



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Lesson 9 – Study Questions

Matthew 12:33-50;
13:1-43

Review: From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 12:33-42

NOTE: As today's lesson begins, Jesus continues to "unmask the wickedness of the religious leaders" (Commentary, page 72) who have accused him of drawing on the power of the devil to drive out demons.

1. Jesus defended himself to the Pharisees, calling them vipers and declaring that "A tree is known by its fruit; if the fruit is good, so must the tree be. If the driving out of demons is good, so must its source be." *USCCB, Notes on Matthew 12*. From verse 35, what do the following produce?

The good person

An evil person

2. In verses 36-37, Jesus says that on the day of judgment we will be accountable for our words, a form of action which comes from our heart. Record Matthew 15:18.

NOTE: Here Jesus refers to the Pharisees words; they will be condemned on the basis of having said that Jesus' power is demonic." *George Martin*

3. In verse 38 the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign from Jesus presumably as authentication that his exorcisms are of God. Jesus refused them, calling them "an evil and unfaithful generation," and tells them there will be no sign except the sign of Jonah. From verse 40, what prefigurement is indicated in this reference to Jonah?

4. Jesus then gives two examples of Gentiles who recognized God's truth and wisdom: First, God sent Jonah to the pagan city of Ninevah and all therein repented, and second, the queen of the South (Sheba) came from "the ends of the earth" to hear the wisdom God gave Solomon. (verses 41-42) What is the common thread related to Jesus that Matthew points out in both of these examples?

NOTE Jesus had given many signs: He had cured the leper (Mt 8:1-4), the servant of the centurion (Mt 8:5-13), Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15), the sick and the possessed of the city (Mt 8:16), He had calmed down the storm (Mt 8:23-27), had cast out devils (Mt 8:28-34) and had worked many other miracles. The people seeing all these signs recognize in Jesus the Servant of Yahweh (Mt 8:17; 12:17-

21). But the Pharisees are not able to perceive the significance of so many signs which Jesus had given. They wanted something different... Jesus does not submit Himself to the request of the religious authority, because it is not sincere. *Carmelites: Lectio Divina, Matthew 12:38-42*

5. CONNECTION: We all know that words can and do hurt others. In the case of the Pharisees, Jesus was pointing out their evil and deceptive intent in their accusations of him. Knowing that we too will be judged on all of our actions, including our words, what can you do, or have you done, to repair damage that careless words may have caused?

Read Ephesians 4:31-32 and write a prayer asking the Lord to guide your heart and thus your words and actions.

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 12:43-50; 13:1-9

NOTE: In verses 43-45 Jesus offers an analogy between evil spirits and those who reject him, using the example of when demons are driven out, they attempt to repossess a man in a worse way...and that people who have been converted and revert to the depravities of their past life become worse than they were before. Jesus is solemnly warning the Jews of his time that if they continue to reject the light, they will end up worse than they were before. *Navarre Bible*

6. In verse 46 Matthew relates a time when Jesus' mother and brothers sought him out while he was speaking to the crowds. We are not told the reason why they wanted to speak with him, but we are told how Jesus replied. From verses 49-50, how would you describe his family?

NOTE: What Jesus asked of his disciples – the breaking of family ties – he himself now undertakes. For Matthew, the church is the family of God, incorporated into the communal life of the Godhead through baptism. Indeed, the earthly family of Jesus, left cooling their heels *outside* may represent the unbelieving members of Israel, cut off from the house where Jesus teaches, i.e. the church. *Meier*

7. Jesus doesn't seem to be rejecting his family as much as he is warmly embracing those who listen in humility and obedience and accept his word, in other words, his disciples. In what ways do you feel you are part of Jesus' family?

NOTE: Chapter 13 is Jesus' third discourse and leaves behind (for a time) the controversies with the scribes and Pharisees to present another grouping of parables. In the first few verses we can visualize Jesus by the sea, looking out on great crowds of people, so many in fact that he had to sit in a boat to teach, while the crowd stood on the shore. He sits down, as all Jewish teachers did... From his pulpit on the water Jesus begins to speak about the Kingdom of God to the people standing on the shore. *National Catholic Reporter*, "A Parable for Parables."

8. Reviewing the parable in verses 3-9 briefly note what happened to the seeds in each case in this familiar teaching:

Seed on the path

Seed on the rocky ground

Seed among thorns

Seed in rich soil

9. Refer to the Commentary, page 74, which suggests that different messages can come from this parable depending on which “character” is the focus: the sower, the seed, the soil, or the harvest. Choose one of the “character” explanations from the Commentary and briefly describe it. Was it one you had thought of before?

Sower

Seed

Soil

Harvest

10. CONNECTION: Jesus says that care and thought are needed in the task of hearing the

Word of the God. Scattering seed is not enough to ensure a successful harvest. Rocks may need to be removed and thorns may need to be uprooted. What are you doing to prepare yourself to really hear the Word of God?

Read 1 Samuel 3:10 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 13:10-23

11. Jesus' disciples asked why he was speaking to the crowd in parables, to which he answered that knowledge of the mysteries of the coming kingdom has been granted only to the disciples. Record Jesus' reason for parables from the end of verse 13. What do you think he means by this statement?

NOTE: Jesus is not distinguishing among people on the basis of how smart they are, but on the basis of their receptivity to him and his teaching. *Martin*

12. Verses 13-15 reflect the prophecy with which God warned Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10). What is the general message of this prophecy and how is Jesus now experiencing it?

13. In verses 16-17 Jesus offers his disciples a beatitude. Why does he say the disciples are blessed, when the prophets and righteous people longed for the fulfillment of God's promise?

14. Jesus then explains his parable of the Sower and the Seed from the perspective of the seed as the Word of God. How can we help encourage others who are seeking the Word of God?

15. CONNECTION: What seems to be a simple parable is more complex when we read it in the context of Jesus' ministry of the time. Some people rejected Jesus, some accepted him at first, then fell away, others had a different idea of who he should be, still others accepted him and his teachings and would find a "rich harvest of fruit." We too can benefit from asking ourselves what kind of fruit our lives are yielding. Share some of the good fruits of your faith for which you are most grateful.

Read Luke 8:15 and pray for the perseverance to bear good fruit.

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 13:24-30

16. Jesus continued with another parable: The Weeds among the Wheat. Refer to the Commentary, page 76, and note the two questions seemingly dealt with in this parable.

17. The kingdom of heaven is a phrase Matthew uses often throughout his gospel. Look back and record one of the following:

Matthew 3:2

Matthew 4:17

NOTE: When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, he invoked Old Testament images of God reigning as king (Psalm 97:1; Isaiah 52:7), and so his listeners would have had some grasp of what he was talking about. Yet the expression “kingdom of God” never occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures and is rarely found in the New Testament except on the lips of Jesus. The coming of the kingdom meant the coming of God’s final triumph over evil; it meant the coming of God’s direct manifest reign over everyone and everything. *Martin*

18. Matthew does not record an outcome to the actions described in this parable; even so, we know that in his ministry Jesus sowed only good seeds. What might his good seeds be?

19. Share your thoughts on verse 29, as an explanation for why there is still evil in the world?

NOTE: The hymn “Gift of Finest Wheat” (You Satisfy the Hungry Heart) reminds us that Jesus is the bread of life, made from the finest wheat. Pray the refrain today: Dear Jesus, You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat; Come give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat.

20. CONNECTION: The parable may invite non-retaliation against an enemy (Commentary, page 76), an action that is vindicated by the end of time as described in verse 30. This relates directly to Jesus’ teaching on loving your enemy (Luke 6:27-29). Share an example where a commitment to love overcame the temptation to retaliate.

Read Romans 12:19-21 and write a prayer for the wisdom to truly follow Jesus’ example.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 13:31-43

21. Today’s lesson begins with the familiar parable of the mustard seed. (verses 31-32) Think about how the growth of the tiny mustard seed into a great tree relates to Jesus’ ministry and the kingdom of heaven. How does this parable carry a message of encouragement for us?

NOTE: In the world of Jesus, a mustard seed was invoked as the ultimate in tininess. Mustard is an annual herb that usually grows to a height of two to six feet, but sometimes to eight feet or higher... a great contrast between how small a

mustard seed is and how large a plant it becomes. Birds of the sky coming and dwelling in its branches suggests the idea of a kingdom sheltering its people.
Martin

22. In verse 33 Jesus conveys another parable, pairing it with the mustard seed parable. Here, a little yeast added to flour will leaven a whole batch of dough to make bread. In what way can you see this metaphor representing spiritual transformation?

23. Jesus continues to speak to the crowd in parables including a quote from Psalms 78:2. Record verse 35.

NOTE: In verse 36 Jesus leaves the crowd and returns to the house, which signals his break with the crowds and symbolically his break with Israel. It is not an accident that this rupture occurs halfway through the gospel. Henceforth, Israel will show greater and greater hostility, and Jesus will turn more and more to his disciples, to devote himself to their formation. *Meier*

24. Read this apocalyptic parable and briefly note what will happen to the “children of the kingdom” and to the “children of the evil one.”

Children of the kingdom

Children of the evil one

25. CONNECTION: All people will ultimately be judged. One of our responsibilities as Christians is to become aware of our own sinfulness, repent, confess and change for the better. In 1946, Pope Pius XII said, “Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin.” How would you define the “sense of sin” and how important do you think an understanding of sin is to your own salvation?

Read and record Acts 3:19 and ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your resolve to live in a holy and just manner.

FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

Choose the parable or story from this week’s lesson that was most meaningful to you. In what way(s) could it be applied to your faith journey?

NOTE: We continue “on the road” with Jesus. The marvelous thing about the Gospels is that they bring us into contact with Jesus. Jesus’ earthly life is far in the past, but through the Gospels we can join his disciples as they accompany him along the roads of first-century Palestine, watching and listening to him. The Gospels are a meeting place

where we can hear Jesus speaking to us and we can speak to him...and when we return from our travels with Jesus in the Gospel to our lives in the twenty-first century, we are challenged to act on what we have seen and heard. *Perrotta*

Read pages 71-78 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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