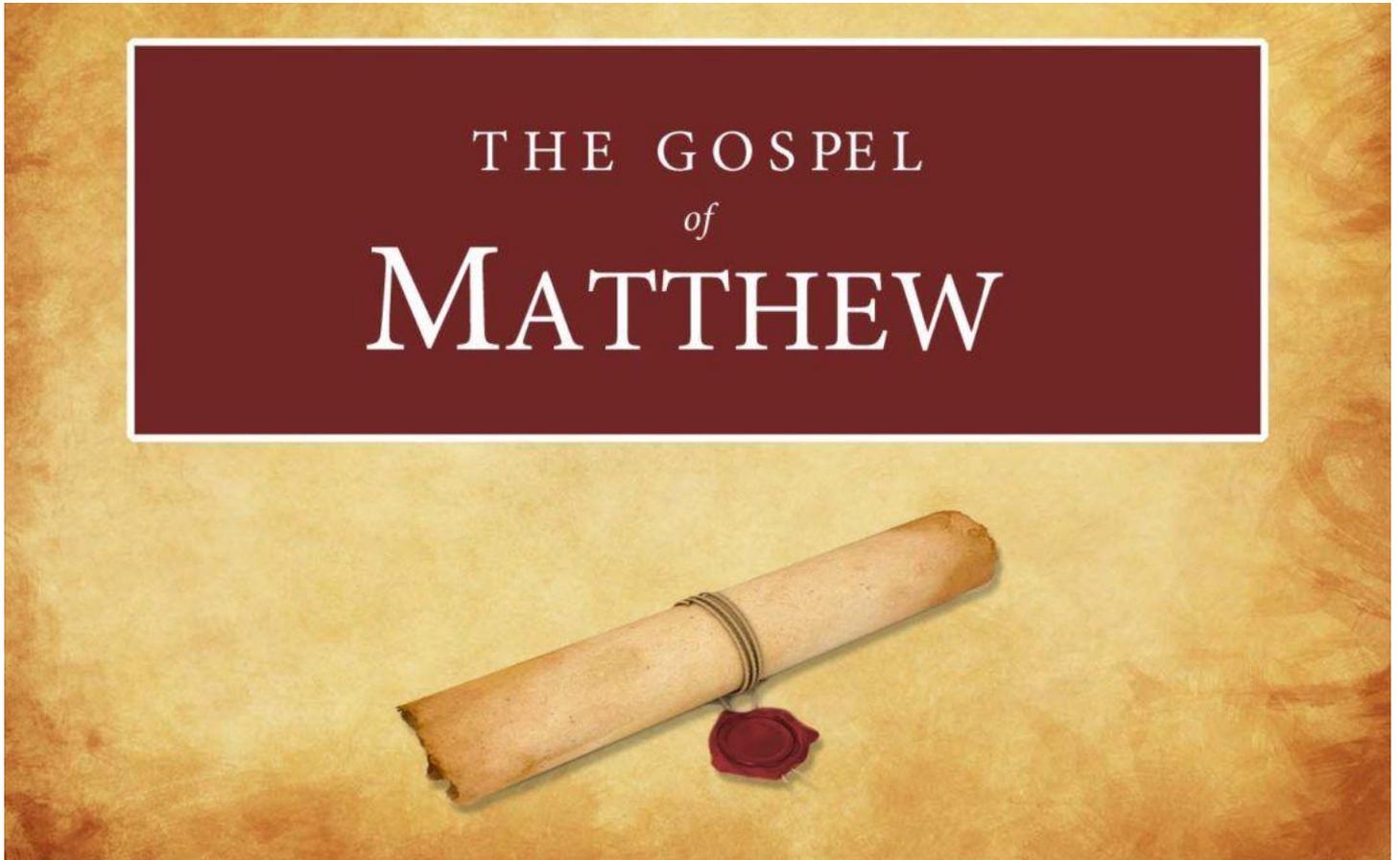


The Book of Matthew



2022 – Part 4
5 more studies in Matthew's Gospel

Brief Outline of Matthew's Gospel

- 1:1 – 4:16 Introducing Jesus
4:17 – 16:20 Public ministry in and around Galilee
16:21 – 18:35 Private ministry in Galilee; preparing the disciples
19:1 – 25:46 Ministry in Judea
26:1 – 28:20 The death and resurrection of Jesus

Please Note the following:

1. It is helpful, but not mandatory, to prepare your answers before meeting with your group.
2. It is not necessary to look up all the Bible cross references listed in a particular question; your Growth Group Leader will summarize these Bible cross references for you.
3. Just a reminder that sometimes in our Growth Groups, people feel comfortable sharing very personal and sensitive things about their lives. This information **MUST BE CONFIDENTIAL and NEVER LEAVE THE GROUP.**

Study 1 – Looking for a sign – Matthew 12:38-50

(Sermon on 24-April-22)

Before we begin: Ponder – what is the purpose of Jesus’ signs and miracles?

The purpose of Jesus’ miracles was as follows:

- a. *To prove His identity as the Messiah; the Son of God; the Creator, the Saviour.*
- b. *To show He had the full authority and power of God – over creation and over Satan and evil – and even over death itself.*
- c. *To fulfil prophecy and God’s promises*
- d. *To glorify God, the Father*
- e. *To supplement His teaching*
- f. *To show compassion on those who were sick, disabled or outcasts*
- g. *To assist people to believe.*

Read Matthew 12:38-40

1. What do the Pharisees and the teachers of the law ask Jesus for? What’s your initial reaction to this?

The Pharisees and teachers of the law ask Jesus for a sign.

Initial reaction: How many signs has Jesus already done? Aren’t they enough?

Initial reaction: They already asked Jesus for a sign in Matthew 8:11-12; and that was immediately after Jesus had fed 4000 people with 7 loaves (Matthew 8:1-10). Are they kidding?

2. What do you think their motivation is in asking this? (cf. Matthew 12:24)

They are most likely looking for another way to try to catch Jesus out or another way to reject Him– they have so far accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath by working on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14) and they have also attributed His powers as being from Satan (Matthew 12:22-37). So, they’re not fair dinkum!

3. How does Jesus condemn their question?

He says they are a wicked and adulterous generation. They are adulterous in that they are being unfaithful in rejecting and doubting God’s Son.

4. What is the sign of Jonah that Jesus is referring to? (cf. Jonah 1:1-17)

Jonah was called by God to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against their wickedness and call them to repentance. But Jonah has written off Nineveh as not being worthy of God’s grace and forgiveness; and so, Jonah runs away. He heads as far west from Joppa as he can, by ship and heads for Tarshish.

But you can’t hide from God or run away from God.

The voyage becomes treacherous and Jonah’s shipmates discover Jonah is running away from God; and Jonah tells them their best option is to sacrifice him – to save the ship – by throwing Him overboard. Here we have a hint of Jesus’ sacrifice – to save us.

But God is not done with Jonah – when he is thrown overboard. God provided a huge fish (not a whale) and Jonah spends three days and nights in the belly of this big fish.

The sign Jesus is referring to is that just like Jonah had 3 days and nights in the belly of the fish; Jesus Himself will spend 3 days and nights in the Earth, after His death – before He rises again; just like Jonah “rises again” – when he is vomited out of the big fish onto dry land (Jonah 2:10).

5. **Ponder:** Because Jesus refers to three days and three nights, some think Jesus had to spend 72 hours in the grave. How do we answer this objection?

*Some have suggested that a special Sabbath might have occurred, so that Jesus was actually crucified on a Thursday. However, a solution, which seems to me to be more convincing, is that Jesus was indeed crucified on a Friday but that the **Jewish method of counting days was not the same as ours.***

*In Esther 4:16, we find Esther exhorting Mordecai to persuade the Jews to fast. “Neither eat nor drink for **three days, night or day**” (NKJV). This was clearly in preparation for her highly risky attempt to see the king. Yet just two verses later, in Esther 5:1, we read: “Now it happened **on the third day** that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace.” If three days and nights were counted in the same way as we count them today, then Esther could not have seen the king until the fourth day. This is completely analogous to the situation with Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection.*

*In Matthew 12:40: “For 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”*

*Then in Matthew 28:1: “Now after the Sabbath, as the **first day of the week** began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb” (Matthew 28:1; NKJV).*

*And in Luke 24:5-7: “Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, **and the third day rise again**’”*

If the three days and nights were counted the way we count them, then Jesus would have to rise on the fourth day. But, by comparing these passages, we can see that in the minds of people in Bible times, “the third day” is equivalent to “after three days.”

In fact, the way they counted was this: part of a day would be counted as one day. The following table, reproduced from the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM) website, shows how the counting works.

Day One		Day Two		Day Three	
FRI starts at sundown on Thursday	FRI ends at sundown	SAT starts at sundown on Friday	SAT ends at sundown	SUN starts at sundown on Saturday	SUN ends at sundown
Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day
Crucifixion		Sabbath		Resurrection	

This table indicates that Jesus died on Good Friday; that was day one. In total, day one includes the day and the previous night, even though Jesus died in the day. So, although only part of Friday was left, that was the first day and night to be counted. Saturday was day two. Jesus rose in the morning of the Sunday. That was day three. Thus, by Jewish counting, we have three days and nights, yet Jesus rose on the third day.

It should not be a surprise to us that a different culture used a different method of counting days. As soon as we adopt this method of counting, all the supposed biblical problems with counting the days disappear.

Read Matthew 12:41-42

6. What two Old Testament events does Jesus mention?

Jesus mentions the people of Nineveh who repented when Jonah (finally) delivered God's message; and the Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the Earth to see listen to the wisdom of God's anointed King, Solomon.

7. What is Jesus' point?

Jesus' points are:

- a. He is a greater prophet than the prophet Jonah*
- b. He is wiser than Solomon and a greater King than Solomon*
- c. In fact, He is The Prophet, Priest and King!*
- d. "You are asking for a sign – I am God's sign. You have failed to recognize me. The Ninevites recognized (and listened to) God's warning in Jonah; the Queen of Sheba recognized (and listened to) God's wisdom in Solomon." (Barclay)*

And because they have not listened to Jesus – both the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba will be in the courtroom on Judgement Day – condemning the Pharisees and teachers of the law for not listening and rejecting Jesus!

Read Matthew 12:43-45

8. Jesus uses an analogy of impure spirits; what is His point to the Pharisees and teachers of the law?

He uses the analogy of impure spirits being driven out of a person; and later returning with seven more spirits more wicked and determined than ever. Thus, the situation was worse than

ever before. In the same way, rejecting and opposing Jesus would leave the Pharisees and teachers of the law much worse off than ever before. This wicked generation – exemplified by the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were rejecting Jesus – would find their last state much worse than their first. They thought Jesus wasn't messianic enough for their liking because He wasn't a political and military Messiah. Yet by AD70 – they state would be much worse!

Note: the evil spirit is only able to return because the house is empty. Jesus is referring to the fact that the Pharisees and teaches of the law will be empty of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Jesus by rejecting Him!

If we are filled with Jesus – being born again by the Spirit of God – then we cannot be empty and therefore inhabited by demons. “Though he shakes his chain at us, he cannot fasten his fangs in us.” (Trapp)

And the last state of that man is worse than the first: This presses the urgency of being filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There is something worse than being simply demon possessed; one can be possessed in a greater measure unto great misery. The answer to such misery is to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Read Matthew 12:46-50

9. Jesus identifies His true family; who are they?

Considering the general context of opposition to Jesus, it may well be that the family of Jesus wanted to appeal to Him to not be so controversial in His ministry.

“The members of his family had come to take him, because they thought him beside himself. No doubt the Pharisees had so represented his ministry to his relatives that they thought they had better restrain him.” (Spurgeon)

His family (Mum and brothers) don't have special privileges.

Jesus says His true family are those that do the will of His Father.

The will of the Father is found in John 6:40 – “For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

10. How might verse 50 relate to the earlier request for a sign?

Jesus' true family (the ones that do His Father's will) stand in stark contrast to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who ask for a sign, and do not believe in Him; they are wicked and adulterous generation.

11. **Ponder:** In the context of our church at St. David's – how might verse 50 apply?

Here at St. David's, we major on the term “Church Family” – the idea being as Jesus said – we are His brothers and sisters – His family – because we share in the common bond – of doing

the Father's will – which is looking to Jesus and believing in Him – so we get forgiveness and eternal life.

12. Ponder: Are signs and miracles necessary for us to believe? (cf. John 20:24-29)

Signs and miracles are not necessary. We don't necessarily need proof of who Jesus is. We have His Word and His Spirit – and we can simply have faith without ANY proof. Just simply believe God's Word is the absolute truth.

Thomas doubted Jesus had risen from the dead and would not accept it until He saw Jesus' face to face alive!

When Thomas finally saw Jesus – Thomas believed.

Jesus' reply says it all: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Matthew 12:38-50**?

Walk by faith not be sight.



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. Confess any doubts we have
- b. Don't write people off like Jonah did
- c. We can't hide or run from God
- d. Everyone has the opportunity to be part of Jesus' family
- e. We are the messengers not the judge
- f. Walk by faith and not by sight!

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Thanking Jesus that we are part of His family and asking God to help us to do the will of our Father. Ask God to help us walk by faith and not by sight.

Study 2 – The Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:1-23

(Sermon on 01-May-22)

See parallel passages in Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15

Before we begin: Ponder – what is a parable and what’s the purpose of a parable?

A simple definition: An earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So, a story is told about a topic that people can relate to (like a farming activity; sowing seeds) and the story has a meaning related to God and His Kingdom and His Son, Jesus.

Parable literally means “casting alongside”. So, when Jesus tells His parable, the story is “cast alongside” a truth about God and His Kingdom, in order to illustrate that truth.

The purpose of parables was to:

- a) Reveal the truth to those who wanted to sincerely know and conceal the truth from those who were indifferent or couldn’t care less or had their minds closed (like some of the Pharisees)*
- b) Make people think about what the story means – and how it might apply to them and who they might be like in the story/parable*
- c) People like stories – and tend to remember them more easily.*
- d) Parables often had one “main point” or “big idea” that people can take away.*

Read Matthew 13:1-3a

1. Why do you think Jesus taught from a boat?

Jesus sometimes used a boat as a “pulpit” (as in Mark 3:9) to give Him a place to speak away from the crowd pressing in on Him. It also provided good acoustics and nice backdrop! Also, Jesus was not always accepted in towns and synagogues.

2. What advantage is there in the people standing and Jesus sitting?

If people have to stand; then they will pay more attention.

As Charles Spurgeon puts it: “we should have less sleeping in congregations if this arrangement still prevailed”

Read Matthew 13:3b-9

3. Why would Jesus use a parable about farming?

Israel had many agricultural customs and so most people could relate to a farming story.

4. What locations (ground/soil) were sown?

- a. The path*
- b. Rocky places*
- c. Among thorns*
- d. Good soil*

5. What do you think Jesus meant in verse 9 by: “*whoever has ears, let him hear*”?
This was a call from Jesus for the people to “listen”. Not just “hear” but “listen” as someone who is really seeking the truth of God and wants to learn!

Read Matthew 13:10-17

6. What question do the disciples ask in verse 10?
The question they ask is “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

7. What does Jesus’ answer in verse 11 mean?
Jesus’ answer in verse 11 is: Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Jesus explained that He used parables so that the hearts of those rejecting would not be hardened further.

The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay; and so, the very same gospel message that humbles the honest heart and leads to repentance may also harden the heart of the dishonest listener and confirm that person in their path of disobedience.

*“The parable conceals truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see. It puts the responsibility fairly and squarely on the individual. It reveals truth to him who desires truth; it conceals truth from him who does not wish to see the truth.”
 (Barclay)*

“Thus, the parables spoke to the crowds do not simply convey information, nor mask it, but challenge the hearers.” (Carson)

8. What principle is at play in verse 12?
The idea is that those who are open and sensitive to spiritual truth more will be given through the parables. Yet to those who are not open – who do not have, these ones will end up in an even worse condition.

“Life is always a process of gaining more or losing more...For weakness, like strength, is an increasing thing.” (Barclay)

For example, if we use our muscles they increase in size and strength; if we do not use our muscles, they decrease in size and strength.

9. What is Jesus’ explanation in verse 13?
*“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand”.
 The parables of Jesus were not illustrations making difficult things clear to all. They presented God’s message so the spiritually sensitive could understand, but the hardened would merely hear a story without heaping up additional condemnation for rejecting God’s Word.*

Parables are an example of God's mercy towards the hardened. The parables were given in the context of the Jewish leaders' building rejection of Jesus and His work. In this sense they were examples of mercy given to the undeserving. There was still the possibility of them softening their hearts and taking in the message of the parable.

10. What prophecy is fulfilled here in verses 14 and 15? (cf. **Isaiah 6:8-10**)

By speaking in parables, Jesus also fulfilled prophecy.

Jesus spoke in a way that the hardened would hear but not (really) hear and see but not (really) see.

The phrase "For the people's heart has become calloused, literally means "fat" "A fat heart is a fearful plague...None can delight in God's law that are fat-hearted." (Trapp)

"They did not really see what they saw, nor hear what they heard. The plainer the teaching, the more they were puzzled by it." (Spurgeon)

11. What privileged position do the disciples have in verses 16 and 17?

The disciples are blessed (v16)

Those who do understand the parables of Jesus are genuinely blessed. Not only do they gain the benefit of the spiritual truth illustrated, but they also display some measure of responsiveness to the Holy Spirit.

Read Matthew 13:18-23

12. Here Jesus explains the meaning of the parable?

a. Who is the Sower?

The person who sows the seed (which is God's Word); therefore, the person who shares God's Word.

b. What is the seed?

The seed = God's Word

c. Who are the locations (ground/soils)?

The various locations (ground/soil) are the different kinds of hearts that receive God's word and the varied results show the different responses to the Word of God.

a. *The path – this soil/location represents those who never really hear the word with understanding. The Word of God must be understood before it can truly bear fruit. One of Satan's chief works is to keep men in darkness regarding their understanding of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). "Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word...He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind." (Spurgeon)*

b. *Rocky places - As seed falling on the thin soil on top of the rocky places quickly springs up and then quickly withers and dies (Matthew 13:5-6), so some respond to the word with immediate enthusiasm yet soon wither away. This soil represents those who receive the word enthusiastically, but their life is short-lived, because they are not willing to endure tribulation or persecution...because of the word.*

Spurgeon made a good point: "I want you clearly to understand that the fault did not lie in the suddenness of their supposed conversion. Many sudden conversions have been among the best that have ever happened." The problem was not their sudden growth, but their lack of depth.

"Tribulation is a general term for suffering which comes from outside; persecution is deliberately inflicted, and usually implies a religious motive. Falls away is literally 'is tripped up'; it is not a gradual loss of interest, but a collapse under pressure." (France)

c. *Among thorns - As seed falling among thorns grew, the stalks of grain were soon choked out (Matthew 13:7), so some people respond to the word and grow for a while, but are choked and stopped in their spiritual growth by competition from unspiritual things (i.e., the trappings and temptations of this world). This soil (among thorns) represents fertile ground for the word; but their soil is too fertile, because it also grows all sorts of other things that choke out the Word of God; namely, it is the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches that choke the word.*

d. *Good soil - Seed falling on good soil brings a good crop of grain (Matthew 13:8), so some respond rightly to the word and bear fruit. This soil represents those who receive the word, and it bears fruit in their soil – in differing proportions (some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty), though each has a generous harvest.*

d. Who are the birds?

The evil one (Satan) who snatches the Word from people before they can accept it.

e. What does the sun represent?

The sun represents trials, tribulations and persecution.

13.Ponder: Why compare God's Word to seeds? (cf. Hebrews 4:12)

Because God's Word is "alive and active" just like a seed growing in soil! And just like the seed must take root – so God's word must take root in people's heart. Just like a seed that grows produces a plant that bears fruit, so too God's word grows in people and produces spiritual fruit.

14.What great comfort is there in verses 8 and 23?

A crop of 100-fold; 60-fold or 30-fold is produced when God's Word is sown in "good soil"

15.Ponder: What word is emphasized over and over in this passage? Why?

The word “hear” is used 17 times in Matthew 13:1-23! Jesus wants the people who are listening to the parable to get the message of how important it is to hear His Word. The word literally means: to understand, perceive the sense of what is said.

16. What must accompany hearing in verses 19 and 23?

Understand. It literally means to “join together in your mind” what you’ve just heard. We might say today “joining the dots...”

17. **Ponder:** Are the parables designed to conceal truth or designed for something else?

Jesus is not here saying that parables are designed to conceal truth and thus keep people out of the Kingdom of Heaven, but that as a matter of fact not everyone has the ability to penetrate their meaning. The ability is GIVEN to the disciples, rather than being a result of human cleverness.

*The ability to penetrate the meaning of parables is given to those who have “open” rather than “closed” hearts/minds. The **key ingredient is a disposition towards God/Jesus**.*

Also, parables are designed to excite people’s interest and arouse their curiosity; and make people think about what they’ve heard – so that their response is a genuine one in which they bear fruit – fruit that lasts.

Just like sun can make a plant grow and kill a plant; so too trials and persecutions can both decrease and increase faith; and temptations of the world can both lead astray and strengthen the resolve not to be tempted.

18. Why did Jesus teach in parables? (cf. **Psalm 78:1-8 and Isaiah 6:8-10**)

- a. *To fulfil prophecy – Psalm 78:2-4 says He will “open His mouth with parables; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done”. Jesus’ parables are designed to reveal what was concealed or a mystery in the Old Testament. For example; the OT says a Messiah will come; but no-one in Jesus’ day fully understand that a Messiah would be crucified (even though it’s in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53).*
- b. *To fulfil prophecy – Isaiah 6:8-10 – just like it was in Isaiah’s day – so it is in Jesus’ day – many have hard hearts, spiritual blindness and deafness: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”. Jesus’ parables are also designed to make some reject Him. For example, in John 8:45, Jesus says: “Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!”. That’s an astonishing statement*

by Jesus – He’s told them the truth and that causes them to not believe. If they won’t believe the truth – what else is left?

See also John 10:26-27 - ²⁶but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

See also 1 Corinthians 2:14 - ¹⁴The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

What’s the **BIG IDEA** of **Matthew 13:1-23**?

We must really “hear” God’s word and take it into our hearts and produce fruit – fruit that lasts.



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?
3 out of 4 of the “soils” were unreceptive/unproductive



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. *Pray for wisdom in understanding God’s Word (the seed)*
- b. *The parable is a mirror: it shows people where they stand. It is held up to the faces of Jesus’ hearers.*
- c. *The response to God’s Word (the seed) depends not only on the message (the same seed is sown in each case) but also on the readiness of the hearers to receive it.*
- d. *3 out of 4 of the “soils” were unreceptive/unproductive*
- e. *However, the productive soil produces a great harvest – 100/60/30 times increase.*
- f. *All parables work the same way as the parable of the Sower; they are all met with varied response.*
- g. *Fruit is the test of true salvation (Matthew 7:16). This will include holiness (Romans 6:22); Christian character (Galatians 5:22-23); good works (Colossians 1:10); winning others for Christ (Romans 1:13); sharing what we have (Romans 15:25-28) and praising God (Hebrews 13:15)*
- h. *We cannot assume everyone listening on Sunday – is understanding and believing.*
- i. *Parables challenge people to make a decision. Jesus’ message is polarizing!*
- j. *Which soil are we?*
- k. *Are we sowing God’s Word?*

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His Word and asking God to help us as we **hear** His Word to take it into our hearts and minds.

– The Kingdom of God is like – Matthew 13:24-43 *(Sermon on 08-May-22)*

In the last study, in the parable in Matthew 13:1-23; Satan tried to snatch the Word from people's hearts (Matt 13:4, 19). But that's not Satan's only tactic as the next parables show...

Read Matthew 13:24-30

1. What problem did the man encounter when he sowed good seed in his field?

His enemy came whilst everyone was sleeping and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So, there was both wheat and weeds growing together.

2. The weeds mentioned in this parable are called tares in the King James Version. What are tares and what is the problem when they grow next to wheat?

Greek word for tares is zizania – it is rye grass (darnel) that resembles wheat, except grains are black. Some commentators say the darnel looks exactly like wheat until it grows taller – and that it is also poisonous (as some are in the church!)

The problem is – it's hard to tell which is the wheat and which is the tares.

3. Remember parables have another meaning related to God's Kingdom; so:

a. Who is the man?

The man is the Son of Man (Jesus) as stated later in verse 37.

b. Who/What is the field?

The field is the world as stated later in verse 38.

c. Who is the wheat?

The wheat represents the people of God's kingdom, believers; as stated later in verse 38.

d. Who are the weeds (tares)?

The weeds (tares) are the people that belong to the evil one (Satan) and the enemy who sowed the weeds (tares) is the devil.

4. What are we meant to do about the weeds (tares)?

The servants of the Sower wanted to pull up the weeds; but the Sower said no because while they are pulling up the weeds, they may pull up the wheat also! So, the servants were to wait for the harvest; the good wheat and the bad tares will be separated. The harvest represents the end of the age, when all people will be judged; and the harvesters will be God's angels, as stated later in verse 39.

Note: Jesus tells this parable about the weeds (tares) immediately after the parable of the Sower, as some might have a question in their mind as to what to do with the seed that grows

*in amongst weeds and thorns; should they pull up the weeds immediately? Jesus answers negatively in this parable of the weeds (tares) and says no, you need to wait!
Illustration: I have trouble telling the difference between onion weed, freesias and jonquils!*

5. What will God do about the weeds (tares)?

The weeds will be bundled up and burned; as stated in verse 30 and later in verse 40. The fire represents Hell, as stated in verses 40-42.

Read Matthew 13:31-32

6. What farming example does Jesus use this time?

The planting of a mustard seed in a field. The mustard seed is proverbially seen as something minute (we might say today “as tiny as an ant”). Despite the size of the mustard seed, the full-grown plant could be 3 metres. The fact that the mustard seed is said to grow into a tree rather than a large plant suggests an abnormal growth.

7. Jesus doesn't explain this parable, so we have to work it out from the context and from other passages.

a. What does the mustard seed represent?

The mustard seed represents God's word starting with small beginnings and flourish. God's kingdom may appear unimpressive to begin with; but appearances are deceptive; in time God's kingdom will grow, and no-one will be able to ignore it.

b. What does the large garden plant/tree represent? (cf. Daniel 4:10-12; **Ezekiel 17:22-24**; 31:3-9)

The large plant/tree represents a huge empire.

*The large garden plant/tree represents abundance – **Daniel 4:10-12** – says “food for all” – God's Kingdom is available for all! Also, there is “shelter” (refuge) in God's Kingdom; and safety “birds lived in the branches”; although “birds” could be outsiders? But the point of the story in Daniel is the tree represents King Nebuchadnezzar's growing empire and how he became arrogant; and eventually a messenger from God came and chopped down the tree. **Ezekiel 17** has the image of God taking a cutting from one of the highest trees of Israel and planting a low tree on the mountains of Israel that grows big and that produces an abundance of fruit – and every kind of bird nests in it. The birds representing Gentiles as well as Jews. Ezekiel 17 also suggests that God is in control of this growth – and He can bring down the high and exalt the low – as He does throughout the Bible.*

***Ezekiel 31** – confirms the idea that God is in control. God warns Egypt – “a big tree nation” like Assyria – that all “big tree nations” can be taken down and end up like logs!*

c. Who are the birds?

This is tricky. In the parable of the Sower; the birds were the ones who took away the seeds (i.e., agents of Satan) and given we've just been talking about the parable of the weeds (tares)

– it's likely the point is – the Kingdom starts off small (mustard seed) and grows big (3 metres plant) – but there will be some “weeds/tares” in this case birds sitting in the branches of the Kingdom tree – who are not fair dinkum. I think that's a better interpretation than the birds being gentiles or other nations.

8. What is the point of the parable of the mustard seed?

Little becomes great when God is at work!

Illustration: You may remember the Superannuation advert “From little things big things grow” (Paul Kelly song).

However, there is a subtle warning that instead of the Kingdom of Heaven as it grows big on Earth, being characterized by humility and gentleness, the Kingdom on earth becomes rich, powerful and in some cases authoritative and arrogant (which is where the birds come in). So instead of the Kingdom relying on obedience to Jesus and His Word, dependency on the Holy Spirit and a child-like faith in our Heavenly Father – the Kingdom relies on marketing tactics, high profile publicity, business practices – and becomes a nesting place for birds. The parable is not saying the Christ's church is a failure but as it grows it is prone to distortion and corruption, which history has shown!

Read Matthew 13:33-35

9. What agricultural/cooking example does Jesus use here?

Jesus talks about a woman putting yeast into sixty pounds of flour.

A handful of yeast eventually permeates the whole flour and goes through the whole batch of dough.

Note: Bread was an important food in Israel; and our daily bread (spiritual) food – a little each day – grows us.

10. What does yeast (leaven) represent throughout the Bible? (Exodus 12:8, 15-20; 13:7; 34:25; Luke 12:1; Matt 16:6-12; 22:16-21; 1 Corinthians 4:18-19; 5:2, 6-8; 8:1; Galatians 5:9)

*Yeast (leaven) definition: The most common one being *S. cerevisiae*, is used in baking as a leavening agent, where it converts the food /fermentable sugars present in dough into the gas carbon dioxide. This causes the dough to expand or rise as gas forms pockets or bubbles.*

*This very short parable of yeast (leaven) could be seen as **another example of growth**. A tiny bit of yeast (leaven) permeates a whole batch –in the same way God's word starts off small and grows and influences a great “batch” of people. That is certainly true.*

But again, in context, we have had in the earlier parables weeds (tares) corrupting the Kingdom; we have here God's Kingdom being threatened by the threat of corruption and impurity (yeast/leaven).

*In the various passages below, we see yeast (leaven) in a **negative sense**:*

Exodus 12:8, 15-10 – At Passover they ate bread without yeast (as a symbol of purity because yeast was seen as a picture of sin and corruption)

Exodus 13:7 – At the consecration of the first born they again had bread without yeast (as a symbol of purity)

Exodus 34:25 – As God ordains the various feasts – sacrifices are to be made without yeast

Luke 12:1 – Jesus warns against the “yeast” of the Pharisees which He says is hypocrisy

Matt 16:6-12 – Jesus warns against the “yeast” of the Pharisees which He says this time is also their teaching

Matt 22:16-21 – An example of the Pharisees hypocrisy when they ask if they should pay tax and Jesus replies “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”

1 Cor 4:18-19 – Paul says the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but power – not with a rod but with love

1 Cor 5:2 – Warns against being proud over a sinful incest act and then says in 1 Cor 5:6-8 – Paul says a little yeast leavens the whole batch; get rid of the old yeast.

1 Cor 8:1 – warns against getting puffed up with knowledge

Gal 5:9 – Again, Paul warns against a little yeast working through a whole batch – therefore a call to purity.

*But remember yeast is **hidden** in the batch of dough, yet it **permeates** the **whole batch**.*

As we just said yeast (leaven) had a bad press in Israel. For example, all yeast (leaven) had to be removed from the house at Passover – to make the house “clean”.

So, Jesus’ listeners would have been a bit surprised to hear Jesus use yeast (leaven) as an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet when we think about it, that is just what Jesus’ followers must have seemed like to any respectable Jew; they would have seemed like yeast (leaven). Jesus’ followers included the common, uneducated fishermen, farmers, carpenters, women, tax collectors and disreputable characters – it would seem quite distasteful to the respectable Jew. But God is like that. He takes distasteful characters and transforms them and then transforms society through them. God’s Kingdom might seem initially to be unimpressive (tax collectors and sinners) but it grows into something amazing.

But there is a stronger point: God’s Kingdom through His Word is bound to penetrate and transform the evil environment in which it is sown just as effectively as yeast penetrates and transforms the flour into which it is put. To be sure, the powers of evil (the yeast/leaven) will do all they can to resist and corrupt the Kingdom, but their efforts will ultimately be seen to have no purpose. Until the consummation of the Kingdom, when Jesus returns, there will always be found alongside the bona fide children of the kingdom those who do not belong to it.

11. What is the point of the parable?

The point of the parable is the influence a small amount (hidden) of good can make. God can use a small amount to achieve great things. For example, a small number of “hidden” Christians in China are growing God’s Kingdom! At the same time a small amount (hidden) of bad can make influence in a bad way too and corrupt a church.

Also: The Holy Spirit dwelling and working in people can’t be seen – it’s hidden but can grow people and communities.

Example: Open Doors.

12. Verse 34 says Jesus spoke in parables and verse 35 tells us why, what is the reason? (cf. **Psalm 78:1-8**)

As well as the reasons we gave last week; that Jesus wanted his listeners to really listen and understand and join the dots; He also told parables to fulfil this prophecy from Psalm 78 – a pattern laid down in the Old Testament.

Psalm 78 shows God speaking in parables – saying that the parables speak about things of old things the ancestors of Israel have told of – but that will now be told and explained to the next generation. So that the new generations’ hearts will not be stubborn and rebellious like the previous generations were. Isn’t that what Jesus’ teaching is all about, to change closed/hard hearts to be open/soft hearts having a disposition towards Jesus?

Jesus wants us to go from drinking milk and eating mushy baby food – and start eating solid foods.

We have to move from “what God says” (i.e., do not steal, do not lie, do not murder, obey your parents) and move to “why God says” (The why is: Why does God want us to be obedient – because He is the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery. The why is: He created us in His image. The why is: We are His treasured possession. The why is: He has plans for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us. The why is: He loves us with an everlasting love. The why is: He does not want anyone to perish. The why is: He loves us so much He sent Jesus. The why is: He is our refuge and strength and ever-present help. The why is: He knows us all about us. Parables help us go from what God or Jesus says to why God/Jesus says it.

Read Matthew 13:36-43

13. Jesus explains the earlier parable of weeds (tares).

a. Who is the one who sowed the seed?

Jesus (The Son of Man)

b. Who are the good seed (wheat)?

The people of God’s Kingdom – i.e., the believers

c. Who are the weeds (tares)?

The people of the evil one – i.e., unbelievers

d. Who is the enemy?

The devil

e. Who are the reapers?

The angels

f. What will happen to the weeds (tares)?

Pulled up and burned in a blazing furnace.

g. What will happen to the good seed (wheat)?

They will shine like the sun in the Kingdom, because they have Jesus – the Light of the World as their Lord and Saviour.

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Matthew 13:24-43**?

a. *What the Kingdom of Heaven is like*

b. *The Kingdom of Heaven will start off small and grow big – but will also face opposition.*



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. *Just as it is difficult to tell between the wheat and tares, which is genuine; so too, sometimes it's difficult to tell between real Christians and fake ones; sometimes it's only God that knows! Donald Trump is a good example where some say he is a Christian and others not so sure! God knows!*
- b. *God's Kingdom starts off small but grows big.*
- c. *We need to be patient as God's Kingdom grows.*
- d. *God's Kingdom offers refuge and safety.*
- e. *God's Kingdom can be corrupted by a small number of people with "bad" (yeast) influence. There may be weeds who sabotage the church!*
- f. *God's Kingdom can grow by a small number of people with "good" influence. Our "little bit of leaven" showing love and care can permeate the whole church family!*
- g. *At the end of the Age – they will be a Day of Reckoning – that's guaranteed.*
- h. *We need to be aware of false Christians (weeds), false growth (weeds and birds) and false doctrine (yeast). Pray for discernment. To combat this: we go back to last week "the best book to read is the Bible" – are we checking what the Bible says.*
- i. *Jesus wants us to go from drinking milk and eating mushy baby food – and start eating solid foods.*
- j. *We have to move from "what God says" (i.e., do not steal, do not lie, do not murder, obey your parents) and move to "why God says" (The why is: Why does God want us to be obedient – because He is the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery. The why*

is: He created us in His image. The why is: We are His treasured possession. The why is: He has plans for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us. The why is: He loves us with an everlasting love. The why is: He does not want anyone to perish. The why is: He loves us so much He sent Jesus. The why is: He is our refuge and strength and ever-present help. The why is: He knows us all about us.

Parables help us go from what God or Jesus says to why God/Jesus says it.

k. Ask God to help us shine like the sun (and the SON the light of the world) – v43!

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

V43 - Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His Word and asking God to help us beware of false Christians, false growth and false doctrine.

Study 4 – Responding to the Kingdom of God – Matthew 13:44-52 *(Sermon on 15-May-22)*

Jesus has been using parables to describe what the Kingdom of God is like.
But the Kingdom of God also requires a response.
Head knowledge needs to become heart knowledge and hand knowledge...

Before we begin: What treasures do we have in our lives? People? Things? Interests? Make a list...

Besides God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and His Word.

Heather, children: Chris, Bryony, Jen and Sammie; grandchildren; friends; Church family.

Home and sport (especially football [soccer])

Read Matthew 13:44

1. In this short parable, Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as being like a treasure hidden in a field which a man finds. What does the man do when he finds the treasure?

He hides the treasure again; and then in his joy, he went and sold all he had and bought the field that the treasure was buried in.

“Under rabbinic law if a workman came on a treasure in a field and lifted it out, it would belong to his master, the field’s owner; but here the man is careful not to lift the treasure out till he has bought the field.” (Carson)

“Finding the treasure appears to be by chance. In a land as frequently ravaged as Palestine, many people doubtless buried their treasures; but...to actually find a treasure would happen once in a thousand lifetimes. Thus, the extravagance of the parable dramatizes the supreme importance of the kingdom.” (Carson)

“So did Jesus himself, at the utmost cost, buy the world to gain his church, which was the treasure which he desired.” (Spurgeon)

2. What is the point of this short parable?

*The parable shows **how valuable the Kingdom of Heaven is**. The Kingdom of Heaven is the treasure.*

The field is the world.

*This parable speaks of **how highly the King values the people of His Kingdom**. The King valued His Kingdom so much He died for it.*

It’s worth noting in Exodus 19:4 – God describes His people (Israel) as His treasured possession. See also: Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Malachi 3:17.

*The parable illustrates the **whole hearted response which the Kingdom of Heaven requires**. No sacrifice is too great, and no other concern must stand in the way of it. That is true of Jesus as He lays down His life for the Kingdom; and it is true of the response required from us; the Kingdom must be our treasure.*

But note it is not a “negative” giving up everything but a “positive” one of joy and fulfilment.

Some people discover the worth of the Kingdom by accident. They are ploughing the familiar furrow of life when suddenly, unexpectedly they find the treasure. What a marvellous picture of discovering Jesus! He is worth every sacrifice to secure.

Read Matthew 13:45-46

3. This short parable of a merchant finding pearls is very similar to the parable of the hidden treasure in verse 44? What does the merchant do when he finds a pearl?

When the merchant found a pearl of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

4. What is the point of this short parable?

Again, Jesus is the buyer and the individual believer is the pearl that He sees as so valuable that He would happily give all to have it forever.

“To the ancient peoples, as we have just seen, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions; that means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world.” (Barclay)

It seems crazy for a merchant to sell all that he had for one pearl, but for this merchant it was well worth it. That shows how much he valued this pearl of great price, and how much Jesus values His people.

The merchant came across the pearl of great value as he was looking for fine pearls. This is a picture of the King and His Kingdom and the response we should have. There are other pearls in the market; there are other things in our lives of great value. But none is to compare with this pearl of great value, the Kingdom. This is how some people find the Kingdom of Heaven; they try others faiths or walk their own way without Jesus or get absorbed by the fine things of this world (wealth, possessions, entertainment, career, education etc.) but one day they find the loveliest “pearl” in the world, King Jesus and His Kingdom. {example of this is Justin Martin (100-165 AD), he was fascinated by philosophy from an early age, he studied philosophy at the libraries of Alexandria and Ephesus. One day he met an old man who told him about Jesus; Justin immediately started reading the Scriptures and he became a joyful Christian}

5. **Ponder:** What did Jesus’ treasure (the church) cost Him?

It cost Jesus everything; His life!

Read Matthew 13:47-50

6. Summarize the parable of the net

The parable is a bit like the parable of the wheat and weeds. Just like the church has both fair dinkum believers and non-genuine believers; the net contains good and bad fish.

The parable is about judgment and separation. Within the church we shall always find good and bad, real and unreal. And although we have been told in the parable of the weeds not to expect a pure world or church on earth and that we can't necessarily judge who are Christians and who are not; the day will come when God will make His final separation. It is not yet; it will be when the net of the Kingdom is drawn to the shore. And it will be God who does the sorting then, not the people now.

There is a call in this parable to persevere until the last day.

Mathew is saying the Christian "teachers of the law" need to remember it is not for them to determine who are the 'real Christians'; this task belongs to God in the future. Perhaps Matthew has in mind the defection of Judas. As Paul says in 1 Cor 10:12 - So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

7. In this parable...

a. What is the net?

The world

b. Who are the good fish?

Believers in Jesus (the real)

c. Who are the bad fish?

Non-believers (the unreal, fake)

8. What is the point of the parable of the net?

Jesus shows that the world will remain divided right up until the end, and the Church will not reform the world, ushering in the kingdom.

There will be both the wicked and the just until the end of the age (as also demonstrated in the previous parable of the wheat and the tares). At that time the angels will come forth and assist the King in the work of judgment, sending some into the furnace of fire for final judgment.

Read Matthew 13:51-52

9. What question does Jesus ask in verse 51? Why is that an important question for the disciples and for us?

Jesus asked "Have you understood all these things?"

It's important for the disciples and for us; because they and us have a job to do; "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"

It's going to be difficult for the disciples and us to make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey Jesus; if they and us, do not understand what Jesus is saying!

10. What is Jesus' point in verse 52? And how might that apply to us?

Jesus said that everyone who really knows God's Word both will know the old and learn the new of the kingdom. "He is not weary of the old; he is not afraid of the new." (Spurgeon)

The main idea is that the disciples – who had just claimed to understand what Jesus taught – are now responsible to bring forth their understanding to others, as if they were distributing from the storehouse of their wisdom and understanding. This storehouse contains things new and old.

"After you have been instructed by me, you have the knowledge, not only of the things you used to know, but of things you never knew before, and even the knowledge which you had before is illuminated by what I have told to you." (Barclay)

The disciples were to be for the Kingdom of Heaven what the teachers of the law (the scribes) were for Israel; that is able to teach others the way of God. The parable of the houseowner challenged them to fulfil this responsibility. The truths they were to teach included both the 'new treasures' of Jesus' teaching and the 'old truths' which the Jewish teachers of the law (scribes). Jesus' 'new teaching' itself goes back to the foundation of the world (as we learnt in verse 35 and Psalm 78:1-8 last week) bringing God's eternal truths to light. The disciples must "join the dots" so that they can teach others. It's the same for us.

Read Isaiah 55:1-13

11. How might this Old Testament passage relate to Matthew 13:44-52?

Here are some similarities:

1. *God through Isaiah invites people to come to Him and treasure something of utmost importance – **the most valuable possession (the pearl) that they can possess - that is feeding from His Word***
2. *God exhorts people to **seek Him whilst He can be found**; otherwise like the parable of the weeds and dragnet; a time is coming when judgement will take place.*
3. *Like the parable of the treasure and fine pearl – there is no one like God – His ways are higher than our ways – and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.*
4. *God promises His Word – exhorted in the Kingdom – will always achieve His purposes and not return to Him empty. And so just like in the parable of the treasure the man was **full of joy** when he bought the field with the treasure; Isaiah says once someone has God's Word and understands it (like Matthew 13:51) **they will go out in joy and be led forth in peace.***

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Matthew 13:44-52**?

What will our response to King Jesus and His Kingdom be?



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?

- ➔ How does this passage **apply to your life**?
- Treasure King Jesus and His Kingdom above all else.
 - What might we have to let go off, to make Jesus our priority?
 - Judgment of real/unreal believers is up to God not us.
 - We must persevere to the end.
 - We have a responsibility, as disciples of Jesus, to join the dots of the Old and New Testament and teach others so they can see the value of the treasure of King Jesus and His Kingdom.
 - Again, we see the importance of knowing God's Word and its power.

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

V52

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His Word and asking God to help us through His Word and His Holy Spirit to have knowledge, discernment and application of His Word.

- c. Matthew 9:18-26 – what faith is shown here?

 - d. Matthew 9:27-31 – what faith is shown here?
7. **Ponder:** Does the response of the people in Jesus' hometown surprise you? Yes/No/Maybe? Why/Why not?
8. **Read Proverbs 1:30-31.** How does this relate to Matthew 13:53-58?
9. **Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-23.** How does this relate to Matthew 13:53-58?
10. **Read 2 Kings 17:7-23.** How does this relate to Matthew 13:53-58?

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Matthew 13:53-58**?



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His Word and asking God to help us through His Word and His Holy Spirit to have knowledge, discernment and application of His Word.

Studies prepared by Paul O'Rourke
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Resources:

The MacArthur Study Bible

New Bible Commentary (Carson, France, Moyter & Wenham)

Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible (G. Campbell Morgan)

The Message of Matthew (Michael Green)

Focus on the Bible: Matthew (Charles Price)

Matthew Volume 1 (Barclay)

Be Loyal Following the King of Kings NT Commentary on Matthew (Warren W. Wiersbe)

Notes/Prayer Points