

## The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

### Session 13 Notes

We continue looking at the section that runs from 11:2 - 12:50.

12:38-42 The word *Teacher /Rabbi* is a polite form of address, but here it isn't being used with integrity and honour. Compare with John Baptist's disciples, who didn't ask for a sign when they came to ask Jesus: *Are you the promised One?* They asked for a teaching; and Jesus gives them the interpretation of the signs that have been shown openly to everyone in Galilee.

This is one of the rare instances, up to this point, of the scribes and Pharisees going directly to Jesus. In most cases we have found John the Baptist's disciples go to Jesus to ask about Jesus' disciples; the Scribes and Pharisees go to Jesus' disciples to ask about Jesus. This is the reality of Matthew's Church and our own: People can only go to disciples to ask about Jesus; Disciples can only go to Jesus, in prayer, to ask about disciples.

V39 Jesus makes two similarities between His ministry and the prophets. The sign of Jonah - Jesus' three days in the tomb is likened to the three days and nights Jonah spent in the belly of the whale. Jonah's effective ministry led the Ninevites to repent, and thereby to be saved. John the Baptist and Jesus participate in the same ministry and offer the same salvation - but *greater*. The present generation is condemned for not responding as the Ninevites did.

V42 Queen of the South = Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon when she heard of his great wisdom and vast wealth. *Something greater than Solomon is here* - Jesus is Wisdom and Word Incarnate.

In both cases, they will rise up at Judgment Day and speak against the present generation which rejects Jesus, because it attributes to Beelzebul the works of God.

Vv43-45 We are reminded of 8:16 when Jesus heals persons possessed by demons and other infirmities. We noted then that Matthew connected the healings with passages connected with the Suffering Servant. *He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.* And we are reminded of 10:1, when Jesus gives this same authority over unclean spirits to His disciples.

In these verses Jesus is asserting that through His own ministry and that of His disciples people have received cleansing, but a vacuum has been created within the hearts of those cleansed, because, again, they attribute to Beelzebul to works of God, thus allowing seven more wicked spirits to enter.

There is always another option available – the void can be filled by *blessedness* – the seven beatitudes should be the spirits which respond to Jesus' healing presence.

Vv46-50 Those who respond appropriately belong to God's family, are *God's children* as firmly as Jesus is God's Son. Jesus stretches out His hand over the disciples, as He did when healing the lepers, and the woman with the haemorrhage reaching out for healing to Jesus, as though healing those *who do the will of my Father in heaven.*

In chapter 13 we find St Matthew doing something entirely new. This begins the third of the five teaching blocks in the gospel. It is only now that we encounter Jesus teaching in parables in a significant way. There were brief passages which bear some similarity to parables, but not in the same way: building one's house on a rock rather than sand, 7:24-27, the bridegroom and wineskins, 9:15-17; children in the marketplace, 11:16-19.

V1 Location has been important to Matthew. This is set beside the sea, in contrast to the waterless places where the unclean spirits wander.

V3 Matthew indicates we are getting a sampling of Jesus' teaching, just as he had told us we were getting a sample of His healing ministry.

*A sower went out to sow...* is a very Jewish idiom expressing a unity of being: You are what you do. God is the Sower, so He sows seeds. The disciples are Christ's, so they are to do the very same.

V9 The parable is self-evident, not really requiring interpretation. A technique of Matthew's to align the reader with the disciples. *He who has ears to hear let him hear.*

V10 Why do you speak to *them* in parables? *Them* are they who are not Jesus' mother, brother, sister.

*It is given to you to now the secrets of heaven.* But do we know them? Yes, and no.

*To you who have more will be given.* This is equivalent to *faith seeking understanding.* Jesus spoke to the disciples: *you of little faith.* Only a little is necessary to begin growing. The first step is being *poor in spirit*, recognizing the need for grace from God and the community of grace, which enables repentance, turning around.

These two phrases together provide a commentary on the *true Israelite*, those who rightly discern God's loving purpose in the life of Israel, and discern in Jesus the one who fulfils the Law and the Prophets. To such persons more will be given.

V14f Another fulfilment prophecy - Isaiah 6:9f. God has always made Himself available to people, and there has always been a choice to hear,

respond, and to be healed. *Blessed are your eyes and ears, v16, aligns the disciples with the prophets.*

Vv18-23 The interpretation of the parable of the sower articulates what we already know. Jesus is Himself the articulation of what is known – the Word Incarnate.

Vv24-30 Weeds among the wheat. In this parable the Kingdom is a man, not a place. The person who sows, because God sows, is whole, and a unity in himself.

The question evil arises – why does the field have weeds? We are again referred back to the Genesis narrative. Weeds spring up in consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve. The enemy in the parable is the serpent in the Garden, and it is also Adam and Eve when they choose to place themselves above God in judging what is good. Both the good and the evil will grow up together until the harvest – until the eschatological judgment day, v30.

Vv31f The Kingdom is the place to make our home. We are reminded also of the two occasions when Jesus has told us we are of greater value than the birds.

V34f Another fulfilment prophecy – Psalm 78:2. It is significant that Matthew is putting the Psalm as Jesus' own words, indicating that we should read the Psalms as being spoken by Him.

Vv36-43 Jesus leaves the crowds and enters the house, where he is followed by the disciples. This is the pattern we have always seen – the disciples follow Jesus. *House* is connected with the *household of Israel*, God's true children, and it is likened to *the kingdom of heaven*.

It is intriguing that Jesus identifies Himself as *Son of man*. The Son does what the Father does – we can do the same as Jesus’ brothers and sisters, children of the same Father.

Previously the *seed* was the Word of God. Now the *good seed* = *sons of the kingdom*.

Vv44f        The kingdom is like a treasure, a pearl of great price. Again, not a place but something. We are reminded of passages from Wisdom literature where wisdom is said to be more valuable than costly jewels. We are also reminded of Jesus’ earlier instruction *to not cast pearls before swine*.

V47        Jesus now gives a completely opposite example to the above. Here the *fishers of men* cast / sow indiscriminately, drawing everything in. The sorting out of the swine, or the weeds, will happen at the eschatological judgment, which will be determined by how people respond to the good seed, being both Word and Person. Even though the fishers sort the good from the bad, yet, Matthew says, it is *the angels of God* who will judge, not us.

Vv51f        *Have you understood all this?* Again, the answer is yes and no. The kingdom is like a householder: treasure both old and new – ie Old Testament and New Testament. The treasure contains both, and yet is one.

Vv 52-58    There is the further rejection of Jesus in His hometown. We are reminded that Matthew identifies Jesus as a Nazarite, set apart for God. And we are reminded that Capernaum was His adoptive home because He makes His home with His disciples. Jesus returns to Nazareth, as He had returned there from Exile in Egypt. The theme of Exile and Return is intensifying.