

## Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus Christ, by Your Cross and Resurrection You have overcome the problems of the world. Minister to all whose lives remain scarred by illness, injury, bitterness, despair, pain, and every kind of personal anguish. Make it clear to us where we can be of help or where we should stand aside, so that Your perfect will may be done for those who need Your help: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Preaching

*Pray for those who teach and mentor new preachers. Pray that they may teach proper and relevant skills, and also how the Holy Spirit works in power through God's Word.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joy of knowing that Christ has forgiven our sins
- Pray for countries of the world where people are not free
- Pray for those who entertain us in great sporting events

## Meditation

Start believing;

Not because you must, but because Christ has saved you!

Start praying;

Not just when you need to, but when the Lord prompts you!

Start listening;

Not because you ought to, but because the Saviour loves you!

Start rejoicing;

Not just when you want to, but when the Spirit leads you!

Start living;

Not because you must, but because your God has set you free!

Start expecting;

Not just when you have a reason, but all the time God gives you!

## Bible Study - Matthew 13:51-58

<sup>51</sup> 'Have you understood all these things?' They answered, 'Yes.' <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, 'Therefore every scholar who studies the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who takes both new and old things out of his store.'

<sup>53</sup> When Jesus had finished these parables, he went on from there. <sup>54</sup> He came to his hometown and taught the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and this miraculous power?' <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary? And brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?'

<sup>57</sup> They took offence at him, and Jesus said to them, 'Prophets have no honour within their own country and in their own house.'<sup>58</sup> Now he did not do many miracles there, because they had no faith.

## Review

This passage concludes the famous thirteenth chapter of Matthew with its famous parables. The last of these parables is in verse 52, and the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' teaching beforehand (13:51) and the rejection of Jesus by his own home town (13:53-58) summarise the different possible responses to Jesus' teaching. In this sense, our passage stands as a whole. When the disciples first asked Jesus about why he taught in parables, He said that the crowds would 'listen but do not understand' (13:14) because 'their hearts are hardened' (13:15), and the end result was that Jesus' own friends rejected Him. The disciples, however, had been drawn aside by Jesus to hear from Him about the 'secrets of the Kingdom' (13:11), and now Jesus asked whether they had understood what He had said. They said 'Yes', but what did this mean to Jesus?

**The eternal importance of the teaching within the parables** It is doubtful whether the disciples had understood every detail of the previous parables. However, their eyes had been opened by Jesus to see more than fascinating stories; the parables led them towards God's wisdom and were about reality; about themselves, Jesus, God, evil and the ultimate destiny of all things under God. The disciples were beginning to realise the eternal significance and importance of what Jesus said, and later, after Jesus died and rose again, they remembered these parables and recorded them in the Gospels, so that they would be a teaching manual for the young Christian church. In some Gospels, the disciples are portrayed as having little understanding or knowledge; this is particularly true of Mark, for example (Mark 16:14), and even Matthew talks of the disciple's 'little faith' (6:30, 8:26, 17:20 etc.). But 'little faith' is significant and can grow (17:20), and is enough for Jesus to justify His teaching them about the 'secrets of the Kingdom'.

**Scholars of the Kingdom** What Jesus says next to the disciples is profoundly important; 'Therefore every scholar who studies the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who takes both new and old things out of his store.' Most Bible versions use the word 'scribe' where I have translated 'scholar'. The term 'scribe' was traditionally reserved for those who had been trained by rabbis; however, the Greek word itself is quite neutral, meaning 'one who is trained in the law', and is best understood today by the familiar term 'scholar'. Jesus used the term positively on more than one occasion (e.g. 23:34)

In chapter 13, Jesus had begun to train the disciples as 'scholars' of the Kingdom; they learned things known to no other scribe of the day. They learned about Jesus' prophetic fulfilment of the Old Testament (5:17) and that the Messiah would suffer and die (10:38) for example. The 'old' and 'new' treasures that the disciples would 'bring out of the store' in due course are cover everything Jesus taught. The 'old' was Jesus' teaching about the Old Testament in which He rejected traditional Jewish teaching and reinterpreted the Law according to the prophets. Jesus used this to show the disciples that He fulfilled both the Law and the prophets, as Messiah. The 'new' was developing before the disciple's eyes, as Jesus taught them the 'secrets of the Kingdom' which proved at least to be instructions from God about the nature and mission of the future people of God, the Church.

In verse (13:52), Jesus prophesied over the disciples about their future work as scholars (scribes) of the new people of God. Their 'Yes' in response to Jesus' questions was the 'mustard seed' of faith Jesus needed to hear to have confidence that what He said would be passed on.

**The hometown rejection** The rejection of Jesus when He went to His home town (13:53-58) simply reinforces what we have already discovered. Those who thought they already knew Jesus were simply incapable of seeing Him in any other way, and their questions (13:55,56) imply that everything you can know about someone is a result of their family and upbringing! They were unable to see that God might be at work, or He might be doing

something special in their midst, or that here was someone who had been changed by the power of God! The mighty works of Jesus simply caused them offence, and the comment 'he did not do many miracles there, because they had no faith' is Jesus' sad acceptance that His ministry would not be received by many with whom He had grown up and loved (see 12:46-50). These people tragically illustrated the rejection Jesus spoke of earlier 'this people's heart has grown cold, they do not hear with their ears ...' (13:15).

We should remember though, that at least two of the people in His home did in due course show faith and become part of the Christian Church; firstly Mary, His mother, who was present at His crucifixion (John 19:25), and secondly James, the brother of Jesus. James became an elder in the early Christian Church (Galatians 1:19) and is reckoned by some to be the author of the New Testament letter of James. The work of Jesus always bore fruit, despite the problem he found on the way!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you reckon that you understand the parables of Matthew 13, and can you say 'Yes' to Jesus' question?
2. Do you regard learning about the Kingdom of God as important? If so, how do you do it, and is there adequate teaching about it in the church?
3. To what extent is your own life simply a reflection of your upbringing, and to what extent has Jesus radically changed your life to do new things?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This summary of the parables is a wonderful and succinct passage. Personally, I love what Jesus says about the 'old' and the 'new' going together to make the art of teaching. It has always seemed to me that the best teachers interpret the past with accuracy and from a position of good knowledge, and also inspire the future both by their original contributions to the teaching and also the way they inspire people to go further, especially with God. To be a teacher is a great privilege.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you were asked to talk about something 'new' and something 'old' about the teaching of the Christian faith, what would you suggest? If possible, discuss with a fellowship group the importance of keeping a balance of old and new in Christian teaching.*
- *It is too easy to reject people because we think that we know what they can achieve and have no real knowledge about what God can do through them. If you have done this, confess your error to the Lord, and ask for forgiveness.*

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, save me from imagining more of myself than is true or right. Help me to understand the call You have placed on my life, and give me the grace to accept the things You have asked me to do; then, as I live each day, may I be content to do Your will. AMEN