount of extrabiblical oral law, for example, limiting the amount of steps one could take without breaking it. Much like his previous teaching on the Law, here Jesus reminds his hearers about the Sabbath and its intention.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Read Exodus 20:8-11. What makes the commandment about the Sabbath different than the previous four commandments? What is the Sabbath and how is it different than our Sunday worship?
- 2 Read 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Why would Jesus use this example to support his disciple's plucking grain? What about the example of the priesthood? How did they break Sabbath?
- 3 Is Jesus saying that they did break the Law? What is Jesus greater point? Discuss.

- 4 Read Hosea 6:6 which is likely where Jesus is quoting in Matthew 12:7. Also read Micah 6:6-8, and compare what these passages are telling us about God's desire for his people. Are these verses saying it is bad to sacrifice or something different? Discuss.
- 5 We have talked about the temple previously. Discuss the purposes of the temple. What is the effect of Jesus stating that "something greater than the temple is here"?
- 6 How do you handle telling the truth when you know it will cause anger in others? How is what Jesus does in Matthew 12:6-8 different than a lot of the polarizing discussions on social media?
- 7 How is the healing here different than healings that took place earlier in Matthew?
- 8 Read Isaiah 42:1-4. Who was Isaiah speaking of and why would Matthew choose this passage as a prophecy that Jesus fulfills?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

What do you really think about the Sabbath? How do you view rest? How do you take rest within your weekly rhythm? Ultimately, our rest is in the person and work of Jesus, but too often in our busy culture we either fail to take rest and rejuvenate in our King, or we find rest in lesser things that exclude him altogether. Take this week to plan for a rhythm of rest. It is a rhythm because it is meant to happen again and again, like a divine drum beat keeping us in tune with our Lord. Plan for it.



BLASPHEMY

MATTHEW 12:22–37

²² Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰ Whoever is not with me

is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. ³³ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”





INTRODUCTION

Jesus is accused of using “demon-power,” not just any, but even the authority of the prince of demons himself. It is clear that Jesus’ power is effective, but is it good? That is how the Pharisees question the wonders that they have seen and heard. Jesus’ humility in the face of such dark accusations is mesmerizing and his logic should make us pause and think.

DISCUSSION

- 1 When you witness or hear about something unbelievable, how do you typically respond? Why do you think you respond this way?
- 2 “Son of David” was used a few times before in Matthew. Read 1 Chronicles 17:11-14 to remember the significance. The last time it was used in reference to Jesus was in Matthew 9:27. How is the story there similar to the story here? Why do you think the name is used?
- 3 An accusation has been made. How have the Pharisees defended their accusation? How do you handle accusations? Do you consider them or typically reject them as false? Explain.
- 4 Do you recall an example from the past, personal or otherwise, where the words “a kingdom divided” proved that it could not stand?

- 5 Map out the logic that Jesus is using in Matthew 12:25-32. With Satan as the strong man, discuss what Jesus is trying to communicate.
- 6 Have you ever been frightened by Matthew 12:31-32? How have you thought you blasphemed the Holy Spirit? Explain your fear and what you think the verse means in the context.
- 7 Matthew 12:30 is another challenging statement. How would you say someone shows they are with Jesus? How does it look different from what you know of the scribes and Pharisees?
- 8 Read James 3:3-12. How do James' words compare to Jesus' words in Matthew 12:32-37?
- 9 Have you ever been susceptible to speaking "careless words"? Explain. What is usually the cause or underlying motivation?
- 10 Imagine an invisible tape recorder recording everything you ever said (maybe even the things that you thought). Now imagine listening to it. If God used this tape recorder as the only witness to your life, would you be "justified by your words"? Explain.





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

There are some scary statements by Jesus in this session's text. Speaking against the Holy Spirit, and careless words bring judgment. It should lead us to ask big questions like "do my words reflect a heart of being with Jesus or do they reflect something different?" We all think and say things that may prove hypocritical or even unjust. While we may not fail to recognize the Spirit's work and we may not call him Satan, what are ways that we can minimize the role of the Spirit in our salvation including our ongoing life as a Christian (our sanctification)? Thankfully, Jesus' salvation is deep and wide enough to save us from our own words and thoughts. Your worry about honoring him is proof that you recognize the goodness of God and his Spirit's work. It is worthwhile to take note of our careless words and thoughts so we can pray for change in our hearts.



IGNS & DEMONS

MATTHEW 12:38-45

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the

South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. ⁴³ "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."





INTRODUCTION

It's almost unbelievable. The scribes and Pharisees have accused Jesus of being a pawn of demons and now they ask for a sign. Why would they believe that any new sign would reveal something other than Satan's dark arts? Sounds like a setup. Jesus responds to this "evil and adulterous generation" with candid words. If you are not familiar with it, it will help to take 10-15 minutes to read the Book of Jonah together as a group.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Do you sometimes find that your relationship with God is transactional? Ex. "God, if I can just get this next work assignment done on time, I will read my Bible every day."
- 2 What does Matthew 12:40 foreshadow? What happened to Jonah after his three days and three nights? How might the sign of Jonah and what Jesus has been doing have in common?
- 3 Read Jonah 3:1-10. Who were the people of Nineveh that are referenced by Jesus? Where were they from and what did they do?

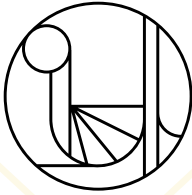
- 4 How is Jesus like Jonah? How are the scribes and Pharisees like Jonah? Was Jonah a hero? Discuss.
- 5 In Matthew 12:42, Jesus refers to an interaction between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon in 1 Kings 10:1-10. What was the purpose of the Queen's trip? How is Jesus using the story?
- 6 How are the stories of a prophet traveling to Nineveh and the member of royalty traveling to Solomon helpful in Matthew's text for this session?
- 7 Compare the unclean spirits of this section with Jesus' words about the Holy Spirit in the last section. What did the Pharisees claim about who is animating Jesus' work and what is Jesus saying about this evil generation?
- 8 The number seven is used in scripture a lot. It generally means "complete" or "full." In Matthew 12:43-45, what is Jesus saying about exorcism (and maybe any other kind of healing)? What is missing? What is the ultimate result?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The scribes and Pharisees are the deaf and blind ones and they have no idea of their own afflictions. Reading between the lines of Matthew 12:38-45, it is clear that a collision course has been set. They represent all who deny the miraculous that they have seen and thus deny the goodness of their own God. A royal prophet is in their midst and they think he is demon-powered. Do you realize this is the same as those who do not know Jesus all around us? We have been granted the ability to see his goodness. Who can you pray for this week that needs the gospel to open their eyes and ears to the goodness of our King?



UNDERSTANDING FAMILY

MATTHEW 12:46–50

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”





INTRODUCTION

The word “father” has taken on new meaning in Matthew’s gospel. God was to be seen as Father. Disciples have been referred to as children. These familial terms are everywhere and this session’s text redefines earthly family as well.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Being gracious, describe one of your more unusual relatives (it might be you!). What makes them unusual? How does the family work with them?
- 2 What makes family “family”? Discuss the characteristics.
- 3 Have you ever had a family friend or other acquaintance of whom you said “they are like family”? How did they receive that honor?
- 4 Read Genesis 37:12-34. How does this small snapshot of a biblical family compare to your own?

- 5 Read Matthew 10:22, 34-39 and compare to this session's text. How do they go together? Are they at odds in any way? Why/why not?
- 6 Compare reactions to Jesus within Mark 3:20-22. What are the reasons that you might not support a family member?
- 7 Have you ever experienced or witnessed a family member being shunned or kicked out in some way? Was it justified? Why/why not?
- 8 Read 1 Timothy 3:14-15. The Apostle Paul equates the "household of God" with the "church of the living God." What are the obvious implications of the church being a household?
- 9 Do you treat others within your church body as a member of your family? Why/why not? What might make it easier?
- 10 Have you ever heard (or said), "I was hurt by the church"? What does it usually mean? Why do you suppose that this sentiment is common? What should our expectation of the church be?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Human families are imperfect in one way or another. While the church is made up of millions of human families that build into one church family, it is no wonder that every local church is imperfect, even dysfunctional in some way. Together and through the ages, we are the bride of Christ. While we are to be obedient in loving God and each other, we do not make ourselves beautiful. Jesus does. His gracious arms surround his sometimes stained and decrepit bride because he loves us. He saves us. He is the One who redeems, restores, and beautifies. We should give thanks collectively in prayer and worship this week.



FEEDING STORY

MATTHEW 13:1–23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but

to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: " ' You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' " ¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' " ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. ¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower:





¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

INTRODUCTION

The seed of the kingdom is further planted in Jesus’ parables. These varied length narratives take on images from daily life and ask the hearers to step into a story, imagining where they belong, or who they are like, or simply what decisions need to be considered. No matter the distance from our own culture, we are invited to step into the stories as well.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Who was the best storyteller in your life? Did they tell stories to help you understand something or just for entertainment? Give an example.
- 2 Read Hosea 1:1-9, 2:21-3:1 and Isaiah 32:9-16. Agricultural metaphors are common in scripture because agriculture was everything. How might such images help to drive a point home? What is the very first agricultural imagery in the Bible? How might every other agricultural image be affected by this first image?
- 3 After reading Matthew 13:3-9, what do you think is most important in the parable? The sower? The seed? The soil (where the seed landed)? The produce? Some combination? What brings you to your conclusion?
- 4 Read Isaiah 6. What is the context of this reference to which Jesus points? What is the prophecy fulfilled in Matthew 13:14? How is Jesus' situation similar and different?
- 5 Seeing and hearing are highlighted, and it is clear that some are intended not to understand. How do you feel about this? Do those that seem not to understand want to understand? Discuss.
- 6 Which of the challenges that Jesus describes in Matthew 13:18-23 is most prevalent in our culture? What are the reasons for your position? Discuss.
- 7 Jesus has given the explanation of this parable, but what would you say is the purpose of the parable? Who sows, who grows, who bears, and who reaps?
- 8 In what ways can this parable be used in day-to-day life or can it?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

How often do we read a parable and wish we had the exact meaning? Even though we have Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower, we know it is deeper than that. Hearing Jesus' words and understanding them are not always perfectly aligned. The disciples have been given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven and we have heard the secret get out. The Tomb is empty. The King is enthroned and returning to make things exactly how they should be. Knowing these facts should make our examination of the scriptures invigorating to our faith even when we don't fully comprehend. Maybe you are someone who has trouble reading or comprehending. Know this: The gospel reveals that your King has saved you and wants you to bear witness to him in whatever ways you can. Find a way to yield fruit this week, no matter how small.



FEEDING STORY

MATTHEW 13:24–43

²⁴ He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ ²⁸ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ”

³¹ He put another parable before them,

saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” ³³ He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” ³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” ³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” ³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The





field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

INTRODUCTION

There are good seeds, bad seeds, tiny seeds, and a little bit of leaven. These parables are intended to reveal a reality to those that can understand them, but little to those who don't care. Here we see that even the future can be understood from a parable.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Where are places you might find good and bad together? For example, a basket of apples or more complicated, a business. In your example, how does one determine good or bad?
- 2 There are several “kingdom of heaven is like” statements in Matthew 13. Find them all (some are later in chapter 13), and place each object of likeness on a list. Looking at the entire list and the key characteristic of each object from each parable, how would you define the kingdom?
- 3 Does the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 indicate how to recognize the difference between the product of good seed and bad seed? If not, what is more important?
- 4 How often are you caught up in “size” being important? (For example, a mother getting worried because her baby is smaller than average or a man always picking the biggest ribeye steak). What does Jesus say about size and his kingdom in Matthew 13:31-32? Why might this message be important to his audience at that time?
- 5 Read Psalm 78:1-8. How is the Psalm related to Jesus’ words in Matthew 13:34-35? What seems to be the intention of the “parable” to the psalmist?
- 6 Compare Matthew 13:42 and Daniel 3:8-25. Compare and contrast the use of “fiery furnace.” Who controls the furnace? What is the furnace intended for?
- 7 Compare Matthew 13:40-43 to Daniel 12:1-4. What are some common images and themes?
- 8 The parable of the weeds gives insight into “last things” or what is called eschatology. Are you generally interested or uninterested when the Bible talks about what happens in the end? Why?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The parables in this session show both God's justice and his grace. Even though evil exists, he patiently waits for harvest to ensure that evil will not be victorious. Cosmic treachery will not harm the ultimate reality he offers those in the kingdom. He also will remove evil and the imagery is that of destruction. We all deserve destruction, but the Storyteller of these parables offers us grace as the story unfolds. It costs him everything, and we stand as paupers, pockets empty. We are cleaned, while he is bloodied. We are healed, while he is crushed. Thank Jesus every day for this miracle and live out your faith in light of the good news.



STORYTELLER'S REJECTION

MATTHEW 13:44–58

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." ⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe

who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." ⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴ and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.





INTRODUCTION

Jesus' wisdom as he describes the kingdom of heaven is being veiled in parable throughout this chapter of Matthew, and this passage makes clearer what it means to be in the kingdom, and what it means to be out. This passage leads with excitement for the kingdom of heaven. Once found the kingdom is more valuable than anything you could possibly possess. But later as Jesus continues to describe the kingdom, his words should produce fear; 'throw away the bad', 'into the fiery furnace', 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever wanted something so bad that you gave up what you had to get it? What was it? Was it worth it?
- 2 How are the first three parables in this passage similar? How are they different?
- 3 How is the fourth parable different from the first three? Who do you think the scribe represents in this parable?

- 4 What are the new and old treasures? Who is responsible for bringing out the treasures?
- 5 The people in Jesus' hometown describe his family in Matthew 13:55-56. How is it different than the way he describes his own family in Matthew 12:46-50? How is his family being characterized in both?
- 6 "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." When Jesus returns to his home town he is greeted with disbelief and contempt. Why do you think that is?
- 7 Does Matthew 13:54-58 parallel at all to the kingdom parables at the beginning of this section? Why/Why not?
- 8 What verses come to mind when you think of the responsibility of sharing the gospel?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

As you wrap up this section of our Matthew series, if you are a Christ follower, be encouraged of the kingdom you are to inherit. Discuss as a group how you can be on mission declaring God's glory in your communities and helping others to see the kingdom. Are there ways that you are already doing this? Does the gospel message make its way into your conversations at home, work, school?



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