



Thoughts Notes and Answers

Acts 10:38 ... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs

Program

MATTHEW 13-14 Preaching/ BibSt / Kiama Anglican 2021.

Week Ending	Study	MATTHEW	Title	Page
Sun 24 Jan	1	13: 1-9;18-23	Four Soils	
Sun 31 Jan				
Sun 7 Feb	2	13:10-17	Speaking in Parables	
Sun 14 Feb	3	13:24-30;36-43	Wheat and Weeds	
Sun 21 Feb	4	13:31-35	Seeds, Yeast and Stories	
Sun 28 Feb	5	13:44-46	Buried Treasure and Fine Pearls	
Sun 7 Mar	6	13:47-53	Fair and Foul Fish	
Sun 14 Mar	7	13:53-14:12	Honourless Prophets	
Sun 21 Mar	8	14:13-21	Fish and Bread for All	
Sun 28 Mar	9	14:22-36	Walking or Sinking?	
Fri 2 Apr		Good Friday		
Sun 4 Apr		Easter Day		

BOOKS

Blomberg, C. Matthew (The New American Commentary) (Nashville, B&H Publishing, 1992)

Bolt, P. Matthew: A Great Light Dawns (Explore the Bible Today) (Sydney South, Aquila, 2014).

Carson D.A. “Matthew” in Expositors Bible Commentary (Revised) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010)

France, R.T. “Matthew” in Carson, D.A.; France, R.T.; Motyer, J.A.; Wenham, G.J. (Eds) New Bible Commentary (21st Century Edition) (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

France, R.T. Matthew (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (IVP, Leicester, 1985).

Green, Michael, The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven (Bible Speaks Today) (Leicester, IVP, 2000).

Hagner, D.A. Matthew 1-13 (Word Biblical Commentary) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000)

Hendriksen, W. Matthew (New Testament Commentary) Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 1973).

Morris, L. The Gospel according to Matthew (Pillar Commentaries) (Leicester, IVP, 1992)

O'Donnell, S.D. Matthew: All Authority on Heaven and Earth (Preaching the Word Commentary) (Osborne, G. R. Matthew (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010) (Wheaton, Crossway, 2013).

Platt, D. Exalting Jesus in Matthew (Christ-Centred Exposition Commentary) (Nashville, B&H Publishing, 2013)

Reeves, R. Matthew (Story of God Bible Commentary) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017)

Schreiner, P., Matthew, Disciple and Scribe. The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2019).

Secombe, David The King of God's Kingdom (Cumbria, Paternoster, 2002)

Snodgrass, K. Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008)

Wilkins, Michael.J. Matthew (NIV Application Commentary) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004)

Wright, N.T. Matthew for Everyone: Part 1 Chapters 1-15 (London, SPCK, 2002)

Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs

MATTHEW 13:1-14:36

Introduction

In Matthew 13:52 in the midst of the passages we are studying this term we read, *He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law (Scribe) who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."*

In his book on Matthew[#], Patrick Schreiner argues that the Scribe (teacher of the law), Matthew as he writes his Gospel, is pointing people to the kingdom message of Jesus and showing his readers the new treasures of Jesus life and teachings and their basis is the 'old' treasures of the Old Testament.

In this series of studies, we see Jesus as a teller of 'stories' and a doer of deeds.

The Parables prompt us to think carefully about what it means to enter and belong to the kingdom of heaven.

The Signs point us to the nature of the King in the kingdom.

As we study these 9 sections of the scripture, I trust that you see the great treasure that Jesus brings with the good news he preaches and will continue to see Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly*.

Greg Holmes,
January 2021

[#] Schreiner, P., *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe*. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2019).

^{*} From St Richard of Chichester (13thC) or 'Godspell' depending on your generation.

Thoughts, Notes and Answers

This booklet is intended as a supplement to the studies themselves.

The material here starts life as my check on whether you can actually answer the questions that have been set and to 'explain' where there are more than one possible answer.

I also include some of my own thinking which goes beyond just the initial 'answer' to the question.

I also then include various material from the reading I have done around the passages we are studying using such resources as commentaries, talks and more general books.

For this set of studies we are providing two possible approaches. There is the traditional one of 10(ish) questions and answers and also a variant of the so-called Swedish method which is explained a bit further a couple of pages down.

Each traditional study starts with a thought starter which is designed to get you thinking about at least one of the topics in the passage.

I then put the questions into three, broadly defined, sections.

The first few are titled **The Text** and these are intended to direct attention to what is actually written in the Bible passage.

The next few are **Connections** and these seek to widen our view with reference to the rest of scripture or the broader themes behind the passage or how the text relates to our contemporary culture.

The final two **Impact** questions seek to encourage us to look at our own lives and lifestyles and the way we live for our King, Jesus.

Please note that my answers below are not the only 'correct' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and an assistance to you.

These Notes are meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me.

e-mail: gregholmes@bigpond.com

phone 0411 244 052

Some thoughts on **PARABLES**

“The word “parable” is hard to pin down. We use it mostly for a story taken from this life that conveys spiritual truth, and it certainly is used in this way. But it may also denote a short, pithy saying, a wise saying. Not much, however, turns on our definition. It is more important to notice what Jesus said and what it means to us.”

Morris (PNTC)

Snodgrass (whose book on parables is entitled “Stories with Intent”) Says that Jesus’ parables have these qualities:

- They are first of all brief, even terse.
- They are marked by simplicity and symmetry.
- They focus mostly on humans. Their main purpose is to goad people into response.
- They are fictional descriptions taken from everyday life but they do not necessarily portray everyday events.
- They are engaging. They were told to create interest and various schemes are used to draw hearers in and compel dealing with the issues at hand.
- They often contain elements of reversal.
- The crucial matter of parables is usually at the end.
- They are told into a context.
- They are theocentric.
- They frequently allude to Old Testament texts.
- They mostly appear in larger collections of parables.

“Matthew 21:45 makes it clear that the understanding of the parables is not so much cognitive as volitional.” Those outside the Kingdom understand the provocative claim of the parables very well but they are not prepared to accept it Jesus speaking in parables is not a riddle as such. What is perplexing is the behaviour that it calls forth - that man can see Salvation personified and never less not come to conversion and belief. Again ‘Jesus deliberately concealed the word in parable lest men against their will be forced to acknowledge the Kingdom and yet he allowed them enough light to convict them and to convince them.’

Parables seek to goad people into the action the gospel deserves, and the Kingdom demands. One of the main problems of Christian churches, of western Christianity in particular, is our stultifying passivity. The parables compel us for Christ sake, literally to do something. Parables do not seek the mild morality about which Kirkegaard lamented but radical cross bearing God imitating response worthy of the name, conversion.

Blomberg (TNAC)

And so we turn to Matthew 13 and 14.

“Matthew at this point relates seven parables, beginning with the parable of the sower, perhaps to show what a parable is. It is given importance by being followed by an explanation of Jesus’ purpose in using parables and then an explanation of this parable. The other six are divided into two groups of three, separated by an explanation of the parable of the weeds. Each of the last six is introduced by “the kingdom of heaven is like...” (all seven are often called “parables of the kingdom,” but we should respect Matthew’s usage; he does, however, speak of “the word of the kingdom” in his explanation of the first, v. 19). Four of them are found in this Gospel only (the weeds, the pearl, the hidden treasure, and the net). It is often said that Matthew has gathered these parables, though they were spoken originally at different times. This may be so, but verse 53 seems to mean that Jesus gave them as a coherent series.”

Morris (PNTC):

For this set of studies, we are providing two possible approaches. There is the traditional one of 10(ish) questions and answers and also a variant of the so-called Swedish method.

The first section of which asks you to talk about what jumps out at you from the passage, it might be the main point or it might be something that has impressed itself on you. The second section enables you to ask what questions the passage raises for you. What puzzles you? What words don’t you understand? What phrases are difficult? Of course, you then need to seek answers either in the group or through other resources. The third section ask you to ponder what your response to this should be. This is the application of the passage for you. What are you going to DO in response to God’s word? The final section suggest you should seek things to pray about from the passage.

It is of course possible to blend both using the material in the ‘traditional’ set up to assist with the Swedish method. It is, of course, up to you, or to your group.

Study 1: Matthew 13: 1-9;18-23

Four Soils

Schreiner (Matthew Disciple and Scribe): *“Chapter 13 sits structurally at the center of the Gospel and is a lens through which to view the entire book. At the center of the chapter Matthew indicates that Jesus’s kingdom parables are in fulfillment of Ps. 78:2, “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden [κεκρυμμένα] since the foundation of the world”*

Before You Start

Note that this study focusses on the telling of the story in v1-9 and the explanation of the story in 18-23. The discussion in regard to Parables in general in v10-17 is the topic for the next study.

Why are we so captivated by ‘stories’ and storytelling?

For discussion. It is, I think, interesting to note that God does not reveal himself to us in statements about who he is and what he does rather, in the main, he tells us stories.

France (TNTC) on the structure of the chapter as a whole in the Gospel as a whole: *“Chapters 11-12 have illustrated the growing divisions among men in their attitude to Jesus, culminating in the sharp contrast between true disciples and all others in 12:46–50. Division, and the problem of how some could reject Jesus’ message while others responded, are the underlying themes of this chapter too; the parables thus provide some explanation of the attitudes revealed in the preceding narrative.*

Division is seen in the structure of the chapter. The parable of the sower is spoken in public to ‘great crowds’ (vv. 1–3), but its explanation and the teaching about parables are spoken only to the disciples (vv. 10–11). More parables are then spoken to ‘the crowds’ (v. 34), but the crowds are again left behind (v. 36), and the second explanation and further parables are spoken to the disciples in ‘the house’ (which Jesus had left in v. 1). The unresponsive crowds are thus clearly distinguished from the disciples to whom alone explanation is given, and this distinction is spelt out in vv. 11–17.

This division and contrast runs also through the contents of these parables. They are often referred to as ‘parables of the kingdom’, and indeed all of them are explicitly about ‘the kingdom of heaven’. But it is men’s response to the preaching of God’s kingdom which is their theme, and in this response there is a division between fruitful soil and unproductive, good grain and weeds, good fish and bad, while those who find the treasure and the pearl are remarkable precisely because they act so differently from other men, and the scribe of v. 52 is distinguished from other householders who can produce only what is old. The kingdom of heaven, for all its

growing power (vv. 31–33), is a ‘secret’ (v. 11), and a secret is a secret only if not everyone is in the know. That so crucial a revelation is offered to men, and so powerful an agent is at work, and yet there are some who remain unresponsive and unaffected – this is the great mystery which these parables are designed to explain.”

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13: 1-9;18-23

The Text

1. What is the setting (v1-2)?

Jesus moves to a public setting to teach.

France (TNTC): *“The house (presumably that of 8:14; 9:10, 28) serves here and in v. 36 to make clear the distinction between the public teaching which follows and the private explanation and further teaching (see introduction to this chapter). The impressive scene, with Jesus seated to teach and the great crowds on the shore was probably typical of this phase of Jesus’ ministry, and shows graphically the authority of Jesus which was recognized by ordinary Jews outside the disciple group (cf. 7:28–29).”*

N.T. Wright (NT For You): tells this story *“We stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee on a spring morning. The bus was up by the road, and we had walked down, several dozen of us, to where the lake was glistening in the sunshine. It was peaceful and still. The ground slopes up steeply from the lakeshore, curving sharply around a narrow inlet. There are several such inlets along the shore just to the west of Capernaum.*

Our guide knew what he was doing. He had already asked a local fisherman to bring a small boat. Leaving us on the shore, he got in the boat, and they pushed off and rowed out to the middle of the inlet. Then he stood up in the boat, and in a clear voice, without needing to shout, he read to us this story, the parable of the sower. We were amazed. His voice came to us across the water, clear and crisp in the morning air. The steep banks of the inlet acted like a well-designed theatre with perfect acoustics. We stood there listening, imagining a crowd many times larger than ourselves listening to another voice from another boat 2,000 years before. Jesus had discovered a perfect way to speak to several hundred at once, and to have them all hear what he was saying.

Jesus is not the only one who knew what he was doing. Matthew, in collecting together the parables which form this long chapter, has put them more or less at the centre of his whole gospel.”

Morris (PNTC): *“Mostly in this Gospel lengthy pieces of teaching are addressed to disciples, but this one is aimed at the crowds.”*

2. Briefly retell the story in 13:3-9. Try to imagine what you would think if you had never heard this story before?

One of the problems with these stories is that to most of us most of them are all too familiar. If we are to 'get more out of them', we need to try to see them afresh and try to put ourselves in the place of the people who sat there listening to Jesus.

3. From v18-23, what do each of the soils represent?

They represent people who hear 'the message of the kingdom' and what they do with that.

Path = heard but not really – basically the message bounces off.

Shallow Soil = Hear, give some sort of assent but it makes no difference to life.

Among weeds = Hear, respond and start to act but become entangled in the world and its cares.

Good Soil = bear fruit.

4. What 'hits' you about the interpretation?

For discussion really.

Morris (PNTC): *"Finally we come to the seeds that fell on good soil. Matthew uses this word, 'good', more than do other writers; it has the notion of 'beautiful' about it. Good seed going into good ground bears a good crop. The magnitude varies from a hundredfold (cf. Gen. 26:12) down to thirtyfold. The first mentioned is an extraordinary crop, but even thirtyfold is very good."*

Connections

1. Note 12:46-47. What does this context contribute to what follows?

Osborne (ZECNT): *"The context is critical. This parable is part of the seven parables of conflict in ch. 13 and with the others is interpreting the kingdom reality behind the unbelief and rejection in chs. 11–12. As such it is portraying the true spiritual reality of the unbelieving Jews of those chapters but at the same time expanding the horizon to the world of humankind as a whole, Gentile as well as Jew."*

2. What does v9 tell us about the parable?

It tells us it is not merely a nice 'earthly story with a heavenly meaning' but it is something we need to apply ourselves to.

Bolt (Reading the Bible Today): *"Stepping out of the parable to speak directly to his audience Jesus called the people to listen. Evidently there was something for Israel to hear in this little story drawn from this everyday scene of rural life what needed to be heard?"*

France (TNTC): (on 11:15) *"This formula is used by Jesus after sayings which require special insight (see 13:9, 43; Mark 4:23; Luke 14:35). It is a call for more than superficial understanding, an invitation to explore the implications of what has been said."* and on v9 here *"the formula conveys a challenge not only to understanding but to life."*

Osborne (ZECNT): *"As in 11:15 (cf. 13:43) Jesus calls for both a willingness to listen (present tense for an ongoing response) and a motivation to respond properly to the message (used also in the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2–3). Jesus is demanding a serious examination of its meaning on the part of his hearers. Many have called this a prophetic warning to the hearers/readers to open their minds and hearts to the spiritual truths being conveyed."*

That is, take it seriously!

3. In v18-23 notice the shift from 'it' in v3-8 to more personal terms. What does this tell you about Jesus' interpretation of the story?

The story is merely agricultural, the application is about persons, individuals and their response to Jesus.

Their response determines their relationship to Jesus and the Kingdom.

Morris (PNTC): *"In the parable he had the neuter plural, proper to seeds, but in the interpretation he emphasizes the people who respond to the seeds in such different ways (cf. JB, "this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path")."*

4. Of the four soil types, who is 'saved' and who is not?

Discuss.

This has been a matter of some debate.

Most probably the first two are not saved (Though there is some acceptance – perhaps telling is the phrase 'falls away'.)

The main question revolves around the final two.

Blomberg (TNAC): *"Many readers have wondered how to fit these four categories of individuals into the two categories into which Jesus is already made clear everyone falls (Matthew 7:13 – 27; Matthew 10:32 – 42). The answer is actually fairly straightforward. The first three kinds of soils are all inadequate, None of them stands for people who are ever true believers, despite certain outward appearances. For farmers only those plants that bear good fruit produced a crop (v8) count for anything. True believers are thus only those who bear proper spiritual fruit (7:16-17), Of the rest Jesus says, 'I never knew you' (7:23). What counts is not profession of faith but perseverance in faith. To be sure all true Christians will persevere but only by observing who perseveres can we determine who those true Christians are."*

Matthew's climatic focus however remains on the astonishing impact of those who are faithful. Jesus provides his followers with an important reminder of God's continued blessings on their work even as large numbers of people become increasingly hostile to the gospel. He will make the point again in verses 31-33 "

- 5. I believe that as much as anything this is a 'parable about parables'. Discuss.**
Discuss.

Impact

- 1. What does this parable tell us about ourselves as 'consumers' of God's word and then as 'communicators' of God's word?**





I think it speaks to us on two levels –

First it tells us that, (as noted from the Matthew 10-12 series) that there are lots of different responses to the gospel preached. Thus four soils (the other debate is are the last two saved or just the last one) and four responses. This tells us that every time we speak about the gospel, in any context, we can expect the same (or similar) four responses. So if it happens to Jesus we should not expect a 100% success rate.

Second it speaks to us every time we hear the gospel spoken, or we read or see some presentation, we too are likely to have one of the four responses (in reality a spectrum I suspect) and thus we need to be alert to be good soil that hears and grows. I am sure that both you and I can think of occasions when the sermon or talk we have heard has really just bounced off and of course others where it has buried deep and had a lasting effect and/or a whole range of responses in-between.

- 2. What soil are you right now?**

Be honest with yourself – this is an ongoing thing every time we consider or hear God's word communicated.

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 1</i>		
Matthew 13: 1-9;18-23		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
Four Soils		
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 2: Matthew 13:10-17

Speaking in Parables

In the chapter this passage occurs between the telling of the “Four Soils” and its explanation. Having looked at the parable we now turn to Jesus’ explanation of parables.

Before You Start

What do you think a parable is?

For discussion.

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:10-17

The Text

1. What is the context of this explanation? What is implied by the disciples’ question?

The context is Jesus taking up teaching in parables again and in blocks

Osborne (ZECNT): *“The disciples have apparently been listening while Jesus addressed the crowds. Apparently, sometime later they “come to”³³ him, for Jesus’ reply is meant only for them. It seems clear that they are confused and do not understand the parable. So they ask him why he is using such an enigmatic form of teaching. It is hard enough for them, but the crowds could hardly catch the meaning. Jesus has used the parable form before (7:24–27; 9:15–17; 11:16–19), but he now has increased their number and made them even more difficult to comprehend.”*

Morris (PNTC): *“As Patte says, the disciples’ question “presupposes that the crowds — together with the readers — do not understand this kind of speech”. The parable is a powerful method of teaching, but perhaps some measure of commitment is required in hearers if they are really to understand what a parable is saying. It is a fallacy that everyone can understand a parable. An unexplained parable is usually open to interpretation in any one of a number of ways,²⁴ and those who lack devotion to Jesus may be relied on to go astray even when they hear the very stories that convey truth so vividly to disciples. Jesus expressly speaks of those who know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as those who understand. If someone does not know the great basic truths of the kingdom, what is he to make of the parables that set it forth or indeed of other parables? Commitment to Jesus is the prerequisite for a true understanding of his parabolic teaching.”*

2. Who is Jesus speaking to in these verses?

He is speaking to his close disciples. Probably a slightly larger group than the twelve, but not the crowds of v2.

They are people who are committed to Jesus to some extent and to his message.

To use the parables terms – the seed has taken root.

3. What does Jesus say the parables do?

He is saying that they both enlighten and also hide the truth from the listener.

France (TNTC): *“The Greek parabolē is wider than our ‘parable’; in the LXX it translates māšāl, which includes proverbs, riddles and wise sayings as well as parables. Matthew uses it for instance for Jesus’ cryptic saying about defilement (15:10–11, 15), and in 24:32 (‘lesson’) it indicates a comparison. Speaking in parables is therefore enigmatic, and requires careful interpretation.”*

4. What are v16-17 saying?

They are saying that for those who listen, who look there is the blessing of understanding the unfolding purposes of God and being involved in them.

Blomberg (TNAC): *“The disciples will not grasp everything Jesus says: the contrast with outsiders is relative rather than absolute but they will be privy to Jesus explanations to move them on to greater understanding than most in the crowds have (18-23;36-43).”*

Connections

1. What is meant by ‘the secrets of the kingdom of heaven’?

Morris (PNTC) *“This is Matthew’s one use of the word mystery (which is found 20 times in the Pauline corpus). It signifies something that people could never work out for themselves, which is why it is a “mystery.” But in the New Testament it usually carries the further thought that that which people can never work out for themselves God has now made known to them”*

France (TNTC): *“To know the truth about the kingdom of heaven is to know secrets. The Greek mystērion, used only here in the Gospels, became important for Paul to indicate that God’s truth comes only by revelation, not by natural insight. That is the sense here too – only those to whom it has been given (by God) can understand the nature of God’s kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, and therefore the facts about its growth, membership, demands and privileges which these parables convey. Parables, which to the hostile and the merely curious were simple stories, would yield their riches only within this context, to those who know the secrets.”*

2. Read Isaiah 6:1-13. How does Isaiah's encounter with God inform this discussion?

Isaiah is commissioned in Isaiah 6 to take a message, initially of judgement to the people of Israel who are in rebellion against God and disobeying the Law.

God tells Isaiah that his task will be a difficult one and only a small remnant will hear and respond.

France (TNTC) on v14-15: *"The same passage in Isaiah which inspired v. 13 is now quoted in full in the LXX version. It is likely that they are Matthew's own addition, along the lines of his formula-quotations, to underline the allusion in Jesus' words. Isaiah 6:9-10 was not in fact a prediction for the distant future but rather for Isaiah's own experience, but this experience formed a typological pattern which is now fulfilled as Jesus re-enacts the role of the Old Testament prophet. Perhaps a statement of fact, 'with them indeed is fulfilled', is used rather than the usual purpose clause to show that the spiritual dullness was the situation within which Jesus taught rather than itself the product of his teaching. It is similarly notable that in v. 15 the LXX, which is here followed, substitutes for the Hebrew imperatives ('make fat', 'make heavy', 'shut') a passive verb ('has been made fat') and two active ones (the Greek reads literally 'with their ears they have heard heavily and their eyes they have closed'), thus placing the blame for their unresponsiveness not on the prophet (here Jesus) but on the people themselves. Thus, as we saw in v. 13, the emphasis is not on either the purpose or the result of Jesus' speaking in parables, but rather on the existing situation within which it took place."*

3. Are parables told to make things easy to understand?

Yes *and* no!

For those who are prepared to apply themselves to them and to seek the meaning they do make it 'easier'.

For those who are not prepared to do the 'work' they remain enigmatic stories.

Morris PNTC) *"Gutzwiller draws attention to Augustine's remarks about a man who looks at beautiful writing in a foreign tongue; he may admire the calligraphy, but the meaning he cannot appreciate. So when a person who rejects Jesus hears parables. He may find things in them that he can appreciate and admire, but their essential meaning he cannot attain. So is it with hearing."*

Snodgrass (Stories with Intent): *"A good parable creates distance, provokes, and appeals. By creating distance it gives the hearer reader space to reconsider; one has no sense of needing to defend one's turf. By provoking*

the parable requires new channels of thought, and by appealing the parable seeks decisions that bring behaviour into line with the teller's intent."

4. Why is this discussion here in the middle of the parable of the soils?

Matthew wants not only to tell the stories Jesus told but he wants people to hear and understand them correctly.

Notice that you can quite legitimately translate v18 as the KJV does "*Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*" So, for the disciples, now the secrets are to be revealed.

Impact

1. How do these verses inform our own communication of the gospel and the reactions we are likely to get to that?





We must not be surprised when people: don't listen, don't get it, don't want to know.

We need to remember that God, in this, calls us to be faithful – being successful is up to Him.

2. How do you become 'blessed' as in v16?

By 'hearing' and 'seeing' – by being good soil.

Osborne (ZECNT): "*Possibly both aspects of "blessed" (μακάριος) are intended here, the vertical divine blessing and the horizontal happiness experienced by those who are blessed.*" Note also Matthew 5:3

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 2</i>		
Matthew 13:10-17 Speaking in Parables		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 3: Matthew 13:24-30;36-43

Wheat and Weeds

Again, here we look at the parable and its interpretation together and look at the intervening material separately.

Before You Start

How do you feel about weeds in your garden? What should be done about them?

Not for me to comment on as, throughout my life, I have consciously and conscientiously avoided any attempt at gardening.

However, I do know that weeds = not good = get rid of them.

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:24-30;36-43

Morris (PNTC): *"This parable is found only in Matthew, who has it as the first of a series of parables specifically said to refer to the kingdom of heaven. It has a strong eschatological emphasis, even though it says important things about the admixture of those who belong to the kingdom and those who do not in the time before the end."*

The Text

1. How does Jesus introduce this parable?

Osborne (ZECNT): Note on the introductory words: *"It is commonly recognized that "it is like" (ὡμοιωθή) should not be translated to say "the kingdom is like a man" but rather is an Aramaic idiom meaning, "it is the case with the kingdom as with this story... ."*

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Jesus' introduction ("The kingdom of heaven is like ...") will introduce all six remaining parables in this chapter (13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47). These are kingdom parables, teaching various truths regarding the inbreaking and future of God's final kingdom in Jesus. These are the "mysteries" Jesus spoke of in 13:11. While the first parable seemed to concern a peasant, probably a tenant farmer, this concerns a wealthy landowner with many day laborers helping care for the farm. The "good seed" is said to be "wheat" in v. 25, a crop for which Galilee was well known and the staple food product of the Roman empire."*

2. What is sown and what problem arises?

Wheat seeds are sown (one assumes mostly in the good soil) but as the crop is coming up it is noted that a quite a significant proportion of the field is now polluted by weeds.

3. What solution is proposed by the servants and by the owner? Which is taken up?

The servants want to 'weed the garden' immediately.

The owner says wait till harvest time.

France (TNTC): *"The weeds are probably darnel, a poisonous plant related to wheat and virtually indistinguishable from it until the ears form. To sow darnel among wheat as an act of revenge was punishable in Roman law, which suggests that the parable depicts a real-life situation. A light infestation of darnel could be tackled by careful weeding, but mistakes would easily be made. In the case of a heavy infestation the stronger roots of the darnel would be tangled with those of the wheat, making selective weeding impossible."*

4. In general (in v36-43) to what time does Jesus say this parable applies? (Note Matthew 16:27; 25:31)

The final act of this parable is applied to the 'end of the age' – the time when the Kingdom (Rule) of Heaven will be displayed in its full glory and power.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"The image of a harvest, so important to ancient Mediterranean life, was a natural metaphor for the eschatological consummation (Isa 17:5; Jer 51:33; Joel 3:13; 4 Ezra 4:30–32; Rev 14:14–20). Likewise, "the end of the age" was a common concept to describe the destruction of evil and the beginning of eternity (cf. Matt 13:40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Heb 9:26). The picture of the angels as harvesters makes sense since angels are often associated with the eschaton (1 En. 46:5, 54:6, 63:1; Matt 16:27, 24:31, 25:31; Rev 14:15, 17–19)."*

Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

Matthew 25:31 *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.*

Blomberg (TNAC): *"One may discern three stages in the story's plot -the initial obstacles to the Kingdom (v27-28) - the inauguration of the Kingdom (v28b-30a) and the final consummation of the Kingdom (v30b). From the actions of the farmer and the fate of the wheat and weeds one learns that God will permit the righteous and the wicked to coexist in this age but he will eventually separate the wicked judge them and destroy them while gathering the righteous together to be rewarded by enjoying his presence forever."*

Connections

1. What do you understand by the 'kingdom of heaven'?

In his gospel Matthew uses the phrase Kingdom of Heaven, whereas, generally, the other gospels speak of the Kingdom of God.

We need to understand 'the kingdom' as being, not so much a place as, the activity of ruling. It is not just a physical heaven that will come in the future. As Jesus preached in Matthew 4:17 *"...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

The kingdom is present in Jesus, he is the King, we belong to the kingdom if we truly acknowledge Him as King and submit to his rule.

2. Who is the landowner? Who is the enemy?

The landowner = The Son of Man (Jesus' code phrase for himself).

Enemy = The Devil

Osborne (ZECNT): *"The two terms for the ruler of the cosmic powers, 'evil one' and 'devil,' are interchangeable in Matthew (the first in 5:37; 6:13; 13:19; the second in 4:1, 5, 8, 11; 25:41). By interspersing the titles here, Christ wants hearers to know who the antagonist is. In this world the war between good and evil cannot be avoided, and there is no middle ground. One either belongs to the kingdom or the powers of evil, and the two forces exist side by side in this world."*

3. From v37-39 what does each element of the parable represent?

Sower	=	Son of Man (= JESUS)
Field	=	the world
Good seed	=	the people of the kingdom.
Weeds	=	the people of the evil one
Enemy	=	the devil
Harvest	=	the end of the age
Reapers	=	the angels

France (TNTC): *"This detailed 'lexicon' to the parable provides a handy guide to its interpretation without focusing on any one point or drawing out the overall application. The following verses will expand the role of the Son of man to be not only the sower, but the chief harvester, and owner of the kingdom (see Matthew 25:31ff., where similarly divine functions are accorded to the Son of man).*

4. In the application of the parable, what happens to the 'weeds' and the 'wheat'?

The Weeds (v41-42) – Judgement

they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Morris PNTC): *"In words reminiscent of Daniel 3:6 Jesus speaks of the fate of the lawless ones. The angels will cast them into the blazing furnace (lit. "furnace [Matthew, p. 358] of fire"), which fits in with other passages using the imagery of fire for the final destination of the wicked. In that place (there) there will be misery, symbolised by the specification of weeping and grinding of teeth. This expression occurs 6 times in Matthew, once in Luke, and nowhere else in the New Testament. It leaves no doubt about the unhappiness of the final state of the lost."*

The Wheat (v43) – Glorification

NIV: *"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."* The Message: *"At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of their Father."*

Bolt (Reading the Bible Today): *"This expression sounds a bit like what is said in Daniel's final vision of those who will be raised from the dead (Daniel 12:3) 'and those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above and those who turned many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever'."*

See also Philippians 2:15: *"Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky"*

Impact

1. In 21st Century Kiama what should the 'wheat' be doing about the 'weeds'?

Discuss





The wheat, the people of the kingdom, should be telling all the 'people of the evil one' (and that is everyone who does not belong to Jesus) that judgment is coming and that there is an alternative.

We tell people about Jesus and his gospel.

2. Discuss what v43 means to you personally.

This does seem to be the better option.

We must continue to have 'ears to hear' and to be 'good soil'.

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 3</i>		
<u>Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43</u> Wheat and Weeds		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 4: Matthew 13:31-35

Seeds, Yeast, and Stories

Before You Start

In what area of our world do you see great growth from small beginnings?

Discuss!

Digital 'stuff'. – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:31-35

The Text

1. In v31 and 32 what is the kingdom of heaven likened to? What is the result?

It is like a very small seed which grows into a large plant.

France (TNTC): *"Mustard seed was proverbially minute (cf. 17:20), though of course it is not literally the smallest known seed. The point of the parable lies in the contrast between this insignificant beginning and the greatest of shrubs which results."*

2. In v33 what is the kingdom of heaven likened to? What is the result?

Now it is likened to the small portion of yeast put in dough to make it rise.
Small portion – large amount.

France (TNTC): *"Three measures of meal would be about 40 litres, which would make enough bread for a meal for 100 people, a remarkable baking for an ordinary woman, but it makes the point vividly!"*

3. Who is speaking in v34-35? What is the point being made? (Note again 13:10-17).

Here Matthew takes up his commentary on the proceedings.

France (TNTC): *"The theme of vv. 10–17 is here briefly resumed in a second interlude before the second set of three parables. The remaining sections will be addressed only to the disciples. For the concentration on parables in public teaching from now on, see on 13:10. This practice, which was previously explained from Isaiah 6:9–10, is now seen as the fulfilment of Psalm 78:2."*

Connections

1. What is the point of the two parables? Is it the same?

You can call these two parables and the parable of the weeds which 'surrounds' them – Parables of Growth.

Weeds looks to a pure harvest and the end time.

The Mustard Seed looks to the observable growth in the 'size' of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Morris (PNTC): *"There is also the thought of the continuity between the seed and the grown plant; it is from the mustard seed and that seed only that the mustard plant grew. So it is from Jesus and his little band that the mighty kingdom of heaven would emerge."*

The Yeast seems more internal - working without easy observation.

Morris (PNTC): *"The leaven was but a small amount, but in time it changed the large quantity of flour. Like the previous parable this one brings out the contrast and the continuity between the small beginnings of the kingdom and its great consummation. ... The parable also makes the point that the power that effects the change comes from outside the dough; the mass of dough does not change itself."*

Bolt (Reading the Bible Today): *"Jesus' simile was saying that what was happening among Israel at that moment had a massive change in view. But things had only just begun."*

France (TNTC): *"So the three parables of growth all focus on the paradox of insignificant or hidden beginnings and a triumphant climax. In Jesus' ministry this was a real issue: for those outside the disciple group it affected the credibility of an announcement of God's reign which had apparently little to show for it; for the disciples there was the natural impatience to see God's kingdom in all its glory, and the total eradication of all that opposed it. To them, and to us today who may expect God to act dramatically and without delay, Jesus points out that the full growth (harvest, mustard plant, leavened dough) is assured from the moment the seed is sown, however unpromising its appearance and whatever opposition it may meet in its development. The way of God is not that of ostentation but of ultimate success. Little is great where God is at work."*

2. Do you know of other uses of 'yeast' in the Bible? Does it always have the same positive image?

France (TNTC): *"Leaven (yeast) is usually in the Bible a symbol for the pervasive power of evil, but it is its pervasiveness, not its metaphorical connections, which is in view here."*

From the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: *"The physical phenomenon of infiltration, as the yeast fungus multiplies throughout its medium, provides the basis for a symbolic use of leaven or yeast. The effect can be either positive or negative. One of Jesus' parables about the growth of the kingdom depended on the understanding of the hidden yet pervasive effect that yeast has on a large*

quantity of flour (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20–21). This is a positive image: the kingdom message will gradually permeate the world. But most uses of the image seem to regard the idea of infiltration as negative, and this may lie behind the commands to remove leaven from bread during the sacrifices. Worship of the true God could not be combined with other gods or religions. Unleavened bread symbolized this requirement of purity of worship.

See also Mt 16:6, 11, 12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6,7; cf. Gal 5:9; 1 Cor 5:8

3. Verse 33 could read “hid in three measures of flour” (ESV). How might this relate to v34-35?

Gives the idea of hiddenness and concealed growth.

France (TNTC): *“Hid is not the natural verb here, and must be designed to emphasize the secret, inconspicuous way the kingdom of heaven begins to take effect.”*

But Osborne (ZECNT): *“ἐνέκρυψεν could mean “hid” and introduce imagery of the “hidden” truths of the gospel, thus pointing to 13:35, 44; but more likely it means simply to “put something into something.””*

4. Note Psalm 78:1-8 (in its context (the entire Psalm has 72 verses)). What is this saying about who Jesus is?

France (TNTC): *“The psalm describes only the writer’s own intention, but as in 12:40–41 and 13:13ff., Jesus’ role is seen as ‘fulfilling’ that pattern on a typological principle. It is the word parables (Heb. māšāl; see on 13:10) which makes the connection, but what was hidden (translating Heb. ḥîdôt, ‘riddles’, sayings requiring insight or explanation to be understood) appropriately sums up Matthew’s earlier explanation of Jesus’ procedure in telling parables to the crowds but explaining their significance only to the disciples.”*

Impact





1. What do the two parables of growth say to us about our effort in evangelism?

Discuss

God gives the (guaranteed) growth!

2. Christ’s “truths, like parables, take time and effort to unlock. There are hidden realities that can only be known by serious Bible study and absolute commitment to Christ.” (Osborne (ZECNT))

Discuss.

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 4</i>		
Matthew 13:31-35 Seeds, Yeast, and Stories.		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 5: Matthew 13:44-46

Buried Treasure and Fine Pearls

Before You Start

What, in terms of material things, is your greatest personal desire? If it was placed within your reach what would you be prepared to do to acquire it?

Discuss

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:44-46

The Text

1. What did the man discover in the field?

He discovered a treasure.

It would seem that he was about normal activities when he comes across the treasure.

2. What did he do about it?

Covered it up (hid it) and liquidated all his assets in order to buy the field – and thus the treasure.

3. What did the merchant find?

He is in the business of pearls and finds a beauty.

Notice he is in fact 'looking for' (ESV 'in search of') fine pearls. Here he is an active seeker of what he finds whereas the 'man' in v44 seems to simply stumble upon this great treasure. (See note on Q2 below)

4. What did he do about it?

He also sells all he has in order to acquire this one pearl of great value.

France (TNTC): *"Pearls were highly valued in the ancient world. The action of the merchant (a substantial trader, not a local retailer), while more economically improbable than that of the finder of the treasure, immediately catches the imagination. In the face of the 'wealth that demonetizes all other currencies,' prudent calculation gives way to extravagant action."*

Connections

1. What are these two parables saying about the 'kingdom of heaven'?

They both say that it is worth obtaining whatever the cost.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"The point is obviously the absolute value of the kingdom, worth surrendering everything to attain. No other aspect is highlighted in this*

short parable, so clearly this is a call for radical discipleship (and especially of financial sacrifices needed) in light of the overwhelming value of the kingdom. Only a few know its worth, and they should surrender everything to obtain it."

2. Is there any difference in the message?

It seems (and I may be drawing a long bow) that the 'man' of v44 wants the treasure to spend, to enhance his lifestyle, while the merchant wants the pearl in order to contemplate its beauty. Given that the Kingdom of Heaven both enhances our lifestyle and is a thing of great beauty to contemplate, the subtle difference may be worth considering.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Davies and Allison take "looking" (ζητοῦντι, an adjectival participle) to be a key term in the story — the kingdom is not open to all but only to those who seek it (Matt 6:33) However, this should not be overstressed, for the treasure parable has the person accidentally "finding," while this one has a merchant deliberately "seeking." In other words, they build on each other, and the key is not so much the mode of discovery as it is the total surrender that accompanies it."*

Blomberg (TNAC): *"Interestingly, in the parable of the pearl the man is searching for wealth, whereas in the parable of the hidden treasure the man stumbles across it. As with the parables of mustard seed and leaven, Jesus is reaching out to every person in his audience. He calls the spiritual seeker as well as the apathetic atheist."*

3. Do these parables, in their detail raise any moral problems for you? Is that a problem?

In the earthly sense one would have to say that the treasure finder's actions are a bit dubious.

Morris (PNTC): *"This will be the reason the man hid the treasure instead of "lifting" it straightaway; if he "lifted" it before the field was his, it might be argued that when he did the "lifting" he was acting as the owner's agent. By buying the land before "lifting" the treasure, he removed all possibility of dispute."*

France (TNTC): *"Valuables such as coins or jewels were often hidden in a jar in the earth (cf. 25:25), and discoveries of such treasure trove were a favourite theme of popular stories. The man is probably a day-labourer; on the legal and moral justification of his action towards his employer see Derrett (pp. 1–16), but that is not the point of the parable. It lies rather in both the joy which a disciple experiences in 'finding' the kingdom of heaven (i.e. in a relationship with Jesus who brings it), and in his willingness to give up everything else for this (cf. 10:37–39; 19:27–29). But it is wrong to describe this 'giving up' as*

'sacrifice'; the man sold from self-interest, in order to buy something far greater. The disciple's 'giving up' is in the context of joy!"

Blomberg (TNAC): *"One should not worry about the man's ethics in hiding the treasure. We need neither justify his behaviour nor imitate it. This is simply part of the storyline which helps to make sense of the plot. Jesus frequently tells parables in which unscrupulous characters nevertheless display some virtue from which Christians can learn (see Luke 16:1-8; Luke 18:1-8)."*

4. What value does the Kingdom of Heaven have?

Inestimable – It is truly priceless.

Impact





1. Back to the introductory question: belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven is of greater worth and lasts much longer than treasure or pearls. It is placed within your reach. What are you prepared to do to acquire it?

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Therefore, the two parables of 13:44–46 present a four-stage scenario: seek, discover, surrender, and purchase. In this sense these parables sum up not just chapter 13 but the entire gospel thus far. Christ has brought with him the consummated kingdom that the OT was waiting for, but neither the world as a whole nor the Jewish people have recognized or accepted it. Yet it is the fulfilled promise of God and the sum of everything humankind has wanted. In light of this, there is only one possible reaction, the radical surrender of one's whole life in order to have it. It is the greatest prize this world will ever see, but to have it one must throw off all worldly values."*

2. You know about the treasure and how to obtain it! What have you done about this?

For thought and discussion

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Collectors throughout history have purchased a priceless heirloom or artwork simply for the enjoyment of it with no thought of profit. The message is that the kingdom is priceless, and no sacrifice is too great for attaining it. It demands the surrender of all earthly value but is more than worth it. Beare points to Luke 14:33 ("those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples") and concludes, "Anyone who counts the cost of discipleship has completely failed to grasp the greatness of the reward.""*

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 5</i>		
Matthew 13:44-46 Buried Treasure and Fine Pearls		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 6: Matthew 13:47-53

Fair and Foul Fish

Before You Start

What separates 'the sheep from the goats' (Matthew 25:31-46)?
Relationships with Jesus and to quote from 1 Peter 'doing good'.

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:47-53

The Text

1. What is the story here?

This is a fishing story but not of the bragging kind.

This is net fishing on lake Galilee.

Osborne (ZECNR): *"The dragnet had floats (cork or a light wood) on top and weights underneath and was either put between two boats or anchored on shore and then drawn in a semi-circle by a boat. It would trap "every kind of" fish swimming near the surface, both those edible and those not."*

2. What happens to the fish?

The good, I suppose that means the edible ones are kept in baskets and the others are thrown away.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"The basis of the separation of good from bad fish was probably ceremonial, i.e., clean and unclean (Lev 11:9–12, all without fins and scales, e.g., shellfish), but it could also apply to edible and inedible fish. Fishermen in the Sea of Galilee would separate at least twenty-four species of fish in the lake on the basis of both categories."*

3. What is Jesus' interpretation?

The wicked, at the end of the age will be cast away.

To a blazing furnace, gnashing of teeth.

The righteous are kept (but one assumes not eaten).

4. What are verses 51 and 52 saying?

First we note the disciples assurance that they understand.

France (TNTC): *"In v. 36 the disciples had asked for explanation. Jesus now checks that the teaching given specifically to them and not to the crowds has been effective. It has produced understanding. For this key*

word see vv. 13, 14, 15, 19, 23, above: it is the special prerogative of the disciple to whom the mysteries are revealed."

Morris (PNTC): *"“Yes.” This may perhaps be a trifle glib, for there is evidence in the remainder of the Gospel that their understanding was somewhat imperfect. But Jesus raises no question, and we may be sure that, with whatever uncertainty there may have been about details, they had understood the main thrust of what Jesus had said. At any rate there were no questions."*

Then Jesus concludes his parables in this section with a reference to the value of his teaching.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Thus it sums up the whole chapter and not just this section. Jesus seemingly accepts this (he will later demur in 14:31; 15:16; 16:9) and labels the apostolic band in their newfound understanding of the new Torah of the kingdom (see on 5:17–20) a group of Christian scribes ("teacher[s] of the law"). As stated in 5:20, a scribe was both an official interpreter of Torah and a teacher of it. Matthew as a former tax collector was a scribe, and so he is building on his own memories here."*

(Note that v 53 functions as a conclusion to the parables section and an introduction to the following section.)

Connections

1. Which other parable parallels this one? What is the same and what is different?

The Wheat and the Weeds.

The explanation of the earlier parable is more complete though they both have the same important message.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"God knows where everyone stands vis-à-vis Christ, and terrible judgment awaits those who reject him and do evil. The parable of the dragnet (vv. 47–50) is similar to that of the weeds (vv. 36–43) and has an identical ending (v. 50 = v. 42), emphasizing the horror of turning away from Christ and God's goodness. In this world, even in the church, the good and the bad live side by side, and we cannot finally separate them. But at the eschaton, God will do so unerringly, and justice will prevail."*

This is the final answer to the age-old question of why the wicked flourish while the righteous so often have nothing. That scenario is only true in this world. But in the final kingdom eschatological separation and judgment

will occur, and those who are playing games with God as well as those who flaunt their evil will pay eternal consequences.”

2. What warning is v50 giving?

It warns of the final judgement for those who are outside the kingdom – not good fish.

3. Verses 52 and 53 finish off this parable section. What aspects of Jesus’ ministry (and Matthew’s recording of it) are our attention drawn to?

Really just for reflection on the whole chapter.

One of the principal underlying themes is that of needing to seek out understanding and to ‘have ears to hear’ and then respond.

Morris (PNTC): *“Jesus is pointing out that there are fresh insights that are of value and that there are also teachings that have stood the test of time. If the word order is significant, the new matters more than the old and Jesus is saying that the new teachings his followers are embracing do not do away with the old teachings (those in the Old Testament), but are the key to understanding them. The new age has dawned, and it is only in recognition of that fact that the old can be understood in its essential function of preparing the way for the new.”*

Schreiner (Matthew, Disciple and Scribe): *“Jesus is not changing God’s plan, for God has been slowly painting his canvas all along. At the same time, the revelation of these things through the Son is new. These are new/old truths, and the disciples scribe brings out a plate of goods for the benefit of others. According to Matthew, the message of the kingdom of heaven does not do away with the old but builds on top of it. Matthew shows his readers that in their enthusiasm for finding the new, they must not disregard the old.”*

4. What treasures have you found in the parables, and teaching of chapter 13?

For discussion.

Blomberg (TNAC): *“Parables provide a model for Christian teachers in every era. Storytelling makes lessons much more vivid and enticing than the mere listing of principles. What is more, they can communicate unique insights not easily translated into propositional language. They draw listeners into what might otherwise seem a more threatening conversation, enabling them to consider God’s claims they might otherwise reject without further thought. This was classically illustrated already in King David’s day with Nathan’s parable of the ewe lamb in 2 Samuel 12. Though cognitive understanding is often enhanced parables do not always bring about the desired response. By forcing people to decide for or against Jesus, parables may be said to drive away those who reject him and, in that sense, conceal the truth from them. Our preaching ought also to bring people gently and tactfully to a clear point*

of decision, even as we recognise that there will be diverse responses to the gospel's call to repentance and faith in Jesus. Despite all opposition God still rules, furthering his purposes. And hastening the day when his people will be vindicated. Hence it is worth sacrificing whatever is required to be on his side."

Wright (NT For Everyone): *"Parables, then, aren't simply nice, friendly illustrations designed to help people get their minds round deep abstract truth. In fact, the truth they speak of isn't abstract at all: it's what God is doing personally, bodily, in Jesus and his work, and what God will do through his death and resurrection. God is indeed sowing Israel again, planting his people once more, through Jesus. But it doesn't look like what most people were expecting. Are we ready for the unexpected? Are we too in danger of deciding so firmly what God ought to be doing in our lives, our churches, our world that we become blind and deaf to him when he tries to tell us that it's actually going to be rather different?"*

Impact





1. What does the parable of the 'net' encourage us to do?

Work at making those around us see the great benefit of being good, not bad fish.

To extend the metaphor beyond what is meant by the parable we need to be casting our net of the gospel to bring in the good fish.

2. Do you see Jesus' teaching and his life example as great treasure?

For discussion.

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 6</i>		
Matthew 13:47-53 Fair and Foul Fish		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 7: Matthew 13:53-14:12

Honourless Prophets

Before You Start

Australians, it seems, love to put down 'tall poppies'. Discuss this.
Of course we don't like others to put them down.

Listen Carefully to Matthew 13:53-14:12

The Text

1. What is 13:35 saying? What function does it perform?

France (TNTC): *"Like the parallel formulae at the end of the other major collections of teaching (see 7:28–29), this verse both concludes the teaching and leads into the following narrative; there is no clear paragraph break, and the following verses will describe a mixed reaction to Jesus' teaching which amply illustrates much of the teaching in the preceding parables about men's response to the kingdom of heaven."*

2. Describe the reactions of the people of Nazareth to Jesus' teaching.?

They are first of all 'amazed' then they begin to question rather than listen.

Carson (EBC): *"It is almost universally assumed that this is the same rejection recorded in Luke 4:16–30, which ties the event to OT prophecy."*

3. What is Herod the tetrarch's reaction to Jesus teaching?

What does he do about it?

Herod is one of the Roman appointed rulers of a section of Palestine. Osborne (ZECNT): *"This is the only place in Matthew that Herod Antipas is mentioned, son of Herod the Great (2:1) and brother of Archelaus (see on 2:22). He was "tetrarch," ruling one fourth of the province, namely, Galilee and Perea from AD 4–39. So Herod has been on his throne about twenty-five years."*

4. What had happened to John the Baptist?

This is a sordid little tale which reflects the decadence and self indulgence of Herod's court and the political intrigues within it.

France: *"John's execution was against Jewish law, both in that he had no trial and that he was beheaded."*

Connections

1. Read Luke 4:16-30 which gives a fuller account of the events in 13:54-58.
What provokes the reaction in this account?

Jesus teaching in the synagogue and his claim that he fulfills the Isaiah passage provokes the reactions.

2. How do the reactions of the people of Nazareth and Herod (and his court) illustrate the point of the parables in chapter 13?

Some hear, listen and understand others hear and allow the message to bounce off.

Note how the people of Nazareth are at first amazed and then hostile.

3. What is (are) Herod's problem(s)?

Herod rules at the behest of the Romans and his position is thus a bit tenuous.

Herod recognizes the prophetic nature of what he hears about Jesus (His kingship is threatened by a legitimate claim to the throne of David).

AND he obviously has a conscience about what he did to John the Baptist. (Whose tale Matthew now tells.)

4. Note the end of 14:12 and the beginning of v13. Why the connection between the two events?

The impetus for Jesus 'withdrawing' may well be more the idea of Herod's thoughts in 14:1-2 than the death of John which has been told as a flashback and happened somewhat earlier...

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Jesus wishes to remove himself from a politically tricky situation, the second time he has done so (cf. 12:15). Luke 9:10 tells us the "solitary place" was at Bethsaida on the northeast part of the lake, an area outside the area (Herod) Antipas controlled. The addition of "privately" means Jesus wishes to spend time alone with the disciples and prepare them for the terrible events soon to come."*

Impact





1. How should we react to Jesus?

We are not merely to be amazed or to be spiritually supersensituous.

The right reaction is to be the right soil.

2. Part of the people of Nazareth's problem was, it would seem, that 'familiarity breeds contempt'. Most of us are very familiar with the stories of Jesus. What can we do not to fall into the same trap as those in Nazareth?!

Discuss

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 7</i>		
Matthew 13:53-14:12 Honourless Prophets		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 8: Matthew 14:13-21

Fish and Bread for All

Blomberg (TNAC): *“Two major miracles demonstrating Jesus’ power over nature are followed by a brief summary of his further healing activity. This section also contains the strongest Christological confession to date by his Jewish disciples (v33) for now Jesus is still ministering in Israel and his Jewish followers acknowledge him as son of God.”*

Before You Start

What do you expect Jesus to do for you?

Morris (PNTC): *“Matthew has sounded the note of rejection, both of Jesus and of John the Baptist, and sad notes will be struck more frequently as his narrative proceeds. But all is not doom and gloom, and he now lets us see Jesus still at work and finding acceptance among the people. He relates a number of miracles, including the feeding of the five thousand, walking on the water, and some healings. Despite the rejections, it is still the same Jesus of whom Matthew writes, the Jesus who does wonderful things.”*

Listen Carefully to Matthew 14:13-21

Osborne (ZECNT): *“This is one of the richest of Jesus’ miracles theologically, as seen in the fact that it is the only miracle story found in every Jesus tradition (ie. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) It reaches to the past (the manna, the Elisha miracle of 2 Kgs 4), the present (God’s provision for his people), and the future (the messianic wedding feast). It is difficult to overstate its importance.”*

The Text

1. From v13 what was Jesus’ intention? How did it work out?

Note also v23.

Jesus’ intention was to find some solitude. A break from the crowds.

But the crowds’ thirst for what they are hearing and seeing is not going to allow that to happen.

2. What did Jesus do for the crowds? What problem presents itself at the end of the day?

Jesus, we are told had compassion on them and healed the sick.

France (TNTC): *“Here Matthew mentions healing, Mark teaching, and Luke both! Jesus’ ministry was an integrated whole, in which physical and spiritual need were met together.”*

'Compassion' often characterises Jesus reaction to the crowds and to individuals.

France (TNTC) on Matthew 10:36: *"The cause of Jesus' ceaseless activity is traced to his compassion on the crowds. The vivid verb 'have compassion' (literally referring to a 'gut reaction'!) is always in the New Testament used of Jesus himself (except in three parables: 18:27; Luke 10:33; 15:20); like his 'mercy' it regularly issues in action to meet the need which evokes it. Here that need is expressed in the Old Testament metaphor sheep without a shepherd, a phrase which referred especially to lack of political leadership (Num. 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; Ezek. 34:5) but which here presumably denotes a lack of spiritual care and guidance as well (cf. Zech. 10:2–3). Harassed and helpless is literally 'torn and thrown down', continuing the metaphor of sheep unprotected from predators, or even suffering from unscrupulous shepherds (cf. Zech. 11:16). The ordinary people of Israel are 'lost sheep' (10:6; 15:24) awaiting the Messianic shepherd (Ezek. 34:23; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 11:4ff.; etc.)."*

3. Who did Jesus direct to do something about it? What was their response?

He told the disciples to give them something to eat. In fact it is a command not a suggestion.

They respond that they only have 5 loaves and two fish between all of them.

Morris (PNTC): *"The disciples had put forward their evidence of this meager supply as a way of indicating the impossibility of their doing anything, but Jesus thinks of it as the basis for action."*

4. What was Jesus' response to the problem? With what result?

He took the disciples loaves and fishes and with the disciples as waiters, having given thanks to God, fed the 5000+ to elegant sufficiency with lots left over.

France (TNTC): *"The actions and words are the same as those in the meal at Emmaus (Luke 24:30), and no doubt in other meals where Jesus presided over the disciple 'family'. It is striking that the four verbs 'take', 'bless', 'break' and 'give' occur with minor variations not only in all six accounts of the two miraculous feedings and in that of the Emmaus meal, but also in all four accounts of the Last Supper (including 1 Cor. 11:23–24). It was a daily Jewish ritual, but in Christian memory it became filled with fuller meaning, as both these experiences in the 'lonely place' and the last meal in the upper room pointed forward to that great feast at which Jesus would be host to all his people of every race."*

Connections

1. Why do you think Jesus seeks some private time (note also v23)?

We tend, I think, from our 21st century perspective, to see Jesus fairly easily as God but to understand less his humanity. The constant pressure or the crowds wanting 'more' and the political uncertainty must have taken their physical and emotional toll on Jesus.

France (TNTC): *"Jesus' movements recorded for the remainder of his 'Galilean' ministry include a much higher proportion of time spent apart, particularly in areas outside Antipas' province. Away from the threat of political suppression, and relieved of the pressure of the Galilean crowds, he is thus able to concentrate more directly on the private instruction of his disciples. Luke tells us that the 'lonely place' was near Bethsaida, across the lake in Philip's tetrarchy, about four miles from Capernaum by land. It was not 'desert' in our sense (see the 'grass' in v. 19 and the nearby villages, v. 15)."*

2. Note 2 Kings 4:42-44. How does this connect to Jesus' miracle here?

Here is a foreshadowing of Jesus' provision. Note the similarity in the words of the command.

Wiseman (TOTC): *"Feeding a multitude (2 Kings 4:42-44). This event ... shows the Lord's care for his own. The acceptance by Elisha of the first fruits, normally offered to God through priests (as Lev. 23:10) and his sharing the gift for the benefit of all, may indicate recognition of him as the LORD's representative. The whole incident is described as fulfilment of predicted prophecy. As a miracle it is to be compared with the later feeding of the five thousand by Jesus (Matt. 14:13-21)."*

3. What other occasions of God feeding his people do you know of?

Note Exodus 16.

God provides 'manna' for his people in the desert.

Here Jesus does the same.

France (TNTC): *"Two Old Testament passages come to mind: the miraculous provision of bread in a 'lonely place' (literally 'desert') recalls the manna of Exodus 16, and the details of the story throughout echo Elisha's miracle of feeding a hundred men with twenty 'loaves' (2 Kgs 4:42-44). In both cases a prophet provided literal food, and Jesus the great prophet does likewise (though on a vastly increased scale in comparison with Elisha); Jewish expectation of a return of manna when the Messiah comes (2 Baruch 29:8; cf. Rev. 2:17) suggests it was a Messianic gesture."*

**4. Note the parallel accounts: Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13.
What extra information do they bring?**

Particularly the John account records the crowds attempt to seize Jesus and make him King. Certainly part of the reason for their hurried departure.

Impact

**1. On what basis do the crowd get fed?
Is the parable of the soils at work here?**

Discuss





One suspects that whether the individuals of the crowd are hard soil or good soil they still get their share of bread and fish. Jesus compassion (God's grace) is available to all.

France (TNTC): *"But there is more to this meal than physical sustenance (see on v. 15); eating together is a symbol of unity. Instead of being dismissed and dispersed (v. 15), the crowds are welcomed into a new community. ... Many regard this as a foretaste of the 'Messianic banquet' (see on 8:11); while a meal of bread and fish with no wine is hardly a 'banquet', it symbolizes the gathering of the people of God which will be consummated then. John clearly saw in this event a eucharistic element, and while this specific connotation belongs to the period after the Last Supper, it is not surprising that the incident came to be seen in the light of the Last Supper, itself a symbol of communion, and a foretaste of the Messianic banquet (26:29)."*

2. In what ways are you fed by Jesus?

Discuss.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Through his mercy and compassion, Jesus will provide for our needs. Most take messianic provision to be the single major theme of the story. It took a long time for the disciples to learn this — indeed, until after Pentecost. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Jesus repeated it again (15:29–39). This is the distinguishing mark of true follower; our minds must focus on the things of God rather than merely human concerns (Mark 8:33b); we must seek and think heavenly rather than earthly pursuits (Col 3:1–2); and we must search after heavenly rather than earthly treasures (Matt 6:19–21). One of the most difficult aspects of the Christian walk is to learn contentment whatever the circumstances so that it does not matter whether we are in need or have plenty, for we know the Lord is in charge (cf. Paul's testimony in Phil 4:11–12)."*

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 8</i>		
Matthew 14:13-21 Fish and Bread for All		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
<p>What shines from the Passage?</p> 		
<p>What questions does the passage raise?</p> 		
<p>What personal response can you see?</p> 		
<p>What are you prompted to pray about?</p> 		

Study 9: Matthew 14:22-36

Walking or Sinking?

Morris (PNTC): *“Matthew, Mark, and John follow the feeding of the five thousand with the striking story of Jesus walking on the water. Matthew adds to this, as the others do not, the story of Peter’s success and failure in attempting to do the same thing. Many expositors see in these stories no more than acted parables that teach us God’s care when in difficulties and the importance of faith when the winds blow hard. But while we may thankfully appropriate these spiritual teachings, such understandings are not exegesis; they proceed from the presuppositions of the expositor.”*

Before You Start

When we use the phrase ‘walking on water’ what do we mean? Can anyone actually walk on water?

Discuss

Listen Carefully to Matthew 14:22-36

The Text

- 1. From v22-23 what did Jesus ‘make’ the disciples do? What did Jesus do? What happened to the disciples and Jesus during the night?**

Jesus ‘makes’ the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake.

Jesus goes up a mountain to pray (By himself)

During the night Jesus is praying. (Alone)

During the night the disciples are in the boat, struggling, trying to make progress rowing and getting nowhere.

- 2. What happened shortly before dawn (v25)? What was the disciples’ first reaction?**

Jesus goes out to the disciples who are ‘a considerable distance from shore’. He is walking on the lake.

The exhausted disciples first fearful reaction on an early dawn morning is that it is a ‘ghost’

- 3. What was Jesus’ reply?**

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Morris (PNTC): *“Jesus recognized that they were scared and immediately took steps to calm them. He said first, “Take courage,” where the verb is one normally used in the New Testament of being cheerful (see 9:2, 22). In all three Gospels Jesus identifies himself with the words “it is I,” employing the emphatic pronoun commonly used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament where God is the speaker. The expression is sometimes used in the Old Testament where God is revealing himself, such as “I am who I am” (Exod. 3:14). At the least Matthew is giving us a hint that Jesus was more than a mere man. “Don’t be afraid” is a note of reassurance that runs right through this Gospel (1:20; 10:26, 28, 31; 17:7; 28:5, 10). Matthew likes to make the point that Jesus’ own need never fear.”*

4. Recount Peter’s adventure and its outcome.

Peter, ever impetuous, wants to test this out – asks Jesus to call him out on the water – Peter tries – notes the conditions – and begins to go down. – calls to Jesus for salvation and is rescued.

Note that as soon as Peter and Jesus are back in the boat the wind dies down.

The disciples recognize and state who Jesus is.

(Note v34-36 are a transition passage and introduce the events of chapter 15. Though, again, the truths of Parable of the Soils are again demonstrated.)

Connections

1. Why does Jesus send the disciples away?

As is subsequently reported Jesus needed to spend time alone with his Father.

Osborne (ZECNT): *““Immediately” (εὐθέως) links this closely with the previous episode, and Jesus’ command to his disciples to depart is in fact the final aspect of that story. Jesus again takes sovereign control, and ἀναγκάζω is a strong verb meaning to “compel” or “force” someone to do a thing.¹ He wants the disciples at this stage to be tested in terms of the lesson of the feeding miracle and so sends them to the other side of the lake in a boat.² Will they entrust themselves entirely to God’s provision?*

Another reason for Jesus to be by himself is given in John 6:14–15; the people conclude that Jesus is a prophet and are going to try to force him to become messianic king. So Jesus withdraws from them and (as here) sends them home. He will have nothing to do with their plan, so similar to the devil’s in Matt 4:8–10.”

**2. What does the way Jesus comes to the disciples say about who he is?
(Note Ps 46:5; Isa 17:13–14; Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16.)**

Osborne (ZECNT): *“After a great deal of time in prayer (from dusk to 3am) Jesus becomes aware of their plight. ... this was the last period of nighttime, 3–6 a.m. The disciples have been rowing for their lives for several hours and are about at the end of their strength and resolve. Luz calls this “at the same time the biblical time of God’s helpful intervention” (Exod 14:24; Ps 46:5; Isa 17:13–14) and France adds that this evokes “the OT imagery of God walking on or through the sea (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16).” While the old rationalist explanation had Jesus walking on the shore, the text makes it clear that he was indeed walking on the water.*

Actually, there are a series of miracles here. (1) Jesus sees their plight, three miles away through a raging storm. We must realize they had left about dusk, six to nine hours earlier. We would have thought they had long ago reached the other side (how long does it take to row four-plus miles?). (2) Jesus walks (present tense stresses the dramatic picture of Jesus “walking” from wave to wave) right to them (we wouldn’t be able to do that even with a GPS system!). Just picture Jesus calmly strolling from one eight-foot wave to the next with the wind and rain whipping around him! (3) Finally, of course, he again calms the storm (as in 8:26).”

From the Old Testament

Psalms 46:5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

*Isaiah 17:13 Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters,
when he rebukes them they flee far away,
driven before the wind like chaff on the hills,
like tumbleweed before a gale.*

*¹⁴ In the evening, sudden terror!
Before the morning, they are gone!
This is the portion of those who loot us,
the lot of those who plunder us.*

*Job 9:8 He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.*

*Psalms 77:19 Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.*

Isaiah 43:16 *This is what the LORD says—
he who made a way through the sea,
a path through the mighty waters,*

3. What is wrong with Peter's faith?

Osborne (ZECNT): *"Then Jesus chastises¹⁵ Peter's "little faith" (cf. 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20). As elsewhere, there is some question whether this refers to unbelief or a faith that proved inadequate (i.e., there was some faith at first). The latter is almost certainly correct. Peter did have enough faith to cry out to Jesus. But he did not have enough to overcome his fear. Instead he "doubted" (ἐδίστασας), or "had a divided mind or loyalty" split between God and this world. As long as his trust was in Jesus, he walked on water, but when the centrality of the world situation intervened, his faith disappeared."*

4. In our studies of Matthew 13 and 14 what have you learned about the King in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus is of course the King.

Impact

1. It is a trite question but to whom should we look in the storms of life??

Jesus!




Discuss what that may mean in our daily lives with one another and in the trials life brings.

Osborne (ZECNT): *"When overwhelmed by external struggles and at wit's end, Jesus is the one who soothes our anxious hearts, who can truly remove our worries and turns our fears to joy and our defeats to victory (Phil 4:6–7; Jas 1:2–4; 1 Pet 1:6–7). Moreover, out of the struggle comes a deeper understanding of the reality of Christ. Out of the disciples' initial defeat they were guided by Jesus into a new awareness of him as "the Son of God," and they are beginning to grow in their understanding of that reality."*

2. What do we learn from Peter here?

Discuss.

Keep trusting – Keep on trusting – even when it seems impossible.

<i>Intentional Stories and Revelatory Signs 9</i>		
Matthew 14:22-36 Walking or Sinking?		<i>Some Thoughts</i>
What shines from the Passage? 		
What questions does the passage raise? 		
What personal response can you see? 		
What are you prompted to pray about? 