

Lesson 19: Review of Matthew 12:38-50: "Jesus Narrows The Way"

Newspapers depend on it! Television news programs have to have it! People gravitate toward it! And lest we think we are superior to people in the world even Christians are drawn to it! What is it? The "it" is that which is *sensational, shocking, amazing, miraculous*, and *out-of-this-world fantastic*. We like to be dazzled and impressed, awed and inspired!

The religious people in Jesus' day were drawn to the *sensational*. They were often seeking to be entertained by the fantastic and amazing. So, it should not surprise us that they wanted Jesus do miracles and amazing feats at their whim and to perform when they wanted (12:38)! But not only did the religious people want Jesus to operate on their own terms but so did His family (12:46-47; see also John 7:1-5). We kind of do the same thing with Jesus. We want Him to do what we want in our way and in our time often just to satisfy a selfish desire. But, we do well to remember that Jesus doesn't operate on our terms. In fact, in this lesson we see Jesus increasingly narrowing the way to God by first expanding the revelation of Himself. Second He warns the religious people about the dangers of empty reformation. And third He narrows the way to God by revealing the unique and exclusive nature of the relationship of His disciples with Himself!

Matthew 12:38-42. "An Expanding Revelation": Jesus did not come to earth to show off His great and amazing power just to become popular. If He did, then He certainly failed miserably. He didn't come to defend His honor as the Son of God. If He did, then He failed miserably. Jesus came and performed miracles and wonders as *signs* signaling the fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures, which predicted a Savior coming to save His people from their sins! That is why Jesus came: To seek and save that which was lost (Lk.19:10). The bottom line in Matthew 12:38-42 is this: If the signs worked thus far in His ministry, if the kindness, compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness and love demonstrated, and if the message He preached thus far was insufficient then one more sign would do nothing for these religious leaders whose hearts were hardened against God. What more could they be shown?

Jesus promised them only "one" sign: the sign of Jonah. Jonah was an OT prophet and served as a "type" of Christ in that it was Jonah who was "three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Of all the signs given by God demonstrating that Jesus is the "Son of God", the greatest sign is the sign of His resurrection from the dead!

In this text Jesus also confronted these hardened men, saying that their judgment will be even more severe than Nineveh because they refused to repent as they heard Jesus preach the message of repentance and salvation. It may not make headlines, but it is shocking to think that people in countries like ours, who have more access to the Gospel, more of the Light of God from the innumerable preaching and teaching ministries will be judged more severely than those who have little light. (see Matthew 12:41)

We can't move on to the next section until we consider Jesus words regarding Solomon. Of all the kings of the earth none were wiser than Solomon. Jesus commends the Queen of the South for coming such a long way to hear Solomon's wise words. Yet, while commanding the Queen of the South He is rebuking these Pharisees because they have the Son of God with them yet refuse to come to Him to "listen". How true it is of people today who refuse to listen to "Truth". Let us not be found among the stubborn and hard hearted.

Matthew 12:43-45: "An Empty Reformation": It is popular in our day and age to champion the cause of people whose life work it is to help rehabilitate people—providing a kind of self-reformation. In these three verses Jesus gives evidence that this kind of "behavioral modification" is an empty reformation. On one hand people do well to "stop" bad habits and destructive behavior. But if there is not a heart change engineered and implemented by God then "the final condition of that man is worse than the first." Why? Because where there is no "new birth", or "regeneration" by the Holy Spirit then the change is ultimately empty. (Titus 3:4-7)

The greatest need of every human being is NOT an improved heart, but a new heart (Ez. 36:26-27). Simply awakening to ones spiritual neediness and then taking steps to "turn over a new leaf" is dangerous and deadly if it is not rooted in Christ. Reforming, or "rehabilitating" ourselves falls short of the righteousness of God in Christ. No! Friends, it is only by God's grace working through faith in Christ alone that we are saved. This saving begins with a new heart and a new mind as described in the reference from Ezekiel.

The antidote for an empty reformation is found in the ministry of the Gospel of God in Christ. I urge you to learn Christ and His Gospel! And, Lord willing through these lessons you will learn Christ and His Gospel.

Matthew 12:46-50: "An Extraordinary Relationship": Finally, these last few verses of Matthew 12 pinpoint the permanence and priority of our relationship with God in Christ. Even Jesus affirmed that those who follow Him by doing the will of His Father in Heaven are closer in relationship than His earthly relatives. Our spiritual union with Christ provides a stronger union than "blood". If you have been born again how are you adjusting to your spiritual family (other Christians; the Church family, etc.)? What can you do to strengthen your relationships with other Christians?

Questions for Matthew 13:1-43 “Parables of Soil and of Conquest”

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain “A”.

Introduction to Matthew 13:1-43: We come to Jesus’ first parables. In this lesson we will group these first parables into two groupings: The Parables of Two Kinds of Soil (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23) and The Parables of Conquest (Matthew 13:24-43). We will also take a brief look at “Why Parables?” (Matthew 13:10-17)

What is a parable? A parable is a method for communicating a primary truth. Jesus told parables (short stories), which paralleled a key teaching and Truth. Contrary to what we may think, parables were not necessarily intended to make Truth plain. One had to contemplate and think. Taking it one step further, Jesus told His disciples that parables can either clarify the Truth or hide the Truth; Harden the heart or soften the heart! We will discuss this more in the notes in the next lesson. For now, let’s dive into these parables.

2. Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. “Parables of Two Kinds of Soil”: Read the whole parable with the explanation (13:1-9, 18-23). **A)** How are you encouraged by the fact that Jesus had to explain the parable to the disciples? **B)** The farmer sowed seed. According Jesus, what is the “seed”? **C)** How many different kinds of soil are listed? How are they described? **D)** What parallels can you draw between the soil and the heart of those who “heard” the message? **E)** In the final analysis, after comparing the soils and what they produced, how would you classify the soils? (hint: only two classifications)

3. Read Matthew 13:24-43: “Parables of Conquest” Let’s first look at the Parable of Mustard Seed and of Yeast **A)** Identify ways do you think the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast parallels the “the kingdom of heaven”? Make some comparisons. **B)** How could you draw some parallels between the mustard seed, yeast and the Church in the world?

Parable of Good Seed and Weeds (24-30, 36-43): C) 13:24-30: What kind of seed did the “man” sow? Describe what it was as well as the quality of it. **D)** What did the man who sowed the good seed expect to grow? Did it? What about the “weeds”? Did they grow as the enemy expected? **E) 13:36-43** Identify the “Sower”; the “Field”, the “good seed”; the “weeds”; the “enemy” and the “harvest”. **F)** What primary truth do you think Jesus is teaching about His Kingdom?

4. Read Matthew 13:10-17: “Why Parables?” **A)** Reread 13:1-3a. What one word does verse 3a contain that instructs us as to the method Jesus used to communicate parables? **B)** Who asked Jesus about why He spoke in parables? **C)** Jesus began His answer in 13:11. He told them that the “secrets” were “given” to them. Who was the “giver”? Use Matthew 11:25-26 to help answer. **D)** In Matthew 13:14-15 Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. According to v.15a who is responsible for “calloused heart”, “hardened hearing” and “closed eyes”? Given the condition of their “hearts” do you think will they ever turn to God on their own volition? (Read also Romans 3:10-18) **E)** If someone you were talking to suddenly realized how powerless they were to come to God, what would you tell them? (Read Romans 3:21-24; 5:8; 6:23; 8:1)