

PARABLES MIRACLES QUARRELS

Bible Reading Plan – Matthew, part 3
November 2023

November 1 – Matthew 12:1-14

1. The Pharisees here demonstrate for us the danger of perpetuating tradition instead of thinking about how the tradition fits into the bigger picture of God's story. Do we have any church traditions that are keeping us from truly being the church that God has made us to be?
2. How does Jesus' attitude towards the man with the shriveled hand contrast with the Pharisees' attitude towards him? How does that reflect the difference between a good church leader and a crummy one?

November 3 – Matthew 12:15-30

1. Who do you know that needs to hear these words? 'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory' (Matthew 12:20, quoting Isaiah 42:3).
2. Do you think that the Pharisees actually thought that Jesus was using the power of demons to drive out demons? (That's a pretty self-defeating use of power, isn't it?) Or were they just blindly throwing accusations, hoping that something would stick? Why are we so quick to misrepresent people with whom we have conflicts? Why can't we just focus on what's true?

November 6 – Matthew 12:31-50

1. How is verse 35 an ideal rather than a sure thing? What do we do to make that idea a reality in our own lives?
2. I think our culture really needs to hear verse 36. How would your words change if you knew that in the end, Jesus would produce a transcript of every word you've ever said and asked you to account for every one?
3. How does the story about the evil spirit in verse 43 illustrate the importance of pursuing growth as a follower of Jesus?
4. Take note of 'the sign of Jonah.' We're going to see that again.

November 8 – Matthew 13:1-23

1. There are two ways of reading this parable: one evangelistic and one pastoral. On the evangelistic side, this parable explains why the Gospel is not received with joy 100% of the time – not all soil is equally receptive to it and so some people simply won't respond. On the pastoral side, this parable presents the soils as a metaphor for the heart and invites us to consider the status of our own heart/soil. Do you think that Jesus meant to highlight one more than the other? Which do you need to hear today?

2. Typically when we read this parable, we think that there are four kinds of soil: 'the path,' 'the rocky ground,' 'the thorny ground' and 'the good soil.' I've heard it said though that there are actually six soils here, dividing the good soil into 'hundredfold producers,' 'sixtyfold' and 'thirty.' Do you think that the '100x-60x-30x' is just a rhetorical flourish or is Jesus acknowledging that different good soils produce at different rates and that that's ok?

November 10 – Matthew 13:24-53

1. Which of these parables speaks the loudest to you? Why?

2. Maybe you can help me with something. Reading through these parable, I get the sense that Matthew has given this passage a very specific structure. Here's what I mean:

Verses 24-30 – are about gathering good and bad together and sorting them out at the end.

Verses 31-33 – are twin parables about the Kingdom starting small and growing bigger.

Verses 36-43 – explain that the good and bad together parable applies to the end of the age.

Verses 44-46 – are two more twin parables about the Kingdom's surpassing value.

Verses 47-50 – are about gathering good and bad together and sorting them out at the end.

Do you think that's on purpose? What's Matthew telling us here?

November 13 – Matthew 13:53-14:13

1. Jesus' arrival in His hometown seems to illustrate the idea that 'familiarity breeds contempt.' How can we, who want to walk with Jesus daily, resist that kind of familiarity?

2. Did Jesus 'not do many mighty works there' because He didn't want to waste His power on their unbelief or did their unbelief limit His power?

3. 14:9: 'And the king was sorry [to murder John the Baptist] but because of his oaths and his guests he did it anyways.' How easy it is to ignore what's right to do what's expedient. John deserved better.

4. How do you think Jesus felt about the death of His cousin and herald?

November 15 – Matthew 14:13-36

1. What do these passages tell us about Jesus' command over the natural order?
2. Does Jesus 'call us out of the boat' or is this an experience that is uniquely Peter's? If it's the first one, what do we learn from Peter's experience?

November 17 – Matthew 15:1-20

1. The Isaiah quotation is a sobering one: 'This people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me' (v. 15:8) and it flows very naturally out of the realization that the religious leaders had raised their own traditions above God's commandments. Are there any ways in which we have elevated our traditions above God's ways?
2. How does Jesus' insistence that it's not 'what goes into your mouth but what comes from out of your heart' influence your understanding of holiness?

November 20 – Matthew 15:21-28

1. How does the Canaanite woman anticipate Jesus' mission to all the nations? Looking back at 15:1-9, how does the Canaanite woman demonstrate that the 'Gentiles dogs' are more worthy of the Kingdom than 'the lost sheep of Israel'?
2. Was Jesus really not going to answer this woman's prayer or was He just testing her faith?
3. Isn't it a little racist to imply that Gentiles are 'dogs'? Interestingly, Jesus doesn't use the word for a 'dog' (the kind that would roam Ancient Near Eastern streets) like in Matthew 7:6; instead He uses the word for a 'household pet' or 'puppy.'
4. William Barclay reflects a conversation we've had before: "The tone and the look with which a thing is said make all the difference. A thing which seems hard can be said with a disarming smile. We can call a friend "an old villain", or "a rascal", with a smile and a tone which take the sting out of it and fill it with affection. We can be quite sure that the smile on Jesus' face and the compassion in his eyes robbed the words of all insult and bitterness" (<https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb/matthew-15.html>).

November 22 – Matthew 15:29-39

1. Verses 29-31 are a foretaste of Heaven: ‘the mute speaking, the blinding seeing and they all glorified the God of Israel.’ What a day that will be!
2. Read the bread and fishes account closely. What does this event tell you about Jesus beyond that fact that He miraculously multiplied these resources?
3. Just a quick note – It’s generally thought that while Matthew 14 describes a miraculous meal for the Jewish people, the miraculous meal here seems to be in Gentile territory. I wonder if Jesus’ experience with the Canaanite woman caused Him to realize the full, international extent of God’s redemptive plan.

November 24 – Matthew 16:1-12

1. What’s ‘the sign of Jonah’? What does Jesus mean by that? (Matthew 12:39-41 will help here).
2. What’s the difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees asking for a miraculous sign in 16:1 and the people who came to Jesus for miraculous healing in 15:29-31?

November 27 – Matthew 16:13-28

1. How does Peter go from recognizing that Jesus is the Anointed Son of God (v. 16) to rebuking Jesus for doing what the Anointed Son of God needs to do (v. 22)? Is it simply that Peter only got the first part right because God revealed it to him (v. 17)? Is it self-interest that doesn’t want to be the follower of a suffering servant?
2. What does it look like for *you* to ‘deny yourself, take up your Cross and follow Jesus’?
3. Does verse 27 teach ‘works righteousness’ (ie., being saved by what you’ve done)?

November 29 – Matthew 17:1-13

1. Why do you think that only Peter, James and John were invited to witness the Transfiguration?
2. Sometimes Christians talk about a ‘mountaintop experience’ where they sense the presence and glory of God with them in a dramatic way. Is walking with Jesus all ‘climactic moments’? How do those ‘mountaintop experiences’ help us when we’re ‘in the valleys’?