

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

Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome to our deep dive into early Christianity. We're going to be looking at the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 12 through 14. And we've got some really great insights from Dr. Craig Keener's lectures to guide us along the way.

Yeah, his work is just fantastic. He really brings a lot of depth to these stories. So we're going to be unpacking those Sabbath conflicts that Jesus had.

We're going to be talking about the messianic secret, which is always so intriguing. And we're going to try to wrap our heads around those parables, which are way more complex than a lot of people realize. Yeah, definitely.

So let's jump right in. Okay. Sounds good.

Let's start with those Sabbath conflicts. Why were these such a flashpoint between Jesus and the Pharisees? Well, Keener, he highlights how the Pharisees, in their zeal to uphold the law, they sometimes miss the point. Okay.

You know, take the story of Jesus' disciples picking grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry. Right. The Pharisees saw that and condemned it as work.

Oh, wow. But Jesus pointed back to scripture. Yeah, yeah.

You know, he reminded them that King David, this legendary figure, ate consecrated bread when he was in need, even though technically that was against the rules. So Jesus is basically saying it's not about just blindly following the rules. It's about understanding the deeper principles behind them.

Exactly. It's about compassion over rigid legalism. He even used the example of priests working in the temple on the Sabbath.

Oh, yeah. They were exempt from the no work rule. So, you know, the spirit of the law in this case allowed for meeting genuine needs, even if it meant bending the letter of the law a little bit.

And it's fascinating that Keener points out the irony of the Pharisees' position here because they were known for being actually quite lenient in many legal matters. So what was it about Jesus that... Well, you know, it makes you wonder if maybe their personal biases, maybe even fueled by his growing popularity, kind of clouded their judgment. Yeah, like they felt threatened or something.

It really makes you think about how those same biases might be operating in our own lives. Oh, absolutely. You know, how often are we letting our own preconceived notions kind of get in the way of seeing things clearly? It's so easy to do.

Yeah. We all have our blind spots. Absolutely.

Now, this conflict over authority, it kind of escalates when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, which is another name for Satan. And this leads to a discussion of the unforgivable sin, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is one that a lot of people get hung up on.

Yeah. It can be a scary concept. Yeah.

So what does Keener say about this? Well, he makes this really important distinction. He says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit isn't just about insulting the Holy Spirit. It's a much deeper issue.

It's not just like, you know, saying something bad about the Holy Spirit. Exactly. Yeah.

It's more about the state of your heart. It's about having a hardened heart that willfully rejects. Like you're choosing to ignore the truth.

You're rejecting the evidence of God's work, even when it's right there in front of you. So it's more about a persistent attitude of resistance to God than a single isolated act. Exactly.

It's a pattern of rejection. That makes sense. And Keener assures listeners that if you have genuinely repented and you're seeking God, you haven't committed this sin.

That's reassuring. Yeah. Because I think a lot of people worry about that.

I think so. Now, another really intriguing aspect of Jesus's ministry is what scholars call the messianic secret. Right.

These are all those instances where he tells people he's healed to keep it quiet. Right. Why all the secrecy? It's a bit of a puzzle, isn't it? Yeah.

You'd think he'd want everybody spreading the news. Exactly. What's Keener's take on this? Well, he argues that Jesus is strategically delaying widespread recognition.

Okay. He connects it to the prophecy in Isaiah about the servant of the Lord who won't cry out or make a big show of things until the appointed time. So Jesus is fulfilling prophecy by sort of managing his popularity, waiting for the right moment to fully reveal his purpose.

It's all about timing. And it raises some interesting questions for us today. Yeah, it does.

You know, about when is it the right time to be outspoken about our faith versus when is a more subtle approach more effective? Yeah. It's a delicate balance. Okay.

So let's shift gears a bit and talk about those parables. Chapter 13 is full of them. And Keener gives us a whole masterclass on how to understand these stories.

And it's not just about finding one simple moral right. Right. Keener really challenges that idea.

Yeah. That there's just one simple meaning. Like a little Aesop's fable.

Right. With a moral at the end. Exactly.

He says that's way too simplistic. Okay. He draws on his understanding of ancient Jewish teaching methods to show that parables can have these multiple layers of meaning.

So it's not like those Russian nesting dolls where you open one, and there's another one inside. Yeah. And another layer upon layer.

So there's no one right interpretation. Right. It's more about unpacking those different layers and seeing how they connect.

And he uses the parable of the sower to demonstrate this. Yeah. The one with the different types of soil.

Exactly. Representing different responses to Jesus's message. Right.

The rocky ground. The thorny ground. Yeah.

It's all about how receptive we are to God's word. It's like what kind of soil are we? Yeah. Exactly.

Are we the good soil that allows the seed to grow? Or are we choked by weeds and distractions? But to really drive home this point about multiple interpretations, he tells this amazing rabbinic parable. Oh, yeah. This is a good one.

About a blind man and a lame man stealing apples from an orchard. I love this story. Okay.

Tell me about it. Okay. So picture this.

Okay. You've got this king who hires a blind man and a lame man to guard his orchard. Oh, that's clever.

Right. Because he figures neither one can steal apples on their own. Yeah.

That makes sense. But guess what? What? They team up. Oh, no.

The lame man rides on the blind man's shoulders. That's sneaky. Right.

And they get away with stealing all these apples. Oh, wow. But when the king comes back, they play all innocent.

Like, how could we have possibly done it? Exactly. How could we have done it? So what's the rabbi's interpretation of this story? Well, he connects it to Judgment Day. Okay.

He says that just as the body and soul sin together, they will be resurrected and judged together. Wow. So it's not just about teamwork.

It's about this much deeper concept of the interconnectedness of our physical and spiritual selves. Exactly. How that plays out in the afterlife.

It's a powerful image. It is. And it shows how these parables can have these layers of meaning that go far beyond the surface.

Absolutely. And it's funny, you know, Keener even shares an anecdote about a rabbi who, no matter what Jesus said, he would just disagree. He would just say it was wrong.

Wow. It's like his mind was made up. Yeah.

I guess that's human nature sometimes. It is, isn't it? We get so attached to our own viewpoints that we miss the wisdom in what others are saying. Absolutely.

It's a good reminder to stay open, to be willing to be challenged even when it's uncomfortable. Exactly. Okay.

Now, speaking of small things with big potential, let's move on to the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. What are the key insights that Keener highlights here? Well, these parables, they're all about the hidden but pervasive growth of the kingdom of God. So it might start small, almost unnoticeable, but it spreads and transforms everything it touches.

Exactly. And Keener points out this detail in the yeast parable that I think often gets overlooked. It does.

The woman uses enough flour to make bread for over a hundred people. That's a lot of bread. It is.

It's a feast. So what's the significance of that detail? Well, it's a hint at the future expansion of the kingdom. It starts small, but it's going to grow far beyond its humble beginnings.

And he draws a parallel to how early Christians might have been viewed. Right. Small, insignificant, but carrying within them this incredible potential to transform the world.

Like those tiny mustard seeds that grow into huge trees. Yeah. It's a beautiful image.

Now let's shift gears a bit. Talk about Herod Antipas, John the Baptist, and this whole drama with Herodias. This is where things get a little messy.

Yeah. A little bit. A little scandalous.

To understand this story, we need some context. Right. Herod Antipas, the ruler, was in this scandalous marriage.

Yeah. He married his brother's wife. He did.

Oh. Which caused a lot of political tension, as you can imagine. Big time.

And then you've got John the Baptist, known for his bold pronouncements, publicly condemning this marriage. Yeah. He didn't hold back.

He didn't. He called it out for what it was. And Keener, he really sets the scene by contrasting that lavish, immoral banquet that Herod throws with Jesus miraculously feeding the 5,000.

Yeah. It's a powerful juxtaposition. It is.

It's like you've got these two completely different worlds. Right. Two different sets of values on display.

Worldly power versus spiritual power. Exactly. And there's this fascinating irony that Keener points out.

Yeah. Herod promises Salome, Herodias' daughter, half his kingdom, as a reward for dancing. Yeah.

He's feeling very generous. He is. But here's the thing.

What's that? He doesn't even own the kingdom. Oh, that's right. It's all controlled by Rome.

Yeah. He's making promises that he can't keep. It just shows how empty and corrupt his promises are.

He's all talk. He is. No substance.

And it's a classic example of how prioritizing personal gratification over truth and righteousness can have these devastating consequences. Absolutely. Herod enjoyed listening to John.

Yeah, he did. But his lust and his political maneuvering ultimately led to John's death. It's a tragic end.

It is a powerful reminder that our choices have consequences. They do. And sometimes those consequences can be really tragic, even when we think we're in control.

Yeah. We're not always as in control as we think we are. No, we're not.

And sometimes our actions have these ripple effects that we could never have anticipated. That's a good place to pause for now. Yeah, let's let our listeners digest this first batch of insights.

Okay, we've covered a lot of ground already. We have. So stay tuned for part two of our deep dive.

Yeah. Where we'll continue to unravel the layers of meaning within these really captivating chapters of Matthew. That could be good.

It is. Welcome back to our deep dive into Matthew chapters 12 through 14. Yeah, we're picking up right where we left off.

We are. With the story of John the Baptist. Right.

A stark reminder of the clash between truth and power. Yeah. And then the narrative shifts back to Jesus.

And we encounter the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. Right. Keener uses this story to highlight the contrast between Jesus's leadership and that of Herod Antipas.

Exactly. Remember Herod? He throws that lavish banquet all about self-indulgence and political maneuvering. Yeah.

And then you have Jesus demonstrating genuine compassion by miraculously providing food for all those people. Yeah. It's such a powerful image.

It is. Of abundance and provision. Yeah.

And Keener reminds us that this miracle goes beyond just physical needs. You know, it has these profound theological implications. What do you mean? Well, by feeding the multitude.

Yeah. Jesus demonstrates his authority over nature, pointing to his role as the true bread of life. So it's not just about filling empty stomachs.

No. It's about feeding souls as well. Exactly.

It's about spiritual sustenance. Now, immediately after this event, we have that scene where Jesus sends his disciples ahead in a boat. Right.

While he goes up on a mountain to pray alone. And as they're crossing the lake, a storm kicks up. Oh, yeah.

Classic biblical storm. Wind and waves. And the disciples are out there.

Yeah. Battling the elements. Freaking out.

They are. And then in the midst of this storm, they see Jesus walking on water. Talk about a test of faith.

I know. It's such a cinematic moment. It is.

Peter even tries to walk out to meet Jesus. Oh, yeah. Good old Peter.

Right. But he starts to sink when he takes his eyes off Jesus. He loses focus.

He does. And Keener points out that even though the disciples had witnessed all these incredible miracles, they still struggled with doubt and fear. Yeah.

It makes them relatable, doesn't it? It does, because we all struggle with that. We do. You know, even when we've seen God work in our lives, we still have those moments where we're like, yeah, is this really happening? Do I really trust you, God? Exactly.

And it's encouraging to see that Jesus. Yeah. He didn't reject them for their doubts.

He didn't. He reached out and saved Peter. He did.

He calmed the storm. And in the end. Yeah.

The disciples respond with worship, declaring truly you are the Son of God. It's a turning point for them. Their faith deepens.

Even as they acknowledge their own human limitations. Yeah. They're still learning.

They are growing. So they make it to shore. Okay.

And guess what? More crowds are waiting for them. Of course. They can't get a break.

Nope. But this time focus shifts from physical healing to spiritual teaching. So we get more of those deep conversations.

Of teaching. And one that stands out is the story of the woman with the issue of blood. Oh, this is a powerful one.

It is. She had been suffering for 12 years. 12 years.

Spent all her money trying to find a cure. Wow. But nothing worked.

So she's desperate. She is completely desperate. And then she hears about Jesus.

And she decides, I'm going to reach out and touch the edge of this garment. She's like, I just need to touch him. Yeah.

And in that instant she's healed. Wow. But what makes this story so powerful is that Jesus turns to the crowd and asks, who touched me? It seems like a strange question.

It does, right? Then he'd know. But Keener explains that Jesus isn't asking out of ignorance. He's drawing attention to the woman's faith.

He's making a point. Exactly. He's highlighting the fact that it was her belief, her deliberate act of reaching out to him, that made the healing possible.

So it's not just about being in proximity to Jesus. Right. It's about actively engaging with him in faith.

It's about that personal connection. And speaking of challenging religious norms. Yeah.

Keener dives into a series of debates between Jesus and the Pharisees. Right. Covering all sorts of topics.

Ritual purity diet. It's like they've lost sight of the big picture. They've gotten so caught up in the rules.

Yeah. That they've forgotten what really matters. And it's a good reminder for us today that true religion isn't about blindly following rules.

Right. It's about aligning our hearts with God's will. It's about living out our faith in a way that reflects his love and compassion.

Okay. So we've seen Jesus challenge the Pharisees on all these religious matters. Right.

But he also faces opposition from his own hometown. He does. In chapter 13, he returns to Nazareth where he grew up, and he's met with skepticism and even rejection.

They're like, isn't this the carpenter's son? Right. As if someone from their small town couldn't possibly be the Messiah. It's almost as if their familiarity with him blinded them to who he truly was.

It's like they couldn't see past their own preconceived notions. And Keener points out that this dynamic appears throughout the Gospels. It does.

Jesus often encounters the most resistance, not from outright enemies, but from those who think they know him best. The ones who are closest to him sometimes have the hardest time. Accepting who he really is.

It's a challenge for all of us, isn't it? It is, because we all have those blind spots. We do. We all have those people in our lives that we think we know so well.

Right. But maybe we need to take a step back and really see them. With fresh eyes.

With fresh eyes. Allow ourselves to be surprised by who they are. And by how God might be working through them.

Exactly. Now, after this encounter in Nazareth, the focus shifts back to the disciples. Okay.

And Keener points out that Matthew structures this section of the Gospel to highlight their growth and development. It's like an apprenticeship. It is.

Jesus is patiently guiding and equipping them. Yeah, preparing them for the challenges ahead. And one of the key lessons they learn.

Is the importance of service and compassion. Remember the story where they come to Jesus? Yeah. And ask, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus calls over a child.

He does. And says, whoever humbles themselves like this child. Right.

Is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's a radical inversion of the world's values. It is.

The world tells us that greatness is about power. Yeah, wealth, status. But Jesus is saying.

Yeah. True greatness is found in humility. In putting the needs of others.

Yeah. Before our own. And that theme of servanthood.

It's woven throughout these chapters. We see it in Jesus's compassion for the sick. And the marginalized.

Yeah. His willingness to wash his disciples' feet. Right.

And ultimately in his sacrificial death on the cross. It's a challenging message. It is.

But it's also incredibly inspiring. Yeah. It calls us to re-examine our own priorities.

To ask ourselves how we can embody God's love. Right. In practical, tangible ways.

And Keener reminds us that even small acts of kindness and service can have a profound impact. Absolutely. It's about looking for opportunities.

To be the hands and feet of Jesus. Yeah. In our everyday lives.

So that brings us to the end. Okay. Of part two of our deep dive.

We've explored themes of compassion. Faith challenge. Right.

The true meaning of following Jesus. Ready to wrap things up in part three. Absolutely.

I can't wait to see what other insights Keener has in store for us. We're back for the final part of our deep dive into Matthew chapters 12 through 14 with Dr. Keener's insights to guide us. It's been quite a journey.

It has. We've covered so much ground. We have.

Last time we were talking about how Jesus encountered resistance even from those in his hometown. Right. Those who thought they knew him best.

But sometimes familiarity can be a barrier. It can. To really seeing and understanding someone.

Makes you think, doesn't it? It does. For sure. Are there times when our own preconceived notions prevent us from recognizing what God might be doing? Even in the familiar.

Even in the familiar. Like we think we know something or someone so well. Right.

But God might be doing something new. Yeah. Something unexpected.

So it's a reminder to stay humble. It is. To stay open.

Yeah. To allow ourselves to be surprised by God. So after this encounter in Nazareth.

Right. The narrative shifts back to the disciples. Okay.

And Keener points out that Matthew has structured this section of the gospel to highlight their growth. Yeah. And their development as followers of Jesus.

The process. Right. No, it is.

They're not just these perfect, like instantly transformed followers. They're human. Yeah.

Right. They're wrestling with their doubts. Yeah, their fears.

Yeah. And they're gradually coming to this deeper understanding. Of his mission.

Of his mission. Of what it means to follow him. It's like they're in training.

It's like an apprenticeship. Yeah. Jesus is patiently guiding them.

Equipping them. And preparing them for what's to come. They want to know who's the top dog.

They do. Yeah. And what does Jesus do? He calls over a child.

He does. He says, whoever humbles themselves like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's such a powerful image.

It is. It's a complete reversal of the world's values. And the world tells us that greatness is about power.

Well, it's status. But Jesus is saying. Right.

No true greatness is found in humility. In putting others first. Yeah.

In serving others. And that theme of servanthood. It runs throughout these chapters.

We see it in Jesus's compassion. Yeah. For the sick.

The marginalized. He marginalized. His willingness to wash his disciples' feet.

Right. And ultimately in his act. Of self-sacrifice.

Of self-sacrifice on the cross. Yeah. It's a challenging message.

It is. But it's also incredibly inspiring. It is.

It calls us to reexamine our own priorities. To ask ourselves. Yeah.

How can we embody God's love in practical, tangible ways? How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus? Exactly. And Keener emphasizes that it doesn't have to be these grand gestures. No.

It's about those everyday acts. Right. Of kindness.

The small things. The small things. That can make a big difference.

It's about looking for those opportunities. To serve. To serve.

To love. To make a difference in the world around us. And that leads us to Keener's final thought.

Okay. In his lectures on these chapters. He talks about the unexpected ways.

Right. In which God's plans unfold. We don't always get to see the full picture.

We don't. Do we? He pointed out how many of the places where Christianity thrived in the early centuries. The growing centers of the faith.

And then other regions? Unexpected regions. Unexpected regions. Have experienced this explosive growth.

It's amazing, isn't it? It is. It reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

They are. His ways are higher than our ways. And so we're called to trust in God's sovereignty.

We have faith. That even when things seem chaotic. Yeah.

He's still in control. He's still in control. Yeah.

Well, that wraps up our deep dive into Matthew chapters 20 through 14. It's been a pleasure. It has been.

Hopefully you now have a richer understanding. Not just of the stories themselves. Right.

But of the deeper layers of meaning within them. The layers upon layers. We've explored challenges.

To religious norms. To religious norms. Yeah.

We've witnessed the power. Of faith. Of compassion.

Of compassion. Of humility. And we've glimpsed the transformative potential.

Of God's kingdom. Of God's kingdom. It's a kingdom of upside-down values.

It is. Where the first are last. And the last are first.

Where the humble are exalted. And the proud are humbled. It's a kingdom of love.

Yeah. May we carry these insights with us. Absolutely.

Allowing them to shape our perspectives. Our choices. Our interactions with the world around us.

And may we be inspired. Yeah. To live out the values of God's kingdom.

In our everyday lives. In our everyday lives. Thanks for joining us.

Yeah. This has been great.