

READ The BIBLE Together



Selection of Parables in MATTHEW

23rd March – 10th May 2014

**SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)**

Day 1 & 2 Read **A Brief Introduction of MATTHEW** below:

For the next seven weeks, we will be reading and working our way through a selection of *parables* found in the **Gospel of MATTHEW**. Since these *parables* are found in **MATTHEW**, **MATTHEW** therefore forms the broad context for them. As we have learned in previous RTBT series, to properly understand the text, we need to keep its context in view.

Hence, we are devoting Day 1 & 2 this week to a brief introduction of **MATTHEW**. The aim of having some understanding of **MATTHEW** (its genre, purpose and audience) is to help us come to a better appreciation and understanding of the *parables* that we will be studying.

Matthew (**MATTHEW 9:9, 10:3, LUKE 5:27**) is the human author of **the Gospel of MATTHEW**. If you scan the 28 chapters of **MATTHEW**, it is without doubt that *Matthew* has left his personal imprint on his book in numerous ways:

- *He selected materials in keeping with the needs of his first intended audience*
- *He arranged his materials in the most persuasive, useful, memorable and compelling way with a specific purpose in mind*
- *He presented the ministry of Jesus and the gospel of His salvation from his own unique perspective, while remaining faithful to the underlying historical and cultural connections that are part of the fabric of the story of Jesus in first century Palestine*

Why was the book written by *Matthew* called '*gospel*'? '*Gospel*' means good news, and so it is the good news about Jesus the Messiah. However, as a genre (type of literature), '*gospel*' refers to a theological biography of the life of Jesus. So the question is: *Why did Matthew write a theological biography of the life of Jesus?*

From **MATTHEW** itself, we can detect the following four purposes:

[1] To *tell* the story of Jesus

Matthew wants to tell his readers about the life of Jesus, from conception to ascension. And as he tells the story, he wants us to see the impact of Jesus on four different groups: (i) the leaders, (ii) the crowds, (iii) the disciples, and (iv) the demons. In doing so, he wants his readers to ask themselves: "*Which group am I?*" Is my response to Jesus like the demons – know Him but hate Him? Or like the religious leaders – opposed Jesus, ignoring what the evidences say? Or like the easily excitable crowd who change their opinions and loyalty by the day? Or like the disciples who are committed to Jesus and grow in knowledge of Him, in spite of repeated failures?

[2] To *spread* and *defend* the faith

Matthew's immediate audience was the Jews of his days. Although **MATTHEW** is meant for all people, yet it is clear that *Matthew* especially had the Jewish people in his mind as he wrote **MATTHEW**. This is why he cited so many Old Testament fulfillment quotations, employed the rabbinic style of reasoning, highlighted the centrality of Jesus in fulfilling the law and focused on the way Jesus relates to the Jewish people.

Matthew's aim was to evangelize to the Jews, and to show them that Jesus is indeed the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. He would also show clearly that the Jews, especially the leaders, have rejected Jesus. As a result, there is judgment on the Jewish people. Some of the parables were told to underline this truth. The kingdom will also be taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. Again, some of the parables were told to reinforce this teaching.

[3] To *explain* the meaning of '*kingdom come*'

The kingdom of God has come in the Person of Jesus Christ --- His incarnation, life, death and resurrection. While the kingdom of God is inaugurated, it has not yet been consummated. In other words, we now live in the tension of the already-but-not-yet: *King Jesus has come and King Jesus shall come*.

What does this mean for believers of Christ? How are we to live our life in the here and now, and how do we do the ministry that He calls us to exercise? The Sermon on the Mount answers the first part of the question while the *parables* in **MATTHEW 24-25** deal with the second part of the question.

[4] To *teach* the church of Christ

While we do not know the identity of *Matthew's* immediate audience other than the fact that they were Jews, yet it is clear that he has the church in his mind as well. This comes out clearly in the way he has structured his gospel, in five discourses (see structural outline below). *Matthew* arranged his book around the teaching discourses of Jesus and their ethical implications. It is likely that he did this because of the needs of the church.

MATTHEW can be outlined in this way:

Jesus' Origin and Preparation for Ministry (**1:1-4:11**)

The Birth and Infancy of Jesus (**1:1-2:23**)

Inaugural Events in Jesus' Ministry (**3:1-4:11**)

The Kingdom Message Goes Out (**4:12-7:29**)

Early Galilean Ministry (**4:12-25**)

First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount (**5:1-7:29**)

The Kingdom Comes with Authority (8:1-9:34)

- # Authority and Discipleship in Jesus' Ministry (8:1-9:34)
- # Second Discourse: Mission and Opposition (9:35-11:1)

Preaching and Teaching in the Midst of Opposition (11:2-13:53)

- # Jesus' Deeds: Revelation and Rejection (11:2-12:50)
- # Third Discourse: Kingdom Parables (13:1-53)

Rejection, Suffering and Glory (13:54-18:35)

- # Jesus' Deeds: Rejection, Discipleship and Glory (13:54-17:27)
- # Fourth Discourse: Life and Relationships in the Community (18:1-35)

The Movement to the Cross (19:1-25:46)

- # Jesus' Deeds: Opposition and Discipleship (19:1-22:46)
- # Fifth Discourse: Guilt and Judgment of Israel (23:1-25:46)

The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus (26:1-28:20)

- # The Passion Narrative (26:1-27:61)
- # The Resurrection Narrative (27:62-28:20)

After reading **A Brief Introduction of MATTHEW** above, attempt these questions:

Who wrote **MATTHEW** and why did he do it?

MATTHEW was written with the Jews in mind. Since most of us in Shalom Church are not Jews, how can **MATTHEW** be relevant and profitable for us?

Day 3 & 4 Read **A Brief Introduction of *parables*** below:

What is a parable? There may be many differing views, but the generally accepted answers would be these:

- *A parable is a story taken from real life from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn*
- *An earthly story with a heavenly meaning*
- *A figurative saying or simile expounded into a picture or story*
- *A story with intent*

For our RTBT series, we will adopt the last answer: *A parable is a story with intent.* Whose intent? The storyteller's! And in our case, the storyteller is Jesus!

Hence, as we look at each *parable*, we need to ask: *What is the intent of our Lord Jesus in telling this story?* It is clear that He tells these stories, not to entertain his hearers, but to change their attitude and conduct. So we need to ask ourselves: *What attitude or conduct was Jesus aiming at, as He told that parable?*

To arrive at this answer, we will often have to remember the broad context (in our case, **why MATTHEW was written and to whom**) as well as the immediate context in which the parables are found. For example, to better understand the *parables* in **MATTHEW 13**, it would be good and helpful for us to know what is happening in **MATTHEW 12**!

Parables are meant to prompt our thinking and stimulate our response. They basically call us to *"Stop! Consider! Change!"* Hence, as we approach a parable, we should come prepared to think hard about what it means, and then as we leave a parable, we should be ready to change, as Jesus intended!

The first set of *parables* we are going to study is found in **MATTHEW 13**:

- Parable of the Sower (**13:3-9, 18-23**)
- Parable of the Wheat and Tares (**13:24-30, 36-43**)
- Parable of the Mustard Seed (**13:31-32**)
- Parable of the Leaven (**13:33**)
- Parable of the Hidden Treasure (**13:44**)
- Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (**13:45-46**)
- Parable of the Dragnet (**13:47-50**)

Revisit the Structural Outline of **MATTHEW** in Day 1 & 2.

1. What is the overall/comprehensive name given to these seven *parables* and what is the context in which these *parables* were uttered?

2. How would your answers in (1) color/affect the way you read these seven *parables*?

Day 5 Background to **MATTHEW 13** *parables*

As mentioned in **A Brief Introduction of *parables*** above, it would be good and helpful for us to know what is happening in **MATTHEW 12** to better understand the *parables* in **MATTHEW 13**. Please take some time to read **MATTHEW 12** and then fill in the blanks (below):

Summary of **MATTHEW 12**

Increasing opposition to Jesus seen in . . .

- Two Sabbath controversies (**12:1-8, 12:9-14**)

Result: _____(v14)

- One response of Jesus: *withdrawal* (**12:15-21**)

- _____ (**12:22-37**)

- _____ (**12:38-45**)

In spite of the increasing opposition, there remains a group of people who will believe in Him (**12:46-50**).

From our Summary of **MATTHEW 12** above, it is clear that Jesus spoke these seven parables in the midst of increasing opposition from the Jewish religious leaders (see Structural Outline of **MATTHEW**). In fact, their hostility towards Him has reached the point where they even plotted to destroy Him!

Note that it is in such a “gloomy” context that Jesus told the kingdom *parables*. Men may oppose Him, and even increase their opposition, but His kingdom will be established and will advance! An example of an Old Testament poetry depicting this truth is found in **Psalm 2**.

With this background context firmly in our mind, we are ready to study these seven parables, starting tomorrow.

Day 6 Read **MATTHEW 13:1-9**

1. From **verses 1-3a**, answer:

When did Jesus tell this *parable*?

Where did Jesus tell this *parable*?

To whom did Jesus tell this *parable*?

2. For the *Parable of the Sower* (**13:3b-8**), list:

(a) The main character and what he did

(b) The four kind of soils and what happened to the seed

3. Jesus ended this *parable* with these words: *He who has ears to hear, let him hear* (**verse 9**).

What does this mean?

Day 7 Read **MATTHEW 13:18-23**

We are grateful that besides telling the *parable*, Jesus also gave us the interpretation of the *parable*. Let's follow Jesus as He explains to us what the four kinds of soils represent. We'll start with the first two today.

1. *The wayside* (**13:4**) – explanation in **13:19**.

The basic issue with the person represented here is that he/she "*hears but does not understand*".

Why would he/she hear and not understand?

Who do you think (from the original hearers of this *parable*) the “*wayside*” hearers represent?

2. *Stony places* (13:5-6) – explanation in 13:20-21.

What do you think is the basic issue for the person represented by “*stony places*”?

What ultimately happened to him/her?

Who do you think (from the original hearers of this *parable*) the “*stony places*” hearers represent?

Week 2

[30th March – 5th April 2014]

Day 1 Read **MATTHEW 13:18-23**

Let’s continue to look at the third and fourth kind of soils today, as explained by Jesus.

1. *Among the thorns* (13:7) – explanation in 13:22.

The basic issue for the person represented by “*among the thorns*” is “*unfruitful*”. What are the reasons given for being “*unfruitful*”?

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Who do you think (from the original hearers of this *parable*) the “*among the thorns*” hearers represent?

2. *Good soil* (13:8) – explanation in 13:23.

The person(s) represented by “*good soil*” stands in contrast to the person(s) represented by the “*wayside*” soil. How?

The person(s) represented by “*good soil*” also stands in contrast to the person(s) represented by the “*among the thorns*” soil. How?

Do you think the person(s) represented by “*good soil*” also stands in contrast to the person(s) represented by the “*stony ground*” soil? Elaborate.

Who do you think (from the original hearers of this *parable*) the “*good soil*” hearers represent?

Day 2 *Parable of the Sower* – Reflections and Applications

1. Revisit your answers in Week 1 Day 7 and Week 2 Day 1.

(a) Why do you think Jesus told this *parable*?

(b) What is the relevance of this *parable* to you?

2. For each of the four kinds of soils, recall your answer to this question: Who do you think (from the original hearers of this *parable*) the “_____” hearers represent?

(a) Now go one step further and ask yourself: *Which group am I?*

(b) After you have answered (a) above, now ask yourself: *So what's the next step I must take?*

3. Re-read **MATTHEW 13:9** and then ask yourself: *How can I take these words of Jesus seriously?*

Day 3 Read **MATTHEW 13:24-30**

This is the second *parable* told by Jesus, recorded in **MATTHEW 13**. It is called the *Parable of the Wheat and Tares*.

1. Note that according to **verse 24**, this *parable* is about the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God?

It is the rule of God over men. When Jesus started His public ministry, it was announced that the kingdom of God is at hand (**MARK 1:15**). This means that with the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of God has broken into human history. The theological term is 'inaugurated'. However, the final form of God's kingdom has yet to appear. It shall only appear when Jesus returns. The theological term is 'consummated'.

Hence, we say that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. And today we live in the time known as the already-but-not-yet period. Jesus is king and He shall come as king! In simple words, this *parable* is about God's kingdom in this already-but-not-yet period.

2. These 7 verses can be outlined as below:

The Setting (13:24-26)

- The owner sows good seed (verse 24)
- _____ (verse 25)
- The wheat and tares grow together (verse 26)

The Dialogue between owner and servants (13:27-30a)

- First interchange (verses 27-28a)
Question: _____
Answer: _____
- Second interchange (verses 28b-30b)
Question: _____
Answer: (i) _____
(ii) _____

The Coming Final Harvest (13:30b)

- Weeds will be _____, _____ and _____!

Can you fill in the blanks for the Outline above?

Day 4 Read MATTHEW 13:36-43

These 8 verses contain our Lord's explanation of the *Parable of the Wheat and Tares*. Note that while Jesus told that *parable* publicly (13:1-3), He gave the interpretation privately only to His disciples (13:36-37).

1. (a) The landowner who sowed (verses 24, 27) – who does he represent?

(b) The good seed (verse 24) – who does it represent?

(c) The field (verses 24, 27) – what does it represent?

(d) The tares (verse 25) – who does it represent?

(e) The enemy who sowed tares (**verses 25, 28**) – who does he represent?

(f) The harvest (**verse 30**) – what does it represent?

(g) The reapers (**verse 30**) – who do they represent?

2. Review your answers in Question 1 above. Then ask yourself: *What is the message of this parable?* (Write down your answer in the space below, using no more than 10 lines).

Day 5 *Parable of the Wheat and Tares* – Notes and Application

It is clear from the explanation given by our Lord Jesus that the field represents *the world!* We need to emphasize this because down through the ages, there had always been people who say that the field represents the church, and this *parable* teaches that there will always be a mixture of believers and unbelievers in the church. **BUT JESUS SAID THAT THE FIELD REPRESENTS THE WORLD, NOT THE CHURCH!**

Christ is actively at work sowing good seed (sons of the kingdom) in this world while the devil is busy planting tares (sons of the wicked one) alongside. In simple words, during this already-but-not-yet period, we will have believers and unbelievers living side by side in this world. The kingdom of God has come, but it will not remove all unbelievers from this world, *not yet!*

A day will come (day of harvest = end of the age) when the tares will be gathered together, bound in bundles and burnt! Jesus clearly tells us that this is the situation whereby all unbelievers will be cast in the furnace of fire (hell) and there they will be tormented (wailing and gnashing of teeth). With the unbelievers removed from this world and cast into hell, all who are left in the world would match those who are in the kingdom of God. Hence, at that point, we could say that *“the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”* (**REVELATION 11:15**)

Recalling the context of these *parables* in **MATTHEW 13** – the increasing opposition of the Jewish religious leaders, it is clear why Jesus told this *parable*. It was to explain why the kingdom of God has come in Him, and yet opposition to Jesus remains. It is consistent with God’s plan that His kingdom will advance in this world alongside all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness. This situation will continue until the end of the age. Hence, the hostile oppositions that were then happening should not surprise the disciples; in fact, in one sense, they should expect it!

1. After reading the Notes above, ponder: *If I am a Christian, how can this parable be applied in my life today?*

2. Look at the two different kinds of endings, one in **verse 42** and the other in **verse 43**.
 - (a) Which one would describe your future? Why?

- (b) Jesus ended His explanation of the *parable* with these words: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*”

What have these words got to do with the two different kinds of endings He outlined?

Day 6 **MATTHEW 13:31-33**

These 3 verses contain two *parables* – the *Parable of the Mustard Seed* and the *Parable of the Leaven*. They share the same main subject: *the kingdom of God* (**13:31, 33**)

Parable of the Mustard Seed

1. From this *parable*, what can we say about the beginning of the kingdom of God?

2. How long does it take for the mustard seed to become a tree?

3. From this *parable*, what can we say about the ultimate form of the kingdom of God?

4. In your own words, write down the message of this *parable*:

Parable of the Leaven

What do you think is the message of this *parable*?

Day 7 **MATTHEW 13:31-33** -- *Applications*

Review your answers in Week 2 Day 6 and then write down how you can apply these two *parables* in your life today:



Week 3

[6th – 12th April 2014]

Day 1 Read **MATTHEW 13:10-17, 34-35**

We have already studied four *parables*: *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Wheat and*

Tares, Parable of the Mustard Seed and Parable of the Leaven. From **13:34-35**, we know that Jesus told these four *parables* publicly, in the hearing of the multitudes. In fact, we were told that *'without a parable He did not speak to them'*. This alerts us to a distinct shift in the way Jesus carried out His public ministry from this point onwards. Up till now, Jesus spoke to the multitudes using various forms of speech, but from this point onwards, He would only use *parables*.

His disciples recognized this distinct shift in Jesus' public ministry, and hence their question in **verse 10**: *Why do You speak to them in parables?* Jesus' reply is found in **verses 11-17**. We are going to look at Jesus' reply in some detail, starting with His summarized answer in **verses 11-12** today.

Verses 11-12 (A summarized answer)

Who?	<i>You</i>	<i>Them</i>
What?	<i>Given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven</i>	<i>Not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven</i>
Why?	<i>Whoever _____, to him _____!</i>	<i>Whoever _____, even what he has _____! _____!</i>

Can you fill in the blanks in the table above?

Who is the 'you'? Who is the 'them'?

It is clear from Jesus' summarized answer in **verses 11-12** that these *parables* are about the kingdom of heaven. The word '*mysteries*' mean '*truths that are hidden, and cannot be known unless God reveals them*'. Hence, a more refined answer is that these *parables* convey truths about the kingdom of God that we can never know, unless God is pleased to reveal them to us.

Now in **MATTHEW 13**, Jesus '*revealed*' these truths about the kingdom of God in the form of *parables*. To '*them*', they have heard these truths in *parables*, but they don't understand! To '*you*', they have also heard these truths presented in *parables* but they do understand! They understand because Jesus went a step further to explain these *parables* to them. Hence, the words of **verse 11** rings true: *To 'you', it has been given to understand . . . but to 'them' it has not been given!*

Why did Jesus make this distinction between '*you*' and '*them*'? The answer is given in **verse 12**. This verse states a principle that is proverbial. It speaks of a person's

responsibility to use and build upon that which he/she has been given; those who do, get more and those who don't, lose what they have.

This is true in the physical realm. For example, in language study, those who study with persistence acquire increasing aptitude in the use of the language, while those who neglect language study lose whatever knowledge they had. Or think of the area of athletics: those who exercise and train become more proficient, while those who do nothing lose whatever athletic ability they had.

The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. If you take the little bit of knowledge that God has given you and embrace it, believing and applying it in your life, God will give you more knowledge. But if you neglect and despise what God has given you, then God will act to take them away from you so that one day, even what you once had (or thought you had), will be gone!

So it is clear that the '*them*' are those who neglect and despise whatever God has given, while the '*you*' are those who make good use of what God has given. At this point, we should ask ourselves: **Do I belong to the '*you*' group or the '*them*' group?** What's your answer?

Day 2 Read **MATTHEW 13:10-17, 34-35** again

Review what we have learnt in Day 1 above.

To the disciples' question in **verse 10** "*Why do You speak to them in parables?*" Jesus gave a summarized answer in **verses 11-12** and a more elaborate answer in **verses 13-17**. We shall look at the more elaborate answer today.

1. In **verse 13**, Jesus explained why He spoke to '*them*' in *parables*.

(a) What was the reason?

(b) What does it mean?

2. After giving the reason (**verse 13**), Jesus quoted from **Isaiah 6:9-10** in **verses 14-15**. **Isaiah 6:9-10** emphasized the spiritual dullness of the Israelites during the time of *Isaiah*. For centuries (since the time of the Exodus), God has been speaking to Israel and calling them to shun sin and walk in righteousness. But they have

disobeyed, and increasingly hardened their hearts against Him. Although God has sent them prophets after prophets, Israel has chosen not to hear! Hence, through the ministry of *Isaiah*, God will harden their hearts in judgment!!

By applying these two verses to the '*them*', Jesus is saying that these people are the spiritual descendants of the Israel in *Isaiah's* time. They have hardened their hearts against God, and now God is hardening their hearts in judgment. Hence, Jesus spoke to them in *parables*, so that they do actually hear the truths of God's kingdom but they don't really understand it. They are spiritually dull, and they only have themselves to blame!

3. In **verses 16-17**, Jesus turned His attention to the '*you*'. He pronounced them blessed. Why are they blessed?

Day 3 Doctrine of *election* and *human responsibility* from **MATTHEW 13:10-17**

By nature, we all belong to the '*them*' group. Our basic posture in life is "*anti-God*". Hence, when we come into contact with God's truth, we do not hear. We do not hear because we have already made up our minds that we will reject what God says. Every rejection of God's truth will only serve to harden our hearts against God. Therefore, over time, we will become increasingly hardened against God. This is a condition called spiritual dullness. Who bears the responsibility for this condition? We bear!

The focus here is on our *human responsibility*. We have a duty to respond positively to God's truth. The fact that we can't (because of our posture) does not take away the fact that we must! Hence, on Judgment Day, we shall have to answer for our spiritual dullness. The frightening thing is that for the '*them*' in **MATTHEW 13**, God has already started to judge them by hardening their hardened hearts! Oh may this never happen to us!

Standing in contrast to the '*them*' in this passage is the '*you*'. By nature, the '*you*' are no different from the '*them*'. Yet they are blessed, having seen and heard what many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear. But why are they blessed? According to **verse 11**, it is because they have been given to know! The word given tells us that it has nothing to do with their merits, but it is purely of grace. Hence, we come face-to-face with the truth of *election*. God in His grace has elected some to receive His blessing. Unless He did so, these people would be no different from the '*them*' and behave exactly like the '*them*' outlined above. Understanding this, the '*you*' have no reason to boast, but every reason to be humble, and to say, "*Who am I, that I should receive such grace from You, O Lord!*"

It is wrong of us to try and find out if we are elected. Rather, we should be focusing on

our *human responsibility*. In particular, we should concern ourselves with **verse 12**. We should be asking ourselves what we have done with what God has given to us right now:

Has He placed me in a Christian Home where the Bible is being read and taught to me regularly? What am I doing with this blessing?

Has He put me in a Christian Church where the Word of God is being faithfully preached and taught to me regularly? How am I responding to it?

Has He allowed me to possess a copy of His Word, the Holy Bible? Am I taking the time to read it? Do I make use of the Read-The-Bible-Together exercise in this church to help me know God?

Remember:

Whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance.

Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

So what are you going to do next?

Day 4 Read **MATTHEW 13:44-46**

Today, we are going to study the *Parable of the Hidden Treasure* and the *Parable of the Pearl of Great Price*. From **13:36**, we know that Jesus did not tell these two *parables* to the multitudes, but only to His disciples.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Verse 44)

Who: *A man*

What: *He found _____, and hid it.*

How: *With joy, he _____ all he has and _____.*

This *parable* is about the kingdom of heaven.

Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Verses 45-46)

Who: A _____.

What: He found _____.

How: He _____.

This *parable* is about the kingdom of heaven.

Day 5 Read **MATTHEW 13:44-46** again

Review Day 4 above, if you need.

1. How is the *Parable of the Hidden Treasure* different from the *Parable of the Pearl of Great Price*?

2. In what way(s) are these two *parables* similar?

3. In telling these two parables, what do you think ...
 - (a) Is the intent of our Lord Jesus?

 - (b) Is the attitude or conduct that Jesus was aiming at?

Day 6 Read **MATTHEW 13:47-50**

These four verses contain the *Parable of the Dragnet*, the last of the seven *parables* we have been studying in **MATTHEW 13**.

1. After reading these 4 verses, what questions would you ask to help you understand its message?

2. Do you find this *parable* similar to a previous *parable* in **MATTHEW 13**? If so, which one, and how are they similar?
3. (a) What do you think is the message of this *parable*?
- (b) How should you be impacted by this *parable*?

Day 7 Read **MATTHEW 18**

Today, we will leave the seven *parables* in **MATTHEW 13** and start our study of the two *parables* found in **MATTHEW 18**. Recall the **MATTHEW** outline in Week 1 Day 1 (page 4). **MATTHEW 18** is the fourth discourse in **the Gospel of MATTHEW** and the topic is '*Life and Relationships in the Community*'.

After reading **MATTHEW 18**, take some time to fill in the blanks (below):

Summary of **MATTHEW 18**

- Jesus defines the greatest in the kingdom (18:1-4)
- Jesus warns against _____ (18:5-9)
- Jesus tells _____ (18:10-14)
- Jesus teaches concerning _____ (18:15-20)
- Jesus tells the *parable* of the unmerciful servant (18:21-35)

From our Summary of **MATTHEW 18** above, it is clear that the two *parables* found in this chapter have to do with how life and relationships are to be conducted in the kingdom of God. They have something to do with offences, with restoration and with forgiveness.

With this background context firmly in mind, we are ready to study these two *parables*, starting tomorrow.

Day 1 Read **MATTHEW 18:10-14**

The *Parable of the Sheep That Goes Astray* is found in **verses 12-14**.

1. (a) How many sheep does the man have? (**Verse 12**)
 - (b) What happened to one of them? (**Verse 12**)
 - (c) What would the man do for that one? (**Verse 12**)
2. In **verse 13**, we see the man rejoicing. Why is he rejoicing?

Note: Jesus used a hyperbole here. He is not saying that the man has no joy over the rest of the sheep who stayed on course. Rather, He is using very strong language to depict just how glad the man was concerning that one sheep.

3. **Verses 10-11 & 14** are the words of Jesus to help us understand this *parable* properly.

* Who are the '*little ones*' (**verses 10, 14**)?

In **MATTHEW**, the '*little ones*' are disciples. However, here in this parable, there could be a double meaning. As Christ's disciples, they are despised by the world. However, the warning of **verse 10** is "*take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones . . .*" the '*you*' does not refer to the world but those within the Christian community. In other words, it is very possible that some in the church (perhaps leaders of the church) may look down on some of the believers (here called '*little ones*'), perhaps due to their social position or insignificance.

* What does '*goes astray*' mean?

There is a textual discussion whether **verse 11** is in the original manuscript (autograph). Assuming that it is, the word Jesus used in **verse 11** was "*lost*". The "*lost*" of **verse 11** should be defined as "*goes astray/straying*" (**verse 12 & 13**). In other words, the picture here is of a sheep that once belonged to the flock but has now (for some unstated reasons) strayed from it. Hence, this

parable is not about bringing sinners to come to faith in Jesus, but it is about the church reclaiming professing believers who have strayed from the faith.

- * Why should the church seek to reclaim the sheep that strayed? (**Verse 14**)

Day 2 Read **MATTHEW 18:10-14** again

Review Week 4 Day 1 and remember the context of this *parable* (see Week 3 Day 7).

In telling this *parable*, what do you think . . .

(a) Is the intent of our Lord Jesus?

(b) Is the attitude or conduct that Jesus was aiming at?

Your answer to (a) and (b) must flow out of the context of this *parable* and match the answers given in Day 1 above.

Day 3 Read **MATTHEW 18:21-35**

The *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant* is found in **verses 23-34**. Recall that this *parable* is found in **MATTHEW 18**, and this chapter is about *life and relationships in the community*.

In **verses 10-14**, the church is called to go and seek those of their numbers who have gone astray. Then in **verses 15-20**, Jesus gave instructions on discipline within the community, focusing on those who refused to repent and return to the community. Now from **verses 21-35**, the focus is on the other side: *what should the church do when the disciplined person repents and returns?*

The immediate context of this *parable* is **verses 21-22** and **verse 35**. It is clear from these three verses that this *parable* has something to do with forgiveness (showing mercy). In response to what Jesus has taught in **verses 15-20**, Peter asked how many times must we forgive that offending brother. In reply, Jesus said seventy times seven (**verse 22**), told this *parable* (**verses 23-34**) and then gave the summary statement (**verse 35**).

This *parable* can be divided into three sections:

Verses 23-27	The king and his slave
Verses 28-30	The slave and his fellow slave
Verses 31-34	The king reverses his decision

The king and his slave (verses 23-27)

1. How much did the slave owe the king?

Note: We can safely assume that 1 talent equals 6,000 denarii. 1 denarius is the salary you would pay the average laborer for a day.

2. Since the slave was unable to repay this debt, what did the king want to do initially? (**Verse 25**)
3. Hear the plea of the slave in **verse 26** whereby he promised to repay the debt. If we assume that the slave is an average laborer, how long will it take for him to repay this debt?

What do you think is the message here?

4. What did the king do instead? (**Verse 27**)
5. Put yourself in the shoes of this slave. How would you feel at this moment (after **verse 27**)?

Day 4 Read **MATTHEW 18:21-35** again

The slave and his fellow slave (verses 28-30)

1. (a) How much did his fellow slave owe him?

(b) What did he want his fellow slave to do?

2. Hear the plea of this second slave in **verse 29** whereby he promised to repay the debt. Do you think he can fulfill his promise? Why or why not?
3. What did the slave do to his fellow slave? (**Verse 30**)
4. Is his conduct expected or unexpected? Elaborate.

Day 5 Read **MATTHEW 18:21-35** again

The king reverses his decision (**verses 31-34**)

1. Why did the king reverse his decision concerning the first slave?
2. What was the final ending of this first slave?
3. Christ's summary statement in **verse 35** tells us how we should understand and apply this *parable*.

How?

Note: Do not get sidetracked into the question of whether it is right of the king to reverse his decision. Rather we are supposed to focus on the main point of the *parable* (**verses 33, 35**).

Day 6 *Parable of the Sheep That Goes Astray* and *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant* –
Summary and Review

Take some time to review your answers from Week 3 Day 7 to Week 4 Day 5.

1. (a) Write a one-line summary of the *Parable of the Sheep That Goes Astray*.

(b) How should this *parable* shape the way we interact here in Shalom Church?

2. (a) Write a one-line summary of the *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*.

(b) How should this *parable* shape the way we interact here in Shalom Church?

Day 7 Read **MATTHEW 20:1-16**

This is the *Parable of the Vineyard Workers*. After reading these 16 verses, write down your first impression of it and any questions you might have.

Week 5

[20th – 26th April 2014]

Day 1 Read **MATTHEW 19:16-30**

If the *Parable of the Vineyard Workers* struck you with a sense of ‘unfairness’, then you have read the *parable* correctly!

Remember that every *parable* told by Jesus has a context. The context of this *parable* is **MATTHEW 19:16-30**. Take some time to read it now.

In **verses 16-22**, we read of the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler. He left Jesus sorrowful. In response, Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. What was the response of the disciples upon hearing this? They were greatly astonished (**verse 25**). In other words, they couldn't really believe what they've just heard from the lips of Jesus. *"How could this be? Is that right? Is it fair?"*

Jesus then proceeded to explain how a person could be in the kingdom of God. *With God, all things are possible.* In other words, at the end of the day, it is the work of God. It is grace! (Warning: Grace can be scandalous! We may actually find God's grace to be 'unfair'!)

From **verses 27-29**, we have Peter's claim that they have left all to follow Jesus and asked what would they get in return; this is followed by our Lord's reply. Then in **verse 30**, Jesus stated a kingdom principle: *The first shall be last and the last first.* Applied to the rich young ruler, it underlines the principle that those whom men thinks are 'first' may yet be 'last' in God's kingdom, if they are in at all! But those whom we think will never be admitted ('last'), they could actually be in the kingdom ('first')!

We note that Jesus repeated this principle in **20:16**, alerting us to the fact that **19:30** and **20:16** functioned as an *inclusio* – bracketing **20:1-15**. In other words, the *Parable of the Vineyard Workers* is meant to explain this principle to us.

With this background information firmly fixed in our mind, we are now ready to study this *parable* tomorrow.

Day 2 Read **MATTHEW 20:1-16** again

The *parable* begins with a landowner looking for workers for his vineyard.

1. The first group of workers was employed early in the morning (**verses 1-2**). How much did he agree to pay them?
2. The second group of workers was employed at the third hour (**verses 3-4**). How much did he agree to pay them?

Note: The same can be said for the third and fourth group of workers employed (**verse 5**).

3. The fifth group of workers was employed at the eleventh hour (**verses 6-7**). How much did he agree to pay them?

4. **Verses 9-10** shift our attention to the end of the workday whereby the daily rated laborers will receive their wages. The *parable* will only place the spotlight on the first and fifth groups of workers employed.
- (a) How much did the first group of workers receive? Was it a fair amount?
 - (b) How much did the fifth group of workers receive? Was it expected?
5. (a) What was the reaction of the first group of workers? (**Verses 11-12**)
- (b) Why did they have such a reaction? (**Verses 10**)
 - (c) What was the reply of the landowner to their complaint? (**Verses 13-15**)
6. Whose side would you take – the first group of workers or the landowner? Why?

Day 3 Review of the *Parable of the Vineyard Workers*

In telling this parable, what do you think . . .

- (a) Is the intent of our Lord Jesus?
- (b) Is the attitude or conduct that Jesus was aiming at?

Your answer to (a) and (b) must flow out of the context of this *parable* (Week 4 Day 7) and match the answers given in Week 5 Day 1 above.

Day 4 Read **MATTHEW 21:1-27**

Starting at **MATTHEW 21:1**, we have come to the final seven days of the life of Jesus. We can outline **21:1-27** as follows:

Verses 1-11 Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey

Verses 12-17 Jesus cleanses _____

Verses 18-22 Jesus curses the fig tree and the lesson to be learnt from it

Verses 23-27 Jesus' authority questioned by _____

Can you fill in the blanks above?

From the response of the Jewish religious leaders to His entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and their questioning of His authority, it is clear that they have rejected Him. It is also clear from His cleansing of the Temple and cursing of the fig tree that Jesus has also rejected them!

Now, these 27 verses form the immediate context for our next three *parables*: *Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)*, *Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (21:33-46)* and *Parable of the Wedding Feast (22:1-14)*.

With this background information firmly in our mind, we are ready to look at the *Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)* tomorrow.

Day 5 Read **MATTHEW 21:28-32**

The *parable* proper is found in **verses 28-30**.

1. The man gave his two sons the same command: "*Go, work today in my vineyard.*"
 - (a) What was the reply of the first son?
 - (b) What did the first son finally do?
 - (c) What was the reply of the second son?
 - (d) What did the second son finally do?

2. What is the point of this *parable*? (**Verse 31a-b**)

3. How did Jesus apply this *parable*? (**Verse 31c-32**)

4. How can we apply this *parable* to ourselves today?

Day 6 Read **MATTHEW 21:33-46**

Bear in mind the context (see Day 4) as you study this *Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers*.

1. **Verse 33** is the introduction to this *parable*. It tells us a number of things that the owner did concerning the vineyard. What did he do?
 - Planted a vineyard
 - Set _____
 - Dug _____
 - Built _____

The last thing he did was to lease it to the vinedressers.

Do you think there is a purpose in giving such an elaborate introduction? If so, what would be the purpose?

2. At vintage time, the owner sends servants back to the vineyard to receive his rightful share of the harvest.

What did the vinedressers do with the servants? (**Verse 35**)

Verse 36 underscores the fact that they did these vile acts repeatedly.

3. When the landowner finally sends his own son, what did the vinedressers do (**verses 37-39**)?

Why did they do that?

4. How would the landowner respond to what the vinedressers did? (**Verses 40-41**)

Do you think it is a fair and right response? Elaborate.

Day 7 Read **MATTHEW 21:33-46** again

1. **Verses 42-44** tell us how Jesus applied this *parable* to his hearers. How?
 2. (a) Did his hearers understand His application? (**Verses 45**)
 - (b) What should be their response?
 - (c) What was their *actual* response? (**Verses 46**)

Day 1 Applying the *Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers*

In its original context, Jesus told this *parable* concerning the Jewish nation. Led by their religious leaders, they have rejected God's prophets and will ultimately murder God the Son! In response, God will take His kingdom and blessing away from them and give them to the Gentiles. All these came to pass when they nailed Jesus to the cross, when the gospel was preached to the Gentiles and when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD 70.

Remaining faithful to the text, how can we apply this *parable* to ourselves today?

Day 2 & 3 Read **MATTHEW 22:1-14**

As we come to the *Parable of the Wedding Feast*, bear in mind the context (see Week 5 Day 3). This *parable* can be outlined as follows:

The Wedding Feast (Stage 1) **22:1-7**

- The feast prepared
- The invitations refused
- The king's response

The Wedding Feast (Stage 2) **22:8-10**

- The invitation goes to others
- The wedding hall filled

The Inappropriate Guest **22:11-14**

- The man without the wedding garment
- The judgment
- The conclusion

For today and tomorrow, we shall look at The Wedding Feast (Stage 1)

1. (a) Whose wedding was it? (**Verse 2**)
- (b) Who was issuing the invitation? (**Verse 3**)
- (c) What can we say about the wedding feast? (**Verse 4**)

2. (a) What was the expected response from those invited?

(b) What was the actual response of those invited?

Verse 3:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

(c) From their response outlined above, what can you say about their attitude towards the king and his son?

3. (a) What was the response of the king?

(b) Do you think the king's response was right? Elaborate.

4. (a) What do you think was the message that Jesus intended to convey here?

(b) What is the relevance of this message to us today?

Day 4 Read **MATTHEW 22:1-14** again

We are looking at the Wedding Feast (Stage 2) today.

As a response to the rejection by the first group of invited guests, the king now sends his servants into the highways to invite as many as they could find to the wedding feast. The result was that the wedding hall was filled with guests.

1. Who do you think the first group of invited guests represent?
2. Who do you think those invited from the highways represent?
3. What is the message here and what is its significance for us?

Day 5 Read **MATTHEW 22:1-14** again

As a people, the Jews rejected the gospel. So God turned to offer the blessing of His gospel to the Gentiles. In the words of **Romans 11**, branches in the cultivated olive tree were cut off while branches from a wild olive tree were grafted into it.

Since we are not Jews, most of us in Shalom Church are '*branches from a wild olive tree*'. The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is now offered to us. In view of this, how should we conduct ourselves?

The third part of this *parable* -- the Inappropriate Guest -- will address this question.

1. **Verse 13** describes the final end of this man.
 - (a) What was it?
 - (b) Why did he meet with such a horrible ending?
2. What do you think the wedding garment represents?
3. Read **verse 14**. What does it mean?
4. Focusing on this third part of the *parable* . . .
 - (a) What do you think is the intent of Jesus here?

(b) What should be your appropriate response?

Day 6 Read **MATTHEW 24:1-51**

Starting tomorrow, we are going to study our final three *parables* from **MATTHEW** – *The Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Servants*, *the Parable of the Ten Virgins* and *the Parable of the Talents*. For today, we want to look at the immediate context for these three *parables*.

Recall that beginning at **MATTHEW 21:1**, we have come to the final seven days of the life of Jesus. This period began with Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey and cleansing the Temple. In response, the Jewish religious leaders questioned the authority of Jesus in doing these things, leading to a series of debates in the Temple.

In **24:1-2**, Jesus left the Temple in Jerusalem. As He was leaving, His disciples pointed out to Him the beauty and glamour of the Temple. In response, Jesus pronounced its destruction.

After leaving Jerusalem, Jesus went to the nearby Mount of Olives. There His disciples asked Him for more information about the destruction of the Temple, believing that that event would coincide with His coming and the end of the age. The reply of Jesus from **24:4b-25:46** is commonly known as the Olivet Discourse.

The Olivet Discourse can be outlined as follows:

Signs That Are Not The End (**24:4b-14**)

- Great Deception and Great Travail (**24:4b-8**)
- Great Apostasy and Great Mission (**24:9-14**)

Signs That Point To The End (**24:15-28**)

- The Abomination and The Need To Flee (**24:15-22**)
- False Messiahs and True Coming of Christ (**24:23-28**)

The Coming of Christ (**24:29-31**)

The Nearness of the Day (**24:32-35**)

Parables on Readiness (**24:36-25:30**)

- The Need for Spiritual Vigilance (**24:36-44**)
- The Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Slaves (**24:45-51**)
- The Parable of the Ten Virgins (**25:1-13**)
- The Parable of the Talents (**25:14-30**)

The Final Judgment (**25:31-46**)

From the outline above, it is clear that the three *parables* have to do with being ready for the return of Jesus. With this background context firmly in our mind, we are ready to study these three *parables*, starting tomorrow.

Day 7 Read **MATTHEW 24:45-51**

This *parable of the faithful and wicked servants* underline the need for readiness and proper ethical conduct in light of the soon and yet unexpected return of Jesus.

1. **Verses 45-47** introduce us to the first servant.

(a) He is called a _____ and _____ servant

(b) What is commendable about this servant? (**Verse 46** cf. **verse 45**)

(c) How does the master reward this servant?

2. **Verses 48-51** introduce us to the second servant.

(a) He is called that _____ servant

(b) How did he conduct himself? (**Verse 49**)

(c) Why did he conduct himself in that way? (**Verse 48**)

(d) What is his final end? (**Verse 51**)

Week 7

[4th – 10th May 2014]

Day 1 Read **MATTHEW 24:45-51** again

1. The master in the *parable* stands for Jesus. What truths about Jesus does this *parable* teach us?

2. In this *parable*, to be made ruler over the master's household (**verses 45, 47**) is set in contrast to being sent to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (**verse 51**).

The former is reward and blessing while the latter is punishment and being cursed.

From the *parable*, what is the standard of measurement used in deciding whether the servant will receive the former or the latter?

3. Review your answers in Day 5 as well as your answers to Question 1 & 2 above.

What do you think is the message of this *parable*?

What do you think is the response Jesus wanted from you, after you've heard this *parable*?

Day 2 Read **MATTHEW 25:1-13**

1. (a) Who do you think the bridegroom stands for?

(b) What can we say about the bridegroom?

Verse 1:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

2. The ten virgins are divided into two groups – wise and foolish.

(a) Why were the wise virgins deemed wise? (**Verse 4**)

(b) Why were the foolish virgins deemed foolish? (**Verse 4**)

3. Initially, all ten virgins look the same; we cannot see who is wise and who is foolish. However, at the coming of the bridegroom, their wisdom/folly is manifest. How? (**Verse 7-10**)

4. What was the ending for ...
 - (a) The wise virgins

 - (b) The foolish virgins

Day 3 Read **MATTHEW 25:1-13** again

1. A *parable* is a story with intent. Since Jesus was the storyteller here, what do you think is His intent? (Review your answers in Week 6 Day 7, and read **verse 13** again. It can help you get the answer).

2. What do you think is the response that Jesus wanted from you, after you've heard this *parable*?

Day 4 Read **MATTHEW 25:14-30**

This is the *Parable of the Talents*. After reading these 17 verses, write down your first impression of it and any questions you might have.

Day 5 Read **MATTHEW 25:14-30** again

1. Identify the four characters found in this *parable*:
 - (a) _____ (c) _____
 - (b) _____ (d) _____

2. (a) What did the first servant receive? (**Verse 16**)

(b) What did he do with what he received? (**Verse 16**)

(c) What was his ending? (**Verse 20-21**)

3. (a) What did the second servant receive? (**Verse 17**)

(b) What did he do with what he received? (**Verse 17**)

(c) What was his ending? (**Verse 22-23**)

4. (a) What did the third servant receive? (**Verse 18**)

(b) What did he do with what he received? (**Verse 18**)

(c) What did he say at the return of his master? (**Verse 24-25**)

(d) What did his master say and do to him? (**Verse 26-27, 30**)

Note: The '*talents*' in this *parable* must not be equated with our modern word 'talents'. Rather, it refers to an amount of money (1 talent equals 6,000 denarii, and 1 denarius is the salary you would pay the average laborer for a day.)

Day 6 Read **MATTHEW 25:14-30** again

1. Read **verses 28-29**. Does it remind you of a previous *parable* we've studied? If yes, which one?

2. (a) What do you think is the message of this *parable*?

(b) How should this *parable* change the way you live your life from now on?

Day 7 *Parables* in **MATTHEW** – Overall review and summary

For the past seven weeks, we have studied sixteen *parables* found in **the Gospel of MATTHEW**.

Which is the most memorable *parable* for you? Why?

How has that *parable* changed your life? Share it with your RTBT Group.

Acknowledgement

Whatever the weaknesses of this Read-The-Bible-Together guide, they would have been far greater without the kind help of Debbie LEOW, Stephanie BOIK, Serena and Shane KUA in giving their time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions.

Thank you, fellow labourers!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)