

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 7A – Matthew 13:53-15:39: Jesus Strengthens the Disciples as Conflict Intensifies

Greetings, this is David Turner, and this is Lecture 7a. We are attempting in this lecture to bite off a rather large hunk of the text of Matthew. We want to introduce Matthew 13:53 through 15:39, particularly as discipleship is strengthened, as opposition continues.

But to get this lecture off the ground, we need, first of all, to set this passage in the context of this next narrative block. We just came to the end of the third discourse, the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13. At the end of Matthew 13, beginning in verse 53, there is the next narrative block running all the way through 17:27, and it is to that that we turn.

Introduction to the Narrative Block, Matthew 13:53 to 17:27. Matthew 13:53 to 17:27 is the narrative block between the third and fourth discourses, and it may be the most difficult section of this gospel to analyze in terms of structure. The conventional wisdom among scholars who believe that Matthew is dependent upon Mark is that at this point, Matthew ceases his distinctive topical or thematic arrangement of Jesus' traditions and begins to follow the order of Mark. This is the view of those who hold to the Mark in priority view.

I'm not sold on that, but neither am I dead set against it. It's just hard to conclude. Although Matthew's structuring of the material in this narrative block may not be as meticulous as it was previously, it is clear that he wishes for his story of Jesus to convey the ever-increasing polarization of responses to Jesus and the kingdom.

In what is perhaps the crucial text in this section, 16:13 to 28, the contrast between the false and true views of Jesus, 16:13 to 16, and of discipleship, 16:21 to 26, is made clear, as well as the ultimate fate of Jesus at the hands of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, 16:21, and the other major passion predictions, 17:9, 12, 22, 23, 20:17 to 19, and 21:39. Now, depending upon how you divide it, there are around 16 episodes in this narrative block. If you look at your handout material, the supplemental material, in addition to the outline for this lecture on page 30, there is also the key themes of Matthew 13:53 to 17:27 on page 31. We've attempted to lay out for you the way in which both conflict with the Jewish leaders, and Jesus' stress on developing the faith of the disciples is shown there, and you can look at that for yourself and notice how these things keep coming up. We would like to develop this more, but time is of the essence. So now we move to the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth in Matthew 13, verses 53 to 58.

Unbelief is always a sad thing, but in this case, it's especially pathetic. It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to think that Jesus, like most people who return home, arrived with fond memories and wishes to renew old acquaintances. But in this case, it is not to be, for Jesus' former associates refused to accept his Messianic status and mission because they remembered his humble beginnings.

Perhaps there is an element of jealousy here. The townspeople cannot accept a small-town boy who, as the saying goes, makes good. But all this aside, they're not merely quibbling over the anomaly of Jesus' humble, ordinary pedigree and his special, powerful ministry.

They are rejecting the kingdom of God. The saying familiarity breeds contempt is applicable here, and the consequences are devastating. In a sense, the unbelief of Nazareth typifies that of Israel as a whole.

Jesus is without honor among the Jews, evidently because they can't conceive of a Messiah as they conceived the Messiah to be a political, military type of conqueror, as having the humble beginnings that Jesus has. So, they don't honor him in his hometown, but he will be held in high honor by the Gentiles. Yet even this shouldn't be pressed unduly, since there are indeed some among Israel, eventually even including Jesus' family, who believe in Jesus and become the messengers of the kingdom to the Gentiles.

Jesus' lack of miracles in Nazareth should not be viewed as a matter of inability, but as a matter of choice. It's not that Jesus' power is hindered by unbelief, but that he does not resort to loud tactics and perform miracles simply to please skeptics. Compare 12:19 and 12:38.

The sower is parabolic, but also prophetic, earlier in Matthew 13. As soon as Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the other parables, he sees its truth sadly in his own hometown. People before whom and with whom he grew up simply cannot grasp his kingdom mission, even though they acknowledge his wisdom and power in 13:54 and 13:56.

They simply do not understand, and thus perhaps they are to be identified in the case of the seed sown on the packed soil beside the path, devoured by the birds or Satan, before it can even sprout, 13:4 and 19. But perhaps even in Nazareth there was some good soil, a few people to whom the secrets of the kingdom were given, 13:11. Now we move to the story of the death of John the Baptist, another very sad story in Matthew 14:1 through 12.

In this passage, the violent history of the Herodian dynasty continues. Herod the Great's evil deeds are well chronicled in ancient history and in Matthew 2. Here,

Antipas proves to be his father's son, although he's smitten in conscience for the evil his rash promise causes him to do. Antipas is a weak, pathetic, despicable figure whose evil caprice is prompted by his vengeful wife's suggestion to her daughter.

Plumtree has a commentary on Matthew, and in it, he has a remark which is often cited. Like most men, Herod feared being thought weak. Instead of humbly acknowledging the error of his rash promise, he saves his own face by destroying God's prophet.

His palace guests are shown a blatant example of corrupt power and action, but Herod takes his place in the list of evil rulers who have rejected and destroyed God's messengers. In Matthew's narrative, the execution of John by Antipas follows upon the rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth. These two consecutive episodes stress unbelief in two different situations, but the unifying theme is the rejection of God's messengers.

The similar treatment of John and Jesus is alluded to in 11:18, and 19, and you can see it again in chapter 17. As Jesus said, there is no greater human than John the Baptist, Matthew 11:11. John fearlessly and faithfully fulfilled his role as the one who prepared the way for Jesus.

Antipas may have been the so-called king at his birthday party when he ordered John's execution and the desecration of his corpse, but one day he will stand before the king of kings, and he will give account for his atrocious treatment of the king's forerunner. Since this section of Matthew intentionally stresses how Jesus develops the faith of his disciples, the action of John's disciples in properly burying their master should be read as a lesson for Jesus' disciples. John's death anticipates the death of Jesus, 17:12, and the action of John's disciples here is exemplary for the disciples of Jesus, 27:57 to 61.

Even Antipas' reluctance to behead John may anticipate Pilate's reluctance to crucify Jesus, 27:18 and following. The similarities between John and Jesus are uncanny, leading people like Davies and Allison to remark that Matthew 14:1 through 12 is a Christological parable. And now the feeding of the 5,000, 14:13 through 21.

One would naturally conclude from this passage that Jesus performed this miracle out of compassion for hungry people. This miracle would also demonstrate Jesus' kingdom authority and influence over people to believe in him. But in addition to this straightforward interpretation of the miracle, a number of approaches have been suggested.

Barclay suggests that the miracle should be understood as the spontaneous sharing of food which had been brought by individuals due to the power of Jesus' example.

Jesus takes the meager stores that the disciples have brought and begins to distribute them. Others follow suit, and there is more than enough to go around.

Thus, the miracle is a matter of selfishness being overcome by generosity as everyone follows Jesus' example. Despite the wholesome lesson derived by this interpretation, it cannot be sustained exegetically. It's clear from the passage that the meager stores of the disciples, 5 loaves and 2 fish, were somehow miraculously multiplied to feed a crowd of perhaps 20,000 people.

There is no mention of others bringing out additional food or any comment about selfishness being turned to generosity. This is a miracle story, not a fable about generosity. Another interpretation stresses the Eucharistic overtones of the passage, viewing it as an allegory of the Eucharist.

Indeed, there are so many clear verbal parallels between Matthew 14 verses 13 through 21 and Matthew 26 verses 20 to 29 that some connection between the two seems inevitable. But it seems to be a stretch to read the story of the Last Supper and subsequent Christian sacramental practice back into this story of hungry people being miraculously fed, especially if the historicity of the miracle is doubted. It's more likely that Matthew intends for his readers to view this story as reminiscent of the miracle feeding of the Israelites with manna in the wilderness.

See Exodus 16, Deuteronomy 8, and other passages. And as anticipatory of the eschatological messianic banquet alluded to in 8:11 and 26:29. Matthew may also intend for the reader to hear echoes of the ministry of Elijah, see 1 Kings 17, and Elisha, 2 Kings 4. Just as God had miraculously met the needs of his people in former days through Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, so he meets their needs ultimately through his beloved son, the definitive prophet and teacher of Israel. In this passage, Jesus continues to strengthen and develop the faith of his disciples.

They learn two lessons from Jesus: compassion and faith. When they coldly wish to dismiss the multitudes, Jesus compassionately wishes to release them. When they view their meager resources as inadequate for the need, Jesus nevertheless commands them to meet the need.

They learn to model their ministries after the compassionate model of Jesus and to believe in his power to multiply their resources. And now, as Jesus walks on water at the end of Matthew 14, beginning at verse 22. Christology and Discipleship: Jesus' appearance to the disciples during the storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee follows on the heels of the feeding of the 5,000.

These two consecutive stories focusing on Jesus' messianic powers provide a welcome relief to the two previous episodes, which stress unbelief. Jesus' messianic

powers must be seen against the background of the Old Testament. To walk on the sea and to still a storm are prerogatives which belong only to God.

Job 26:11, and 12, Psalm 65:7, 89:9, and 10, and other passages. These actions of Jesus should be understood as evidence of the status equal to that of which Jesus spoke in 11:25 and following. The worship and testimony of the disciples to Jesus' messianic sonship in 14:33 is a direct result of the divine acts performed by Jesus.

Jesus is, quote-unquote, worshipped several times in Matthew by such people as the magi, a leper, a synagogue official, a Canaanite woman, the mother of Zebedee's sons, and the disciples. Study this term in an English concordance or your Greek concordance with the word *proskuneo*, and it can involve merely a respectful bow to a superior, not necessarily the religious worship of a deity. But you have to look at these passages in their own context to come to the conclusion that's appropriate.

It seems that in this passage, a messianic worship of the Son of God is appropriate as the understanding here. Although the disciples' faith was implicitly challenged in the feeding miracle, 14:15, the storm miracle directly challenges them, reinforces their need for stronger faith, and provides the occasion for their stirring confession in 14:31-33. This second storm miracle, just like the first, should be read as a picture of discipleship in the midst of the trials of life.

This miracle also portrays Peter as the model disciple, the first among equals, 14:28-30. Peter's actions lead to the disciples' confession, 14:33, which anticipates 16:16. Peter's failure due to lack of faith, even more than his success due to faith, is exemplary for growing disciples of Jesus both then and now.

Now, to summarize Matthew 14, after the characteristic transition of 13:53, Matthew leaves Jesus' third discourse and begins to narrate the next stage of Jesus' ministry. He arrives in Nazareth, where his ministry is not honored. News of Jesus comes to Herod, who mistakenly takes Jesus as John Redivivus, or reborn.

When Jesus hears of John's martyrdom, he withdraws to a lonely place, but is followed by multitudes whom he miraculously feeds. This is followed by the second storm incident and many healings in Gennesaret. One theme that continues to characterize Matthew's narrative is that of Jesus' rejection, which now occurs even at Nazareth.

Another blow comes from John's grisly martyrdom, which causes Jesus to withdraw from the public eye. Yet he cannot avoid the multitudes who are clamoring for healing. Jesus' disciples continue to exercise little faith when they are tested by another storm, but they repeat the affirmation that Jesus is God's Son.

So, in general, one can conclude that in the midst of growing opposition, the authority of the kingdom is growing through the miracles and through the weak but genuine and maturing faith of the disciples. Now we come to chapter 15. The structure of Matthew 15 develops as from the Pharisees' question in 15.1 and 2, which is answered by Jesus in 15.3 to 9. Then Jesus turns to the crowd and addresses them parabolically, evidently in the presence of the Pharisees in 15.10 and 11.

Then, in response to two questions from the disciples, Jesus first denounces the Pharisees in 15:12 to 14, and then explains the enigmatic saying of 15.11 to the crowds in 15.15 to 20. The movement is from 1, Jesus' enemies the Pharisees, to 2, the crowd, which views Jesus in a very superficial manner, to 3, the disciples, whose understanding of Jesus is genuine if flawed. The passage is an inclusio, or it has bookends, and in that it begins and ends with the matter of eating with unwashed hands, 15:2 and 15:20. Now, Jesus in the oral and written Torah.

This passage is crucial in understanding the relationship of Jesus' teaching to the traditions of the Pharisees and the Law of Moses. Jesus clearly sets aside the traditions of the elders as it cross-purposes with God's Word in 15:3 to 6, but does he do the same with the dietary laws of the Old Testament, Leviticus 11, and Deuteronomy 14? Those who answer this question in the affirmative stress 15:11 and 17, to the effect that Jesus categorically denies that food can defile a person. They also note that whatever is left in doubt in Matthew is made clear by the editorial comment, "he declared all foods clean," in the parallel text Mark 7:19. But in view of Matthew 5.17, is it not a bit simplistic and presumptuous to think that Matthew would present Jesus as dismissing a key Old Testament law in such an abrupt and facile manner? Others argue that Matthew does not present Jesus as annulling the Old Testament dietary laws, such as Davies, Allison, and Overman.

Such scholars assume the priority of Mark and argue that Matthew has toned down Mark's version of this incident mainly by omitting Mark 7:19b, he declared all foods clean. Another argument is that Matthew 15:11 is hortatory and that its antithesis is a rhetorical strategy, not a prosaic proposition. It's also pointed out that Matthew stresses Jesus' disagreement with the Pharisees in verses 2 and 20, which frame the passage.

Jesus denied the validity of their tradition on washing hands, not the dietary laws themselves. Another noteworthy factor is that the enigmatic saying of 15:11, often taken as annulling the dietary laws, is not interpreted by Jesus in terms of dietary law, but in terms of Pharisaic traditions. Granted, Jesus does say that whatever the food enters the mouth, it is eliminated, and that what comes out of the mouth is the real problem.

But in his final comments, he contrasts the sins which defile not with eating unclean foods, but with eating with unwashed hands. Thus, there is reason to doubt that

Matthew intends for his readers to conclude simplistically that Jesus is simply annulling the dietary laws. Carson is correct in pointing to Matthew 5:17-48 as the key to the interpretation of 15:1-20. Jesus has not come to destroy but to fulfill the law and the prophets, and in so doing, he definitively teaches the law and accomplishes its purpose.

He fulfills the Old Testament dietary laws by pointing out that ultimately defilement is a matter of the heart. Eventually, the implications of Matthew 15:11 for the Old Testament dietary laws will be recognized by the Apostolic Church. Acts 10, Peter's experience there, Paul's counsel to the weak and the strong in Romans 14, and perhaps also Colossians 2:16. But at this point, Matthew narrates the teaching of Jesus for his Christian Jewish community in an implicit cryptic manner.

The principle of putting the priority on internal ethical matters rather than on Pharisaic hand-washing traditions is clear, but one would think that Matthew's community would probably go on practicing the Old Testament dietary laws as reminders of the deeper ethical concerns voiced by Jesus, the ultimate teacher of the Torah. Now, the Jesus encounter with the Gentile woman in Matthew 15:21-28. This passage contains a dialogue in which Jesus responds three times to the pleas of the Canaanite woman and once to his disciples. The request of the disciples comes after Jesus' first response to the woman.

He ignores her in 15:22-23. His second response may be more to the woman, excuse me, may be more to the disciples than to the woman, and in it, he flatly denies that his mission concerns her. His third response to the woman whose pleas this time are underlined by her bowing before him, uses blunt, even cruel language, 15:25-26. The woman's final plea exhibits amazing humility and insight, asking Jesus to permit her a scrap of the children's bread. He responds by commending her great faith and granting her request.

The repeated requests and responses induce a dramatic anticipation in the reader. Each time Jesus places an additional obstacle in front of the woman, the fact that her faith wins out in the end makes it all the more remarkable. Now, Jesus and the Gentiles are in this passage.

It's already clear in Matthew that Jesus and his disciples minister only to the lost sheep of Israel, 9:35-36, 10:5-6. However, there has already been at least one notable exception to this rule in Matthew 8:5-13, the healing of the Roman officer's servant. It's noteworthy that both the previous and present cases of ministry to Gentiles center around exceptional faith, 8:10, 15:28. Both cases involve a request for another person. Both cases also speak of blessing in terms of table fellowship, and that table fellowship is described in terms of the primacy of Israel.

The Roman official may look forward to sitting down at the table with Jewish patriarchs, and the woman here may have scraps of the children's bread. The language of the table is clearly eschatological in 8:11 and is implicitly so here in Matthew 15, since the woman is receiving blessings flowing from the presence of the kingdom, 12:28. The language of Jesus at the Last Supper also has an eschatological context according to 26:29. Thus, every meal among Christians, and even more so, every Christian Eucharist service anticipates the eschatological feast with Jesus. Davies and Allison are correct when they say that this passage makes it abundantly plain that the biblical doctrine of Israel's election must be taken seriously.

As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, salvation is from the Jews, John 4:22. The world mission of the church, which concludes Matthew 28:18-20, is couched in language which echoes Daniel 7:13-14. Thus, this world mission does not contradict the earlier mission to Israel, but it expands it. Matthew would agree with Paul that through Jesus Christ, Gentiles have been brought near to the covenant promises of Israel, Ephesians 2:11 and following. The covenantal language from which both Matthew's and Paul's views arise is evidently Genesis 12:3, and Abraham, all the families of the earth, will be blessed.

And now the second miracle meal in Matthew 14, the feeding of the 4,000, excuse me, Matthew 15:29-39. Davies and Allison lay out a convenient summary of the reasons why many scholars view the feeding of the 4,000 as a miracle meal for Gentiles, which balances the previous feeding of 5,000 Jews. This is quite convenient theologically to have a balancing meal for Gentiles, for that of the Jews, but it can't be proven. The geographical language of this passage is too vague and obscure to prove that Jesus was in Gentile territory.

The statement that the crowd which witnessed the healing glorified, quote, the God of Israel 15:31 is fitting in the mouths of Gentiles, but it's also a common phrase in the Old Testament for Israel's worship. There are many passages that show that to get a concordance, you can find it for yourself. Therefore, neither the geography of the passage nor this key phrase proves that the meal was for Gentiles, and one must make the case for this from the context in which the meal occurs.

Jesus has recently gone to an area bordering Israel and has healed an amazing Canaanite woman's daughter. It would fit this emphasis on ministry to believing Gentiles if the healings and miracle meal narrated in 15:32-39 were done for Gentiles. Similarly, one might even view the 4,000 people as symbolic of Gentiles from the four corners of the earth, and the seven baskets of food left over as symbolic of the completeness or universality of Jesus' kingdom ministry, but all this is mere speculation which fits a preconceived theory.

In fact, the context probably tells against the view that 4,000 Gentiles were fed because it indicates that Jesus' ministry to the Canaanite woman was exceptional,

15:24. It's quite unlikely, therefore, that this feeding of the 4,000 was a miracle for Gentiles. If that's the case, why has Matthew included it? For one thing, if Matthew were following Mark, Mark also contains the story, but Matthew likely also has a theological motive, not just a historical one. Several elements of this passage combine to fit what is called by Donaldson, among others, a Zion eschatology, which portrays the gathering of scattered Israel to Mount Zion for healing, a great feast, and many other miracles in passages like Isaiah 35, verses 5 and 6. In other words, Matthew has crafted his narrative of this miracle to connect it with Old Testament prophetic images of God's eschatological blessing upon his people.

There's additional likelihood here that this imagery connects Jesus with Moses, where you have a mountain and a miraculous meal echoing Sinai and the manna from heaven. Clearly, Matthew's story reminds those who are familiar with the Old Testament of God blessing his people, both the past blessings through Moses and the future blessings foreseen by the prophets. This would be expected in a gospel which stresses the role of Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the law and prophets, but one would also expect to find a reason for the second miracle meal in the narrative of Matthew itself.

It seems probable that Matthew included a second miracle meal to emphasize the lessons his readers should learn from it, such as the compassion of Jesus, his power to do great things with meager resources, and the foreshadowing of the eschatological feast with Jesus. But another lesson will be taught based on the two miracle stories in 16:5-11. Here the disciples' little faith will once again be confronted with their preoccupation with physical needs instead of kingdom, truth, and priorities. What about some lessons for the disciples in Matthew 15? In each of these main sections of Matthew 15, Jesus addresses the genuine but flawed faith of the disciples.

In 15:1-20, the controversy over purity, the disciples are evidently slow to perceive that the rift between Jesus and the Jewish leaders is irreversible. They are overly concerned that the Pharisees were offended by Jesus' teaching, and Jesus' response to their concern makes it quite plain that these leaders are blind to the kingdom because they are not God's plants. 15:12-14, the disciples are also slow in perceiving Jesus' teaching that genuine purity comes from within.

Jesus' reply to their question makes it clear that the disciples should have understood what he meant in 14:15-16. This passage shows that the disciples' assertion in 13:51 should not be taken totally at face value. No doubt they thought they understood the kingdom well, but their genuine knowledge needed considerable deepening. In the other two sections of Matthew 15, the disciples appear to be impatient with the needs of the people.

They ask Jesus to dismiss the Canaanite woman because her repeated pleas bother them. 14:23, and they are incredulous that Jesus wants to feed the 4,000 because they have inadequate provisions in 14:33. The disciples have evidently forgotten Jesus' merciful response to a previous request from another Gentile in 8:5-13, and Jesus' ability to feed a previous crowd even larger than this one in 14:13-21. From the lack of compassion and short memories of the disciples, Matthew's readers learn that they must have Christ-like compassion on the needy as they trust Jesus to use their meager resources to meet the needs of others. In the very next section of Matthew, the little faith of the disciples is once again exposed, 16:8, and Matthew's readers are once again reminded of the power of the kingdom.

And now some summary thoughts on Matthew 15. The events of Matthew 13:53-14:36 serve to illustrate the mixed response to the gospel which Jesus stresses in the parables of 13:1-52. However, opposition in this section has not yet come from the Pharisees whose ultimate slander was stressed in 12:1-45. Even though the murder of John anticipates that of Jesus, 12:14, 14:10, 17:12, the absence of the Pharisees from 13 and 14 reduces the tension somewhat from the level it had reached in chapter 12. However, this absence is only temporary.

The Pharisees now return in chapter 15 to criticize Jesus' disciples for not obeying the traditions of the elders. After this time, Jesus withdraws to Gentile territory and heals the daughter of a remarkable Canaanite woman. Then he moves into territory near the Sea of Galilee for additional miracles and another miraculous feeding.

The events of this chapter not only portray the continuing obduracy of the Pharisees, but also further our understanding of Jesus as the fulfiller of the law. As he confronts the Pharisees, 15:1-9, teaches the multitudes 15:10-11, and explains his teaching to the disciples 15:12-20, Jesus is in effect repeating the formula 5:21 and following, that is to say, you have heard it was said, but I say to you, and he is emphasizing a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Though this righteousness is not appreciated by the Pharisees, it is welcomed by the Canaanite woman who hungrily takes the crumbs from the meal the Pharisees refused to eat.

Her great faith, 15:28, reminds us of that of the centurion in 8:10 and following, who would participate in the eschatological meal. The ensuing miracles and the meal continue the story of Jesus as the compassionate miracle worker and patient teacher. Thus, the kingdom is forcefully advancing, but violent people are attacking it.

11:12. The controversy continues. This is the end of the lecture. Thank you for bearing with me as I spoke very rapidly.