

Matthew 12-13

Reactions—to Jesus' identity and teaching

Matthew was a Jewish tax-collector. In his time, that was a contradiction.

On the one hand, he had grown up as a descendant of Abraham, part of the people that God had chosen to use to roll back sin and restore this broken world. This mob was the people God would use to deal with sin, restore his people to his place under his blessing, by his word.

On the other hand, Matthew had turned his back on his people, and thrown his lot in with the occupying powers, the Romans. He was ostracised, rejected and marginalised—and such a decision reveals a pragmatic man, who (at some point) had thought he could do better by dealing with the Romans than by trusting in the dusty promises of God.

Furthermore, as Matthew writes this biography of Jesus, he has become a follower of Jesus—and this is even more problematic! In this sense, Matthew is writing as man who NOW sees in Jesus the promises of God fulfilled, and in Jesus the restoration a sinner needs.

For me, this is captured in Matthew 1:1-18: verse 1 describes the understanding of Jesus that Matthew has come to, and verses 2-18 display the method of grace to sinners (any sinners) that Matthew has experienced.

As Matthew lays out the life and times of Jesus, there is a strong emphasis on fulfilment—this man Jesus is the climax of the plans of God committed to in Genesis 12:1-3. In the section we are spending 8 weeks in, Matthew continues to reveal Jesus' identity/mission and teaching, and the reactions (largely adverse) to him.

Study 1: Matthew 12:15-21

Read Matthew 12:15-21.

Comprehend

1. Verse 15 draws our attention to events immediately preceding. What are they? (vs.1-14)

2. Jesus' reputation follows him. So does something else. What is it, and how does he deal with it? (vs.15-16)

3. Matthew gives an explanation of this decision by Jesus—how does Matthew explain it? (vs.17)

4. Matthew describes Jesus as 'fulfilling' Isaiah 42:1-4. Read Isaiah 42:1-9. Who does Matthew suggest Jesus is? And how are the events of Jesus' life explained in the Isaiah passage?

5. What is the mission of Jesus, in light of Matthew's explanation? And how does this contrast with the mission of the leaders of God's people? (vs.14)

Consider

6. Look at Isaiah 41:8 and Isaiah 1:1-26. Who is the 'servant' and what is wrong with the 'servant'?

7. Look again at Isaiah 42:1-9. Who is the 'servant', and why is this 'servant' sufficient, and what for?

8. How does Matthew seem to be explaining the work, mission, timing and identity of Jesus?
9. If the servant of Isaiah 42 is the same servant as Isaiah 52:13-53:12, what kind of 'justice' and 'victory' is being talked about here with Jesus?

Contact

10. Remembering what Matthew has already communicated about Jesus (cf. 1:1-18), how does his referencing here of Isaiah 42 fill the reader with confidence and hope?
11. Remembering the way in which Isaiah 42:1-9 lays the timetable of the servant's life in the timing of God, how does Matthew regard the events of Jesus' life?
12. What hope does Jesus offer, and what is the contrast with the religious leaders of the day?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 2: Matthew 12:22-37

Read Matthew 12:22-37

Comprehend

1. In verses 22-23, what miracle does Jesus perform, and how do people identify him?

2. The Pharisees have an alternative theory. What is it? What does this reveal about their opposition to Jesus? (vs.24)

3. Jesus' answer is long, but it follows a logical structure:
 - What inconsistency does he reveal? (vs.27)
 - What reality does he reveal? (vs.28-29)
 - What consequence/division does he reveal? (vs.30)
 - What indictment does he proclaim? (vs.31-32)

4. Jesus closes by placing the language of his opponents in the big-picture of judgement.
 - What image does he use? (vs.33)
 - How does he unpack this image and what is sharp about his language? (vs.34-35)
 - What is his final warning? (vs.36-37)

Consider

5. What is the connection between 'Son of David' and Jesus' healing?

6. What is significant about the contrast between the reaction of the crowds, and the reaction of the Pharisees?
7. How does verse 28 highlight the significance of Jesus' arrival, and the nature of the kingdom of God?
8. How would you describe the 'unforgiveable sin'?
9. What is significant in verse 36-37 for our understanding of God's judgement? (cf. Rom.10:9; 2 Cor.5:10)

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10. How does this passage confront you about the times we live in, and the nature of God's kingdom?
11. How does this passage confront you about the connection between your proclamation and practice?
12. How does this passage reveal the identity of Jesus?

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Study 3: Matthew 12:38-45

Read Matthew 12:38-45

Comprehend

1. What is the request of Jesus from the 'scribes and Pharisees'? Why is this surprising? (vs.38; cf vs.13, 22-23)

2. Jesus' answer begins boldly and then ends with condemnation by comparison.
 - How does he describe his questioners? (vs.39)
 - What does he offer them? (vs.39)
 - How does he describe this sign? And what is the result? (vs.39-41)
 - How does he extend this in verse 42?

3. What Jesus says in verses 43-45 obviously deals with those questioning him (see verse 45c).
 - What is the image?
 - How does vs.28 help us understand what Jesus is saying?
 - What is the warning?

Consider

4. What do you think the 'sign of the prophet Jonah' means? And what does the 'queen of the south' refer to?

5. What is so confronting about what Jesus says in verses 43-45?

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6. How similar can we/many people be today, in light of verse 38?

What is the sober warning Jesus' response gives?

7. What is the sober warning we must hear in verses 43-45?
8. Why is this such a strong passage about 'rejection' and its consequences?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 4: **Matthew 12:46-50**

Read Matthew 12:46-50.

Comprehend

1. Who interrupts Jesus and what do they want? (vs.46-47)

2. Jesus asks a searching question—what is it? And what hints have we already been given about its answer? (vs.48; cf. vs.30, 36-37)

3. How does Jesus answer his own question? And what is at the heart of being in Jesus' family? (vs.49-50)

Consider

4. Do you think Jesus is playing biological/earthly family off against heavenly family? Why/why not?

5. How does verse 50 create division? And in what way is it an application/exposition of Matthew 6:33?

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6. What is encouraging about Jesus' description of his family?

7. What is confronting about Jesus' description of his family?

8. What is transformative about Jesus' description of his family?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 5:
Matthew 13:1-23

Read Matthew 13:1-23

Comprehend

1. What is Jesus doing? (vs.1-3)

2. How does Jesus teach? (vs.3)

3. What is the parable that Matthew recounts here? (vs.3-9)

How does it end? (vs.9)

4. Who comes to Jesus with a question, and what is it? (vs.10)

5. Jesus' answer is NOT simple!
He acknowledges a fact—what is it? (vs.11)

He makes an observation—what is it? (vs.12)

He gives a reason—what is it? (vs.13)

He recognizes a fulfilment—what is it? (vs.14-15)

He makes clear a blessing—what is it? (vs.16-17)

6. Jesus then explains the parable of the sower, as it has been labelled. What is his explanation? (vs.18-23)

Consider

7. How do people usually describe the role/use/purpose of parables in Jesus' ministry? How might this passage change this?

8. Read Isaiah 6:1-13.
The section Jesus quoted comes from here. What does it mean in Isaiah, and what was its purpose, and what was its duration?

Why do you think Jesus quoted it?

9. Looking at this section as a whole, how does knowledge of Jesus and his identity and mission come about?

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10. How might this section change our understanding of our 'natural' knowledge of God, and the need for God to intervene—through his work—for us to know him?

11. How might this passage explain both our responsibility to speak the good news of Jesus, the nature of the reaction we often receive, and how people are able to hear?

12. Could this passage be used in any way to stop sharing the good news?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 6:
Matthew 13:24-43

Read Matthew 13:24-43

Comprehend

1. Jesus teaches with three more parables. What are they, and what are they about? (vs.24-33)

2. How does Matthew describe Jesus' use of parables? (vs.35; cf. Ps.78:1-8)

3. Similar to verse 10, what happens next? (vs.36)

4. What is Jesus' explanation? (vs.37-43)

How does Jesus finish in verse 43?

Consider

5. As Jesus uses parables, what is the subject of them all in this section?

6. What do we learn about 'the kingdom of heaven'?

7. Does verse 35 contradict verses 14-15? Why/why not?

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8. Write down one thing you have learned about parables...

9. Write down one thing you have learned about the kingdom

of heaven...

10. How do these parables raise the urgency of the kingdom, and the work of those connected to the kingdom?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 7: **Matthew 13:44-53**

Read Matthew 13:44-53

Comprehend

1. The parables focus continues—what three parables does Jesus teach, and what is their subject? (vs.44-50)

2. This time Jesus asks the question—what is it, and what is the response? (vs.51)

3. Jesus closes with what seems almost like a ‘wisdom-saying’. What is it? (vs.52)

4. How does this ‘parables section’ close? (vs.53)

Consider

5. What do we learn about the kingdom of heaven, and its urgency?

6. What do you think the statement by Jesus in verse 52 means? And what do you think its connection to understanding parables is?

Contact

7. Sum up all that you have learned about parables here, and what their use reveals about:
 - (i) natural human knowledge of God’s kingdom.
 - (ii) the role of revelation.
 - (iii) the way in which God and humans relate.

(iv) the mission of Jesus.

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...

Study 8:
Matthew 13:54-58

Read Matthew 13:54-58

Comprehend

1. Where does Jesus go and what does Jesus do? (vs.54)

2. What is their response? Why? What is so offensive? (vs.54-57)

3. How does Jesus respond? (vs.57)

What does this imply about his response to the situation?

4. What is the result for an aspect of his public ministry there? (vs.58)

Consider

5. Why do you think Jesus' hometown was so offended?

6. How does this help us understand the connection between miracles and faith?

7. Were miracles a necessary part of Jesus' public ministry? Why/why not?

8. How does this provide a summary of the reactions to Jesus we have seen over the last few weeks?

Contact

9. Without making this a complete metaphor, how can we, as God's people now, be like Jesus' hometown with his teaching?

10. How might we be like that with those whose job it is to faithfully proclaim God's word?

11. In what sense is there a warning here about the appropriate reaction to the ministry of Jesus, and God's word?

Write down something you have learned, and something to pray for...