

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 12, Matthew 12-14

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 12, Matthew 12-14.

Jesus says, come to me and I'll give you rest. Well, in the very next paragraph, Jesus and the Pharisees have a bit of a conflict over the nature of rest, over the nature of the Sabbath. It was legal to glean in other people's fields. That was allowed for in the law.

Pharisees approved of that. However, it wasn't legal to prepare meals on the Sabbath. That was against the law.

The tradition also forbade fasting on the Sabbath, which is what Jesus' disciples would have had to have done if they hadn't gleaned from the field because they didn't have anything prepared because they were involved in ministry. So, the Pharisees criticized Jesus for letting his disciples do this. The only way they're really preparing the meal is they're taking the husks off and grinding the grain to put it in their mouth.

But Jesus responds to them with an insult. Have you not read? Again, these were the highly illiterate people. Haven't you read what the Scripture actually says? He offers biblical examples in verses 4 through 6. David and his companions.

The priest gave David and his companions bread. Now, we don't know from 1 Samuel that he actually had companions with him, but at least we know that the high priest thought he did because that's what David told him. So, in any case, the high priest thought it was all right.

Even though this was consecrated bread, it was normally for the priests only. In an emergency, human need took precedence. Also, Jesus said, the priests work in the temple on the Sabbath.

Well, Pharisees used that argument when it was convenient for what they were arguing for on the Sabbath. Priests work in the temple on the Sabbath. So, how can you say that we can't do this on the Sabbath when it's in the spirit of the law? And then, again, in chapter 12 and verse 7, just like we had back in chapter 9 and verse 13.

Mercy versus sacrifice, just like the prophet Hosea said. And you have this a lot in the prophets. And you have it in Isaiah chapter 1 where he talks about your new moons and all your sacrifices.

That's not enough if you don't live by justice. Isaiah chapter 58, Amos chapter 5, let justice flow down like water, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. God wants not just our sacrifices of the prescribed rituals.

He wants the sacrifice of obedience and the sacrifice of mercy. So, mercy versus sacrifice. And then in verse 8, Jesus climaxes this by talking about the Son of Man being Lord of the Sabbath.

Well, you know, if he's Lord of the Sabbath, he has to be divine. He has to be God because only God is Lord of the Sabbath. However, they can't prosecute him as if he's claiming to be God because it's really kind of tricky.

Son of Man in Hebrew and Aramaic normally just means human. You could speak of the Son of Man being a human being. So, the Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath.

So, the Son of Man, humans are Lord of the Sabbath in that indirect sense. They could possibly construe it that way so they can't get him. But what he actually is saying is that he is Lord of the Sabbath because that's what he normally means by Son of Man.

Healing on the Sabbath caused some conflicts with the Pharisees. The Pharisees allowed medical help to save life. And of course, life took precedence.

If you were attacked on the Sabbath, they said you could defend yourself. But the Pharisees allowed medical help to save life. But Jesus doesn't actually apply medicine.

Jesus doesn't even lay hands on the man. Jesus says to the man, stretch out your hand. And as the man stretches out his hand, it's made whole.

Stretching out your hand was not work. Now, of the two schools of Pharisees, the Hillelites even allowed prayer for the sick on the Sabbath, even though the Shammaites did not. But Jesus doesn't even pray per se.

He just says, stretch out your hand because he knows what's going to happen. He's following the Father's will. Now, Jesus said, which of you wouldn't help an animal that's falling into a pit on the Sabbath? The only group that forbade that was the Essenes.

They wouldn't help an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath, but everybody else would, including the Pharisees. The Pharisees would also water their animals on the Sabbath. I mean, they have to drink on the Sabbath.

The Essenes were kind of extreme. Some of them wouldn't even allow you to go to the bathroom. It wouldn't allow you to defecate on the Sabbath.

Very extreme. But the Pharisees would do all these things because they realized it was necessary. So, they're being hypocritical.

Well, you would do this for an animal. You dug pits for other kinds of animals, like wolves or something, but sometimes your own animal would fall into it. You'll help an animal out, but you won't allow this person to be healed on the Sabbath.

And their response would have been, well, he's had this for a long time. He could be healed any other day. Let him come on some other day and be healed.

But this was the day that Jesus was there. This was the day healing was available. And then it says that they went out and they wanted to kill Jesus.

Keep in mind, the Pharisees were known for leniency. The Sadducees were not. The Sadducees, you got in their way, they'd get rid of you.

They were in control of the government, remember? But the Pharisees emphasized leniency. The Pharisees, it was really hard for you to get executed under Pharisaic rules because if you go into a cave and you find somebody who's just died and somebody's standing over him with a knife and blood dripping from the knife, you can't prosecute the person and have them executed for murder because for one thing you have to have two witnesses and for another thing, you didn't see the murder take place. You just see the person holding the knife.

So, the Pharisees made it really hard. They didn't want to kill people. They were lenient.

And here Jesus hasn't even broken the rules that the Hillelites would follow. In fact, he hasn't even broken Shammaite rules because he didn't even pray for the sick. He just said, stretch out your hand.

But what we are on paper, what we are in principle is not always what we are in person. And these particular Pharisees weren't abiding by their principles. They were really mad because Jesus had a large following and he was leading people in ways that they thought was against the law because it was against their tradition about the law.

May God help us because often we follow things simply because of the traditions of our church and they're not always what God is actually saying in the Bible. To heal people, Jesus often said, don't tell. And we have that here in 12:16. Well, that's already a theme in Mark.

It's all through Mark. And I'm going to summarize the theme through Mark before I come back to Matthew here. Jesus healed a leper and said, don't tell anybody.

Mark 1:44. When he raised Jairus' daughter, he ordered, don't tell anybody. Mark 5:43. When he healed the deaf in 7:36 and the blind in 8:26 in Mark, he said, don't tell anybody. Well, what they often did was they went and told somebody, but he told them not to.

You know, he already had big crowds. Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a secret to outsiders in Mark 4:11.12. Demons knew Jesus' identity, so he always silenced them in Mark 1:25 and 3:11. Jesus wanted nobody to know where he'd gone on a retreat in 7:24. Some of this may have been just to restrain the popularity, which would lead too quickly to the cross. But Matthew shows that it also fulfills something in the book of Isaiah.

So, coming back to Matthew 12, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42.1-4, where it speaks of the beloved servant in whom God is well pleased, and God places his spirit on him. Well, Matthew translates it his own way so that it fits the same as the voice from heaven in Matthew 3.17, where God says, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. It's clear that this is linked with how he's quoting Isaiah 42.

But Isaiah 42, when it speaks of this beloved servant, says that he will not cry out or break even a weak reed until the time of triumph. And then, Matthew 12:21, then the Gentiles or the nations, it's sort of the way it's rendered in the Septuagint, will trust in him. Well, that makes good sense.

It fits into the Gentile mission again that Matthew is talking about. But until that time, he doesn't cry out or break even a weak reed. Remember, this is the one who's meek and lowly in heart.

He's not out to trumpet himself. He's out to show God's love and to bring people to the truth of God's love. Now, in Isaiah's context, Isaiah 42 is clearly talking about Israel.

That's why it goes on to say in verses 18 and 19, who is blind but my servant? Who is deaf but my messenger whom I send? Israel doesn't fulfill the mission of the servant in the way that they're supposed to. Isaiah 49 starts out that way. But pretty soon Isaiah 49, speaks of the servant who suffers on behalf of Israel.

And you have the same thing in Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, where we have one who fulfills the servant's mission, and that is Jesus. And he's doing that here in Matthew's gospel. Well, Jesus is accused by the Pharisees some more.

Tension is building. The narrative is moving towards the cross, although the Pharisees won't be the ones ultimately who will do it. Who is it the devil? The Pharisees say it's Jesus.

They accused Jesus, but reversing charges was common practice. If somebody accused you of something in court, if it were possible, you'd say, well, no, you did it, not me. And Jesus actually reverses the charges here.

Jesus says, your generation, your generation craving for a sign, I'm casting a demon. You're like those who invite all the demons back in. In 12.45, he says that.

So, he's casting out demons. That generation is inviting them back in sevenfold. In this conflict with the Pharisees, the issue of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit comes up.

They've already accused him of blaspheming God. Well, he's warning them that they're in danger of blaspheming God at this point. The charge in 12.24 is that he casts out demons by Beelzebul.

Exorcism by demons was a form of sorcery, and people often, find it in magical papyri, people invoked spirits to get rid of spirits. So, they're accusing him of sorcery, which was death-worthy under Jewish law. So, Jesus gives three responses to this here.

The first response is, why would Satan do that? Why would Satan be widely casting out demons? Yeah, maybe once in a while to get you to follow Satan more, but why this widespread casting out of demons I'm doing, why would Satan be involved in that? Secondly, if you're telling me that I'm casting them out by Satan, by whom do your own sons cast them out? Because when Pharisees or other people would try to get rid of demons, they would use bad smells, magic rings, and incantations. Jesus didn't use any of those things. He simply cast them out because he was authorized by God to do so.

And his third response, this is not by magic, not by spirits, not by a spirit Beelzebul, no, but by the true spirit of God, 12.28. Now, the spirit and the kingdom are closely related here as we'll see, and also elsewhere in the New Testament. In fact, in Paul's writings, he emphasizes the spirit more than the language of the kingdom because it's through the spirit that God's rule is being actualized in us in the present.

But in Luke chapter 11 and verse 20, the wording is a little bit different. If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. It's like Pharaoh's magicians.

In Exodus chapter 7 they duplicate things, some in Exodus 8, but finally, they say in Exodus chapter 8, this is the finger of God. We can't duplicate this. What Moses is doing, we can't even duplicate on a small level at this point.

Well, Matthew interprets the wording and his interpretation is surely correct. The finger of God, what does he mean by that? The spirit of God is doing this. Now, this fits the context in Matthew's gospel because you think of Matthew 12.18 where he's quoting from Isaiah.

Jesus fulfills Isaiah 42. Jesus is the spirit-empowered servant. And that fits what we know of the eschatological promise of the kingdom.

Isaiah 44, Ezekiel 36, and so on. The spirit was associated, with Joel chapter 2, going on in Joel 3, the spirit was associated with the promised restoration, the restoration of God's people. That's true in most of the passages that talk about a future outpouring of the spirit in the Old Testament.

So, they should see, that because the Spirit is active in Jesus' ministry, they should recognize that the kingdom is at hand, that God's kingdom is present in Jesus' ministry. But they don't. And this means that they're calling the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God working through Jesus, they're calling him an evil spirit.

They're calling the spirit of God Satan. They're rejecting not only Jesus, they're rejecting the spirit's clear evidence of Jesus. Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, people have said all sorts of things about it, and what it means.

But I think in this context, it shows us what it means, that the people's hearts are so hard that they're not just rejecting the message, but they're rejecting the clearest evidence of the message. They get to the point where no matter what kind of evidence is offered, they reject it. Their hearts are that hard, their minds are that closed.

Jesus says, you're in danger of getting that far, he says to the Pharisees. Sometimes Christians wonder, oh, have I ever done this? Look, if you've repented, you haven't done it. This is a person whose heart is so hard, they become incapable of repentance.

Jesus talks about binding the strong man. He gives a parable about binding the strong man. It's also in Mark 3:27, and Mark actually gives an illustration of this,

where Jesus casts a legion of demons out of a man that nobody could bind because he was just so strong.

Well, here Jesus talks about binding the strong man in a different way. Sometimes you have people who go around and they say, I bind you, Satan. By the way, when I talked about ways that I used to pray and God answered my faith, even though I was doing it the wrong way, this is one of the ways.

However, once I learned it was wrong, it didn't work anymore. But it doesn't mean Jesus went around saying, I bind you, Satan. He doesn't do that before any of his exorcisms in the Gospels.

That's not to say it's necessarily wrong, but often in Jewish stories you have this, in magical texts you have it all over the place, where they're talking about binding spirits to do their will and so on. But Jesus speaks parabolically of having tied up the strong man so the strong man could have his goods taken away. In other words, Jesus is delivering these people from being possessed by Satan.

Well, where had Jesus bound the strong man? If he's referring to a particular incident, the likeliest place where we can see that he had bound Satan was by resisting him at the temptation in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus defeated him there. Now Jesus was free to spoil the strong man's possessions. The strong man couldn't get at him.

Jesus goes on to say, you'll be judged by your words. You're speaking critically of me, but every word that a person speaks, it's going to be there. It's going to be brought up on the Day of Judgment.

Well, if saying bad things merits judgment, obviously blaspheming against the Holy Spirit would merit judgment. Why can't it be forgiven? Well, if one rejects even the most obvious evidence, then your hearts are too hard to find the truth. So, it doesn't, again, apply to somebody who's already repented.

Jesus goes on to say, you know, they want a sign. Jesus goes on to say, you'll be given a sign. It's not the one you're asking for.

His critics demanded a sign in 12:38, as if he hadn't been giving signs. He'd been giving them lots of signs already. But Jesus says I'll give you the sign of Jonah.

Jesus was dead for three days like Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature for three days. Now, three days by ancient counting means, you know, part of a day counted as a whole day. So, I do agree with those who say Jesus died on Friday and was raised on Sunday.

But in any case, it's part of each of the three days. But it makes the point that Jesus is making. He said the Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching.

Now, in Matthew, it's actually the preaching that they're invited to repent at. In the judgment, Jewish teachers said that the rich who followed God would rise up in the judgment. And for the people who said, no, I'm too rich to follow God, the rich who followed God would stand up and condemn them.

And the poor would rise up in the judgment. And the poor who were godly would point to the poor who were ungodly. The poor who were ungodly said, you know, we were too poor to serve God.

And the poor who served God would say, you know, we can say that that's wrong. And they would condemn that. In the same way, Jesus says, the Gentiles are going to rise up.

These people who had less light than you did, will condemn you in the judgment. Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will be better off in the day of judgment than you. And Matthew 12 goes on to talk about Jesus' mother and brothers.

Now, in Mark, Jesus' mother and brothers came at roughly this point in the story, in 3:31, because in 3:21 they'd heard that Jesus had lost his mind. Well, Matthew is a little bit kinder to Jesus' mother and brothers here. He doesn't emphasize that whole point.

But family was an essential value in the culture. And you had to honor your parents, obviously. But Jesus says, my disciples are my spiritual family.

That's the family that counts most. He's not rejecting his earthly family, but he's making it a priority that his spiritual family counts most. And that would have been offensive in that culture.

Moving on to Matthew 13, the parables of the kingdom's presence. We have seven or eight parables here, just like the seven or eight future kingdom parables in Matthew 24 and 25. And one of these parables, toward the center of this section, it really emphasizes the difference between the...emphasizes the importance of the presence of the kingdom.

The mustard seed versus the mustard tree. Again, the yeast was mixed through the dough. Emphasize the present hidden kingdom versus the future glory.

In this parable also he has Matthew 13, a Sower sowing for a future harvest. He also speaks of wheat and tares growing together until the future. So, this is talking about present activity in light of the future kingdom, but it's present activity.

The kingdom is especially like yeast, like a treasure, or like a pearl for which one sacrifices everything. What is a parable? Jesus tells lots of parables. What is a parable? Well, some scholars have emphasized the usual sense of the Greek term.

Already in Aristotle, it meant an analogy. Greek philosophers and Paul used illustrations, they used analogies a lot, but normally what they were telling weren't lively story parables like those of Jesus and other Jewish teachers. By the way, that implies the authenticity of Jesus' parables.

Since the later church didn't tell these kinds of parables, we can be sure that the later church wouldn't have made these parables up. These are things that go back to Jesus. And that's something that even those who are inclined to be skeptical of something that you can't prove, well, here we have evidence that should incline them to say, no, these go back to Jesus, if they're open to evidence.

The Hebrew word *mashal*, sometimes translated as parable in Greek, *parabole* in Greek, means various things. It can include stories, proverbs, taunt songs, riddles, and so forth. In the same way, Jesus' parables span the same range of literary forms.

So probably it's used the way that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, sometimes uses *parabole* to translate *mashal*. Jesus is speaking in this kind of way, wise sayings. The closest specific parallels that we have to Jesus' parables are from other Jewish sages.

You might find some animal parables, and fables among Greeks, but really the closest parallels that we have, and we do have a plant parable, by the way, in the Old Testament, the first veggie tale, we might say, from Judges chapter 9, told by one of Gideon's sons. But we also have Nathan telling a parable to David in 2 Samuel chapter 12, I believe. But the closest specific parallels to Jesus' parables are those told by other Jewish sages.

In fact, some of them use the same storyline. Rabbis also used story parables. They used the same kind of stock features that Jesus did, like a landowner and a field, a king throwing a wedding feast for his children and for his son, and so on.

But later rabbis couldn't have influenced Jesus. We know that because they're later. Nor would they have tried to learn from Jesus.

There's a story of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanes, I believe it was, who got arrested for a minute for heresy. And he was like, well, what did I do wrong that God would allow me to be falsely accused of this? And another rabbi said to him, well, have you ever heard anything that these Jewish Christians said that you approved of? He said, oh yeah, there was something. Well, you see, that's why you deserve this.

They were very much down on approving of anything that Jesus said or that his followers said. They considered that contaminating their minds. So, they didn't try to learn from Jesus.

But they both had a common source in that Jewish sages often used stories to communicate their point, as we have some of that in Sirach and so on. The rabbis, as we have them in their later literature, more often use royal courts than Jesus does. He does that sometimes.

But Jesus' parables are more agrarian, probably because he's speaking to especially Galilean peasants, Galilean poor farmers. Rabbis also tended to support conventional values. Jesus tends to subvert traditional values to go against the grain of the culture.

Jesus is also more eschatological and talks more about the end time. The rabbis may have done less of that partly because they got burned following a false messiah by the name of Bar Kokhba, whom they acknowledged afterward was false. But Jesus, the true messiah, was willing to talk about the end time.

The purpose of parables. Parables were essentially sermon illustrations. Well, what good is the illustration without the sermon? There may be exceptions, but a lot of times if you tell the story and you don't have the sermon to go with it, people have no idea what you're trying to communicate through the story.

Often Jesus told parables without interpreting them publicly. Jesus kept the secret of the kingdom for his disciples and gave others only enough clues to invite them back for the midweek Bible study or to invite them to follow him more closely so they too could be disciples and learn his teaching. It's not just for the twelve, but for the disciples, all those who were Jesus' students, those who were following him closely.

Some scholars who are more skeptical of some of Jesus' teachings doubt that Jesus ever explained his parables, even to his disciples. But they're very likely wrong. In fact, I can say they're very, very likely wrong, simply based on what we know of ancient Jewish culture.

Jewish teachers normally gave interpretations with their parables and even their secret teachings, which they communicated to their disciples. Now they had some secret teachings that they would only communicate to one disciple at a time, like when they were talking about the throne chariot or they were talking about the mysteries of creation, because they said, well, fire might come down from heaven if we do this with too many people. But even with their secret teachings, they communicated to their disciples.

That's what they did. They would explain their parables. Many of Jesus' parables are self-evident from their context.

Certainly, the parables in Luke 15 are self-evident. But Jesus' disciples weren't any smarter than most of us are, and Jesus' disciples needed the explanations. I don't know how many of them I would have gotten without the explanations.

Some of the more skeptical scholars don't like the Gospel's records of Jesus' explanations because they disagree with the interpretations of the parables these scholars came up with. But again, ancient teachers normally explained these things to their disciples. And guess who the main source for what we have in the Gospels is? The disciples.

So presumably they heard the interpretations. Well, Augustine and medieval interpreters allegorized the parables too much. So, some interpreters overreacted against that allegorizing of the parables, trying to find symbolic meaning in every detail of the parable.

So, Adolf Jülicher argued that each parable has just one meaning and one main point. So, whenever Jesus explained in his parables more than one point of contact with reality, Jülicher rejected the explanation. But Jülicher, who was also followed by Dodd and Jeremias, and Jeremias should have known better because he knew Jewish literature pretty well, but Jülicher, Jeremias and Dodd went too far because in ancient Jewish parables they often did have multiple points of contact with reality.

Not every point had to be symbolic of something, but often they did have multiple points. Jülicher said one point because he was following Aristotle's rules of rhetoric. But rabbis didn't know, probably usually, and certainly didn't care that much about Aristotle's rules of rhetoric.

And as Ben Witherington, a rhetorical critic, has pointed out, Jülicher even misinterpreted Aristotle. Fiebig, Jülicher's contemporary, approached the parables in a different way. He actually looked inductively at how the rabbis told their parables and how they gave their interpretations.

And Fiebig was actually on the right track as opposed to Jülicher. So, Robert Johnston actually did a 600-page dissertation on Tannaitic parables and demonstrated in detail that Fiebig was right, and Jülicher was wrong. And so most scholars who know anything about Jewish parables recognize that, including Jewish scholars who write about Jewish parables.

They recognize that there were often interpretations and often they had multiple points of contact. Even biblical parables often had multiple points of contact. That's

true in 2 Samuel 12, verses 1 through 6, where there are a few things that stand for other things.

Just an example of a rabbinic parable like this. A rabbi told a parable about a king who needed guards for his orchard. So, he chose one guy who couldn't walk and another guy who couldn't see.

The guy who couldn't walk, could spot the thieves, and the guy who couldn't walk, could jump up and wave his hands and scare off intruders. But neither of them could steal his apples. Well, the guy who couldn't walk and the guy who couldn't see, figured out a way to outsmart the owner, though.

The guy who couldn't walk climbed on the blind guy's back and they stole some apples. When the king came back, they said, oh, we don't know who stole the apples. Obviously, it couldn't be us because one of us is blind and the other one can't walk.

So, he made the lame guy climb on the blind guy's back. You sinned together, he said, so you will be judged together. The rabbi said it's the same way when God judges the world.

He will resurrect us first, so our souls and our bodies, which sinned together, can be judged together. Well, obviously, in this parable, the judge and the king represent God. And in the parable, the blind person and the person who couldn't walk represent the body and the soul.

So, there were multiple points of contact, at least three there. We're going to see something like that in the parable of the Sower with multiple points of contact, a parable of the soils. The context is this.

Jesus is being opposed by the religious elite and possibly by his own family, although Matthew isn't really clear that way, the way Mark is. And then at the end of the parable section, he's rejected by his hometown. Not everybody is receiving Jesus' message.

Therefore, those who spend time with Jesus should recognize that the soil that doesn't produce good fruit represents the people who reject Jesus' message. The soil that produces good fruit, are the people who receive Jesus' message. But Jesus is going to have to explain it anyway to his disciples.

Jesus uses some commonplace images that his hearers would recognize. Most Galileans were agrarian peasants. They worked the land either for themselves or for wealthy landowners.

They often sowed before plowing. Sometimes they plowed before sowing. Some cultures would say that's stupid.

You never sow before plowing. But in ancient Jewish literature, we find that it was done both ways. Sometimes they sowed before plowing.

And apparently, this is the person's first year in the field, so he doesn't really know the terrain as well as he would if he had had this land for a long time. The average return on grain in Italy was about five or sixfold. In Judea, it was about seven and a half to tenfold.

So, for every grain that you sowed, you'd get on average seven and a half to ten back. But Jesus, after he tells this parable about the good soil that makes up for the bad soil, more than makes up for the bad soil, and we thank God for that because otherwise, the church would have died out a long time ago, right? But Jesus sends the crowds home without explaining the parable. So, the disciples ask him about the parable.

What is this talking about? Jesus says the secrets of the kingdom are only for you. They're not for outsiders. If somebody wants the secrets of the kingdom, they need to stick around.

They need to not just be an outsider. They need to not just stay for the stories and the healings. They need to become disciples.

Only those who stuck around after the crowds went home would have understanding. Then Jesus explains four kinds of people who hear his teaching. The seed gets stolen by the devil, he says.

No, the devil is not omnipresent, but the devil is behind the stealing of the seed. The seed gets stolen by the devil. We have a figure of speech that goes in one ear and out the other.

This might be like somebody who watches the video or hears the teaching, but they don't really pay attention. Their commitment is too shallow for hard times and tests is another kind of soil. And another kind of soil, those who are distracted by wealth and the affairs of this life.

They're worried about other things. They're not seeking first the kingdom. Not that other things don't matter, but seek first the kingdom and all these things will be added to you.

First things first. But then the fourth group, he says, the fourth kind of soil, those who heard the word and understood it. Well, who were the ones who understood the word? Jesus has already told them.

You, disciples, you who stayed for the interpretation. Do we want to be good ground? We can be good ground by choosing to be disciples, not just crowds. If you stayed with me this long through the Matthew course, I suspect that you were probably good ground because most people wouldn't have the patience to be doing this, but you do.

For those who just hear preaching on Sunday morning, that may not be enough unless they have a very strong devotional life of their own. We need to go beyond just hearing something once a week. We need to be disciples.

We need to follow Jesus. We need to learn from Jesus regularly. The future revelation of kingdom people is in chapter 13, verses 24 to 43.

We have the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, 13:31, and 32. It's placed in the midst of the parable of the weeds, just like Jesus gives the first interpretation before a second interpretation after the parable of the four soils. In the midst of the parable of the weeds, he's going to talk about the mustard seed and the yeast because it gives us something of a clue.

We'll talk more about it. But the parable of the weeds, 13:24 to 30, with the interpretation in verses 36 to 40, emphasizes the hiddenness of the kingdom in the present. It's a realistic agricultural story, 13:24 to 30.

Householders were common in rabbinic stories and in Greek stories. Fields were common in rabbinic parables, although they were ad hoc. They could mean any sort of thing in those parables.

Jesus says the kingdom is like. He doesn't mean the kingdom is necessarily like the first thing that he mentions in the parable, but it was when rabbis said that they meant the kingdom is like this whole story, like what this parable is about, not necessarily the first thing that they mentioned. So, this is the way it is with the kingdom, Jesus says.

Well, this person had an enemy. It was common in the ancient world. A lot of people had enemies, including farmers having enemies.

And what enemy farmers sometimes did to other farmers were they sometimes sowed dandelion, *Lolium temense*. It looks like wheat in the early stages. I call this a terrible parable.

It's also, some translations call these tares. So, it looks like wheat in the early stages. We know that rival farmers sometimes feuded this way because Romans even had to come up with a law against sowing darnel in somebody else's field.

You could carefully root out the weeds, but you couldn't get out this many. And because the darnel looked like wheat, there was a chance of uprooting some of the wheat in the early stages. But after the wheat was fully grown, well, then you could distinguish between the darnel and the wheat.

Then you could separate them. The darnel was useless except as fuel. And so it would be in the day of judgment.

That's when the righteous and the wicked will be separated. Before he comes back to the interpretation of the parable of the tares or the darnel, he gives a parable about the present hidden kingdom, which is the same as the future glorious kingdom. Mustard seed was proverbially small, and it grew into a very large plant.

According to what scholars most often identify as the mustard seed and the mustard tree, the mustard tree is actually a very large shrub. It can grow to a height of around eight or ten feet around the Lake of Galilee. So, birds might not build nests in its branches so much.

They might just perch in its branches. But it's interesting. Jesus uses language that's very similar to Ezekiel 17, and especially to Daniel 4:12. Daniel 4:12 talks about these different kingdoms, the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar.

He speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as like a tree, a great tree where birds could come and nest in the branches. So, Jesus is alluding to this language of the kingdom, but he's talking ultimately about the kingdom of God that will supplant the four kingdoms that Daniel talks about, the earlier kingdoms that Daniel talks about. Yeast was sometimes associated with evil.

So, when we hear about the yeast mixed up in the loaf or the bread, yeast is sometimes associated with evil. So that might give it some shock value here. But the main idea of yeast is not evil.

In the case of getting the yeast or the leaven out for Passover, it was just a symbol of haste. You had to hurry. You didn't have time to work with the yeast.

Here the point of the yeast is just the pervasiveness of yeast, the most characteristic feature of yeast. It gets mixed throughout the whole dough. Jesus uses special wording for this though.

He says the woman hides it in the dough. Now that's an unusual description, so it's emphatic. It's making the point.

This yeast pervades the dough, but she hides it in the dough. You don't know it's there if you don't know any better. The same as people didn't recognize the kingdom of Jesus if they didn't know any better.

Galilean women would bake bread for their household, but this is more than the Galilean woman would normally bake. The flour here is roughly 50 pounds. That's enough bread for over 100 people.

I can't think offhand what the metric equivalent of 50 pounds is, but I don't have to worry about the metric equivalent for 100 people. That's a lot of bread. Normally one wouldn't fix so much.

It was impossible for the woman to fix more than that, but it's a way of saying, you know, it's going to be great. It's going to be far beyond what it looks like now. But only those with the eyes of faith recognize the presence of the kingdom.

Those of us who have that spiritual sense that God has given us sight to recognize, here's the kingdom. Not everybody recognizes that. Paul speaks of that in 2 Corinthians 2. He says we are the aroma of life to those who receive the good news, and the stench of death to those who reject it.

They see in our apostolic sufferings only suffering, just like they see in the cross only death. But those who have been given the gift of eternal life, recognize in the cross that that's the message of life, and they recognize in the apostolic suffering that this is for a purpose. It's to bring life.

In the same way, people didn't always recognize the kingdom in Jesus healing some sick people and driving out demons, but that's what Jesus was doing. Jesus' parables are meant to reveal God's mysteries. He says these are riddles to outsiders, but they convey truth to disciples, to those who are willing to heed them.

Well, the interpretation of the parable of the tares, of the darnel, the weeds. God tolerates the wicked for the sake of the chosen, but he will distinguish someday between them, 1336 to 43. The imagery of an end-time harvest was familiar.

You'll find it in some later Jewish works like 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra. Jesus embraced sinners at the table, but he denounced religious folk. You couldn't tell by looking who was going to make it into the kingdom and who wasn't at a given time, because you didn't know who was going to persevere, and you didn't know who was going to really respond to the message who hadn't heard it yet.

The same with the parable of the soils. You sow everywhere. You don't know.

God has surprises for us. You know, the message first spread in Galilee and then Judea. Then it began to spread in Syria, Turkey and Egypt, and eventually, it spread further in the Roman Empire.

It began to spread eastward into Western Asia and further into Asia. It began to spread southward. The empire of Aksum in the 300s was converted to Christianity about the same time the Roman Empire was.

But you see that these aren't permanent, that some of the places that had the gospel flourishing most at one time in history have it least now, or at least don't have it very strongly now. In some other places the gospel is flourishing. You can see this.

I mean, nobody in the first century could have imagined this, but so much of Africa, so much of Latin America, and certain parts of Asia where the gospel is spread. Much of that happened over the course of one century. God makes sure that the good news goes out to all the nations, and to all peoples.

But we don't always know beforehand who's going to receive. So, we're sent to all peoples with the good news. Sometimes we lay the groundwork and then it explodes later for the sake of the gospel.

It explodes in a positive way, I mean. It spreads in a positive way. Matthew's emphasis may be partly, on remaining part of the Jewish community.

You don't have to pull out. Or continue to fellowship with people even though they may not be serving God now. We don't know what the future holds.

Probably, some people have said this applies to the church where you have ungodly and godly people in the church. There may be truth in that. It also may be talking about the coexistence of kingdom people with the world in this age.

2 Peter 3 talks about looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. What's the reason for the delay? 2 Peter 3 says God doesn't want anybody to perish. He wants everybody to have eternal life.

There are some people who will turn to God, who haven't turned to God yet, if the word tarries. 13:44-53 speaks of those who knew the kingdom's value. The kingdom will cost its true followers everything.

Jesus is worth everything. 13:44-46, Jesus speaks of treasure hidden in a field. Well, people in Judea and Galilee often hid treasures.

It was a prominent folklore motif. There were a lot of people who told stories about this. The happy ending, you get the treasure.

A peasant farmer here, apparently, is working for a probably absentee landowner. There were a lot of landowners. They owned the land, but they didn't come out to see it very much.

Here's somebody working on this other person's estate. Well, he goes and he buys this plot of land from the landowner. Because land contracts often specify, you get the land and all that is in it.

He gets the normal land contract, and he owns everything that's in the land. Most treasure stories that rabbis told involved a legal compromise, the wealth of the finder, or a reward for repentance, but here the emphasis is on the cost. This treasure was worth everything, so he sold everything he had to get something that was worth so much more.

Jesus said, even your own life, if you lose your life for life eternal, it's worth it. We give up our lives to Jesus and he saves them. He also tells another parable like this, The Merchant and the Pearl.

Unlike the peasant, this is a man with capital. Jesus tells a story here about somebody who's got some wealth. Most merchants sold single products, but pearls were among the more expensive products.

They were luxury products by the time the imports came into the Roman Empire. Divers fished for pearls in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. Other Jewish stories talking about pearls would emphasize a person's piety, a man who overpaid to get a fish for the Sabbath and therefore found a pearl in the fish, and so on.

Sometimes a pearl was used as a symbol for Torah teaching. But in any case, in this story that Jesus tells, here a man finds a pearl of great price. This pearl was worth everything.

And so, in this case, Jesus says, give up everything if you need to for the sake of this pearl. Only the final judgment will reveal those who are truly committed to the kingdom. 13:47 to 50.

Don't do this so that other people will think you're great. And again, some people don't persevere and some people come to faith in Christ later on. Around the Lake of Galilee, you'd see fishermen separating edible and kosher fish from the kind of fish that you couldn't eat or was against Jewish law to eat, Leviticus 11.

The kingdom hadn't consumed with fire yet, but the kingdom was present in a hidden way in the world. Someday, the kingdom will be consummated and God will bring everything to light. God will judge the secrets of people's hearts.

Those who are forgiven, those who walk in the light of God's love, will be with him forever. The suffering will be over. Those who've chosen to reject all the offers of love God has made to them through everything he's done for them will be away from him forever, according to their own choice.

And we see in 13:51 to 53, the true teachers of the kingdom display its value for all to see. The law is still valuable, remember? 5:17 through 5:20. Well, there were people who knew the law.

They've already been schooled in the law, but then they come into the kingdom. And so, they bring together the best of what they had in the Torah with the full understanding of the kingdom. And Jesus speaks of these as scribes for the kingdom.

We read about this later on in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus says, I send you prophets and teachers and scribes. In 28:19, he says that we are to make disciples for the kingdom. Matthew himself was probably such a scribe for the kingdom.

He knew scripture well, and he understood the good news of the kingdom well. At this point, I can move on to Matthew chapter 14. Again, I'm going to be doing some of these things in less detail but I'm going to tell you in Matthew 14, this story about Herod Antipas.

You remember that Herod was the governor of Galilee. Well, there's more than one Herod. The Herod in Matthew chapter 2, is Herod the Great.

This is Herod Antipas, one of his sons. Archelaus, his son, didn't reign over Judea very long. He was put out of office, but Herod Antipas had stayed in power for a long time.

He was not a king. He was a governor, specifically a tetrarch, which was governor of a tetrarchy. But he minded his own business, and kept Rome happy, and so he stayed in power for a whole generation until the time of John the Baptist.

But that's when he had an affair with his brother's wife, Herodias. He liked her so much that he wanted her to marry him. But Herodias was a princess, and as a princess, she refused to be married to a polygamist.

She said, look, I'm not going to marry you if you already have another wife. So, Antipas decided, okay, I want to marry Herodias so I'm going to divorce my first wife.

Well, we already know what Jesus thought about things like that, but Antipas decided to divorce his first wife.

Unfortunately, his first wife was also a princess. She was the daughter of King Aretas IV, who was the king of the Nabataean Arabs. Now, Nabataea stretched over a very wide area.

It included the Decapolis we were talking about before. Probably didn't control Damascus in this period, but he had an ethnarch stationed there as head of the trading community in Damascus. But he controlled a lot of territory, a very powerful king.

The Romans actually left him in power as a king under the Roman Empire because he was pretty set in power. His daughter was married to Herod Antipas I, and that was a very politically smart marriage. But Antipas' first wife, the Nabataean princess, refused to accept the insult, learning that Antipas planned to divorce her.

She escaped back to her father before Antipas could divorce her. This created tensions between Galilee and the Nabataeans. Here are some scenes from Nabataea, probably looked a bit better back then.

But this became a big political issue in that day because even in Herod's own territory, Herod controlled not only Galilee, he also controlled Perea beyond the Jordan. There were many Nabataeans who lived there. And the last thing you want within your territory is some people who are your subjects, but they're really loyal to somebody else.

Of course, that happens often today in countries where we have divisions that don't follow ethnic lines and so on. It happened, but it was very inconvenient for Herod Antipas. Eventually, it led to war, and the Nabataeans totally defeated Herod Antipas.

It was very humiliating for Herod Antipas. They would have taken his kingdom if the Romans hadn't intervened. His bad marriage to Herodias was politically sensitive.

Now, this war actually happened after John the Baptist's death. People said that it was a judgment on Herod because of John the Baptist's death. But it was already a political issue, already a political problem when John the Baptist was talking about it.

John came along. Sometimes we're addressing moral issues, but those moral issues appear to have political implications. So, Antipas had John arrested.

John's preaching was just stirring up people complaining about what he had done with this marriage. And so he placed John in the dungeon of Machaerus, his Parian fortress. Here are some remains of Machaerus again.

It looked better back then. Here's some more of the scenery, and that's not even a dungeon. But Matthew 14, the story is longer in Mark chapter 6, but Matthew has the most relevant of the details.

The banquet here contrasts with Jesus as the host of the 5,000 that we have in the context. Jesus is a good host. Herod Antipas is a rotten host.

One day, Herod Antipas was throwing a big birthday party for himself. Birthdays, by the way, were celebrated by Greeks and Romans. That was not a Jewish custom.

That's not to say it's a bad custom. I like to celebrate that God has given me another year, and I like that people were especially nice to me on that day. But that was a Greek and Roman custom.

But members of the Jewish elite often followed Greek customs. Banquets of the Herodian family were notoriously immoral. There's one scholar who often is very skeptical of reports in the Gospels, but when he comes to this story, he said, you know, I would have been skeptical of this, except we know that, well, the Herodian family was notorious for its immoral banquets.

Mark chapter 6 contrasts with the story of Esther. Remember, in the book of Esther, chapter 1, Queen Vashti refuses to undress before the guests. But here, Herodias' daughter, Princess Salome, we know her name from Josephus, dances lewdly before these guests.

King Akash of Arosh, King Xerxes, probably, offered Esther half the kingdom. That's in Mark. Matthew doesn't include that detail.

But in Mark chapter 6, Antipas offers Salome half the kingdom because of his drunken lust. Now, Antipas couldn't have given her half the kingdom. Remember, he's just a Tetrarch.

Rome owns the kingdom. So, you know, he's promising her, offering her something that he can't really give her. Well, Salome's smart, and she needs to request something more practical.

So, she goes and asks her mother. Now, Mark says she went out to ask her mother. Why did she have to go out? Well, Machaerus, like most palaces, had separate banqueting halls for men and women.

So, she goes out to ask her mother, Herodias, in a separate place. Herodias wasn't there to witness her husband's drunken lust, although she probably knew him well enough to know the way he was in this case as well. So, Salome gave her a request.

Well, Herod was drunk. He'd also made oaths. His honor was now at stake in front of these dinner guests.

He was very sad to do this because he liked to hear John, just like some other rulers liked to get entertained by listening to philosophers or something. So, John gets decapitated. This was the more merciful form of execution.

It was the form used for Roman citizens and so on because the person died faster by cutting off their head. Crucifixion could take a few days to finish dying at times. His disciples then risked their own necks to come to bury him, which highlights by means of contrast the unfaithfulness of Jesus' own disciples a few chapters later.

Mark talks about how the head is presented on a platter, just a very grotesque climax to this banquet that is so much in contrast to the banquet where Jesus was the host and feeding many, many people. In terms of this grotesque element, we do have some other true stories from antiquity of some rulers who, for the sake of a boy or a woman that they were interested in sexually, would entertain them by executing someone in front of them. That was universally despised by the people who read this.

So, John is being portrayed as a martyr here, but Herod Antipas is being portrayed as a very bad person, which he was. So, whatever happened to Antipas and Herodias? Well, the Bible doesn't tell us, but biblical principles did play out in their lives. Adultery never pays.

Mark sometimes calls Antipas a king, which he acted like. Within Galilee, he was the closest thing to a king that they had. But Antipas technically was not a king.

Technically, he was only a tetrarch, as in most passages in Matthew and in Luke. Mark might be making fun of Herod Antipas, especially if he knows what happened later on. Herodias had a brother by the name of Herod Agrippa I. Acts 12 just calls him Herod, reserving the title Agrippa for his son, Herod Agrippa II, who acted a little bit more mature.

But Herod Agrippa I was party buddies with Gaius Caligula in Rome. Gaius Caligula later became emperor, and he took care of his old friend, Agrippa. Agrippa was a people pleaser.

He did that in Rome. He also did it in Judea. When he became king over Judea, he tried to please people there, and Acts 12 talks about that.

But he became king of Judea. Caligula actually didn't let him leave Rome, but when Caligula died, the next emperor, Claudius, sent Agrippa I to be king over Judea in Judea, and he reigned there from 41 to 44 until he died. His death is described both in Josephus and in Acts 12.

But okay, here's Herodias' brother. He comes and he becomes a full king after spending some time in Rome. Herod Antipas had been the tetrarch of Galilee for an entire generation.

He'd never been king, and Herodias was upset. My brother's a king, she said. Why aren't you a king? But no one could be king unless the emperor said so.

Antipas said I can't do this. You have to have the emperor's permission. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Herodias kept pestering him again and again until finally he gave in, and Antipas petitioned the emperor and said, could I please become king? To which the emperor replied, no one can be king unless I say he can be king.

Sorry about the pictures again. I took whatever was free and just mixed and matched. But anyway, the emperor was so angry about Antipas' request that he banished Antipas to Gaul.

But he said to Herodias, you know, you are the sister of our friend, Herod Agrippa I, so you don't have to go into banishment. She said, no, I'll go too. So, Herod Antipas and Herodias spent their last days as exiles.

Not to rub it in, but they should have listened to John, shouldn't they?

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 12, Matthew 12-14.